

THE
Story
OF *Earl*
Nightingale
AND HIS
Strangest
Secret

Told by his daughter
Pamela Nightingale

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DEDICATED TO:

My Mother, Mary Julia Peterson Nightingale

Intelligent, Kind, Loving, Driven, Courageous, and Beautiful

My Brother, David Allen Nightingale

Fun, Smart, Humorous, Stubborn, and Adventurous

My Aunt, Daisy Peterson Cumnard

Fierce, Generous, Loyal, and my Friend

–and of Course, My Father

*Who thought it was selfish to talk about his good
life but did everything he could to help others achieve it.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS BOOK COULD not have been written without the help of many people to whom we owe thanks. Here are a few:

Vic Conant, President of the Nightingale-Conant Corporation for his friendship, support, encouragement, and help with material, copyrights, and publishing expertise.

Thanks to the University of Arizona Libraries Special Collections who helped us with research and permissions to use materials from their extensive Pearl Harbor Exhibit.

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Thanks to editors who were of great help, among them Benjamin Minson and James E. Adams.

A special thanks for her firsthand knowledge of Uncle Earl and events in the family, and for putting up with us while writing the book goes to Geri Lynn, Daisy's daughter, Earl's niece, Pam's cousin, Angela's mother, and Victor's talented, beautiful, and loving wife.

Many thanks to Jason for his support and creative ideas.

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And to David Nightingale, thank you for being a wonderful big brother, a childhood partner in crime, and best friend. And, thank you for your candid emails and cooperation with our project.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

MUCH OF THIS book was written based on memories of, and stories from Earl Nightingale's family members, friends, business partners, and associates. Because these recollections are from events which occurred many decades ago, it is possible that some dates and details are broad declarations with vague details. However, we are confident that the representations are accurate in concept and context.

Care was taken to research and accurately relay information taken from articles, recordings, newspapers, museums, personal accounts, fan mail, and writings from Earl himself. We have also relied on personal conversations, journals, letters, and photographs for information.

Dialogue used in this book is not meant to represent direct quotes but is used to relay the essence of events and relationships. Whenever possible, we have used direct quotes from Earl himself. These quotes are individually cited and placed throughout the book.

In order for us to write a biography while including memoirs from Earl's daughter, Pamela, we have chosen to include direct statements from Pam in sidebars we call Pam Boxes. These boxes are also disbursed through the book and are clearly marked to

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easily recognize the stories and statements made there are from Pam's point of view.

Footnotes are included when we had additional material of interest that didn't necessarily move the story forward. Instead of omitting it altogether, we have added these details here. Footnotes are also used to explain terminology.

Pamela Nightingale

Victor Corbin

Angela Moon

PROLOGUE

I WAS ONLY EIGHT years old when my whole life changed. It happened very unexpectedly as we docked our boat. We were out sailing the Caribbean for the summer, my dad, my brother David, and me. As we pulled into our slip and tied off, there was a noticeable group of people standing there waiting for our arrival. It was a hot sunny day in 1956. I was wearing cutoffs and a t-shirt. A clean one was hard to find after sailing the Caribbean for more than eight weeks. David smelled like a dead fish, he always smelled that way after fishing trips.

Troubled by the group of people at the dock, we were only able to take a few steps forward when it became apparent the crowd would not let us pass by. “Are you Earl Nightingale?” a man from the crowd called out.

This was the first time I had ever seen my father speechless, his mouth agape with wonder or surprise I could not tell. A few moments of silence passed; then, he tucked me and my brother behind his legs for protection and asked, “Am I being arrested?”

I remember big camera lights flashing and chuckles from the crowd. As the tension in my dad’s legs relaxed, so did I. Everything was okay, it was safe enough and I peered out from my protected place behind his big legs to see that something my Dad had done

was newsworthy: a big enough deal in fact, those reporters came to Fort Lauderdale from Chicago and waited for our return. I would quickly learn what fame was and this version of the 1950's paparazzi was now part of our family's life.



MY FATHER WAS a giant of a man. When I say that, I mean it in both the literal and figurative senses of the word. Not only did he live a life that towered above his fellow man, he also suffered from a rare disease called acromegaly, a hormonal disorder that causes your bones to increase in size well beyond the normal limits of human development. In truth, everything about my father, Earl Nightingale, was larger than life.

For some of you reading this account of my father's life, the mere mention of his name is sure to bring all kinds of associations with it. This is even more likely to be the case if you were a part of The Greatest Generation, or if you've found yourself drawn to self-help and personal development works in your life, or if you are involved in radio or broadcasting. And yet, for those of you who are unfamiliar with the life of this colossal individual, let me do my best to reveal to you the mysteries of the world which he uncovered and shared with anyone willing to not only listen, but to hear the secrets that lead to success and happiness.

My sincere hope for all who read these pages is you will feel inspired, motivated and encouraged. Regardless of your position in life, there is always opportunity and potential to be realized.

Pamela Nightingale

*“The most inspirational, fine, honorable,
hilarious, thinker, and an absolutely
excellent, present father.”*

—**PAMELA NIGHTINGALE**

(Introducing Earl in a live interview)

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CHAPTER ONE



THE “HAVES” AND THE “HAVE-NOTS”

“Everything that’s really worthwhile in life comes to us free—our minds, our souls, our bodies, our hopes, our dreams, our intelligence, our love of family and friends and country. All of these priceless possessions are free.”

—EARL NIGHTINGALE

IN THE WARM afternoon sun of Long Beach, California, young Earl Nightingale walked down the street heading for home. He was thinking about his birthday only two days away—not that he expected any presents. He would be twelve years old. *Twelve*. It had a grown-up ring to it.

Suddenly a loud roaring sound broke the peace and calm around him, as if a speeding locomotive had jumped its tracks and was racing down the street toward him. Simultaneously with

the noise, the earth beneath him began to shake. In the violence of the shaking earth, a moment later the street and sidewalk heaved as if ocean waves ran underneath, throwing him side to side. Unable to stay upright, he fell hard to the ground and was pounded against the heaving asphalt. Around him he was aware of buildings cracking, shifting, and tilting. Terrified, he could barely breathe until at last the violent pitching subsided. The earthquake seemed to last several minutes, but in reality, it was only seconds and was over before Earl fully understood what just happened. He was astonished to find he'd moved nearly twenty feet down the street without taking a single step.¹

In the relative quiet surrounding him, the eerie moaning of the buildings continued as if in slow motion. They twisted, crumbled, and sank, falling into grotesque shapes that looked like warped interpretations of what they had been.

Earl cautiously took a few steps, trembling. He moved away from buildings and fallen power lines into open areas. Dodging around buckled sidewalks and uplifted streets, he quickened his pace. He weaved between damaged cars and rubble. Now different sounds reached him, softer but chilling: distant explosions, sirens, men and women shouting for help, or offering it.

As he took in the scene around him, he worried if his mother was safe and able to return home from the factory. Where were his father and brothers ... and what about Wilbur? He was six or eight blocks from home and, overcome with emotion, he began to run.

¹ An eyewitness account from a ten-year-old boy who was playing softball when the quake hit said, "It bounced me all the way from second to third base."

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Example of damaged residence from Long Beach 1933—
not the Nightingale house. (Credit: contributed by the Griffin
Family, U.S. Geological Survey, Public domain.)

As he rounded the corner onto his street, he was relieved to see his two brothers in the front yard of their house—frightened, anxious expressions on their faces. When Earl reached them, he found his father sitting on the porch steps staring blankly at their misshapen home. Even Wilbur, their pet pig, appeared distressed. He continued squealing as the boys took turns stroking his fat belly and curly tail, trying to help him relax.

Because no buses or other services were operational, it took Earl’s mother quite a while to get home from the factory where she worked. She had to walk through damaged streets and chaos left by the quake. When she arrived, she gathered her three sons in her arms, comforted them, and gave thanks to God for their safety.

After the brief reunion, she took her despairing husband by the hand, and together the family walked solemnly around their house, assessing its condition. The front door was open and would never fit into its frame again. The roof was askew, walls leaning, foundation cracked. After all they'd already been through since the Depression, this was a cruel outcome: their house, like many others, was completely unlivable, a total loss.

Except a bicycle which had been propped against the front steps and a red wagon in the backyard, every material item the family had was in that house. The furniture and decorations, dishes and cooking utensils, clothes, towels and linens, and all the things the parents had accumulated in their years of marriage. Earl had a few toys and keepsakes. Not many, but scarcity made them all the more valuable to him. When other things failed, this house had been a retreat. He and his brothers played there and had friends nearby. It was their home because his mother made it so.

