

Jeff Benedict's and Armen Keteyian's number 1 *New York Times* bestseller is based on years of reporting and interviews with more than 250 people.

The following extract from the biography introduces Tiger Woods' parents Kultida and Earl and his grandfather Miles.

Jeff Benedict and Armen Keteyian

Family Matters

On September 14, 1981, five-year-old Tiger Woods entered a kinder-garten classroom at Cerritos Elementary School that had been carefully decorated to help put children at ease. It was the first day of school. Pictures of animals and nature were tacked to a couple of bulletin boards. Hand-colored drawings – one of fluffy white clouds against a blue sky, and another of a bright yellow sun with beams radiating from it – were taped to a side wall. Numbers and the letters of the alphabet ran along the top of the chalkboard. But none of it diminished the fact that Tiger felt different from all the other kids. Vastly different. Instead of toys, his prized possession was a custom-made set of golf clubs. Besides his parents, his closest friend was his golf instructor, a thirty-two-year-old man with a mustache named Rudy. Tiger had already appeared on national television a couple of times, performed in front of millions of people, and rubbed shoulders with Bob Hope¹, Jimmy Stewart², and Fran Tarkenton³. His golf swing was so smooth that Tiger looked like a pro in a miniature body. He had even signed autographs, printing "TIGER" in block letters to compensate for the fact that he had yet to learn cursive. He was a whiz with numbers too. When he was two years old, his mother taught him how to add and subtract. He was three when his mother erected a multiplication table for him. He worked on it every day, over and over. The more she drilled him, the more he developed a love of numbers. In math he was performing at a third-grade level. Yet no one in his kindergarten class knew any of this. Not even his teacher.

Tiger quietly found a chair among nearly thirty other kindergartners. Only three things were discernible about him: His skin was a little darker than everyone else's. He was painfully shy. And he had a very peculiar first name – Eldrick. But when kindergarten teacher Maureen Decker played a song written to help the children introduce themselves that first day, he referred to himself as Tiger. Throughout the remainder of the class, he resisted Decker's gentle attempts to get him to talk. It wasn't until class was over that he gingerly approached his teacher and tugged at her.

"Don't call me Eldrick," he stammered. "Call me Tiger."

Kultida Woods gave the same instructions: address her son by his nickname, not his given name.

Tiger lived one-tenth of a mile from the school. Each morning his mother dropped him off, and each afternoon she picked him up. Then she would drive him to a nearby golf course, where he practiced. It didn't take long for Decker to recognize that Tiger had an unusually structured routine that left little to no time for interacting with other children outside of school. Academically, he was way ahead of the other kids in his class, especially when it came to anything related to numbers. He was also unusually disciplined for a five-year-old. But he seldom spoke, and he looked lost on the playground, as if he were gun-shy when it came to playing with others.

As an adult, Tiger reflected back on his childhood and the fact that he focused solely on golf. In a 2004 "Authorized DVD Collection," Tiger said that he liked to run and play baseball and basketball as a kid, but he didn't love it. "Golf was my decision," he said. But his elementary school teachers have a different recollection. At the first parent-teacher conference, Decker diplomatically raised her

¹ *Bob Hope*: (1903-2003), American comedian

² *Jimmy Stewart*: (1908-1997), American actor

³ *Fran Tarkenton*: (b. 1940), American former football player

concerns and suggested involving Tiger in some after-school activities. Earl instantly dismissed the idea, making it clear that Tiger played golf after school. When Decker tried explaining the benefits of letting Tiger make friends with kids his own age, Earl cut her off. He knew what was best for his son. Kultida remained quiet, and the conference ended awkwardly.

Decker decided she wouldn't bring it up again. But one day, Tiger approached her during recess. "Ask my mom if I can go play soccer," he said softly. Decker talked to Kultida privately. The two of them had developed a friendly rapport, and Kultida agreed with Decker that it would be good for Tiger to play soccer with the other children. She pleaded with Tiger's teacher to continue encouraging Earl to allow Tiger to participate in after-school activities. So at the next parent-teacher conference, Decker raised the subject again. This time Earl got animated. While he pontificated about knowing what was best for his son, Kultida again kept silent. The bottom line: No soccer. It was golf and nothing else.

"I felt sorry for the child, because he wanted to interact with others," Decker said.

At a time when very few fathers attended parent-teacher conferences at Cerritos Elementary, Earl Woods was known for always showing up. Sometimes he even arrived without Kultida. School administrators got used to seeing more of him than they did of any other father. He even came for show-and-tell. Ann Burger, Tiger's first-grade teacher, said she would never forget that day, because it was the most unusual show-and-tell in her thirty-year teaching career. Earl walked in with a bag of miniature golf clubs, and Burger ended up taking her entire class outside, where Tiger put on a show, blasting golf balls all over the playground.

"He was good," Burger recalled. "He had special clubs⁴. They were little clubs. But they were *his* clubs."

