

ELSIE'S STORY

This is the story of Elsie Teinert and Walter Penk, their life and history, as told by Elsie in her own words. Elsie, over the years, wrote several books of her and Walter's family history and their life together. She wrote these books, one for each of her grandchildren, and they were given to her children, Jeannine, Adrienne and Walter. Jeannine received two of these books and this account is a compiled account of these two books. One book goes into great detail of the family history and ancestors, the other focuses more on her early childhood, life as a young girl and teenager, and finally her life with her husband Walter Eric Penk. The changes in text script reflect those parts taken from the two books.

Pictures have been added to this account, compiled from the many pictures that Elsie kept, many of which were identified so that a family history and record could be kept. I have chosen those pictures that relate to her story.



I have taken the liberty to divide the story into chapters, and apply paragraph breaks for ease of reading, and for easier computer organization. Indentations are as Elsie used them.

IN MEMORY OF ELSIE AND WALTER PENK
Charles Kriegel & Jeannine Penk Kriegel

Elsie's Story

CHAPTER ONE

Past, present and future. Yes, I am thinking of the past. Does not the present mean Now, and how much Future I have, who on earth knows? Oh, when you mention the Past, why I have seventy-five years of the Past to think back to. Then there is the Past that was here long before I ever was born, so can you not understand why the elderly so often speak of the Past?

The past has given me so many memories, most of them I do not want to forget. My memories go back to early child-hood, first school days, high school days, the day I met a special young man and later married. Our first child, our second child, our third child, our children's achievements. Memories are beautiful, they are humorous, they are sad, and if there was no sadness in this world, and all our wants were granted, why would we need God?

I wish I knew more about your great grandfather Franz P`enk. Franz originally was a Frenchman who decided to remain in Germany after the Franco-Prussian War.

Naturally Franz was born with a French name which he wished to make sound as if it was German. The name P`enk was born. Your father told me the original name. To me it sounded as if it was La P – (Jeannine remembers the name being spelled or pronounced La Penkeau.)

Why did he change his name? I do not know. Perhaps when he met Maria Trzygodda she preferred he change his name at the same time he became a German citizen.

They were married, and had one son born to them. His name was Max. Max was baptized in Habesberger St. Trinitatsmeinde Church in July, 1887.



Maria Trzygodda and Walter Penk



Walter's Conformation

Through letters I felt I was acquainted with Maria Trzygodda Penk.

Your father, Walter Erich Penk, was her only grand-son. It was natural his grand-mother expressed her wishes that we visit her in Germany. We invited her to come to see us too, but due to a deafness in one ear she preferred to remain in her own country. An ear drum ruptured when she sneezed.

Your father and I met during the depression, and we had an income for our needs, but not enough to make a trip across the ocean. Besides your grand-mother said my best dresses she would use as house dresses.

A friend, Mr. Alfred Bremser, did visit her in Berlin where she lived. He told us she lived in a beautiful apartment. He had not expected her to live as well as she did.

Letters ceased when World War II was fought. It was after the war was over that we learned from a friend of Maria's that she died during the last air raid over Berlin.



Max Penk and Martha von Siegmund.

Your grandfather, Max Penk, who lived in Berlin, married Martha von Siegmund in April 30, 1909. Max was a Lutheran and Martha was Catholic. It was the custom at that time the wife would give up her religion in favor of her husband's.

Martha, your grand-mother lost her father very early in her life, and a few years later when she was still a child, her mother died. She told me how often she would stay in her mother's room while she was in the hospital.

When her mother died, Martha was sent to live in the home of an older sister (Martha's mother's older sister), who resented the child. Martha was a von Siegmund. Why did she not live in the castle which was in Sommerfeld, where Martha was born. The castle may have been in Fuenster-walde. Between these two cities the castle existed.

I know your father would stay at the castle each summer vacation. It was understood that all descendants of the Siegmunds family were allowed to go there.

It was Martha's grand-father or her father that was in a fight which lost him his title. At the same time your father was allowed to visit. Perhaps you are allowed to visit here too unless it was destroyed in World War II.

