

## 2. Earl's Upbringing

Earl Martin Shaeffer was born in Farnham, Lincoln County, Nebraska on September 24, 1903, the third of eight children born to Martin William and May Ellen Suttle Shaeffer. The family returned to Colorado around 1905 where Martin worked as a teamster in Denver.



Earl remembered riding in the delivery wagon with his father. He recalled that one time they approached another driver who was unmercifully whipping a poor tired old horse up a steep hill. This enraged Martin so that he let his own whip fly at the heartless freighter, saying, "Don't let me ever catch you beating that horse again."

Below: May Ellen Suttle & Martin William Shaeffer  
Wedding 1899, Steamboat Springs, Colorado  
(center)



Earl's mother hailed from Steamboat Springs, Colorado, a very high mountain town, where the snows came early and stayed late. She often went to school on skis. On one occasion when the snow was very, very deep, her ski caught on a telegraph line causing a fall in which she broke a tooth.

In 1910 the Martin William Shaeffer family and the Robert F. Shaeffer family lived side by side at 3332 Eliot Street in Denver (possibly a duplex - 1910 census and Denver city directory). At least part of the Shaeffer family was living in Denver by 1895. Earl's two older sisters were both

born in Colorado. The 1900 census showed grandparents, George and Louisa Shaeffer in Lincoln County, Nebraska. That's where Martin and his family were also living when Earl was born. It is unclear what took them to Nebraska, but both families returned to Colorado prior to 1905. Earl's grandmother, Louisa Shaeffer, died in Denver in 1907. Grandfather George lived until 1914.

May Ellen Suttle Shaeffer lived until age 79, passing away in 1961 in Denver, having been a widow for over 38 years.

May Ellen and her daughters were known for their beautiful, smooth, creamy complexions.



L-R: Violet Shaeffer Learmouth, May Ellen Suttle Shaeffer, Mary Shaeffer Thomas

Earl's mother, May Ellen Suttle Shaeffer, was the daughter of George Henry Suttle of Iowa and Amelia Francis Tennis of Illinois. A family researcher, Jeremy Dover, has taken the Tennis line back a number of generations. (See Appendix.) The Suttles lived in Steamboat Springs, Colorado when May Ellen met Martin William Shaeffer.

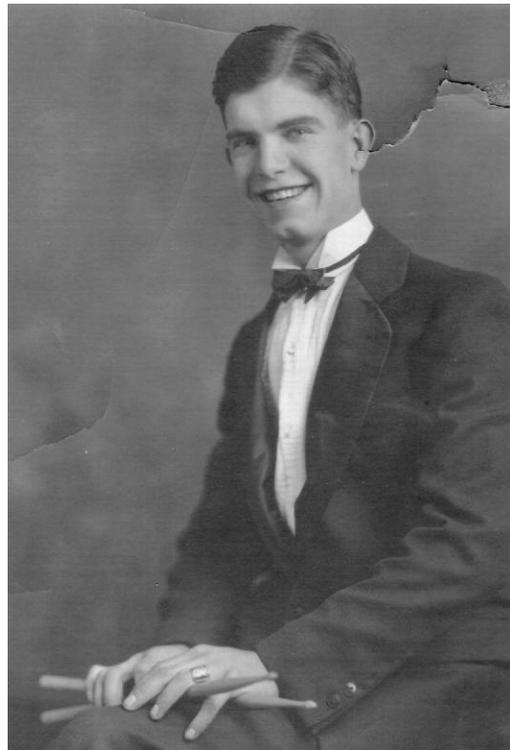
Earl's father, Martin, as a teamster often delivered orders for a number of Denver's grocery stores. His grandfather, George Shaeffer, had also been a teamster, according to both the 1870 and 1880 federal census records of Polk County, Iowa. In various documents the Shaeffer name has also been spelled as Shafer, Shaffer, Schafer, and Shaefer, all referring to the same persons.

Martin William Shaeffer died as a result of kidney disease at the age of 49 leaving his widow with 8 children to rear. Times were hard after Martin's death. Earl recalled that at one time a neighborhood contest was organized to see which family had the most children, which family had the most girls and which family had the most boys. The winner in each category would get a ton of coal. The Shaeffer family won in all three categories, and they were awarded three tons of coal which helped them get through the winter. It would be nice to know which kindly neighbor set up the "contest" in which the Shaeffers were sure to win.

Though the Shaeffers may have been poor as far as this world's goods were concerned, they were rich in family love and loyalty. They all worked to keep the family going. During Martin's illness, Earl quit school in his sophomore year of high school to begin working in a foundry. The work was hard and dirty. Foul fumes were a daily health hazard. Then in 1921 he was hired by Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Co. "assisting in cable measurements and records." The title of Cable Splicer was given him in 1924 according to the telephone company's publication, The Monitor.

The Elks organization helped young people by organizing a drum and bugle corps. Earl was fortunate to be admitted to this group where he became a talented drummer. His family was unable to provide the funds for him to have a drum, but they did help him buy drum sticks. He practiced drumming on the dresser top and became very good at it.