Earl's parents argued about what to do, but eventually they carefully entered the house and gathered the necessary items to make sandwiches for dinner. They brought out other items like milk² to consume before they spoiled. Finally, they retrieved blankets and pillows so they could sleep outside that night.

Over the next several days, Earl's twelfth birthday completely forgotten, they removed what they could save from the house. Like their neighbors, they lived in their yard and cautiously scavenged items from the house despite the city's condemned sign nailed to the front post.

² In the 1930s milk was sold in glass jugs for 26 cents per gallon.

THE “HAVES” AND THE “HAVE-NOTS”



Buildings damaged by the Long Beach 1933 earthquake

Later they learned the total destruction, injuries, and death caused by the 5:54 pm March 10th, 1933 southern California earthquake was widespread and severe. The quake would have registered high on the Richter scale³ had it been invented at the time. The shaking and resulting fires damaged homes, office buildings, and factories in Long Beach and surrounding areas for miles around. Water, sewer, and electric lines broke down. One hundred and twenty schools in and around Long Beach were damaged. Seventy of them were total losses. Building codes in those days didn't enforce much in the way of seismic safety. Fortunately, the

³ This earthquake inspired Charles F. Richter to develop the magnitude scale named after him just two years later.

quake occurred after school hours, or the death toll of 115 to 120 would have risen into the thousands.

Terror-Stricken City Emerging From Frightful Experience

Long Beach Progress

Building Materials — 4 1/2 CENTS
 Newspaper — 5 CENTS
 Home Office — 10 CENTS
 Bank Office — 15 CENTS

LONG BEACH SUN

OFFICIAL CITY PUBLICATION OF LONG BEACH, CALIF. — PUBLISHED DAILY EXCEPT ON SUNDAY AND HOLIDAYS

PAID LEASED WORK SERVICE UNITED PRESS

Weather and Tides

Forecast: Partly cloudy, 60 to 75.

High tide: 12:45 p.m., 6:45 p.m.
 Low tide: 7:15 a.m., 1:15 p.m.

M. XXXVY No. 228
LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA, SATURDAY MORNING, MARCH 11, 1933
Five Times Cost

53 DIE, 1000 HURT AS EARTHQUAKE SPREADS DESTRUCTION IN LONG BEACH

Downtown Long Beach, Once Stately Seaside Community, Transformed By Earth Shock

Business Buildings Appear 'Shaky' After Streets Mass Of Debris Thousands Frantically Rush To Safer Areas

In recent conversation Long Beach, this morning was emerging from its most frightful experience in its history. It was a Saturday morning, the city, a town, was made for the long holiday and was crowded with people. The earthquake, which struck upon the city, a few hours before 8 o'clock last night, caused more of its stately buildings to fall than anywhere else on the coast. The time story of the disaster cannot be written here, but it is a tragedy of the first order.

Hundreds of people, a few minutes after the quake, raced to the city square to search for loved ones. Many groups and great assemblages on highways began their search.

All the day yesterday the search only was continued.

At the Long Beach station, thousands of people were waiting for news of their friends.

The searchers were often met by the police, who were trying to keep order.

At the Long Beach station, thousands of people were waiting for news of their friends.

AS TEMBLOR LEFT HEAVY TOLL OF DEATH AND DAMAGE



Some of the houses that were destroyed by the earthquake in Long Beach, Calif. The picture was taken in the street near the Long Beach station, where the earthquake struck on Saturday night.

Scores Perish In Other Southland Communities As Buildings Crumble

Buildings crumpled again as a new temblor ripped through Long Beach at 8:27 a. m. today.

Small cities of little habit and of wretched shacks in apartments which exist around the City Hall and in other sections of the city.

A violent earthquake dealt death and destruction to Long Beach last Saturday afternoon. Early today the city was broken to have been killed. The toll may reach seventy-five, a shocking record. More than 1000 were injured, list of these seriously. Property damage was seriously estimated at between \$1,000,000 and \$2,000,000.

The quake struck at 8:23 p. m., making the entire city for 10 seconds. Sections of buildings tumbled. Heavy machinery to sidewalks struck pedestrians. Cars were scattered packed cars, making accidents.

While screaming shrieks of fear were heard from the city during the night the earthquake continued to strike. Several buildings, although they were badly damaged in the quake, were the center of action for the injured and dying. An 4 inches of water on the lower floors, which were caused by, and emergency operations performed on the subsidence and private cars were with the victims. Ten minutes after the quake, 100 persons were at the hospital.