Your father's ancestors in France also were prominent people. Perhaps some day you may wish to investigate in order to learn more about them.

Your grandfather Max Penk did not have to go to war in World War I as he accidentally lost a finger. He was anxious to join some young friends in service, therefore he enlisted.

He was sent to fight in Russia. He was wounded on the first day in a battle. A few days later he died. Either he died on his birthday on May 19, 1915 or was wounded on that day. Your father was six years old in July 23, 1915. Too early to lose a father.

Your grandfather wrote your grandmother saying, "Martha, we did not believe in God very much, but if you could see what I see it makes you believe in Him."

Your father, Walter Erick Penk, and his mother visited the grave of Max Penk in Russia after the war was over. I think I have a picture of the grave. (I was not able to find this picture)

As the war continued there was much sickness in the school room, many children died of diphtheria. Nearly each day another child was missing from the class room.

Germany was hungry. There was not enough food for its people. The Salvation Army of the United States fed the children. Hot chocolate was served. Your father never forgot the good deeds of the Salvation Army. In this country he always was happy to make a donation to the Salvation Army. He always had sympathy for the unfortunates.



Martha von Siegmund Penk & Wilhelm Kirsch

A few years after the War I was over, Martha married Wilhelm Kirsch. His family raised a fine breed of horses, but Wilhelm became a sailor for a few years. Then the dream came to him to go to America. He left his wife and step-son and arrived in the United States, in the state of Texas. When he had saved enough money he sent for your grandmother and father. By this time your father was fifteen years old. They arrived December 1924.



Walter Penk (bottom center) on the boat to America



NORDDEUTSCHER LLOYD BREMEN

December 8, 1924

Passenger Guest Book

A Mr. Lehman, who was a barber found a job for Walter at the Sweeney Jewelry company under Mr. Glen Tate, an outstanding jeweler. My husband became just as great a few year later.

Mr. and Mrs. Tate treated your father as their own son. All of their children died in infancy. They often took him along to their home at Clear Lake Shores. They had a boat and invited many friends to enjoy the lake life too.

The history of my ancestors is different then the history of your father. I am proud to be of Windish descent. I am proud to be a Wend. Who are the Wends may be asked. I will try to tell you about a minority race that existed in Europe at least one thousand years B.C. Roman writers such as Pliny, Tacitus and Ptolemy called the slavs Wends or "Veneti".

The ancient Greek geographer says traditional origin of Veniti dates back to the Fall of Troy , 1183 BC , when they came to the Adriatic from Paphlagonia.

The Wends were reluctant to unity (unify) which caused them to be divided against each other. This made them a very easy prey by ambitious people. They strictly believed in individual liberty. They had no desire for war, but fought fiercely when attacked.

The origin of the Slavs is traced back to Madri, son of Japhet. Japhet was a son of Noah.

It is believed that my ancestors, who were Wends came from Mazon, son of Japhet, who was a son of Noah. If this is correct then the Slavic race is traced from the beginning of all races.

Rev. J. W. Behnken, once minister of Trinity Lutheran church in Houston, Texas and later president of the Missouri Synod, once remarked that if there is a language spoken in Heaven that he believes it will be Wendish.

In the fourth century as Germanic tribes moved out of the territory between Elbe and Oder Rivers, the Wends moved in and continued westward.

At the end of the sixth century they were dominant in Central Germany, but continuous conflict with the German armies pushed them back east of the Elbe.

Wends were subdued in 963 by forces of Otto the Great. They were conquered by the Prussians in 1167, a conflict that lasted three hundred years.

Ensuing years Lusatia was tossed about between Germany, Poland, Bohemia and Hungary. In 1815 the Congress of Vienna decreed Lusatia be split between Saxony and Prussia.

The Wends were now subjugated and transformed from a cultural majority to a minority of serfs. They were christianized and Lutheranism became a dominant force in their lives.

