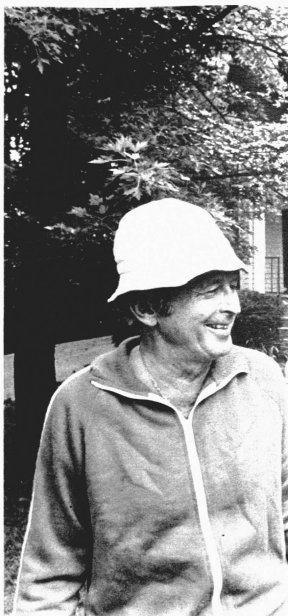


The House With Two Studies

by Anne Baber



Professors Margaret and William Peden live in academia. For them it's an intense, creative and productive lifestyle.

Bill is a professor of English, known for his works on Thomas Jefferson, his literary criticism and his short stories. Petch (She prefers her childhood nickname to Margaret) is a professor of Spanish, who is quickly gaining recognition for her translations of contemporary Latin American literature. He has 14 books and numerous short stories and critical works to his credit. She's translated eight books, several short stories, including one published in *Playboy*, and has written many critical articles. Both, of course, are teachers.

Many of us lead compartmentalized lives. Our marriages, our jobs, our hobbies and avocations and our social lives are in separate boxes. The Pedens collaborate on their life.

THEY LIVE IN A TREE-SHADED, turn-of-the-century, white clapboard house on Thilly Avenue. It's always been a professor's house, and Thilly (pronounced Tilly) Avenue was named for a former dean of the Graduate School at Mizzou. Many of their neighbors south of Stewart Road in the area Columbians call Quarry Heights also are faculty members.

But the Pedens' house is different: Two professors live there. At Mizzou, there are only a few other faculty couples with equal academic rank. And the Pedens' home is not a retreat from work; it's a retreat for work.

After Bill fixes breakfast and they eat, he goes upstairs to his study, and Petch goes upstairs to her study just across the hall. After a couple of hours, he walks to his Campus office, and she rides her bike to hers. They meet again at home for lunch. It's her turn in the kitchen.

Theirs is no 8 to 5 workday. In the afternoons, evenings and on weekends, they work—if doing what you love can be called work. She translates. "It's my passion," she says. He writes. "It's my life," he says. And they teach.

"I can't imagine any life I'd like better," Bill says. "I have time to do my own writing, reading and research without cheating my job, because it is part of my job."

They work together. "Petch reads my stories in manuscript and often makes suggestions," Bill says. Petch laughs, "And then he does exactly what he wants to. But I am his final typist."

"We get along famously," Petch says. "There are no egos in this house. Perhaps if we were both novelists, we'd be fighting over contracts, but we're not competitive. I do think, though, I get more out of the exchange than he does."

"I learned about style from Bill," Petch says. "I used to have the 'translators' disease.' I tried to be too faithful to the original; I've learned to let it flow."

LETTING IT FLOW has won Petch the praise of reviewers. Her most recent work is *Terra Nostra* by Carlos Fuentes, who is regarded as Mexico's finest contemporary novelist. *Newsweek's* reviewer, though not altogether enamored of the novel, said, "You can always admire Margaret Sayers Peden's translation, itself a work of art."

**William Peden is a writer.
Margaret Peden is a translator.
Together, the Professors Peden
collaborate on life.**

She is now working on a series of three books of prose poetry titled *Odas Elementales* by Nobel Prize Winner Pablo Neruda.

Poetry translation presents special problems. "The translator must maintain the meter, texture and imagery of the piece," she says. "A good translator transmits the tone of the original writing."

When she has finished a second or third draft, she gives Bill the English translation, and she sits across the room holding the original in Spanish. They discuss such niceties as the merits of the word "mottled" over the word "spotted." "Mottled" wins. "I used 'snowy' here," she explains, "instead of 'snowwhite.'" He nods. They confess that sometimes the literary discussions get heated. But the advantages of having an "in-house critic" are obvious. And both relish this added dimension in their relationship.

"I think it works beautifully. Anything Petch does builds my ego and, perhaps, vice versa," Bill says.

This spring at commencement, just 11 years after she earned her PhD here, Petch received the Byler Distinguished Professor Award for 1976-77. The award and a stipend of \$1,200 were made possible by a gift from Dr. William H. Byler, AM '31, PhD '37, retired senior vice president for research at U.S. Radium Corporation.