Fire broke out simultaneously over the city, shortly after the last terrific impact. Columns of the Central Fire Station in which one man was killed and five others injured, handicapped firemen.

Fire Controlled

At an early hour this morning, however, it was reported that most of the fires during the city were under control, with the exception of those at Ferry High school, where the loss was estimated at \$100,000; at Franklin Junior High school, and at an oil well on Atlantic avenue south of these two.

One of the main streets in the city is the first fire station after the quake. Within a few minutes the growth of fires was kept on the ground by the station's strength. All the fires were controlled.

At the Long Beach station, thousands of people were waiting for news of their friends.

Three Killed In Earthquake At Santa Ana

At Santa Ana, Calif., three people were killed by the earthquake of Saturday night. The victims were a man, a woman and a child. The man was killed by a falling chimney, the woman by a falling wall, and the child by a falling piece of furniture.

EDITORIAL

LONG BEACH, GRIEVED BY FATALITIES, FACES FUTURE COURAGEOUSLY

LONG BEACH last yesterday felt something of the first night's experience which in years past shook heavily at Santa Barbara and San Francisco, other California cities, which immediately on the occasion appear to have crumpled with comparatively slight loss.

San Francisco, which had a death toll of 49, and the greater part of the city buried to the ground by the quake and coming loss, evidently faced the task of rebuilding, and now face to enter a new day here.

Santa Barbara, six days almost as heavily, has rebuilt itself as a more beautiful city than ever.

Alfred Greenwich, has been rebuilding the cities of these two other cities. Long Beach will accept it together with courage and will endeavor to build something as much modern.

Seismological Readings On Shock Waited.

Readings on the seismological instrument at the Long Beach station were waited for several hours yesterday. The readings were not available until this morning.

LAST OF DEAD

The last of the dead in the earthquake at Long Beach was identified yesterday. The name was Mrs. J. J. Brown, of Santa Ana.

TWO LOSE LIVES AT SAN PEDRO

Two lives were lost in the earthquake at San Pedro, Calif., yesterday. The victims were a man and a woman. The man was killed by a falling chimney, and the woman by a falling wall.

PARANORMAL SCIENCE TEL

Paranormal science has been called in to assist in the search for the missing. The searchers were often met by the police, who were trying to keep order.

Initial earthquake reports the following morning





Pam Box

MY FATHER AND HIS HERITAGE

Earl Clifford Nightingale V, the young boy in this story, was my father. He never used his full name. He didn't like the name Clifford and was not fond of the Roman numeral after his name. He was just Earl Nightingale.

Dad was born in or near Long Beach, California on March 12, 1921, but not in a hospital. No birth certificate or hospital records exist documenting his birth. But my grandmother knew the date—she was there at the time.

My dad was the second of three children. His brother Albert was three years older, and his brother Don was three years younger. The brothers loved each other intensely and got along well. They played together, worked together, and supported each other.

My grandmother's name was Gladys Fae Hamer, but we called her Honey. Everyone did. Actually, I didn't know her real name wasn't Honey until I was a teenager. Honey was the granddaughter of immigrants from Denmark who came to America as part of the Mormon Gathering and crossed the plains in covered wagons during the mid-1800s—"the days of the Indians." Honey often told stories her grandmother recounted

about her adventures and experiences. Many stories included dead animals, skeletons, and burned covered wagons she saw along the way. They came to Utah first. Honey's grandmother married into the Lee family and later moved on to California.

My grandfather, Albert Earl Nightingale Sr. (Bert), was the fourth Earl Nightingale in the family line. He emigrated from Kensington, England to Halifax in Nova Scotia, Canada. Eventually he traveled west to Los Angeles, California. There he met Honey, they fell in love, married, and lived their lives during "the roaring '20s" in Long Beach.

During those years the economy was booming. My grandfather, Earl Sr., opened and operated a family restaurant called Nightingale's Diner. Life was good.

**These words were taken from Honey's handwritten genealogy. See the appendix.*

Most businesses shut down for a time after the quake. Earl Sr.'s restaurant had already suffered from the effects of the Great Depression. As history has it, the booming economy of the 1920s didn't last, transforming quickly into the Great Depression. The banks failed in 1929, and soon after, despite being open 24 hours a day, Earl Sr. was forced to close the diner. The business failure sent him into a deep personal depression. He had no steady work from the time his restaurant closed until the earthquake in 1933. Day jobs were also hard to come by with a lot of competition for the few

available. It was Honey’s factory job that provided monetary support for the family.

