

Vera Lee Justice Earl: A Life of Beauty

Vera Lee Justice Earl grew up in the tiny rural town of Dacula, Georgia, the daughter of Herman and Jessie Justice. She is the mother of three children, the grandmother of eight and a longtime beautician in Juneau, Alaska. Vera's kindness, generosity of spirit, and personal support made her a perfect candidate for the Women's Voices Project.



Vera Lee Justice Earl grew up in the tiny rural town of Dacula, Georgia, one of five children of Herman and Jessie Justice. Dacula, according to Vera, is somewhere between Atlanta and Athens, Georgia - the kind of town that “if you blinked, you would miss it.” Her first house was four rooms with no running water or indoor plumbing. “My siblings and I slept in the same bedroom,” she said. “We didn’t know any different, we were young and we were happy.” It wasn’t until she was six, when her grandfather helped find a new house for the family, that Vera experienced running water and a bathroom for the first time. “It was a big farmhouse with lots of outdoor buildings and barns. My dad tore down all the buildings and we all pitched in and planted Bermuda grass in rows all through the huge yard. There were big oak trees and one huge Magnolia, with ivy running on the trees in the old Southern style.”

Vera went to elementary and high school in Dacula, in a school system that wasn’t integrated until the year after she graduated.

“I was 19 years old when I married for the first time. I married my high school sweetheart. My husband knew he was going to get drafted to go to Vietnam, so he joined the Air Force. We got married right before he went in to basic training. He got sent to Michigan and I went with him.”

Vera had her first child at age 20. “Our first year of marriage was in Michigan, and it was probably good for me. I was a hometown girl who had never been anywhere. It really was the best thing that ever happened, because I got out of that little town

and saw life is a little different in other places. I made a lot of friends and we all had babies together.”

But Vera said her first husband was very domineering. “He didn’t want me to go outside the house without him. He was jealous, domineering and possessive. He was also an introvert and didn’t want friends or family over. Things started changing for me after our second child. I felt like I was having to sneak to have a little fun or go to talk with a friend. We went back to Georgia and that’s when I really started to get discontent.”

“I lived in a mobile home in my parents’ backyard when my husband went to Thailand during the war. My mother-in-law tried to plan my day. When my husband and I were separated for a year, that’s when I started to think about things.”

Vera said she was raised in the Baptist Church where the husband in the head of the household. “I was raised to be a good girl, to listen to my husband. I enjoyed being a mother and was very conscious of the children’s health and school. We were very active in our church; we went every Sunday.”

After her last child was born Vera went back to work in a beauty salon. “I had worked for my aunt while I was in high school. She was a hairstylist and I got to apprentice with her. Once I went back to work, looking back on it, I think that was when I started planning a divorce. I started saving cash.”

“I was terrified. What was I going to do out there on my own? I had to make a living. My son was six and my oldest was 10. I started working full time and I went to school for a year to get my license.”

“We had built a beautiful, three story house. My husband was an electrician. His father was an electrician too. We borrowed \$29,000 and built this fabulous, three story house with four bedrooms and three baths. My husband’s family gave us the property right next door to their place, by a big creek. It had a big bridge and a big beautiful yard. I had what most people would have looked at on the outside as a wonderful marriage. But on the inside, I was pretty miserable. I couldn’t go anywhere or do anything. I felt really stifled. I had been in that house for three years and I decided that we just weren’t meant for each other. I grew up and he stayed the same.”

“I went to him one day and said, ‘I want a divorce.’ Life is too short and I want to move on.’ He had not a clue. He was livid.”

Vera said her husband wanted to start over and perhaps move away from living near his domineering parents. “I thought about it but I realized I didn’t love him anymore.

My parents were devastated. They thought it was me. You wouldn't believe the things they said. I kept to myself for a long time. But I felt really comfortable when I realized I could take care of myself."

Vera said marrying so young had left her feeling she had missed out on fun. "I started driving to another town on the weekends, just to go out and have fun. I did that for two years, and then I met my current husband, Richard, through my best friends. The first time I met him I thought, 'Oh no, he has too much hair! He was riding a motorcycle and looked all ragged out. I was looking for a guy in a three piece suit!"

"We met again about a year later. He was looking for a date to go to a friend's wedding. When he asked me out he said, 'I'll wear a three piece suit! And by the way, I shaved!' We've been together for the last 28 years."

Vera said that when she thinks about the lessons she has learned in life, she realizes that a person can't be too quick to make decisions. "You have to think things through. I wanted to marry to get out of the house when I was young. I knew I couldn't afford a college education, so getting married was my ticket out. But I realized that's not the answer. You have to plan your life. You have to have some sort of a plan and not just jump for one thing or the other."