He played the drums throughout the years, including dances in Grand Junction and surrounding communities. He recalled that often about midnight when the band was scheduled to end their night's gig, the dancers would pass a hat around to collect enough money to keep the band playing for another hour or so.



The story of how Earl taught Jo to play the drums was included in the memorial tribute to Earl published in the Curry County Historical Foundation book in 1978, p. 491:

Earl M. Shaeffer was a man of quiet dignity and great depth of kindness. He was loved and respected by all who know him... As a young man he was a drummer in the famous Cook's Drum and Bugle Corps. The group, a 60 piece band organized during the Colorado gold mining boom, traveled and performed all over the United States.

Earl spent his growing up years in Denver where he met and married Helen Josephine Osborne on New Year's Day 1925. One day, when the Shaeffers were still newlyweds, Jo was looking through the newspaper and an unusual ad caught her eye. It read: WANTED: Drummer for All-Girl Orchestra. "How I would love to do that," said Jo, though she had never played the drums. The audition was only ten days away but Earl was convinced he could teach Jo to play the drums in that length of time if she would really work at it. And work she did! Each day Earl would teach her a new set of rhythm patterns when he came home from work. Then she would practice—practice—practice—on the table—on pots and pans, until Earl would teach her a new set.

On the day of the audition Jo was nervous. Could she do it? She didn't want Earl to hear her performance so she asked him to just drop her off. Instead of leaving, however, he drove around the block, parked and sneaked into the rear of the audition hall.

When Earl heard her play he was proud. His pupil had learned her lessons well, and he knew she'd get the job. And she did! The All-Girl Orchestra performed at the Pump Room of the Holland Hotel in Denver and received wide acclaim. It was a delightful experience for the young Shaeffers. With Earl in the Drum and Bugle Corps and Jo in the All-Girl Orchestra, it was a musical time of life they would long cherish.



Jo on the drums

On a videotape made in her 80's Jo talked about playing in the all-girl orchestra:

*I made the orchestra and I had a lot of fun with it. And I made \$19.75 a week. We played down at the Holland Cafe in Denver which was a very nice restaurant at that time. We played for an hour during the dinner hour and then we played from nine to eleven [in the evening]. I think it was five days a week, but I can't remember exactly. I played with them for a while, I guess it was about a year, maybe not quite a year. We had lots of fun. It was a real cute bunch. Dixie Lee and I were very dear friends, and still are. I hear from her only at Christmas now but anyway, she had tried out just before I did. She played the piano beautifully, but she also played the banjo and guitar. The other two were sisters, Addie and Nettie. One of them played the violin and one played the piano beautifully. We really had fun playing.*

*Every once in a while when we lived in Grand Junction I'd meet somebody who had heard me play in Denver and remembered me. While I was playing with them, a real famous all-girl orchestra came through Denver. I can't remember the name of it now, and while they were there, their drummer--and I can't remember if she quit or if she got sick--anyway, they were without a drummer and they came down to the restaurant and they heard me play and the manager of their group came and asked me if I'd meet with them the next morning at ten o'clock at the Brown Palace. And they offered me a job playing with that orchestra. Imagine that! And I didn't know anything. Of course, I could keep time to the music, and I guess that was all they were interested in. And I really would have liked to have done it, but of course they traveled on the road and Earl wouldn't listen to that and neither would I because I wouldn't leave him. But it was a wonderful opportunity and I certainly learned a lot.*

The Great Depression hit not long after the Shaeffers had their first baby and times were hard. But Jo and Earl were always grateful for Earl's job with the telephone company, especially when many college-educated men were on the streets begging for money to feed their families. No one was ever turned away from the Shaeffers home who asked for money or help.

Earl's work took the Shaeffers all over Colorado: Colorado Springs, Grand Junction, Meeker, Durango, Aspen and Cripple Creek.

Right: Bobbie Jo and Earl  
Note the lace-up work boots and leather jacket.



After 47 years with the telephone company Earl retired as manager of the Palisade, Colorado telephone exchange. Two of his brothers, Cliff and Bob also worked for the telephone company. It was noted that the three Shaeffer brothers eventually had a combined service of well over 100 years with Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Co.



Left: Cliff and Bob Shaeffer

Earl's brother, Cliff, was injured in WWII. He had a steel plate in his head which caused him much pain and anguish. Over time, the results of this injury, combined with personal problems, triggered a depression in which he eventually ended his own life.

Earl's sisters, Esther, Violet and Mary, were beautiful and gracious. One snapshot (below) of the Shaeffer children from their early years, unidentified, are perhaps: (L-R) Bob, infant Cliff, held by Esther or Mary, then Earl on the right. Photo about 1912 or 1913.



The author never met Esther, who died in 1932, but Violet and Mary were very kind when E.C. was introduced into the family. Mary was particularly helpful in providing family history information.

Lois Louise died as an 8-year-old child, and her twin, Louis, lived until the age of 43. Cliff and Bob were both living in Albuquerque when Marty and E.C. resided there from 1959 to 1961.