The Wends came from Lusatia, about fifty miles from Berlin, which now is in East Germany. We know the Wends are an intelligent race, not aggressive, but could fight fiercely if they found it necessary. Throughout the years these ancestors of mine may have been noblemen; they may have been gypsies. They traveled from the east, always going westward. Some had as many as twenty wives, and when a husband died it was an honor to the wife that joined her husband in death.

Wends are a Slavic race, but did not begin their historical career in the name of Slavs, but used the German name "Wenden" or English name "Wends".

In 1848 the Wends were extremely unhappy with economic situation, so talk of emigrating to America began. Due to the oppression by the Germans, who wanted them to speak German, but they could not be a citizen or worship in the Lutheran Church. Only a few could hold choice jobs, and if they could have a good position their pay was not as high as the German.

The Wends in Saxony decided to emigrate to Texas. From colonist that emigrated earlier, they wrote home to loved ones. Texas was described as having fields and fields of beautiful flowers.

Families met in various homes to discuss coming to Texas. Earlier Wends in Texas sent glowing letters about the beauty of Texas, and sent pictures of the beautiful blue bonnets and many other wild flowers. Rev. Johann Kilian was chosen to be their leader.

It appears that my great grandfather Carl or Karl Teinert and Carl Lehman were elected officers of the Wendish colonist. Secret meetings were held in Lehman's Mill and at Teinert's home. The interested people in this movement came from many different villages from Saxony and Prussia.

Johann Kilian was chosen to be minister and lead them to Texas. His ambition was to establish a refuge in America. He wanted a land of freedom. Kilian was an aristocrat, well educated and spoke fluently in German, Wendish, Latin and English.

They left in September 1854 on two small ships, but in Liverpool were transferred to the Ben Navis. Many of the colonist died in Liverpool. On the journey to Texas my great grandmother, Carl Teinert's wife, died. His son Johann witnessed his mother's funeral as she was lowered by several men slowly

into the deep sea. She was my great grandmother. Finally after much suffering the colonist arrived in Galveston on December 16, 1854. Since there was no hotels, many had to sleep on cotton bales.

From Galveston the colonists went to Houston. Some of them remained there because of insufficient funds. Most of them went on wagon driven by oxen, some walked. It was a slow and dangerous trip. Once there was a prairie fire while they were traveling. Scared, the wild animals were running among them.



Ben Navis, Painting commissioned by Elsie from a friend
and given to Jeannine.

Not all colonists continued their journey to the area near Serbin. Some stopped at New Ulm. The Falkes did, but the Teinerts continued until they reached their destination. The land was poor where they stopped, but they needed wood to build places to live. The first house that was built was made for the minister, Rev. J.K. Kilian and his family. The house consisted of two rooms. One room was for the Kilian family, and the other was used as a school room. Many of the colonist used dug outs until better shelter could be made for them.

My great grandfather, Carl Teinert, was the organist in the church. He also played the violin beautifully. My father had a Stradivarius violin that my brother Roy learned to play. It was kept in my possession. My husband, Walter Penk, also had his own violin which he brought from Germany. One was stolen while we were moving from one house to another. The other was given to a nephew. Could it be that the Stradivarius was Carl Teinert's violin?

Carl Teinert, the first organist in the Serbin church, played the organ well. I was told when I was in the teens, that he played so beautifully that a young girl often came early to church just to hear his practice.

Since Carl's first wife was buried at sea in 1854, he married for the second time to Anna Michalk aus Oelsen, bei Klitten, Preussen. This means she was from Oelsen near Klitten, Prussia. Together they had four children. One of their daughters I remember quite well. She lived to be very old. Her name was Theresia Lieberty. In English it is Liberty. She was one of the sweetest person I have ever known.



Theresia (Liberty) Teinert

Carl Teinert was a farmer. He hauled cotton for farmers to Houston and brought back merchandise. It was once when he was returning home from one of his trips, he saw a lot of people at his house. His second wife died and was being prepared for her funeral. When my great grandfather was on one of his trips it was uncertain when he would be back.

My great grandfather moved to Warda. Serbin had called a teacher, and teachers were expected to play the organ at church. This upset Carl; he left Serbin.

