The farmer's daughter

ALTHOUGH she has appeared in more than 40 movies, the hazel-eyed star of ABC-TV's **The Donna Reed Show** confesses, "Before we shoot each week's episode, I get opening-night jitters." Despite the tension, she plunged into TV because "I felt my most productive years were ahead; I'd never done comedy and I would be working with my husband." Donna and her husband, producer Tony Owen, own one-third of the series.

Donna Reed
weekly jitters.

She plays a pediatrician's wife and the mother of a daughter, 14, and a son, 11. "I'm glad I photograph much younger than my 39 years," says this 5'4", 108-pound brunette. "But we get scores of letters saying I'm too young for the part. Audiences are conditioned to actresses who become grandmothers before they will accept mother roles."

Married since 1945, the Owens have four children: Penny, 13; Tony, Jr., 12; Timmy, 10; and Mary Anne, 2. The two eldest are adopted. Donna assigns them home tasks, in keeping with her own close-knit family life, when everyone pitched in on the farm chores.

She is the eldest of five chldren born to farmer William Mullenger and his wife in Denison, Iowa. "We had a hard time eking out a livelihood," she says, without bitterness, and still proud that she once won a blue ribbon for biscuit baking at Iowa's State Fair. Acting in high school plays helped her overcome her shyness. After graduation, Donna—with only $60 in her pocketbook—headed for Los Angeles where she knew she could attend City College "for a $5 student card and my book fees," while she lived with an aunt. Later she worked as a maid, dishwasher and librarian to pay her way.

At 20, Donna, an English major, was elected campus queen and movie talent scouts sought her out. MGM signed her as a $75-a-week starlet in 1940 and changed Mullenger to Reed. "I was forever playing straight woman to the hero," she says. Then, in 1953, Harry Cohn, boss of Columbia Pictures, cast Donna as a prostitute in *From Here to Eternity,* despite heated objections from almost everyone at his studio that she was the "goody-goody" type. Her touching performance won her an Academy Award.

Outspoken and cheerful, Donna spends almost all her free time with her children. "I need them as badly as they need me," she says simply. "I'm not encouraging my kids to go into show business, because it's too hazardous and egocentric an occupation."

—MARK NICHOLS

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