

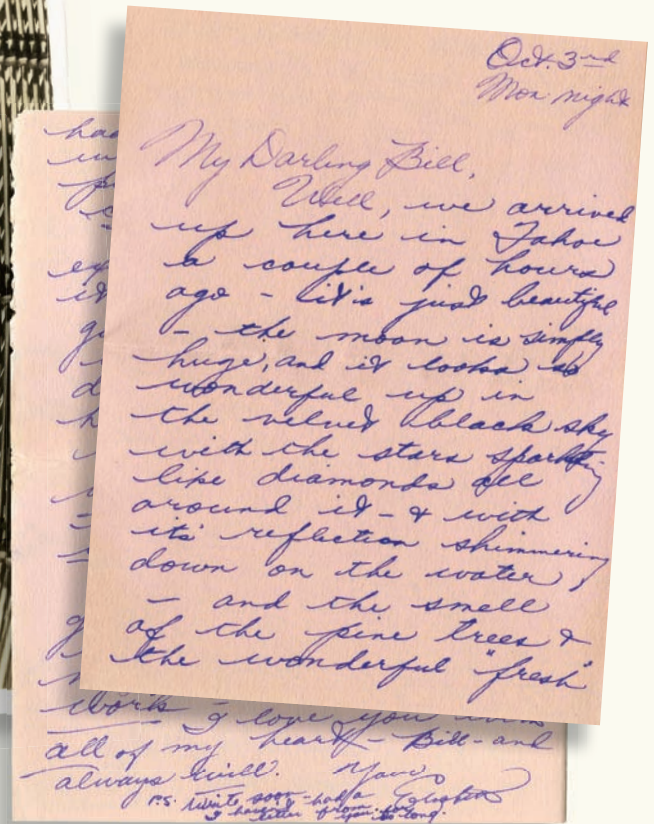
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CONNECTING WITH CELEBRITY



Elizabeth Taylor 66 Love Letters



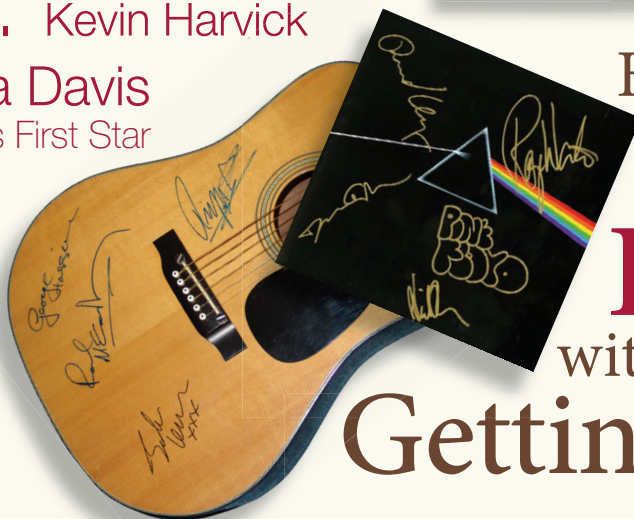
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Elizabeth Taylor

66 Love Letters

A living legend's letters to her first love

By Tricia Eaton

HAVING THE PRIVILEGE TO WORK AT AN AUTOGRAPH AUCTION HOUSE, ONE OF MY FAVORITE things to hear from customers is, "You must love being able to not only see but touch a piece of history every day." It's precisely what I love about my job.

Recently, an unprecedented collection of Elizabeth Taylor material came across my desk—66 handwritten love letters by Taylor, a woman famous for her many love affairs and marriages.

What made these 1949 letters all the more enticing was that they were written to William Pawley Jr.,



Signed and inscribed photo of a young Elizabeth Taylor to her first love, William Pawley Jr., in 1949

the son of a wealthy American businessman who was ambassador to Peru and then Brazil from 1945-50. Although it lasted less than a year, her relationship with Pawley was important because it was her first engagement and perhaps the beginning of her love affair with jewelry, since he gave her her first white diamond ring.

These heartfelt letters reveal a blossoming woman of 17, who even though called the most beautiful girl in the world, had insecurities just like the rest of us. As I read these letters one after the other, I was deeply moved and gained a new understanding of this misunderstood, larger-than-life celebrity.

A Diamond in the Rough

One of the last living actresses of the Golden Age of Hollywood, Taylor is a legend, and the prices her autographs command attest to that. She remains one of the most sought after vintage entertainment autographs of all time.

