

THESEN CENTENARY

TED STENT'S GOSSIP COLUMN

DINNER PARTY AT "THE HILL" ON 6TH APRIL 1970

What could have been nicer than Stanley and Ros's invitation to a family dinner party at "The Hill" on the evening of 6th April to celebrate the arrival of the Thesen Family in Knysna on that day 100 years ago. Nothing could have pleased the family more as several of us had felt there ought to be some family celebration apart from the flag raising ceremony that had been arranged earlier, and, this party, planned just a few days before, could not have been more appropriate. As somebody at the party, I think Hjalmar said, it is so pleasant to know that as a family we are all such friends.

There were sixteen of us there representing three generations and who more charming could we have had than Stanley and Ros as hosts, both calm, collected and unfussed by having so many to dine with them.

We met first in the drawing room where Stanley had provided a silver bowl of champagne punch. It was a lovely evening and the lights of the town below glinted cheerfully. How few dim lights there must have been when the family first arrived and as Kitsy said, how much brighter everything was than when she first came to Knysna some fifty years ago. The view from "The Hill", whether it be by day or night, fascinates everyone who knows it.

The ladies were all dressed up and looked charming in their long or short frocks and just for fun I shall describe what they wore.

Ros looked distinguished and lovely in a shimmering white and silver blouse worn over a long black skirt.

Kitsy, who gets more and more beautiful as she ages, wore a turquoise blouse also over a long black skirt.

Hildur was in a smart boldly figured short dress in dark red and brown with a touch of fawn. She wore with it an old cameo brooch of her mother's.

Marie looked charming in a short pale pink frock heavily jewelled below the collar line.

Judy was beautiful in a very elegant long and flowing black frock set off by a high waisted narrow corded white belt.

Gwen, as usual when she's dressed up, looked like a duchess in her outstanding long black frock heavily embossed in a design woven in gold thread.

Doaty challenged her sister in an extremely well cut long black frock wearing with it an intricately designed gold and ivory choker on black velvet ribbon. It was of antique eastern origin and had belonged to her mother.

Anne Reid was very smart in a dark green short frock with gold buttons and, last but not least, the representative of the third generation there was Susan Chaplin in an attractive white blouse worn under a well draped narrow long sea-green blue skirt threaded with gold. With it she wore a locket on a thin gold chain which had belonged to her grandmother.

I felt we men should all have been wearing white ties and tails to live up to the women!

There was much talk as there always is when the Thesen family gets together, and a lot of it referred to the pleasant ceremony which had gone off so well during the morning when the Thesen Flag was raised at the Company's Head Office by Marie and small Georgina, and at Thesen Industries by Ros. The weather had been perfect and the ceremony had been simple, dignified and pleasant going off without a hitch.

In due course Ros led us all in to dinner. What now is the dining room was once the main bedroom used by Grandfather Thesen. The room looked charming, candlelit throughout with low bowls of lovely pink hibiscus, sparkling silver and glass, all enhancing the long broad dining table which once graced Portland. Ros had made name cards for each guest with a black and white sketch drawing of the "Albatros" in full sail using one of the old pictures painted by the Albatros steward, Frantszen, as a guide for the design. The curtains were not drawn and once again the lights of Knysna down below glistened through the windows.

As a matter of interest I give the seating arrangements. Stanley with Hildur on his right shared the broad end of the table at the window end. On his left was Kitsy then Anne Reid, Ted, Doaty, Lorne, Marie next to Charlie who with Ros shared the other end of the table. Then came Susan Chaplin, Hjalmar, Owen, Colin, Judy and Chauncey next to Hildur. Sitting between charming dinner companions I nevertheless, like others there I am sure, was fascinated by the snatches of conversation one heard on all sides. So many of the things talked about referred to the past and one got new impressions, of pleasant memories, for instance one heard Hildur talking of excursions to Robberg by oxwagon "for a change of Air", the girls sleeping in the wagon and the boys below it. Chauncey told of his chaperoned walks up Table Mountain with Katie, schoolgirl Hildur aged sixteen acting as chaperone. Kitsy told how difficult it was to come to town from Rushmere, particularly as there was no bridge over Goukamma River then, and that she had to wait nearly a month in Knysna until Stanley decided to arrive into the world when a large white towel had to be hung out of her window to inform Mr. Charlie that he had his first grandson. And so on.

The menu was wonderful and served without any fuss, Ros and Stanley quietly supervising unobtrusively in the background. We started with fresh oysters, followed by a choice of cold consommé or hot Norwegian fish soup which was delicious. Then came nice red roast beef served with pickled walnut, roast potatoes, peas and Brussels sprouts! The very nice apricot mousse, served with what I thought was trifle, I gather had been made by Doaty who whispered to me of the distracting accidents

that had happened to it in the making. To end off there was a wide choice of cheeses including some of the very smelly varieties. There were lovely wines to suit each course and. finally a really beautiful port supplied by Gwen went the rounds in traditional manner.

Stanley started what became a sequence of impromptu toasts, in a very serious and impressive manner. I wish I had an exact record of what he said. The theme of his toast was that when drinking it we should all remember the tradition built up by the whole family throughout these 100 years and what they all had stood for and to remember the dedication that had gone into the building up of the family and firm throughout that period. In drinking this toast to the family as a whole and the firm we should be prepared to face the future with the same courage and dedication as had been shown in the past.

Hildur then proposed a toast to our host and. hostess, Stanley and Ros, who had so calmly and graciously made the party such a pleasant one.

Marie toasted all the "in-laws" saying how fortunate the family had been in having such nice ones to which Chauncey replied most appropriately.

Hjalmar asked us to drink to absent friends and particularly to all those of the Thesen family who were not present.

Gwen then proposed a toast to the future generations who will carry on the Thesen tradition over the next hundred years, causing some amusement when it was realised that Susan would be 115 years old if she lived all that time!

Ros in approved traditional manner shepherded all the ladies out and Chauncey told the men some of his experiences in a German prisoner of war camp during the First World War, all of which could have been heard without a blush by the ladies.

The party ended with coffee and. liqueurs in the drawing room until gradually the family dispersed happily to their own homes. This ended a lovely evening and what had been a very pleasant and dignified day.

Signed

Ted Stent

7/4/70