The city implemented relief programs as the cleanup went on. Earl’s family stayed in makeshift shelters in buildings that weren’t condemned and ate at spontaneously arranged soup kitchens. That was all they could do.

The destruction of their house, on top of everything else, was more than Earl’s father could handle. Already seriously depressed, nowhere to live, and no way to support his family, he was distraught and dejected. He abandoned Honey and the children without a note or explanation. Honey believed he went back to Canada, but no one knows for sure. This was tragic for the family—something that disturbed Earl (and surely his brothers) for the rest of his life.

Honey, devastated by her husband’s departure, was overwhelmed with worry about the prospect of raising the boys alone. But Honey loved her children, and she would not leave them. She was determined to be strong and work hard.



EARL KNEW BY the way Wilbur snorted and oinked that dinner-time was approaching. With nothing to feed him, Earl fastened a thin rope around Wilbur’s neck and took him for a walk to forage for food. The two walked slowly allowing Wilbur to sniff under and around bushes and trees. Eventually the duo ended up at the beach. With his own stomach growling, Earl sat in the sand and watched the waves roll in.

He missed his dad. Eventually his thoughts wandered connecting his heart and hunger pangs reminding him of life before the

Depression. He remembered the days he could go down to his dad's diner. In the mornings it smelled like a mix of coffee and pancakes, and in the evenings like coffee and meatloaf. Every time he went there, his dad would find something tasty to give him. Sometimes it was just a quick sandwich, other times a juicy cheeseburger and fries with ketchup for dipping. Earl loved that diner and all the people who worked in it.

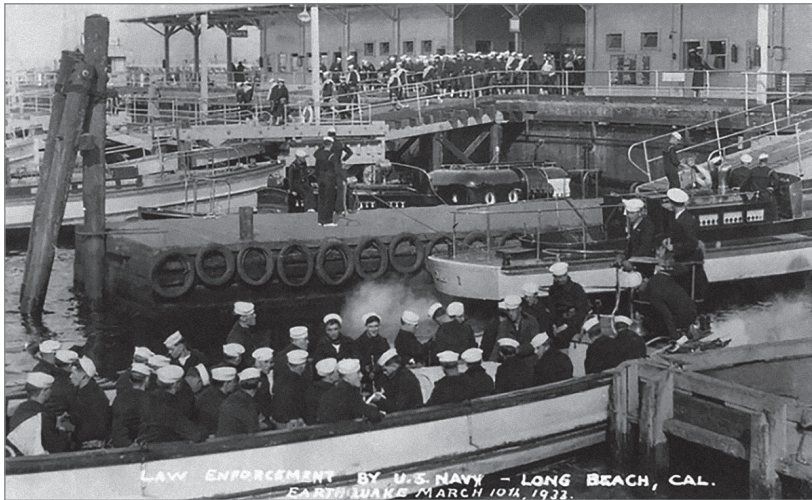
Emmie, his favorite waitress, worked for his dad for as long as Earl could remember. If Earl came in and his dad wasn't there, Emmie always was. She got him ice cream or made him something fun like a bunny salad. The bunny salad wasn't on the menu. She made it quickly with half a canned pear, decorated the face with raisins and made ears on the top with almonds. Then she put on a fluffy white tail with a dollop of whipped cream. She finished the dish by placing a carrot stick on the plate as if the bunny was going to eat it. Earl had the whole menu memorized and went through it in his mind often—usually when he was hungry.

As he sat on the beach keeping an eye on Wilbur, he saw an enormous battleship approaching. As it came closer, he could read the words painted on its hull, USS *Arizona*. Earl watched as the massive ship glided by. He imagined himself a seaman, walking the decks of the mightiest vessels in the world, discovering what life had to offer beyond Long Beach. It was a sight to see, and he watched with enthusiasm as it crossed in front of him, headed toward Terminal Island.

THE “HAVES” AND THE “HAVE-NOTS”



THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT sent the battleship USS *Arizona*, loaded with supplies, to Long Beach to provide aid to the stricken community.



U.S. Navy shore party from the USS *Arizona*—Courtesy of the University of Arizona Library Special Collections. Law Enforcement by U.S. Navy—Long Beach, Cal. Earthquake March 10th, 1933

When the *Arizona* arrived, a shore party entered the city with food and relief supplies for those affected by the quake. The sailors’ purpose was to restore order, aid local law enforcement with patrols, assist in establishing communications, provide food and shelter, and set up first aid stations and supply centers.