The most desired autograph to possess is a signed photo of Taylor, which may bring from \$300 to \$3,000, mostly depending on the photo, size, condition and when it was signed. Younger vintage matte double-weight photos usually bring the most, and the larger the better. Overall, her signed photos average about \$550.

Taylor's signature on an index card or autograph page can be found for \$150 or less, or for about \$250 with Richard Burton or another of her seven husbands. A Taylor signed document generally brings from \$400 to \$800, depending on the content.

I have come across only a handful of handwritten letters, all of them dating from 1945 to 1947, so it will be interesting to see what these 66 letters bring.

As always, you must do your homework to ensure that you're getting the genuine article. As with most popular vintage Hollywood stars, secretarily signed photos are extremely common. Next are the outright forgeries, which plague the market because her autograph is worth quite a bit and her health is poor, so she is rarely seen out in public for autograph opportunities.

The Feel of Elizabeth

While recently explaining to a collector how I knew when an item was forged, I expressed that it just doesn't have the right feel to it. He said that I hadn't stressed the importance of feel in my other two signature studies in *Autograph*. Instead, I focused on tips and authentic exemplars to aid the collector in purchasing autographs.

I frequently hear the question, "How do you know it's real? I don't sign the same way every time." Autograph authentication is primarily learned through firsthand experience. It is not an exact science; it's more of an acquired art. Experienced forgers pick up on the con-

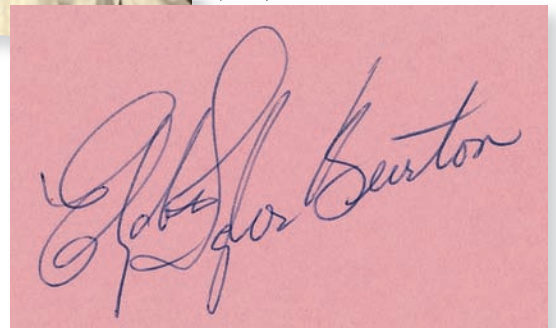


sistencies in someone's signature and handwriting and try to replicate them. No one signs the same way every time, but seeing someone's authentic signature time and again familiarizes you with its natural flow. This helps you spot many forgeries, especially the slow, deliberate ones.

The feel of Taylor's autograph is unrestrained and beautiful, like her personality. There is no hesitancy or shakiness like there often is in a forgery. Over the years, her signature has become messier and wider spread, and keep in mind that as one becomes older their handwriting may become shakier due to age or illness.

See "7 Lessons to a Genuine Liz" on page 58 for tips to identifying Taylor's autograph. Taylor's signature still maintains the majority of these characteristics to

Above:
A signed photo inscribed "Best Wishes," circa 1954 •
Right: This signature of Taylor as Elizabeth Taylor-Burton sold for \$177.



this day. The characteristics of someone's signature that are difficult for a forger or secretary to replicate are the defined shapes, angles and slants of the letters. As you look at the authentic examples provided, take note of Taylor's unique handwriting style.

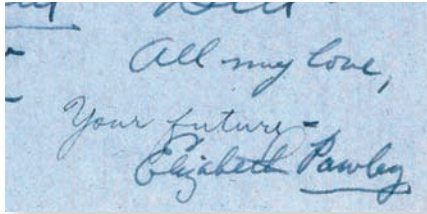
Elizabeth's First True Love

Taylor's 66 love letters to Pawley provide a window into the young starlet's personal life. The letters begin in March 1949, a few days after Taylor and her parents left their vacation home in Florida, where Pawley was located, for California so Taylor could work on a movie. The letters dry up around the middle of November of that year as their relationship ended.

Some believe that Taylor's first engagement was to 1946 Heisman Trophy winner Glenn Davis, whom she met at a casual football game on the beach. What few realize is that the entire affair was purely a publicity stunt, orchestrated primarily by her mother, Sara, to attract additional attention to her career. In reality they barely knew each other. Taylor simply agreed to wear his golden football necklace before he shipped out to Korea.