Carl's third marriage was to Johanna Simme, who was born in Rackel in Sachsen, which is Saxony. Together they had eight children.

After Carl died, Johanna moved with her children to California. I know of them because my aunt Hulda Teinert who was always in a wheel chair would write letters and receive them.

I failed to mention my grandfather, August Teinert was born to the first wife of Carl Teinert, my great grandfather. My father, who also was named August, was the youngest child from Carl's first wife.

My grandfather August Teinert was born in December 19, 1838 in Saxony. He was sixteen years old when he came to Texas on the Ben Navis. His wife was Johanna Kasperick. August was a farmer living on a large piece of land five miles from Giddings. He built the log cabin in 1860 which still stands. It has rooms added to it.

Many years later your father, Walter Erick Penk and I bought eight and half acres from my cousin, Otto Teinert and his wife Frieda. We built a small house on our property and the time we spent away from the city in the country was what we needed. We left our cares, and loved our little country house. There is a lot of history there.

It was here my grandparents lived. Grandfather Teinert was a soldier in the civil war. Once when my grandmother was alone in the cabin she was boiling some meat in the big black kettle which was hanging in the fire place. The door opened and seven Indians came in. She backed into a corner and watched them put their bare hands in the very hot water. The Indians were not hostile, they were hungry.

Another time at Christmas Eve when people usually had more food prepared she was afraid to sleep in the house. She went to the cow pen and slept among the cows.

I repeat my ancestors were Wends. They spoke Wendish. They left Germany to have freedom of speech and of religion. They lived near a German settlement too, and in business it was necessary to speak German. As time passed my grandparents began to speak more German than Wendish. Their first children were confirmed in Wendish, then they consented to have two or more confirmed in German. When a young daughter at the age of eight was looking with her mother at some flowers, the little girl fell down. She was dead. My grandmother felt that God was punishing them for accepting the German language. My father was the youngest of their children. When it was time for him to be confirmed, it was in the Wendish language.

CHAPTER 2

My knowledge is limited about my great-grandfather Georg Falke and my great-grandmother Agnes Falke. They both came to Texas on the Ben Nevis at the same time the Teinerts came. They too were Wends. Georg was born in Saxony on Nov. 15, 1812, and his wife Agnes birth date is June 2, 1816. They came with their four children. The fifth child was born on the ship. Little Magdalena died five days later.

A Mr. Moore brought his slaves from Alabama to Texas when there were rumors that slaves would soon be freed. Georg (this is the way she spells Georg) must have accumulated some slaves through Mr. Moore or perhaps there was more than one slave owner that stopped in Warda Texas. I do remember one slave that had been a Falke clearly. Who could forget Mandy?

There are some black people living in Giddings, and a cousin of mine asked them how they received the Falke name. Their answer was they belonged to the Falkes when they were slaves. Did my great grandfather have enough money to purchase slaves? He must have as Ernst, my grandfather, son of Georg Falke was only 13 years old in 1854.

I have visited the graves of Georg and Agnes Falke. They are not buried in the Warda cemetery that we know today. Their resting place is on the Dunk farm in Warda.

My great grandfather Teinert moved to Warda when he left the church in Serbin. He helped to obtain a Lutheran Church in Warda. It must have been written in the stars that the Falke and the Teinerts would be friends. My mother was a Falke, my father a Teinert.

Grandpa Falke (Ernst) was born October 16, 1846. He came with his parents to Texas on the Ben Nevis in 1854. He too served in the Civil War, was captured by the union army, and held prisoner of war. Later he escaped. When he arrived home to Warda all he owned was a horse and a saddle.

It was destined Grandpa Falke would become wealthy. Did he do it alone or did his father accumulate enough money so he could help his son Ernst get started. My grandfather did establish a store that sold a bit of everything. Farmers brought their wagons, their piece goods, so that their wives could sew, groceries, just about everything what people needed in that day. Joining the store was a saloon. I remember the saloon when Mr. Ben Sterling was running it. His wife many years later gave me a heavy large beer glass that was used in the saloon. It is in my cabin in the country.

