

A Woman Named Eartha

About a half-century ago, "Reader's Digest" published a story about one of the most remarkable human beings ever to walk the face of the earth. No, she was not a governmental leader, member of a royal family or super performing star, although she might have been. Her name was Eartha White, and she was the four-and-a-half-foot-tall daughter of a former slave. She believed that "service is the price we pay for the space we occupy on this planet."

Eartha lived by the principle that each of us should do all the good we can in all the ways we can for all the people we can while we can.

She gave up a promising opera career to join her mother in trying to make things easier for the people who came to her mother's free soup kitchen. She taught school for 16 years, then used her small savings to open a department store that catered primarily to African-Americans. She eventually started a steam laundry, an employment agency, a real estate company and an insurance business. She amassed an estate worth more than \$1 million, only to commit most of it to projects that made her a one-woman welfare department.

Eartha's life was about helping people. She reached down and lifted those who needed a hand up instead of a handout. She maintained a boarding home for indigents and a mercy hospital for those who had become completely helpless. At another home, she took in unwed mothers, and in another, she nursed alcoholics back to sobriety. She also donated buildings for two child-care centers, and turned a vacant movie house into a recreation center for children who lived in slums. Her deep faith led her to quote John 15:7 (KJV), which says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

She worked hard, lived expectantly, and died fulfilled. If each of us did a fraction of what she did, the contribution to society would be significant. The sheer joy of giving and doing for others is hard to top. We have discovered that in Life Care, American Lifestyles and Life Care at Home. By following Eartha White's example, we have found that joy and personal fulfillment are great rewards, indeed.

--Beecher Hunter