One community already established by Long Beach City for homeless people due to the Great Depression was “Tent City.” Placed in a large grassy area with some shade trees, it was not far

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from the beach. The layout was orderly with city-provided electricity for a single lightbulb in each tent. The residents kept it relatively clean. The population swelled with new, military-issue 10' by 12' open-bottom canvas tents for families displaced by the earthquake.



An example of early 1900s California tent cities

After her husband left, Honey and the three boys, their home destroyed, had no choice but to move into Tent City. Honey was given a standard tent and four cots from the supplies provided by the USS *Arizona*. The family set up the tent and moved their meager possessions in—it was just as well they had so little, there wasn't much room in the tent for many belongings. The single lightbulb was enough to read and dress by. The tent was not equipped with heating or cooling. The boys had each other, and Wilbur. And a mother standing all of five feet two inches tall, one hundred ten pounds, determined to work and provide for her boys. She was strong as steel.

THE "HAVES" AND THE "HAVE-NOTS"

The Nightingales showered and used the bathroom in public buildings. Meals were provided by soup kitchens that sprang up all over town. Before the earthquake their clothes often came from welfare programs and charitable donations. This continued in Tent City as well. Though it may have hurt their pride to live on handouts, this was a time of little more than subsistence. Honey taught her boys to be grateful for whatever they had.

While Honey could get her children hand-me-down clothing at a charity drop-off, shoes were a hot item and much more difficult to find. At the rate Earl was growing, shoes only fit him for a short time anyway, so Earl went barefoot.



A barefoot Earl Nightingale

Fortunately, Honey resumed her job as a seamstress making girdles at a nearby Works Projects Administration⁴ (WPA) sewing factory. By some miracle, the building was restored and production reestablished. Honey began working there after Nightingale's Diner failed. Her job provided support for her family in the early years of the Depression, and now it would support them after "the Catastrophe," as Honey called the quake. She said, "My hands and a sewing machine kept the family alive through those difficult years."



IN THE DAYS following the earthquake, Honey and her sons reorganized their lives to suit their post "catastrophe" situation. They established a regular routine with chores and responsibilities for everyone. Not everything was a daily grind. During this time Earl enjoyed going to the beach. The sand and ocean water calmed him and cleared his mind. He developed into an excellent swimmer and surfer.

⁴ Works Projects Administration (WPA) was an American New Deal agency employing millions of job-seekers. The WPA put women to work in clerical jobs, gardening, canning, and as librarians and seamstresses. Women engaged in sewing projects made up about seven percent of the national WPA workforce.

THE “HAVES” AND THE “HAVE-NOTS”



Note the armed sailor guarding a bank. Courtesy of the University of Arizona Library Special Collections



BECAUSE OF THEIR circumstances and the lack of records, there are only family remembrances indicating Earl received the most basic and short-lived formal schooling during his youth. But he was an unusual boy and did a remarkable job of educating himself. Though Honey surely helped, Earl largely taught himself to read. He even taught himself to speed read. Books and other texts helped satisfy his never-ending curiosity.

Honey always encouraged him. “Knowledge is everything; and everything you want to know has been written down by someone, somewhere,” she’d say.



Pam Box

READING EVERYTHING

I recall Honey telling me a story about my father's self-taught reading skills. She said, "I was in the kitchen of our house preparing food and doing dishes and was startled to hear your father reading. He was so young he should not have been able to." She put her hands on her hips remembering her three-and-a-half-year-old son. "He finished eating and turned the plate over, then read the manufacturer information out loud off the back of the dish."

Shortly after entering Tent City, Earl began reading every book he could. He had a library card—they were free. He walked barefoot to the library, pulling his red wagon along behind. He checked out as many books as he was allowed. Under that single dangling lightbulb in the middle of the tent, Earl read for hours at a time. Within days, he would make another trip to the library to return the books and fill the wagon again.