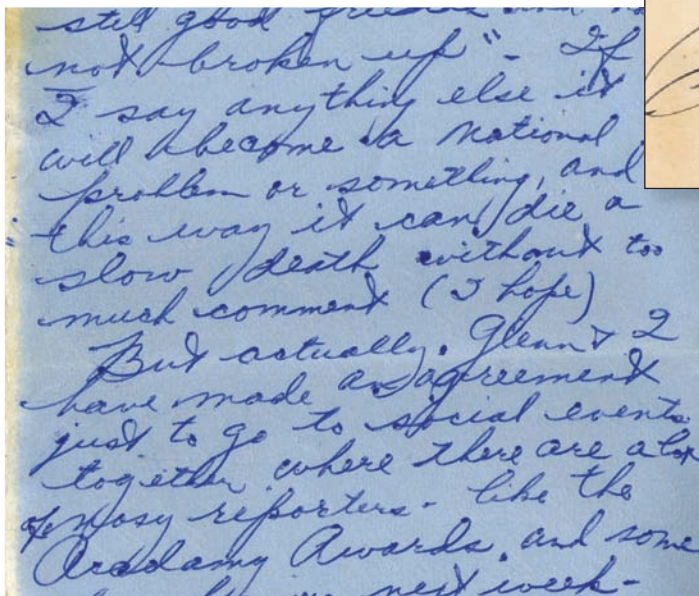
To avoid tarnishing Taylor's girl-next-door persona that MGM worked so hard to sculpt, the pair was forced to attend public events

"Your future Elizabeth Pawley"

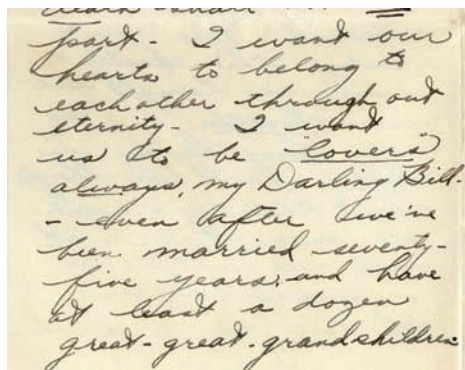


together, including the Oscars, even while she was involved with Pawley. On March 6, 1949, Taylor wrote Pawley about keeping her relationship with him under wraps: "If I say anything else it will become a national problem or something and this way it can die a slow death without too much comment (I hope) ... Glenn and I made an agreement just to go to special events together where there are a lot of nosy reporters ... like the Academy Awards."

In these brash letters Taylor makes no secret of her disdain for this ruse. On April 1, 1949, after a dinner where Glenn mistakenly broke a pair of earrings that Pawley had given to her, she wrote, "I have never had such a strong desire to hit anyone with all my might in all my life." That night, she had finally decided she had enough.



March 26, 1949: Taylor writes of hiding her relationship with Pawley from the public.



March 28, 1949: Taylor tells Pawley of her plans to live a long married life with him.

for the 28-year-old Bill. Despite their significant age difference, this was no studio directed act—it was the real deal. On March 28, 1949, she wrote, "I want our hearts to belong to each other throughout eternity.

Elizabeth penned, "I gave him back his 'A' pin, the football and his All-American sweater... I don't care what they say anymore ... from now on I'm going to live my life the way I want to."

Throughout the letters Taylor continually professes her deep love

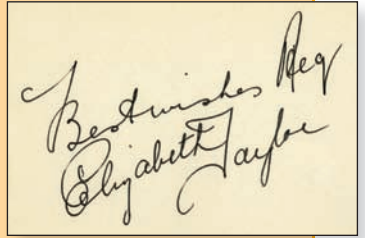
7 Lessons to a Genuine Liz

1. Taylor's most common sentiment is "Best Wishes," to which she sometimes adds "Always" at the end.

2. The *y* and *l* in Taylor are almost always connected, the exceptions being in earlier examples of her signature.

3. Taylor connects the *or* in Taylor uniquely. They are looped together and the top of the *r* is slightly tilted as it connects to the *o*.

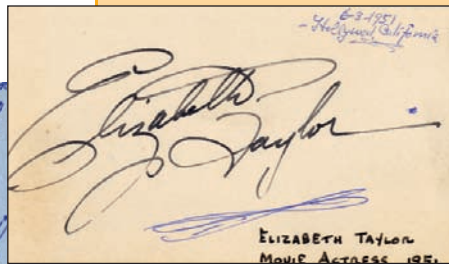
4. The majority of the time, the *t* in Elizabeth is under-formed (especially as time went by). It's almost always shorter than the following *h*.