Tiger was the show and Earl did the telling, explaining to the children how his son had become so accomplished through hard work and practice. The six-year-olds were in awe, but the performance was just one of a series of observations that raised questions in the minds of some of Tiger's teachers. *What is this child going through? What goes on in his home? What is the family dynamic?*

Part of Tiger Woods's family tree is rooted in Manhattan, Kansas, a hard scrabble⁵, windblown city that was segregated when Earl Woods was born there on March 5, 1932. His father, Miles Woods, a fifty-eight-year-old stonemason whose health was already in decline at the time of Earl's birth, was affectionately described by his children as an "old, fussy, cussy⁶ man." A faithful Baptist who avoided alcohol and cigarettes, Miles nonetheless had a legendary habit of using foul language. "My father taught me discipline and how to swear," Earl would later say. "He could swear for thirty minutes and never repeat himself."

Earl's mother, Maude, a mixed-race woman of African, European, Chinese, and Native American ancestry, had earned a college degree in home economics from Kansas State University. She taught Earl to read and write in a cramped, 1,300-square-foot home. The family had no car and no television, and Earl spent a lot of time outdoors with his father. Together, they built a stone wall between the family home and the street. "He showed me how to mix the mortar," Earl said. "He had his own way. He'd say, "You've got to have the right amount of spit in it." He'd spit in the bucket and say, "Yeah, that's about right."

Earl also spent a lot of time with his father at Griffith Park, a new minor league baseball stadium in town, where Miles was a scorekeeper. Miles could recite the names, batting averages, and pitching statistics of every future major leaguer who came through Manhattan. He scored his final game in August 1943; hours after the final pitch, Miles died from a stroke at age seventy. Earl was eleven at the time and recalled watching his grieving mother sit in a rocking chair, repeatedly humming the words from the gospel hymn "What Are They Doing in Heaven?" Four years later, Maude also suffered a stroke and died. Earl, just a few months shy of turning sixteen, was suddenly

⁴ the tools for hitting the ball

⁵ *hard scrabble*: not having enough of the basic things you need to live

⁶ (here) swearing

an orphan who ended up in the care of an older sister, who ran the house like “a little dictator.”

85 Earl’s father had one obsession when he died: he wanted Earl to become a professional baseball player. Nothing would have made him prouder. Knowing this, Earl set his heart on joining the big leagues. It was a dream that got a boost in 1947 when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier⁷ and joined the Brooklyn Dodgers. That summer, Earl was working as a batboy at Griffith Park, and many of the best players in the Negro Leagues were barnstorming across the Midwest. Earl met Roy
90 Campanella, Josh Gibson, and Monte Irvin. He also said that one afternoon during batting practice he caught for legendary pitcher Satchel Paige, whose fastball was believed to hit one hundred miles an hour.

After graduating from high school in 1949, Earl enrolled at Kansas State and joined the baseball team as a catcher. He would also pitch and play first base. By his junior year, he was one of the best
95 players on a very bad team. As an adult, Earl published a best-selling memoir in which he claimed to have earned a baseball scholarship and broken the color line as the first black athlete in the Big 7 (later the Big 8, and now the Big 12) Conference⁸. Both statements were exaggerated.

“He didn’t get a scholarship from me,” former Kansas State baseball coach Ray Wauthier told journalist Howard Sounes in 2003. “I think he put that in the story to make it sound a little better”.

100 “Nor was Earl the first black athlete to play in the Big 7; Harold Robinson and Veryl Switzer, who later played for the Green Bay Packers, preceded him. But Woods was the first black player to make the American Legion all-state team in Kansas, which prompted Wauthier to offer him a spot on the K-State roster, earning Earl the distinction of breaking the Big 7 color line in baseball.

Woods’s baseball career would never advance beyond college, but his views on race were
105 strongly influenced by his experience as the only black player on the roster. Once, while the team was on a spring-training trip to Mississippi, an opposing coach saw Woods warming up and told Coach Wauthier that his catcher would have to remain on the bus and not play. Wauthier responded by telling all his players to get back on the bus. The team left without participating. On another occasion, in Oklahoma, a motel manager informed Wauthier that his lone black player would not be
110 allowed to stay, suggesting instead that Woods spend the night at a different motel three miles away, Wauthier canceled the reservation for his entire team.

These experiences were hardly Earl’s first encounters with racism. Back at Manhattan High School, he had had his eye on an attractive white girl. He had always wanted to dance with her, but he didn’t dare ask. In Kansas in the late forties, a relationship with a white girl was out of the
115 question. Instead, he kept to himself, storing in his mind an inventory of taunts, snubs, and personal roadblocks that came his way because of the color of his skin.

During his junior year of college, Earl joined the ROTC⁹. The first time he put on a military uniform, he felt an unfamiliar sense of pride and self-worth – unfamiliar because he’d never quite gotten over the fact that he wasn’t talented enough to make it as a pro ballplayer the way his father had wanted.
120

(2018)

⁷ *broke the color barrier*: became the first African American player in a white team

⁸ *Big 7... Conference*: top leagues

⁹ the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps