IN MEMORIAM

LEIGH PECK
(1901-1969)

Leigh Peck, Professor Emeritus of Educational Psychology died April 26, 1969 at Rosewood Hospital in Houston, Texas after an extended and painful bout with cancer. Her death is a significant loss, not only to the University community and to the many faculty and students she supported and befriended during her many years here, but, also, to the intellectual and literary community nationally. No group suffered greater loss than the children of America. Leigh was one of their foremost champions and no one ever gave them more delightful and stimulating stories.

Dr. Peck was born in Rockwall, Texas, February 14, 1901, to Joseph V. and Laura Isabel (Franklin) Peck. She received her A. B. degree from North Texas State Teachers College in 1922, her M. A. degree from The University of Texas in 1930, attended The University of Chicago in 1930 and 1932, and received her Ph. D. in Educational Psychology from The University of Texas in 1934. Her dissertation, An Experiment with Children's Drawing in Relation to Prediction of Success in Reading, was written under the supervision of Professor Herschel T. Manuel. Professor C. T. Gray, a member of the committee, considered her final oral examination the best he had ever heard.

In 1922 she embarked on a professional career that was destined to span almost half a century and to have a marked impact on education in Texas. She served as a teacher and school psychologist in Texas public schools until 1930 at which time she returned to The University of Texas to continue her graduate education which she had begun earlier in summer sessions. She served as a temporary instructor at The University of Texas in 1930-31 and began her permanent career at The University as an Instructor in 1932. She became Assistant Professor in 1943 and Associate Professor in 1949. She retired May 31, 1964, and at the time of her death was Professor Emeritus.

During Dr. Peck's long and distinguished career, she did much to reflect credit on The University. In addition to her outstanding and inspirational teaching of both graduate and undergraduate courses, she was the first member of the faculty to be certified as a Diplomate in Clinical Psychology by the American Board of Examiners in Professional Psychology. She often served as a consultant in clinical psychology to school systems throughout the state. She was Acting Chief Psychologist at the Gulfport VA Hospital in 1948-49, Co-Director in 1953-54 of the Southwestern Standardization of a Revised Form of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale; Consultant to the Testing Services Center of Arkansas State Teachers College and Visiting Lecturer at Hendrix College in 1954, and Chief Psychologist for a Rehabilitation Institute at The University...
of Oregon in 1957. In 1962-63 she served on the faculty of the NDEA Academic Year Counseling and Guidance Institute conducted at The University of Texas. She represented The University at the Fourth International Mental Health Congress in Mexico City in 1951.

Dr. Peck made significant contributions to scientific knowledge in the area of child psychology. As indicated by the bibliography at the conclusion of this resolution, she was the author of a widely adopted college text in child psychology as well as a chapter in a well known book of readings and numerous articles in professional journals, including Psychological Bulletin, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Educational Psychology, Journal of Social Psychology, Journal of Negro Education, Journal of Genetic Psychology, and Childhood Education.

She was also the author of three popular volumes of children's fiction. On the basis of a poll conducted by Coronet Magazine, her Pecos Bill and Lightning was placed on the all-time library honor roll of books for children. She was active in the Texas Institute of Letters and highly regarded by her fellow writers. In 1952 she served on a committee to select the best Texas Juvenile to receive an award from the Institute. Two years earlier she had been elected to Theta Sigma Phi, honorary fraternity for women in journalism.

Other professional memberships included the American Psychological Association, American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Association of University Professors, Authors League of America, Texas State Teachers Association, and Texas Academy of Science. Among her biographical listings are Who's Who in the South and Southwest, American Men of Science, Leaders in Education, and Who's Who in American Education.

Possibly transcending in importance all these contributions was Dr. Peck's unselfish and unstinting contribution of her energy, time, and resources for the benefit of persons in need. Throughout her career she performed free testing and therapeutic services for endless numbers of children whose families could not afford to pay for such services. She often brought such underprivileged children into her home and showered them with love, gifts, parties, story-telling sessions, and other activities to stimulate them intellectually and emotionally and to enrich their experiences generally.

At another level but in the same unselfish vein, she made it possible for uncounted numbers of young adults to achieve meaningful careers for themselves. It was her custom over the years to identify students with promising intellectual potential but lacking the financial means for getting the necessary college or graduate education to attain that potential. She then used a major portion of her meagre academic salary to assist them in meeting their educational expenses. She even gave some of them free living quarters in her own home while they pursued their studies.
Her benevolence extended to bewildered new faculty members thrust into academia with the ink hardly dry on their doctoral diplomas. Her patience with those who sought her counsel was boundless, and her advice was unexcelled. She would spend any amount of time the novice might desire on any topic from personal or family problems to explaining the intricacies, intrigues, and politics of the academic community.

