

The Men Who Came to Dinner

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Growing up in a boarding house/ vacation resort/ tourist home is different than growing up in a regular house or an apartment. We always had guests. In the summer time guests would fill all of the rooms. Usually they'd stay a week at a time. When the summer ended my folks would welcome boarders. Some stayed a month...the ones I remember best stayed longer.

There was this one man called, "Christiansen" he came for a weekend in the summer and stayed for two years. Story was he'd been or still was a sailor in the Danish navy. His ship sailed to Iceland. There he did a lot a card playing and won a lot of money. He decided to come to vacation at our house when the ship came to the States. He came for a week and stayed two years. There's something fishy in Denmark about that story, but that's what I was told. That's what I believed.

I never knew if he had a first name, I never questioned it. I remember he was a nice man, played tennis with my Dad. I imagine if they did play cards my father was certainly smart enough not to play for money with him.

Then there was Stanley Lemon. He came for dinner one night. Mother prepared the meals for the summertime vacationers as well as did everything else. Stanley was a charming English actor. Being an out of work actor, he asked for a job as bartender. No salary just rooms and board. Stanley was the absolute best storyteller, magician and bar tender there ever was. He has such wonderful true stories to tell. He'd been in the French Foreign Legion in India and in Africa. His stories fascinated all the customers and me.

He'd been married twice before and spoke lovingly of them both. While he was working for us he fell in love with one of our customers. She was the daughter of a very prominent and wealthy doctor. They soon married. He moved out of our house and into hers. I missed Stanley.

When he died all three of his wives came to the funeral, they all cried.

Then there was Charles J Hackett. He'd been a Captain in the Army. A writer of books and poetry. When he first came to our house he got a job at the Oakland Military Academy. It was just a mile away and only natural that he'd rent a room from us. Both my sister and I loved having him there. He was like a brother to us. His poems frequently were the intros to Walter Winchell's column in the NY Post. I didn't realize how impressive that was at the time. He was a good writer.

He'd take Evelyn and I places, he enjoyed having family. Charlie became our family. He didn't have stories that could compare to Stanley's French Foreign Legion stories, but he was a marvelous and clever kind man with the absolute best sense of humor. My sister would enjoy nothing better than spending an evening talking to Charlie. He had class and style.

I often think how lucky my sister and I were not growing up in a normal home. We never lived a routine life...we were always surrounded by exciting people, ever changing.

When people would come for the summer, they were coming to vacation, to have a good time. What a marvelous atmosphere to grow up in. There were times I envied my friends that didn't have 30 guests for dinner every night. I had no idea how lucky I was.

I could never understand how my mother had the stamina to keep it all going. My mother worked much too hard, but she was never bored, she had no time to be bored. She ran a thriving business. Managed people, shopped, planned, and cooked. She could do everything and she did, and she did it like a pro. What she didn't know how to do she learned. The hours were long; there was no time for anything but taking care of the customer. It was hard work, but I think she loved the excitement and the challenge. She had much too much energy to be an ordinary housewife; she needed more...More she got, in spades.

My father was part of it, but mostly he would help entertain the customers. He'd play tennis with them. Plan parties with them. Initially he did so much of the rebuilding of the structure that became the Hansen House. After that was finished it seemed it was up to her to take it from there. Wasn't a problem for her, she took it all on with style.

My mother never had to wonder, "What am I going to do today?" She only could hope there was enough time to get everything done, that needed immediate doing. She had little time for wondering she just got busy.

If I were to tell you I grew up in a 20-room house, you'd think it was impressive. When I mentioned the Canopied entrance, the library, the baby grand, a serving staff, chefs, the lovely pond on the property, a shuffleboard court, the tennis court in the back yard, the library and the 5 fireplaces. It was an eighteen thousand square feet home with a 30 by 40-ft. living room. You'd be tempted to say WOW! Some things are not really what you might imagine. You had to see it for yourself.

As I said earlier it was not a normal home or life style, it was much more. It was a thriving business; our bedrooms were on the third floor. Our rooms all

numbered. My room was number seven. It had a bay window with four double hung windows. Swell to say the least. The numbering of the rooms was a left over thing from the days of the summer vacation hotel.

The second floor was eventually converted into two banquet rooms. Used for parties and Rotary Club dinners and meetings. So much for those five guest rooms. Mother was now running a Smorgasbord restaurant.

I didn't like the business very much. Funny that I should end up working in the restaurant business for 28 years of my life. Guess some of the excitement did rub off after all.

Sometimes I felt cheated that I didn't have a more normal growing up. How foolish I was. How else could I have had such diversity, excitement? How else could I have known so many wonderful people like Stanley Lemon, Charles J Hackett and Christiansen. We have a wonderful family friend that is so important to us all Sidney. He was a big part of my growing up. He was such help to my folks when they first started, even before that. But that's a long story, and for another time.

For now, I just want to thank my wonderful mother, let her know how proud I am of her. Her example in everything that she does is a tough act to follow. Her love, her generosity, understanding and her attitude are remarkable. She tells me she never worried. She just always did the best she could, and life unfolded just as it should. What an exciting life she has had. I love you Mommy.