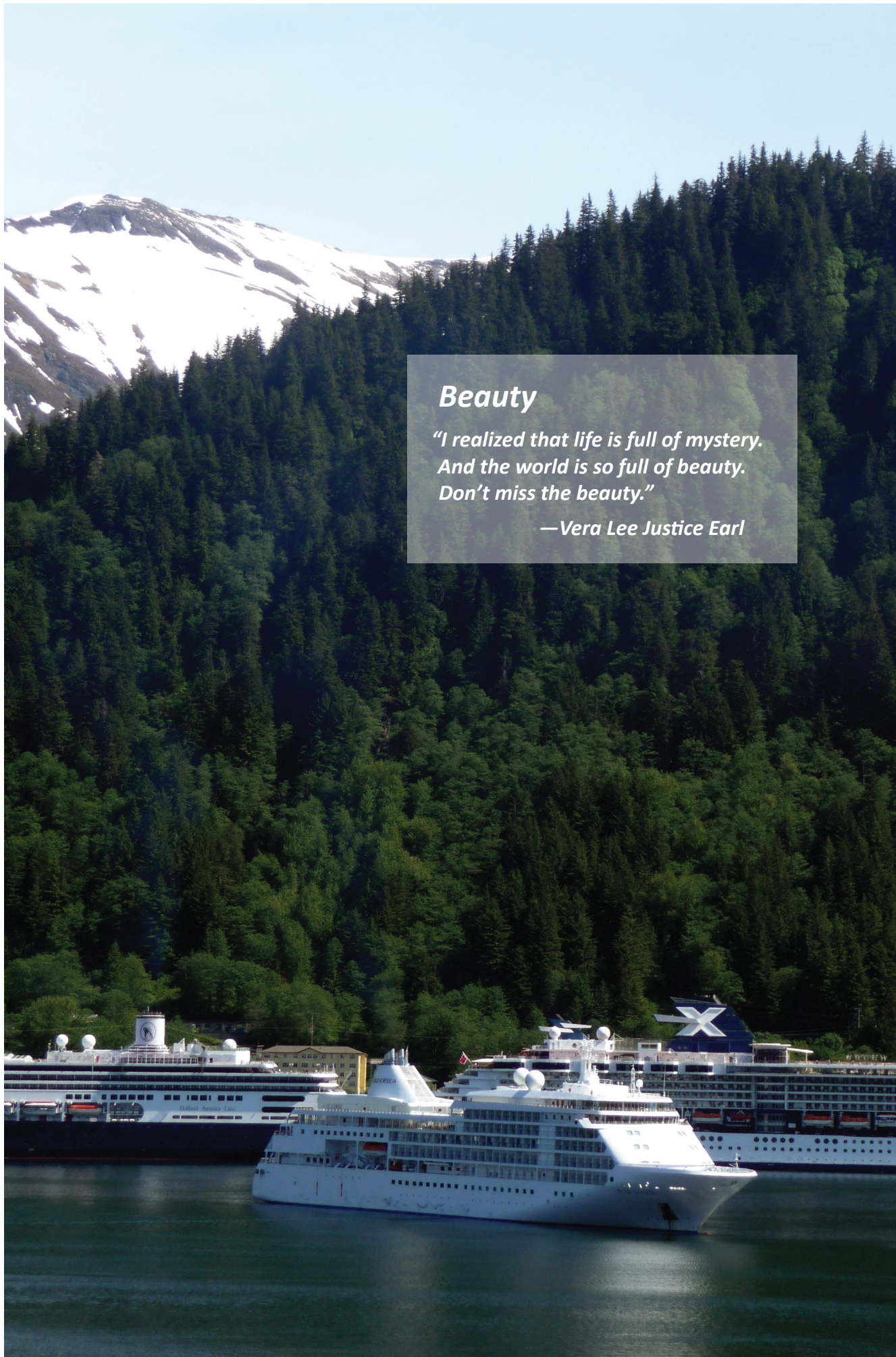
"Having a career has kept me going. I sometimes see 10 people in a day. I get to socialize. My clients tell me their innermost secrets. Each one of my clients is my friend. I really enjoy that."

Vera said girlfriends are important, too. "Girls need each other. Girls need to have fun together. We have fun with our husbands, but with our girlfriends it's a whole different ball game."

"My children are a wonderful part of my life. Staying good friends with your children is important too. If I had any advice to give young women it would be to take your time. Life is good. Don't sweat the little things. Wait things out and don't jump the gun. You have your whole life ahead of you."

"Another thing I have learned is that finances have a place in happiness, but you really don't have to have a lot of things. I don't have to have brand name things or a big house anymore to be happy. I really think getting in debt and overextending yourself is a big mistake. Being in debt is very stressful and it can disrupt a happy marriage."

"I realized that life is full of mystery. And the world is so full of beauty. Don't miss the beauty."



Beauty

*“I realized that life is full of mystery.
And the world is so full of beauty.
Don’t miss the beauty.”*

—Vera Lee Justice Earl