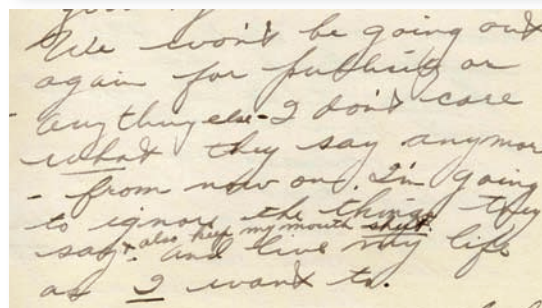
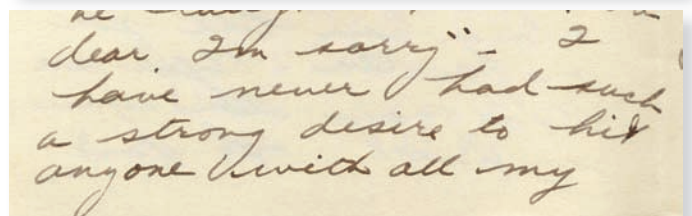
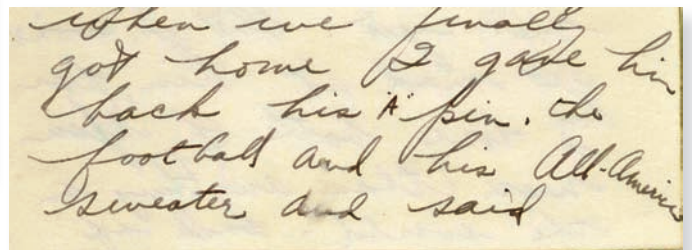
5. She concludes her first name by looping a line back through the *h* to cross her preceding *t*, but it often barely touches the top or narrowly misses.

6. Taylor is always on a lower line than Elizabeth.

Two authentic examples of Elizabeth Taylor's autograph



7. Her connection of her first and last name is truly unique. The concluding *h* of Elizabeth and the beginning *T* in Taylor are connected so fluidly that it's nearly impossible for a forger to properly replicate.



Excerpts from an April 1, 1949 letter expressing the end of Taylor's superficial public relationship with Heisman Trophy winner Glen Davis

I am very excited about this picture, it should be a very good one - for George Stevens is just about the best director in the business - and he's so nice - the whole company & cast are just wonderful - I hope it remains as happy - I'm sure it will.

Letters with movie related content are in high demand. A letter dated Oct. 3, consists of content related to filming *A Place in the Sun*.

I want us to be 'lovers' always my Darling Bill, even after we've been married seventy-five years and have at least a dozen great-grandchildren."

A Respectable Lady

Despite the reputation she now holds, it is clear by reading these love letters that Taylor was still a devout Christian Scientist and a virgin, saving herself for marriage. On April 29, 1949, she penned, "I hope you know how much I love you ... I can never find quite the right words to tell you. I guess I'll have to wait until we're married and then I can show you."

Taylor and Pawley were engaged in May 1949, but they didn't go public until June 6, when Taylor's relationship with Davis was further from the public's mind. On May 16, 1949, she wrote, "Now it is alright for us to announce our engagement and to tell the whole world that we're in love ... Dad says I can wear your ring." A few weeks later, on May 31, 1949, Elizabeth wrote to Bill to calm his nerves, "DO NOT WORRY WM. D. PAWLEY JR. And remember at all times that your wife-to-be Miss Elizabeth Taylor loves you at all times." Besides the mushy stuff, Taylor touches on several inter-

3/ When we woke up the ground was covered in about six inches of snow - and the temperature was about 24 degrees - but presently the sun came out, so they decided they could shoot anyway - so the whole company went charging out to the location with five blazers & hoars to melt the snow off the ground & trees - and about an hour later we were called out - and I played a whole scene in a bathing suit - with snow all around me - and

Oct. 3rd
Mon night

My Darling Bill,
Well, we arrived up here in Tahoe a couple of hours ago - it's just beautiful - the moon is simply huge, and it looks so wonderful up in the velvet black sky with the stars sparkling like diamonds all around it - & with its reflection shimmering down on the water - and the smell of the pine trees & the wonderful "fresh"

...
I had a snow fight with Mr. Stevens - and some of the snow got in the sockets of my

esting subjects, mentioning problems with MGM, family friend and gossip columnist Hedda Hopper, fellow actress Janet Leigh and Arthur Loew Jr., Hollywood royalty whose grandfathers were Mark Twain, the founder of MGM, and Adolph Zukor, who founded Paramount Pictures.

Pawley was somewhat jealous of Taylor's relationships with other men while she was across the country from him. In her last letter to him, Taylor's mother, Sara, wrote, "You have a nervous condition and a problem with jealousy, as such you and Elizabeth can never be together."

