Hattie Polk XXX XXXXXX NC

January 26, 2005

Dear Hattie:

Where do I begin? It was truly a blessing from God for me to find you after all of this time. In fact, I had actually given up on finding any of my Father's family in spite of how hard I had searched for the past two years. I guess I will try to start from the beginning.

Judith Ellen Chandler (my biological mother), was from a broken home. Her father (my grandfather) abandoned them when she was 10 years old in San Francisco. My mother says that one day she stepped off of the school bus after school, and there he was. Twenty-seven year old Earl Van Best, Jr. She said that he started up a conversation, then the conversation led to continued meetings after school. My mother said that he was the first person that ever told her that he loved her. She fell for him and ran away with him when she was 14. My mother said that my father forged illegal identification for my mother so that they could get "married". They married in a Reno wedding chapel on January 5th 1962. I guess when my mother's mother (Verda Mae Chandler) found out about it, she contacted the authorities and my father was arrested on February 22, 1962 at the residence where he and my mother were living, and charged with "rape of a minor under 18 years of age". Evidently my grandmother dropped the charges and my mother and father continued to see each other. On July 30, 1962, my father kidnapped my mother from the hospital where she was confined for an illness. Somehow, the charges were dropped, and my mother and father got together again and ran away to Mexico. From there, they ended up in New Orleans where she gave birth to me on February 12, 1963. When I was three months old, my father kidnapped me (according to my mother and the police report) and took me by train from New Orleans to Baton Rouge (about 70 miles by train). He allegedly dropped me off at a church, and returned to New Orleans without me. When my mother found out that my father had "disposed" of me, she ran away. My father tracked my mother down a week or so later and demanded that she return to him. When she refused, my father turned her in as a juvenile runaway from California. When the authorities picked up my mother, she told them everything about my father and him kidnapping me and dropping me off in Baton Rouge. The police pieced everything together, and took my mother to Baton Rouge where she signed the adoption papers relinquishing me for adoption (part of her mother's agreement with the authorities), and then shipped her back to my grandmother. My father was arrested in New Orleans and transported back to California as a fugitive (he had broken probation

from his rape and kidnapping offense by fleeing the state of California for Louisiana). That is the end of the "Best" side of the story. On May 17th, 1963, I was adopted by the Stewart family. I was only 3 months old and they were the only family that I ever knew. They were very honest with me from the very beginning and told me that I was adopted, even before I knew what that word "adopted" really meant. For 39 years, I was Gary Loyd Stewart. I was raised in the Istrouma Baptist Church by the best parents in the world. My parents, Loyd and Leona Stewart are both 73 years old now and just celebrated 53 years of marriage on January 19th. In May of 2002, a lady from San Francisco telephoned my mother, Leona Stewart, and claimed to be my birth mother! My parents, as they did with everything, prayed about what to do for nearly two weeks before they told me. Finally, they decided that God wanted them to share the news of this "lady" in San Francisco. On Mother's Day, 2002, I spoke to my birthmother, Judith Ellen Chandler, for the first time. Since then, we have spent each of my birthday's together, and spend several weekends together during the year. She is very close to my parents, Loyd and Leona Stewart. For nearly three years, I have searched for my father. My mother had friends in the San Francisco Police Department that helped me find out who my father was, because she knew that he was a criminal. My search led me to discover the last residence of my grandfather, Reverend Earl Van Best. With this information, I found out more about who I was, and I then researched his military records to discover that he had family in the Galivant's Ferry area, therefore leading me to you! I have condensed three years of hard work and research into these two pages of history to you, but rest assured, there is so much more to the story than I have mentioned here. I know that this sounds like a novel, something that Oprah would like to get a hold of. When I first found out about my birthmother, I started writing a journal of my life and my discoveries. This journal is now in a form that could be published...I just don't have all of the pieces to the story yet! Unfortunately, I feel that all of the genius and power and glory that made up the Reverend Earl Van Best, somehow went terribly wrong in my father. I have discovered that kidnapping and rape were just the beginning of the end of my father, and he died a miserable death in Mexico in 1984. All I ever wanted to do was to meet my father face-to-face and to tell him that I love him and to release all of the guilt that must have riddled his soul. I just wanted to offer forgiveness and tell him that he had actually given me the best possible life by having given me up for adoption to the Stewart's. I wanted him to look at me and to see his father...and to be proud of me. But that wasn't part of God's plan, and now I will follow my God with the faith that "all things work together for good for those that love the Lord and for those who are called according to his purpose".

From the first day that I was ever able to reason, I knew that God had placed me here on this earth for a greater purpose. It is only now that I begin to see the hand of God revealing his plan for my life in the discovery of you and my family.

There is so much more to share. I look forward to meeting you very soon, and you are in my prayers each and every day.

Gary Loyd Stewart (Formerly Earl Van Dorn Best)