

## JOHN EARL SPENCER

John Earl Spencer was born the son of John Chancey Spencer and Grace Darling Spencer, nee Hodge, in Evansville, Vanderburgh County, Indiana, on 7 JUL 1949. John and Grace were both from White County, Illinois; Hawthorne and Mill Shoals townships respectively. They were married in Henderson, Henderson County, KY 22 AUG 1939. John was the son of Chancey Cook Spencer and Minnie Pearl Hart, and Grace was the daughter of Anderson Newton Hodge and Martha Elizabeth Miller. John Earl had a brother, Chancey Newton, that was born and died on 28 JUL 1940 and a sister, Mary Jane, that was born 6 SEP 1947.

Young John was raised on the family farm near Crossville, Phillips Twp., IL. The farm had been in both his Graves, Spencer and Peacock families since about 1805-1810. His father managed a couple of lumber yards at the time of his birth, but returned to farming about 1954. John Earl had the life of most farm boys in those days. There was much work to be done even as a small youngster. At an early age he toiled in the soil, played in the creek, ran through wheat fields, picnicked in fields of red clover and climbed into the hayloft for an afternoon of slumber with his dog, Pal. Being from Southern Illinois, John Earl pronounced Pal with about five vowel sounds.

The Spencer children were raised in the First Christian Church in Carmi, the seat of White County. They were a family that prayed, played and worked together. The family suffered a traumatic blow when John C. Spencer suffered a debilitating stroke that left him aphasic and paralyzed at the age of 54 until his death 26 years later. Therein began John Earl's interest in family history. He was only 12 when his father had the stroke, his father had been about 12 when his father, Chancey, died of influenza, and Chancey was only 7-9 years of age when his father, John Wesley Spencer, the first born in the United States committed suicide. John W.'s parents had been John "Jack" Spencer and Elizabeth Kershaw of Lancashire, England, that emigrated to IL by way of NYC and Utica, NY. Much family history was lost to these early demises and disabilities. His paternal grandmother instilled in John Earl the importance of family history. She was a great storyteller as well. Through her, he was passed as much information as he could absorb.

John Earl's mother was the youngest child of Anderson Newton Hodge who had passed years before his birth. Grace's recollections of her nights with her Granny Hodge, Rachel Jeanette Carter, (wistfully wondering if her missing husband, Alphonso, had shelter or was sleeping under the stars) and Grace's conversations with "Old Fat George" aka George Peter Hodge simply added to the child's curiosity of family unknown. He couldn't quite grasp that his great-grandfather had been a physician and had abandoned his family. In addition, Old Fat George's story of his Negro "mammy" and his remembrance of suckling her breast until about the age of four or five added more interest in the history of the his Southern roots. John's quest would grow as he would accompany family members from as far as California to the local cemeteries to find their common ancestors and share their stories. From his father, he had learned that it was his duty to carry the tradition of honoring all the graves of the ancestors on Memorial Day and to oversee their care with the clipping of grass, repairing of stones, etc.

The Spencers moved to Carmi when John was 13 where he graduated from high school. He then continued his education at Southern Illinois University where he received his B.S. degree and later attended the University of Evansville. His degree prepared him for life in the corporate world as a manufacturers representative in the home furnishings industry and public relations. When his father's health faltered, John returned to Carmi to assist with his ailing father and opened a floral, gift and accessory store. Due to the economy of the 80's and other unforeseeable setbacks, his venture failed. He made the move to San Francisco to return to the home furnishings industry. John has sometimes said that his life is not about his accomplishments as much as his failures. For in success he was sometimes led to failure and in failures he would find his success and himself. He believes his greatest achievement was persevering three years in hospice care. His interests are naturally in genealogy and history. John likes to be transported back in time and distance through an imaginative but a realistic

mind. Illness precluded a continuation of civic duties and organizations. Other interests or hobbies now include being near or on the ocean, kayaking, hiking through Pacific Coast trails and redwoods, the performing arts, museums, art and photography galleries, creative writing, volunteer work for charities and the love of meeting and embracing all of mankind.

John is at his best when confronted with a mystery or a difficulty and fantasizes himself as a sleuth, King David or a diamond in the rough...though he would be equally happy as a pebble. He describes himself as simply another one of God's creatures attempting to complete the journey called Life through various paths and bumpy roads. He would be the first to tell you that he has had a lot of backtracking to do. Robert Frost; he is not.

John's heroes are Helen Keller, Albert Schweitzer and his parents, John and Grace (Hodge) Spencer.

His motto is Deus et ignoscentia, "God is forgiving."