Just Like the Rest of Us?

I found it interesting that the person who was then considered the most beautiful woman in the world doubted

My Darling Baby,
It is 2:30 in the afternoon, but I am still in bed. I didn't go to the studio today, & I'm going to the hospital next Thursday. I have been so lonely today that I could find die - there's a lump in my throat the size of a watermelon - I keep wandering into

you - In other words - DO NOT WORRY WM.D. PAWLEY JR. - And remember at all times that your wife-to-be Miss Elizabeth Taylor loves you at all times - and that nothing

Taylor writes to ensure Pawley of her love.

April 29, 1949: Taylor expresses her loneliness without Pawley.

herself at times. Elizabeth once wrote, "I have to watch my weight, I'm still starving after a big steak dinner—I could eat more!" She constantly sought Pawley's approval, repeatedly asking him to profess his love for her—even going so far as to say, "I think I would really die if you left me. Now that you aren't here with me, I feel so lost and empty inside and kind of dead."

Taylor often told Bill of the depressions she endured, most likely due to her demanding career, and the ensuing loneliness that comes from being a sheltered child star. Taylor confessed on April 29, 1949, "It is 2:30 in the afternoon but I am still in bed. I didn't go to the studio today ... I have been so lonely today that I could just die. There's a lump in my throat the size of a watermelon."

A Place in the Sun and The Big Hangover

Much to the delight of classic Hollywood movie buffs, Taylor goes into detail about the two movies she made during this era, including *A Place in the Sun* and *The Big Hangover*.

Taylor was absolutely thrilled to be working with *A Place in the Sun's* director, George Stevens, calling him "just about the best director in the business." She wrote to Bill a few hours after she arrived on location, "It's just beautiful, the moon is simply huge, and it looks so wonderful up in the velvet black sky with the stars sparkling like diamonds all around it."

Although *A Place in the Sun* took place in the summer, the movie was shot at Lake Tahoe at the beginning of winter. Elizabeth

"You have a nervous condition and a problem with jealousy, as such you and Elizabeth can never be together."

goes into detail about having to shoot a bathing suit scene in the water even though there was six inches of snow on the ground. On October 8, 1949, she wrote, "The temperature was about 24 degrees ... The whole company went charging out to the location with fire blazers and hoses to melt the snow off the ground and trees and I played a whole scene in a bathing suit."

She also describes a playful snowball fight that she had with Stevens. "I had a snow ball fight with Mr. Stevens—and some of the snow got in the pockets of my big fur lined army coat—and several hours later the snow was still unmelted [sic]."

Although Taylor later expressed to the press that she was too busy to be upset about her eventual break-up with Pawley, specifically mentioning her excitement about making *The Big Hangover*, in truth, she was deeply hurt and despised the project.

Throughout several letters to Bill, Elizabeth repeatedly complained about the production, voicing her opinion on the horrible script, the sub-par director and the annoying character she was expected to play. On July 16, 1949, she wrote, "I am doing a test with Marshall tomorrow for a picture called *The Big Hangover* ... I am not terribly crazy about the script." She continued to say, "The writer and director are partly mad."

In another letter on July 25, 1949, Elizabeth wrote, "I don't like the part I am supposed to do at all ... she's a real dull character besides being snobbish, severe and patronizing." Later in the same letter Taylor reveals an acting vulnerability when she writes, "You'd be surprised how the average audience thinks that you are just like the character you por-



Elizabeth Taylor signed photo, circa 1952

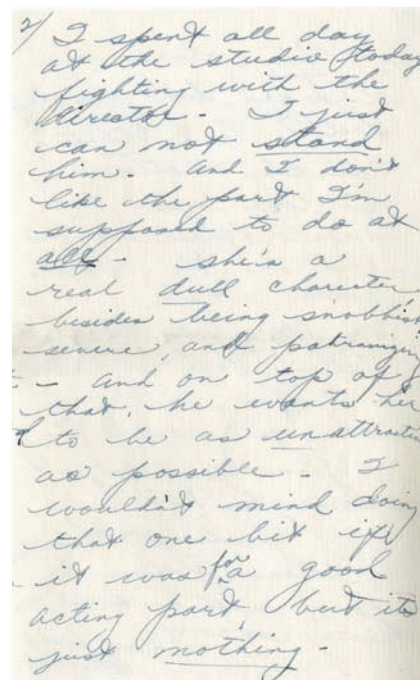
tray—And I don't want people to hate me!"