Petch, who says she types "20 miles a year," spent part of the stipend on a new IBM typewriter. The salesman who sold her the machine had taken a course from her husband. "I use the writing skills he taught me to write the best business proposals," the salesman said.

Praise from a former student is not new to Bill. He has been winning awards for years: a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1961; the Robert Earl McConnell award as "a member of the

**"I teach to support my habit —
translating," she jokes.**

After he fixes breakfast and they eat, they climb the stairs to work in their separate studies.



University family who most exemplifies Jefferson's attributes" in 1972; and the Bicentennial Literary Award of the Missouri Library Association in 1976. One book edited by Peden, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, is the first edition of the only full-length book written by Thomas Jefferson and was selected to be in the White House library. Peden's book reviews have been in the *New York Times Book Review*, *Saturday Review* and many other publications.

BUT THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS that please him most are "starting the University of Missouri Press, developing the writing program here and watching the success of writers who have come out of the program," he says.

He was the first director of the Press in 1958 and currently is chairman of the editorial board. The Press has an excellent reputation in academic circles and consistently wins national and international awards for book design. "It's one of the best small presses in the country," he says.

When he came to Campus in 1946, he began the creative writing program. His proteges have included William Manchester, who wrote *The Death of a President*; Richard Matheson, who has written science fiction and did the scripts for many of the Vincent Price/Edgar Allan Poe movies; and Marijane Meaker, who writes under the pen names Vin Packer and M.E. Kerr and whose recent *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smak* is already a teenage classic. He is reluctant to stop with just three examples.

The teaching is very important to him. He was on the faculty (with John Giardi and William Stafford and others) of a workshop for teachers of creative writing this summer in Denver. He directed the Missouri Writers Workshop, which flourished briefly in the late forties and early fifties. "Missouri just couldn't compete with Colorado and Vermont—particularly without air conditioning—in the summer," he says.

Teaching is important to his own creativity as a writer. "The constant contact with young people keeps one from stagnating," he says.

Petch jokes that "I teach to support my habit—translating." This year, she taught a course titled *Techniques of Translation*. The goal she set was that every student was to work toward producing something for publication. When a student called her during the summer to report that her work was going to be published, Petch rejoiced with her and said, "I get as big a kick out of this as if it's my own."

"But when you're teaching, you can't see the product," she says. "It's just by chance that you find out if you had any effect. Sometimes I just have to wallpaper a room or make a dress, so I can feel something, hold something I've done."

"Of course, you can't teach students to write, any more than you can teach someone to run the four-minute mile," says Bill, who used to be a track coach. "but you can sure help."

IF THE ACADEMIC LIFE were just writing and teaching, the Pedens would be completely happy. "The administrative duties kill you," Bill says. Among those duties are cocktail parties for visiting lecturers and prospective faculty members. "We occasionally see friends," Petch says,

"but much of our social life is official. We run away to Kansas City or St. Louis every few weeks. This is the first summer we've not been out of the country. We usually split our time between the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries."

After next year, Bill, who is 64, will be teaching only alternate semesters. He's looking forward to getting back to Jefferson. "Every generation needs to reinterpret the great men. I want to write about Jefferson as a private human being, an intellectual and a humanist." He believes that there still are truths to discover about Jefferson. The suggestion that Jefferson fathered the children of his slave Sally Hemmings, for example, annoys him greatly. "It's possible, even probable, but the evidence points to Jefferson's nephew. I suppose it's irresistible to try to find out and that's fine, as long as it stays in the realm of intelligent speculation." Bill also will continue to write short stories. And Petch will continue to translate. That's what their lives are all about.

They dream of a house on the coast of Spain. But that will probably remain just a dream, because they don't want to be too far away to see their four children and four grandchildren. Perhaps they will find a house near the water in South Carolina, or North Carolina or Virginia.

In the meantime, they live on Thilly Avenue in a place called academia. □

Contact with students keeps him from stagnating and is important to his creativity as a writer.

"We get along famously," she says. "Anything she does builds my ego, and perhaps, vice versa," he says with pride.

"I can't imagine any life I'd like better," he says. "But sometime we would like a house near the sea."