Violet lived with her mother in her later years. Mary married George Thomas who had two children by a previous marriage. They later adopted a girl who was the joy of their lives. Mary and George lived in Denver until they were no longer able to care for themselves, at which time they moved to Michigan to be near George's son.

Earl had a charming dimple in his chin as did his brothers and at least one sister. The photos below were taken in a photo booth, probably around 1935-1940.



Members of the Shaeffer family were loyal to each other and worked together to support their mother when she was widowed. Throughout the years Earl and Jo made frequent visits to their widowed mothers in Denver. From Grand Junction the trip was long and tiresome over mostly graveled roads up and over Loveland Pass. Marty remembered as a child being “shushed” if he made too much noise in the apartment buildings where his grandmothers lived. To him their rooms always seemed too warm and too crowded with furniture.

Earl was an excellent craftsman. He always tried to simplify every task. He was very creative, modifying tools for specific jobs. One example was his “snips” which were very small but strong wire cutters. He modified these to strip the coating from copper wire, a frequent task at work. As time went by he was never without a pair. Eventually “snips” became a standard tool for all the telephone linemen as well as for the Shaeffer clan. Earl used them to clean fish, pull fishhooks from fingers, install telephones, rewire the Jeep, cut hair, patch a tire and remove porcupine needles from a dog’s nose, among other things.

Earl could fix anything, or at least he would always try. When his grandson, Bo, was small he tore apart an old alarm clock and couldn’t get it back together so he brought it to “Pappy,” so named by the grandchildren. Pappy told him that you had to study the object before you took it apart. Then figure out what each part does, removing and labeling each part. Earl threw the clock parts out, then let Bo help him tear down the electric motor that operated the irrigation pump. “Dad read directions only after he tried all other options,” noted Bobbie Jo. She said, “The whole family saved broken things for him to fix. He even got into watch repair. I had a good watch that stopped and a jeweler was going to charge me \$35 to fix it. Dad used his magic cure for watches: one drop of carbon tetrachloride on the moving parts, shake it and remove the excess with a piece of cotton. It worked every time. This solvent was eventually taken off the market because the fumes were dangerous. But Dad still kept a small bottle at his workbench. He explained that “everything is dangerous if you don’t know how to use it.”

“Dad knew a great deal about electricity,” said Marty. “He could test hot wires with his bare hands. He would use his little finger with his thumb so that the three middle fingers wouldn’t

cramp up. His long experience with electricity had taught him how to handle it with confidence as well as respect.”

Earl grew up in a church in which the minister had a positive influence on him. But in his later years Earl resisted organized religion. He wouldn't join or even go to a church because he knew some of the church members were hypocrites. They didn't pay their bills, they cheated on their wives or were lazy and didn't give a day's work for a day's pay. Jo countered that perhaps these people needed the church more than others. Earl said that he didn't need a church to tell him to give an honest day's work or give a helping hand to those in need. Earl said he found God in the mountains and in growing things. “He taught us by example,” explained Bobbie Jo.

Earl's favorite pastime was fishing. Bobbie Jo wrote:

*When Marty and I were children we looked forward to traveling with Dad in the summer time. Mother suffered greatly with hay fever but as long as she was in the mountains she was fine. Since Dad's work took him all over the state he saved the work in the small mountain towns until summer. We spent time in Silverton, Ouray, Durango, Telluride and a couple of summers in Aspen. Dad usually found us a place to live through the local telephone office.*

*Mom would pack the car with clothes, pots and pans, extra pillows and blankets. Marty and I each took along a box of treasures. We spent summers in Aspen where when it was mostly a ghost town. The silver miners had moved on and the skiers hadn't yet discovered it. There was a grocery store and a drug store and the old Jerome Hotel. Most of the houses were boarded up with For Sale signs. The owner of the Jerome Hotel had the keys to most of the houses, many of which still had furniture. In addition he was a realtor as well as a hotel manager. He gave Dad the keys and let him choose a house for the summer. Many of those houses could be bought for back taxes. Mother wanted to buy the last house we lived in, which was across the side street from the Jerome Hotel. Dad said, “Who would want to spend every summer in Aspen?” Dad was never able to live down this remark.*

*Shortly after unpacking, Mother would go hunting for the library. These Colorado mountain towns usually had a library of sorts in the back of the courthouse, general store, jail or sometimes in an old house. Often Mother read everything there was and many times straightened and dusted the shelves. She met some interesting people along the way.*

*Dad checked out all the fishing streams, particularly along old mining roads. It didn't take him long to find places where after work he could catch enough trout for supper.*

Marty remembered an all-day fishing trip on the Crystal River which was just out of Glenwood Springs:

*When I was older, we would do leap-frogging on the river so that we each could fish in undisturbed water. I remember doing that one day on the Crystal River and I was amazed to discover that I was catching very, very large trout. I couldn't wait to show them to Dad. Suddenly someone stepped out from behind a bush and startled me. He kindly explained that he was with the Secret Service and they were preparing for President Eisenhower to fish that portion of the river the following day. I asked him if by chance they had salted the river, and he grinned and admitted they had. I was reluctant to abandon the river, but happy to save the rest of the big ones for Ike!*

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