The Break-Up

Since the Taylor-Pawley relationship began when Elizabeth was publicly dating someone else, you could say it was doomed from the beginning. The couple had trust and long distance issues long before they were engaged.

By August 1949, Elizabeth was mentioning other men in her life more visibly than in previous letters to Pawley. On August 30, she wrote about a day at the beach where

"some boy that was in swimming had to get a hold of me and help me get ashore." In the same letter she mentioned, "Speaking of going out, I went out to Chasen's Friday night for dinner with Arthur (Loew)."



July 25, 1949: Taylor writes of disliking her part in *The Big Hangover*.

that this is not the end for us - it couldn't be - we love each other too much.

I received your wire this morning about sending the ring and bracelet to New York - I have the ring on now - it is sparkling so beautifully in the sun - I suppose this will be the last time I have it on - for a while, at least -

take good care of it, Darling - for my heart is embedded right there in the center of it.

Bill, I shall love you for the rest of my life - I know - and I also know - that God is taking care of me - and whatever is meant to be - will be - so we must trust and believe in Him - with all our hearts.

Good bye - my Darling - take good care of yourself - and please be so careful - because you still belong to me, you know - and I am all yours -

On Sept. 21, 1949, Taylor writes about giving back her engagement ring to Pawley.

-5-

Elizabeth

I realized for the first time just how very much I do love you - why, you are my whole life. Bill - I think I should really die if you left me - Now! that you are here with me - my heart isn't either, I feel so lost & empty inside.

In May 1949, Taylor wrote Pawley of her willingness to quit acting to be with him.

My entire life trying to make you happy (and that I shall be the happiest person in the world doing it) - and I want him to know that you are my whole life now. and that nothing else in the world matters to me anymore. but you - and that I am truly ready to say farewell to my career and everything connected with it. - for I

On September 21, 1949, Elizabeth wrote to Bill, "I received your wire this morning about sending the ring and bracelet back to New York—I have the ring on now. It is

Elizabeth

won't be giving anything up - but I will be gaining the greatest gift that God bestows on man - love; marriage, a family - and you my Darling - what more could I ever ask? My Darling. I know that we shall be the two happiest



sparkling so beautifully in the sunshine. I suppose this will be the last time I have it on—for a while, at least—take

Original candid photo signed in person, circa early 1950s

good care of it, Darling—for my heart is embedded right there in the center of it."

At the time Taylor still hadn't given up hope and would continue to write until November of that year, but ultimately her relationship with Pawley ended. He grew tired of living his life around her demanding schedule and most likely felt lacking in comparison to the rising starlet.

Many people wrongly believe that Pawley, though jealous and possessive, demanded that she quit the film industry. As such, I was enthralled when I found a letter in which Taylor actually declared that she would retire in order to be the perfect wife. She was even excited about it!

On May 3, 1949, Taylor wrote, "I am only too ready to say farewell to my career and everything connected with it—for I won't be giving anything up—but I will be gaining the greatest gift that God bestows on man—love, marriage, a family—and you my Darling." Those in her inside circle believe that, with the threat of Taylor's possible retirement looming, her overly involved mother and MGM plotted to end the relationship.

What If?

I began to wonder what would have happened if Taylor and Pawley stayed together. Perhaps she would have found the long-lasting love that has proven to be so elusive to her all these years. But if they had tied-the-knot, we might have never gotten to see Taylor in such Oscar-winning performances as Gloria in *Butterfield*, Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and awe us all—while being the first actress to earn \$1 million per film—as Cleopatra.

Only a few months after the Taylor-Pawley engagement ended in the spring of 1950, she married her first husband, Nicky Hilton, then heir to the Hilton Hotel fortune, but it lasted only seven months. It came out years later that the marriage failed when Hilton's drinking spawned spousal abuse, the last straw being a blow to Taylor's stomach, causing a miscarriage. Theirs was only the first in a long line of failed and abusive relationships Taylor would endure.

Despite the siren the press made her out to be, these intimate letters reveal a young, idealistic woman who just wanted to love and be loved in returned. At 17, she seemed to be genuinely sweet and caring. Given her continued search for love and overly generous and philanthropic nature, I don't think that Elizabeth Taylor ever strayed far from those inherent personality traits.

She may be famous for her outlandish behavior, extravagant spending and many husbands, but underneath it all, Elizabeth Taylor is still that same sweetheart who wrote these beautifully endearing letters to her first true love, 60 years ago. 📖