My grandparents Falke had fourteen children, some died in infancy. One boy was adopted when his parents died, his name was Willie. My grandparents first child was Willie. These two boys were about the same age. They were very close to each other, they worked together, they played together. One day the weather was very hot, and they had been working outside. The two fourteen or fifteen year old boys decided to go swimming after eating peaches from the peach trees.

Later that night the two boys became ill. They both died. Two young boys with the same name, same age, same illness and same day of death.

Little eight month old Alexander was in his cradle, he was crying very hard so my grandmother asked her daughter Hulda to rock him. A neighbor girl was visiting and she wished to rock the baby. She rocked him so hard that Alexander was rocked out of the cradle. He died.



Ernst Falke

My grandmother spent much of her time in the grocery store, or rather the store that had a bit of everything. She was pleasant and greeted customers while knitting socks for the children. I have heard that her pleasantness made the store prosper. There were servants working in the home.

My grandmother also had one brother who was Albert Peter. She was so fond of Albert that she named a son Albert, and most of her son's middle name was Albert. My mother named her first son Albert. Aunt Mamie and uncle Robert named one son Albert.

There was a Matthaues Peter, who was a retired real estate owner, born in 1789 and his wife Rosina born in 1798. No children were listed on the Ben Nevis. They were too old in 1854 to have children which makes me believe at least one grown son left Germany to go to Texas with an earlier group that come here. To this son and his wife, Wilhelmina and Albert were born.

After the death of my grandmother, grandpa moved to Giddings. Before I write about this I wish to tell you about Mandy who had been a slave. She felt she belonged to the Falke. Sometime I wonder if the Falke belonged to her. She freely came and stayed with whatever home she decided to go to. She took over the kitchen.



Mandy - the one
with her head uncovered.
She was a slave in the Falke
family, although freed remained
faithful to all of its members
by serving one than another.
She came as she pleased and
remained as long as she
wanted to.
I very clearly remember her
famous hot biscuits and her
sitting in the kitchen and
telling me stories.
Elsie

Mandy had a home of her own and lived with a daughter. The house was located near town in Giddings. Sometimes my mother would take me along when we visited Mandy. Mandy came to our family when she chose to come. She was extremely proud of her biscuits, and can still hear her call my father saying "Mr. Teinert hurry up to breakfast before the biscuits get cold." When she tired of us she might go to Aunt Elsie's house or to Aunt Hulda's house. There were several years when many of the now grown Falke children lived in Giddings. My parent lived there from February, 1914 to July 1918.

There was another black woman that was often in our home, but I cannot recall her name. She might have been Mandy's daughter. This lady was a good story teller. I always enjoyed sitting in the kitchen with her while she smoked a corn cob pipe. Life in the old days was slow, but pleasant. At least my young life was. In later years, I still can find more blessing than misfortune.

My mother lost her mother when she still was a little girl. She remembers that her mother had a beautiful voice, and that a sermon brought tears to her eyes. She also was the only woman in the church that wore a hat. Bonnets were worn by the others.

After her mother's death a very sweet woman known as Mutter Bohot stayed very much with the Falkes. Mutter Bohot often took care of the sick. She was still active when Aunt Elsie gave birth to her first child, Inez Bell Marion Krenek. Mutter Bohot was there.

It was Mutter Bohot that took my mother, while she was a young girl on a train ride. They got on the train, but after awhile Mutter Bohot did not recognize any of the landscape. This train was going the opposite direction in which they expected to go. It was difficult for the conductor to understand her because she could not speak English. Neither could my mother. Finally somehow they were put off the train, then waited for a train going in their direction.

My grandfather and Mary Schellnick got married on February 4, 1906. My mother who would be eighteen on May 19, 1906 and her sister Alwina about ten years older then my mother got married two days later on February 6, 1906. They had a large double church wedding.