Dr. Peck's official retirement in 1964 by no means signaled the end of her professional activities or her continuing service to her fellow human beings. In spite of calamitous physical disabilities that would have completely incapacitated most of us, she remained mentally alert and productively active until the very end of her life. Her ability to remain productive was much enhanced by those she had befriended in the past and who came to her aid in her time of need. Especially notable among those who aided her in her waning years was Mr. L. S. Cross, her long-time friend and attorney, who unselfishly assumed many responsibilities which she could no longer handle alone. Immediately after retirement, she built a cottage in her beloved Port Isabel overlooking Laguna Madre, South Padre Island, and the Gulf of Mexico, and had it and its grounds equipped with protective railings and devices designed to permit her to continue to remain relatively self-sufficient and active. Without delay she began playing an active civic role in the surrounding community which includes many deprived Mexican-American children. At the same time she continued her professional activities with The University of Texas at Austin. When Hurricane Beulah of September 1967 virtually destroyed her retirement home, together with library holdings and personal property collected over a lifetime and housed there, she immediately rebuilt and continued in her own intrepid way.

During her "retirement," Dr. Peck rewrote the syllabi and continued to teach by correspondence the courses in educational psychology required for elementary and secondary teacher certification in Texas. Several students in the course, not knowing who prepared the materials spontaneously wrote to the then Dean of the College of Education to say that, in spite of an expectancy to be bored, they found the materials stimulating during the course and useful in subsequent teaching experiences. Upon ascertaining that few school systems in the Rio Grande Valley around Port Isabel had personnel capable of diagnosing pupil learning problems, she initiated and taught for them a graduate course in individual psychological and educational testing under the auspices of the Graduate School and the Extension Division of The University of Texas at Austin. She also continued her graduate instruction by supervising, in conjunction with Professor Benjamin Fruchter, the Master of Education thesis completed by Mr. Arnulfo Balboa in August 1968. The special field of the thesis was individual intelligence testing of Mexican-American children, and it was entitled, The Escala De Intellligence Wechsler Para Ninos - An Experimental Adaptation for South Texas.

Still in progress but never completed was a novel for adolescents entitled, Follow the Drinking Gourd. One of her last communications to the then Chairman of the Department of Educational Psychology concerned
Miss Parthenia Archer, "teacher of mentally retarded, Weslaco, Texas." The letter said, "I donate one day a week to testing those of her pupils whose parents can't pay for testing; she brings them to me on Saturdays."

As her cancer worsened and she became increasingly aware that her death was soon to come, she lost none of her composure, dignity, and good humor. When asked to fill out a perfunctory application form for Professor-Emeritus appointment she furnished in the space for "recent picture of applicant" a photograph that must have been made when she was about five years old. She also chose to submit as a recommendation at that time a note from James Knight, Professor of Educational Psychology, a long-time and beloved colleague who actually predeceased her. His words were: "St. Peter may raise a lot of questions about you, but the Old Man himself will raise hell if he doesn't let you in."

On March 9, 1969 many of Leigh's friends received the following message from Rosewood Hospital:

When Socrates took the court-ordained dose of deadly hemlock, he said to the friends who were waiting with him, "We know not what follows death, whether eternal sleep or continued existence. If it be eternal sleep, what time have you ever spent more happily than a deep and dreamless sleep? If it be continued existence, what could be happier than to enjoy the companionship of the good and wise of all ages?

"We do not know what follows death, but this we know: no evil can come to a good man in life or after death."

Soon afterward her intimate friends received a message dated April 26, 1969, sent at Leigh's request by Miss Virginia Wyche, which included the following:

Leigh Peck completed life, April 26, 1969,

"In simpleness, gentleness, honor and mirth." (Kipling)

I have enjoyed Earth so much, especially the wonderful people I have been privileged to know, that I expect to find Eternity no less satisfying.

The best of luck to you!
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II. Fiction and Other.

Books:


Newspaper Articles:


These resolutions were prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professor Benjamin Fruchter, Professor John R. Peck, Mr. Robert S. Andrews (Special Consultant), and Professor Jackson B. Reid, Chairman.