Earl was interested in the classics. He wanted to know the answers to the big questions in life and started at the beginning with the ancient philosophers—Thales, Plato, Aristotle, and others—because their writings had stood the test of time. Homer's

epic poems of adventure, heroism, perseverance, and loyalty were favorites.⁵

From these Greek philosophers, Earl moved to Confucius, Tomas Aquinas, Descartes, Bacon, and Emerson to name a few. Before he turned 17 Earl read every worthwhile book in the Long Beach public library. This is a literal statement—*every worthwhile book he could find*—over a period of years starting before he turned 12, according to his mother. These writers entertained, excited the imagination, and enlightened Earl. From the pages of these books, he was taught and mentored. The authors became like friends to Earl. He was truly an unusual boy.

Checking his books back into the library always took some time because Earl had so many. The librarian had to examine each book, find the checkout card, date and initial it, place it back in the book, and put the book on the return cart.

Earl chatted with the librarian as she checked in his books. He asked her to recommend books he should read next. With check-in complete, he set about finding new books to read. At checkout, he waited through the long process again. One day the librarian suggested he sit in a chair and read for a while until he was ready to go home. Earl welcomed the chance to read in the cool, quiet atmosphere of the library instead of in the cramped, warm tent. Sitting undisturbed with a book in a soft chair for a while would be nice, and he took the librarian up on her offer.

After that visit, he frequently stayed and read at the library. The librarians helped him find the classic books he was looking

⁵ Earl also enjoyed lighter reading. Authors such as Zane Gray, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and Mark Twain also excited the imagination and taught lessons of their own.

for. Because of his friendly, outgoing nature and the amount of time he spent there, Earl became popular with the staff. He asked intelligent questions and engaged with other visitors at the library more like an adult than a boy.

Earl's ability to recall what he read was phenomenal, and the extensive reading he did as a child provided him with a vast repertoire of stories and wisdom to draw on throughout his life. He used the references almost completely from memory, rarely having to double-check a source.



Pam Box

WILBUR

When the family moved to Tent City, Wilbur came along. He was a remnant of their more carefree life prior to the stock market crash. My dad and his brothers loved that pig. They spent a lot of time playing with him and taking him out for walks around the neighborhood.

Honey told me, "There came a point where our difficulties reached their peak and we had to face the reality we could not afford to keep feeding Wilbur." She paused, searching for the right words.

"We ate the pig."

Although my dad understood the decision, he was broken hearted at losing his pal. Honey, still pained by the experience, said, “It was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I knew how much it hurt my boys. Life moves on, and you don’t have much time to dwell on the heartache when you’re in survival mode. You just keep putting one foot in front of the other and hold on to hope that things will get better eventually.”



EARL HAD A newspaper route. Shoeless as usual, he rode the family bicycle down the street enjoying the cool morning breeze blowing through his hair. He drew a newspaper from the basket tied to the handlebars and took aim. His strong arm thrust the paper into the air. It whizzed over the lawn and landed with a faint thud squarely on the customer’s front porch. He continued down the street, house to house, throwing papers or hand-delivering them if the homeowner happened to be outside.

Earl rode this route so many times he could have done it on a moonless night without streetlights. He knew most of the people who lived in the houses, and all seemed nice enough. But this day he noticed something he hadn’t thought about before: there were stark differences between neighborhoods and the way people lived. This discovery felt like a little nugget of treasure to Earl, a new piece of information to mull over like a riddle, or analyze and piece together like a puzzle.

On the surface everything and everyone seemed the same, but now he noted differences between people and their living conditions.

He saw that some families had choices regarding education, vacations, medical care, clothing, and even what they ate. Other families were bound to doing the same things every day with limited results. Like the Nightingales, there were families that didn't have birthday or Christmas presents. This piqued his interest. He wanted to understand how it was that some people succeeded in life, while others struggled. What made the "Haves" and the "Have-nots"?

It was not only financial success Earl was curious about. He recognized that happiness, loving relationships, kindness, and other traits were equally important. Money really wasn't everything. Still, given his situation, money did have importance—another piece to the puzzle he was putting together.

As intriguing as Earl found books to be, his observations while delivering papers gave him a whole new perspective on the world. The question stirred him. How could someone like Earl, homeless and without a father, make something of himself?

Somewhere, he believed, he could find the answer.



AS ITS NAME suggests, the city of Long Beach is bordered by an extensive stretch of sandy beach. The land slopes gradually into the ocean and the water is shallow and calm for some distance leading away from shore. For that reason, Long Beach was a longboard-surfing mecca until the construction of the breakwaters in the 1940s. In the mid-1930s, the beach was a popular, crowded place.

