

## Reminiscences of the Heritage neighborhood

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by herself, Ada rallied courageously. According to her granddaughter Julie, Ada bought a T-square and went to night school to learn to make blueprints. It was her plan to develop the neighborhood and to assist her children in educating themselves.

"Education," says Meryl Penn, "was always extremely important to Mother Penn. She was herself one of the first graduates of Huntsville Teachers College. She was determined that all her children, the six boys and three girls, would receive a college education." She adds, with a smile, "And of course her children could go anywhere they wanted, as long as it was the University of Texas."

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Ada Penn persuaded the city council to rename the old Asylum Avenue (leading to the State Hospital) West Avenue, and arranged to have Grandview Street cut and named for its view of the foothills, west of town, then referred to as Austin's "violet crown." Eventually, she built 18 houses in the neighborhood, most of which were

occupied by young university families. Some of these families included those of Judge Staton, who taught law, Professors Gray and Click, who taught English, and Professor Pennick, the tennis coach, who taught Greek.

Meryl Penn has some wonderful old photographs of her stalwart mother-in-law and her children. They were exceptionally handsome people, and one picture of mother Penn stoking a fire in a huge hearth especially reveals the strength of her character. Here was one woman who was going to keep the home fires burning.

Her daughters were beautiful, her sons, photographed in uniform, were what used to be called dashing, as gutsy and handsome as their mother. One son, Eugene Doak Penn, was shot down in

World War I, one of the first local aviators to serve for the United States. An emergency air field in south Austin is named in his honor.

Ada Penn dealt with her grief by writing about it; she was, indeed, disposed to write and published a pamphlet of her poetry which enjoyed some popularity. Here is the poem in which she records her sorrow for Eugene's death.

Why

On the rosy clouds of the morning my spirit floated away  
I seemed to share in the dawning of a glorious promised day  
Far above the sound of men's striving where mother's loved sons lie dead  
I was again a heartbroken mother approaching the Great Godhead  
I fell on my face before Him, unstifled my anguished cry,  
"Why, O most powerful Father, Why must my darling die"  
The healing breath of the mountains brought to me surcease from pain.  
Deeply I'd drunk of Truth's fountain whose gushing like gentle rain  
Cleaned my soul of its anguish and this was the message that came,  
"Thy son has not died but he liveth  
A life free from sorrow and sin  
And our Father who all blessings giveth  
Allows anguish to draw us to him."

Albert W. Penn, Meryl's husband, was luckier in life than Eugene. He attended the University of Texas where he edited the Cactus, the University yearbook, was a member of the Friars, and was a "two letter man," his widow told me, producing two gold jewelry mementos of his athletic glory. "Yes, he was one of Billy Disch's boys. He had quite an athletic career at Texas."

I asked this lovely lady, so willing to sing the praises of her family, so shy to come forward with any mention of her own accomplishments (which are considerable) how she met her husband, nine years her senior. She laughed and said, "Now that's a funny story!" And that's for next time. ■