Mary Magdalene Falke & August Gerhard Teinert

My mother married August Gerhard Teinert, who would be twenty-two years old on May 17, 1906. Alwina married Kurt Grindle, who recently come from Germany. Evidently from a rich parents as they sent him a check each month.

When grandpa Falke left his business in Warda, he turned it over to two of his sons, C.A. Falke and E.A. Falke. My grandfather was elected to be a state representative in Texas in 1894. This was the twenty-fourth Legislature by the Democratic party.

He was a successful business man. In Giddings he owned several store buildings, a saw mill in Giddings and one in Burton.

People in Giddings found a few people who owned automobiles. My grandfather purchased a Buick. He received some instructions how to drive the car. He was impatient to try driving it: he drove off alone all over Giddings. When he was ready to stop the car he found he did not know what to do. He called out "whoa" several times, but the car would not stop. He drove and he drove on and on. He drove until finally the gasoline was all gone. Then the car stopped by itself.

My grandpa never drove his car again. He turned it over to his wife to drive, she was a chauffeur to him. She had to be ready to go when he was ready. One day he wanted to visit my mother. (my mother's name was Mary and my mother's step mother was Mary too). Mary the step mother rushed to get ready to drive her husband across town to where my parents lived. The Falkes arrived with Mary walking in and trying to button her dress and saying "Mary don't look at me, you know how your father is, when he is ready to go I must be ready too."

My parents first anniversary was February 6, 1907. This was the same day Uncle Ernst, my mother's brother, left on a freight train to Ft. Worth to take a load of cattle there. Two trains collided and my uncle and another man was killed. The others had time to jump out of the train. On the 11th of March of that same year my mother gave birth to their first child. This baby was born with a cleft lip. He cried a lot as he could not eat well. Something was being done especially for little Albert in Galveston, but everything takes time.

Aunt Alwina lived nearby and would come over often. She would rock the baby and sing very loud. She was somewhat deaf so did not know how loud her voice was. In July the baby got pneumonia and died.

A few months later Aunt Louise had their sixth child. Her husband was Dr. Paul Beckman, who lived in Warda awhile then moved to La Grange. Aunt Louise died soon after giving birth to Baby Roy. My aunt told my mother she could take their children home with her, all but the baby because he was going to follow her. He died eight months later.

Aunt Alwina also was pregnant. She died giving birth to the baby. The baby also died. She must have had a feeling she would die as she made a remark that if she knew she would die she would make three sommer saults in her bed. She asked her sisters to pray the Lords Prayer. As they prayed her soul went to Heaven.

After my mother lost so many dear members of her family she had a nervous break down. She thought everyone in her family was going to die. Soon afterwards my parents decided to move to Georgetown, Texas. In a short time they made many new friends. In Walburg twelve miles away lived two of my father's brothers, and their family. They were Uncle Carl and Uncle Traugott with their families.



Mary & Hulda Falke

It is time I stop about my family from the Falke side, and go back to the Teinert side.

My father lost his father when he was seventeen years old. Both men were named August. My father turned out not to be a farmer as his father was, also his brothers. He moved into town in Giddings. My father August, worked in a drug store as a pharmacist. Dr. Fields soon learned he would be a good doctor so that when he needed to make house calls in the country, he would take my father with him. He would drive the horse and buggy for the doctor. At the patients house, my father learned to help the doctor with the patients. The first time my father cut off an arm from a man he fainted. As time passed Dr. Fields learned my father could be a very good doctor.

Since the doctor's two sons were not interested in following their father's foot-steps he became more and more interested in my father. He discussed his wishes with my grandmother, who recently had lost her husband. Dr. Fields was willing to pay all of my fathers expenses if he would go to school in Galveston to be a doctor.

My father was willing to go, but my grandmother could not give up her youngest son, especially to Galveston. People were still talking about the horrible storm in Galveston in 1900 which took six thousand lives.

My father was a good worker, he was a good pharmacist, and feel he could have been a good doctor. To be in business for himself as he was later was not meant for him.

ADDITIONAL PICTURES



Otilie Teinert & Emil Matthijetz



Esther Kunze and Lillian Wuensche