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# Memorial to Jane K. Penn (1910-1980)

JANE K. PENN, founder of Malki Museum Inc., and a nationally known leader in American Indian affairs, passed away on March 22 at Loma Linda University Medical Center after a lengthy illness which she fought vigorously for months. Jane Penn (Juanita to some of her older friends) was an energetic, assertive, and active person who did not easily succumb to any circumstances that didn't suit her clearly seen objectives. Yet even during her last months she continued as long as she could to direct the affairs of Malki Museum from her bedside, making the same firm demands upon herself that she had made through a lifetime of service to her people.

Jane Penn was born on Morongo Indian Reservation on May 6, 1910. She grew up on the reservation, close to her parents, brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins. She was educated there and at St. Boniface Indian School, a Catholic school in Banning, California. As a young woman, she left the reservation for Los Angeles, where during World War II she was employed in the defense industry. Her keen perception of social problems and political ways caused her to make significant contributions to the union movement during that period. Later, when she returned to Morongo Reservation with her husband, Elmer Penn, she quickly became an active force in the development of a local garment worker's union.

Soon after World War II, Jane Penn began assuming those leadership roles for which her background had prepared her so well. Her

father, William Pablo, was a noted shaman and a political leader of enormous skill and longevity. Her grandfather, Pablo Gabriel, before him, had been at the cutting edge of White-Indian relations for many years. Before that her great granduncles had occupied prominent positions in the Cahuilla culture as Néentum, Púvulam, and Hauniktum, and so had held within their family (lineage) all of the honors, responsibilities, and privileges that the Cahuilla and Wanikik peoples provided. Jane Penn was a member of a *'a ca?i* (which means "first" lineage). One somehow sensed the importance of her ancestry in her presence regardless of how limited one's knowledge of her culture might be.

Upon her return to Morongo (she preferred the name Malki—a Wanikik word by which the reservation was originally known), Jane Penn rapidly entered into reservation affairs. She had a gift for knowing which problems could be solved and for taking action to solve them. She was also quick to see instances for potential exploitation by outsiders or to spot weaknesses of management within tribal affairs. Many problems (some more than a century old) she perceived immediately, complex as they might seem to others, and she was skillful at analysis of such problems, whether they were local and involved Morongo or Indian problems of national magnitude.

A list of Jane Penn's contributions might fill a small book. She served on elected tribal committees, on several development committees for reservation affairs, and at the

regional level (e.g., the California Claims Case). She sought out help from whatever agency, group, or individual she believed could add to the repertoire of ideas and talents needed to solve a problem, always with caution and careful consideration.

During the first few years after she returned to the reservation, Jane Penn launched a vigorous battle against Bureau of Indian Affairs procedures with which she disagreed. A visit to the BIA office with her could be an experience in bureaucratic terror! Which is to say that she more than held her own against professional bureaucrats who were not used to being challenged. She negotiated so well with the BIA and other outsiders that she was able to acquire many advantages for her reservation; new housing opportunities after World War II, the first electrical service to the people of the reservation, the development of domestic water to the reservation, and both highway and road construction (such as off-ramps to the reservation where they were not originally intended). She provided much of the ammunition needed by reporter George Ringwald for a series of articles he did in the 1950's for the Riverside Press-Enterprise exposing bureaucracy and mismanagement within the BIA. Then in the mid-1960's, again supported by Jane Penn, Ringwald won the Pulitzer Prize for his newspaper with a series of articles exposing Indian guardianships at Agua Caliente.

Jane Penn was a catalyst to positive change in more ways than she would have cared to recount (she understood that an effective leader moved in many ways, some quietly, to solve a problem). She addressed the medical problems of southern California Indians, and her efforts led to events finally resulting in the establishment of a health clinic at Morongo and other reservations. Her concern for applied research in history and ethnography led to her establishing friendships with various scholars who she encouraged to work with herself and other Indian people. These efforts

have resulted in a renaissance of Cahuilla studies—much of the work sponsored by Malki Museum.

Her most important legacy, perhaps, was the establishment of Malki Museum on the Morongo Reservation. In 1964, she brought together a group of Indian and non-Indian people she had known for years and set out to found the first non-profit Indian museum on a California reservation. The people she brought together served with her on the first board of directors of the museum, which opened its doors in February of 1965 in a small adobe building that had formerly been the home of Mr. and Mrs. Penn. Throughout the rest of her life, she served as director and treasurer of Malki Museum, keeping the museum open six days a week without recompense, and directing the many activities that developed as the small museum grew. Her careful budgeting of the museum's slender finances gradually made possible a publishing program by Malki Museum Press that has become internationally known. No small museum in America has matched the number of books and other publications printed by Malki Museum. She was instrumental in persuading many churches and other organizations to contribute regularly to Malki's scholarship fund, which has given numerous scholarships to Indian young people over the years to attend college. She provided the acreage for the museum grounds from her own inherited property on a long-term lease arranged through the BIA. Once the lease was arranged, she initiated a building fund drive which led to the construction of the museum's first all-purpose building, dedicated in 1975. In the last months of her life, Jane Penn launched an effort to raise grant funds to build a second unit, an exhibit hall, on the grounds of Malki Museum. She reviewed the grant application in her bed at the hospital, also drafting a floor-plan of the proposed building as she envisioned it. During the last weeks of her illness, she learned that Malki Museum was being favor-

ably considered for a construction grant by the James Irvine Foundation. She did not live to learn this Spring that Malki Museum was awarded \$150,000 to construct the exhibits hall. The new building is to be named in her honor.

Jane Penn's concern for what was "right" and her training and heritage led to her being chosen as the ceremonial leader of the Wanakik Cahuilla in 1960. She was responsible for all ceremonies at the Big House on Morongo Reservation. She performed this role until her death, following in an ancient line of succession in her family. In recent years, her efforts in Native American affairs brought her statewide attention and resulted in her appointment by Governor Jerry Brown to the Native American Heritage Commission. As a commissioner, she was part of a new, innovative, nationally significant process in ensuring the recognition of Indian needs in her state. Her brilliant ability to focus on a problem and get to the basic issues involved was remarkable to observe and made her much appreciated by other members of the commission.

In the 1960's, Jane Penn also served as the delegate from Morongo Reservation to the Inter-Tribal Council of California. In 1968, she was given the SCOPE Award by the Soroptimist Federation of the Americas—the first such award ever made in the Pacific Region—for her many activities in behalf of Indian people. In that same year, she was also made Honored Historian and an Honorary Life Member of the American Indian Historical Society. In 1977, she attended the International Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations in Geneva, Switzerland,

one of many forums at which she spoke out against the deprivation of Indians of their lands and heritage. In all of her efforts, she was closely supported by her husband, Elmer, whose objective advice she often solicited on many matters.

Jane Penn was a loving wife, sister, and aunt. She was also a demanding and loving friend—a source of strength, wisdom, and encouragement to all who worked with her. The legacy she leaves will continue to have an effect upon many Indians and non-Indians whom she chose to have become a part of her very large, faithful family of colleagues.

Jane Penn was a very private person in some ways—like most people of talent and accomplishment. She never sought flattery; she sought results! She was accustomed to criticism and didn't let it delay her efforts to accomplish those goals she thought necessary for *the* people. She often said that personal feelings and personal loyalties always came second to doing what was "right," and all of us who knew her well felt the force of her belief in that respect at one time or another and respected it because her effort to do the "right" thing was always consistently administered. No one was immune. No one person was more important than the group, its history, its persistence, and its well-being. Jane Penn believed that—and whatever the consequences over the years—she practiced it. She will be greatly missed yet remembered by all who had the privilege of knowing her.

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