Earl felt driven to read and learn, but swimming lifted his spirits. This was especially true after the incident involving Wilbur. If he wasn't delivering papers or reading a book, Earl was down

at the beach enjoying time in the ocean. Possibly for him it was the place where he could be an equal with everyone else. There he wasn't the only one walking around without shoes.

Honey once said, “I don't mean to brag, but Earl was as comfortable in the water as he was on land. He was a faster swimmer than anyone around. And he was very competitive. In fact, he received many awards and recognitions for his swimming skills.” His skills were good enough that at only fifteen years old, Earl became a life-guard on the beach.



IN THE SUMMER of 1937, the Peterson family was vacationing in California for a week. Sreeve and Hazel Peterson raised their three children in the small town of Mesa, Arizona. At 16, Mary was the oldest child, Daisy was 14, and Bob, their youngest, was 12. They visited many of the more touristy locations in California (which didn't include Disneyland, as it hadn't been built yet). One particular day, Sreeve, Hazel, and their children went to Long Beach to swim and sunbathe.

This same day, Earl Nightingale was also at the beach.

Of all the people on the 5½-mile-long shoreline that day, Earl noticed Mary. He said she was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen. For him it was love at first sight. Outgoing as always, he walked right up to the pretty girl and introduced himself. Earl was the same age as Mary, good looking, tall, with an athletic build. The two teenagers talked for hours, walked in the sand and swam together. Without realizing he was doing it; Earl easily made some adjustments to his athletic beach activities to accommodate Mary's

THE STORY OF EARL NIGHTINGALE

more limited swimming abilities. Earl was so taken by Mary, he was even bold enough to insist on meeting her parents.



Earl & Mary resting on Long Beach, 1937

Mary's father, Sreeve Peterson, a respected and capable businessman, owned a gas station and a large sporting goods store in Mesa. Sreeve was very protective of his family and particular about his daughters' boyfriends. Unknown to the 16-year-old Earl, Sreeve had access to guns and knew exactly how to use them. In spite of Sreeve's inclinations, Earl managed to charm him.



Pam Box

LOVE

I once asked my dad what he felt and saw upon first seeing and meeting my mother. He told me she was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen and that when he first spoke to her he fell in love with her. He loved the way her hair shone with copper and gold in the sun, her million freckles that almost became one when she got tan, her shyness, the way she blushed, and the way she spoke.

Even her name—Mary Julia—enchanted him. He loved her natural grace, style, formal education, her family, everything. He said he was also shy but approached her nonetheless. They saw each other every day until her family's departure and was quite pleased when they exchanged addresses and agreed to write.

Mary and Earl spent every minute they could together during the remainder of the Petersons' vacation. Mary giggled, smiled, and occasionally blushed when Earl was around. And when he was not around, he was the topic of her conversation.

“Mary,” Daisy said one morning while getting dressed, “you know it's never going to work out.”

“What?” Mary exclaimed.

“There is no way this is going to work out between you and that boy.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Mary retorted.

“Yes, you do. You know exactly what I’m talking about,” Daisy said as she grabbed a hairbrush off the hotel bed and began to imitate Mary. In a voice higher than her own she continued, “He’s so dreamy, don’t you think.” Daisy brushed her hair the way Mary often did by grabbing all of it in one big clump and holding it up like a ponytail as she brushed out the ends to fluff them up. She continued attempting to mimic Mary, “He’s so smart and a life-guard—a good looking one with wavy hair.” Daisy started laughing and couldn’t continue. She threw the brush back on the bed and looked Mary straight in the face. “You’ll likely never even see each other again. Put your feet on the ground, Mary. You live in Arizona, and he lives in California!”

Mary’s cheeks felt hot. She took the hairbrush off the bed and rolled it around in her hands. Then she bent down close to Daisy so she could speak softly enough their parents wouldn’t overhear, “Daisy, he asked me for my address. We have agreed to write.”

Daisy, ignoring Mary’s desire to keep things quiet, loudly proclaimed, “Write, that’s all? The way you talk about him, we all think he’s asked for your hand in marriage.”

Mary was smitten.

Much too soon, the Petersons’ time in California ended, and they returned home. To Daisy’s dismay, Earl and Mary corresponded regularly by mail and once in a while by phone—a very expensive option in those days. Mary had made a big impression on Earl too; she never left his mind.

THE "HAVES" AND THE "HAVE-NOTS"



HANGING OVER THE sweethearts like a curse was a doctor's prediction: Mary wasn't expected to live beyond age 16.