

The Heidenstam Dinner

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There are some experiences which are worth remembering forever. Flying Virgin Atlantic first class to Heathrow and attending the fourth annual Oscar Heidenstam Foundation Hall of Fame Awards dinner in England on March 18, 1995 are two exalted pleasures of my life. First cabin on Virgin Atlantic and the Oscar Heidenstam reunion are what class is all about. Everyone should spend some time in the VIP lounge of Virgin Atlantic at Heathrow. It's a preview of what heaven may be like. Former double NABBA Mr. Universe Joe Abbenda and his wife Jayne were also on the flight starting a two week vacation by first attending the Oscar Heidenstam Foundation dinner. We arrived in England to find delightfully sunny weather with flowers in bloom on the grounds of the Marriott Hotel where this unequalled function is annually held.

In the lobby we found several barbell buddies from previous reunions. Cherished acquaintanceships renewed. Joyful encounters. There was Mike Baker, Bill Pearl, and Leo Stem. In the center of the small crowd was the inspiration of us all, the monarch of strength and health, John C. Grimek holding court with his beloved Angela at his side.

Seven P.M., the main event. There were physical culture people from all over Europe, from the Caribbean from the USA flowing into the spacious main ballroom. Towards the rear wall of the ballroom were four almost life sized photographs of John Grimek in his classic biceps pose leaning against the Roman or Greek pillar, Reg Park, Steve Reeves and the 1995 honoree Bill Pearl. Incredible. Then there was a captivating array of physical culture memorabilia.

The Oscar Heidenstam Trustees and Directors are Ian MacQueen, MD., president; Dr. Tom Temperly, vice president; Clifford LeMaistre, chairman; Cohn Norris, vice chairman; Malcolm Whyatt, secretary. These are all extraordinary people. The indomitable Malcolm should be knighted, in my opinion.

Malcolm introduced Colin Norris who reminded us that "we're meeting tonight in the memory of a man whose unselfish concern for others touched many lives. It's the idea of the Foundation to honor and help others. I was privileged to conduct the funeral of Oscar Heidenstam. It was during that service that I realized how much he meant to others. I looked out on the congregation of about two hundred men, mostly bodybuilders, crying like babies. Only then did I realize that not only had I known this special person but thousands of others would know him as well. We of the Trust want to keep his memory and his ethics alive. With your help we endeavor to do that."

Colin Norris then said a prayer of thanks for the food we were about to eat and said, "enjoy yourselves." Cliff LeMaistre now took the microphone and said, "This brings us to a very special gentleman, Uncle Bob Wooler, one of the pioneers of physical culture and weight training in Great Britain. He opened his first club way

back in 1930 which soon became well known through the pages of *Health and Strength* and other journals as just about the finest of its kind in the country. It's often said that behind every successful man there's an even better woman and in this case it's no exception. When Bob was a young lifeguard he met his wife Vera back in 1935. Their happiness and success was absolutely limitless. Vera was an outstanding professional dancer. And when their children came along, Dianne, Bob Jr., and Joanne, they were naturally guided towards a healthy lifestyle. After a spell as a physical training instructor during the war years, joined by his wife Vera, he re-opened the Bob Wooler Barbell Club which actually catered to many other physical activities besides weightlifting, bodybuilding, etc. But Bob's real claim to fame was as a sports and entertainment manager at the Sunshine Health Club. Bob organized many sporting events during the late 1940s, '50s and '60s including the annual Mr. South Britain at Portsmouth. He fronted the annual Mr. and Miss Britain shows. All of the family was supportive or involved during this great era. We all know his daughter Dianne and the Dianne Bennett Glamour Girls and of course, her famous husband Wag Bennett who was not only a top physique star but one of Britain's strongest men. Both are still active in bodybuilding and physical culture. Bob's enthusiasm hasn't diminished one bit over the years. He still runs his famous health studio which takes up three floors of his own home in Portsmouth. And remember, Bob is just eighty-two years young. Bob, many congratulations, you're a great example to all of us."

There was a warm ovation for Bob Wooler as he was presented with an award of royal cut-glass crystal with the Foundation emblem and the date. Wooler, a distinguished looking gentleman with white hair, voiced a moving thank you speech to an audience made up of people who obviously loved him.

Malcolm now passed the microphone to Dr. Tom Temperly who said "it's with a mixture of sadness and yet some pleasure that the Oscar Heidenstam Foundation presents its first ever posthumous award to a supreme strength athlete, all around physical culturist, and loving family man Reuben Martin. This evening Reub's vivacious wife Beryl honors us with her presence to accept the award. She's supported by her family members and friends. Reub's legendary exploits and accomplishments leave us all with outstanding memories of him. He was a supreme athlete, a warm, kindly human being, a man with a great sense of humor. Reub was born on March 15, 1921. During the war he was a physical training instructor in the Royal Air Force. He excelled in weightlifting, gymnastics, boxing, and ran the one hundred yard dash in 10.3 seconds. In swimming he did one hundred yards in sixty seconds. In 1947 he won the British heavyweight weightlifting title. In the 1948 Universe, won by Grimek, Reub came second to Steve Reeves in the tall class. He competed against such notables as John Grimek, Reg Park, Bill Pearl. Her-

culean balancing was Reub's forte. Last year on March 17, Reub passed away suddenly. He was an inspiration to all of us. We miss him so much."

Malcolm Whyatt, ever the consummate British gentleman, said "Beryl, I'm sure you want you to say a few words, as he handed the microphone to Mrs. Reub Martin. As she stood up and commenced speaking in an evenly modulated, wonderfully cultured voice I felt my breath taken. "Thank you ladies and gentlemen. I'm here this evening, as you know, to accept this award on behalf of Reub. Many of you here this evening have special memories of a very special person. Those of you who didn't know him, well, I'm sorry for you. You don't know what you missed. Reub was Reub. Gregarious, outgoing with such a great zest for living. He always used to wear us out. With Reub you got what you saw. No pretenses. Looking back, I had never seen a balancing act like Reub's. I think I fell in love with him then. And, of course, we had Reub the weightlifter. And he once told me, 'Ber, when I walked out on that floor at Wembly I was the proudest man in England.' And there was Reub, Mr. Universe contestant. He was a man of many facets. An interesting person. An inspiration to so many. So on behalf of my family — all of whom are with me this evening, my daughter, my son, and grandchildren — I want you to know I'll treasure this always. I'm so very proud to have been his wife."

Wow! There was applause that I thought would bring the building down. This is one impressive lady. Reub was a fortunate man. And I had a lump in my throat.

These Oscar Heidenstam Foundation reunions just get better. But one has to be there to really appreciate just how good they are. Yet as good as it was we still hadn't come to the main man.

Dr. Ian MacQueen referred to the lyrics of a song when he said. "my love has no beginning and no end. Bill Pearl's distinctions certainly have a beginning but apparently have no end. They're still going on. In 1952 at the age of twenty-two he came third in the Mr. San Diego contest. But that didn't satisfy Bill Pearl. He started training for the next event the next year with intentions of entering again. But before the next Mr. San Diego contest had come around he had won the Mr. Oceanside, Mr. Southern California, Mr. California and Mr. America. In 1953 he won the NABBA Mr. Universe amateur title even while he was serving in the U.S. Navy. There was a short spell following that when he went into professional wrestling and then he opened his own very successful gymnasium. Three years later he entered the Mr U.S.A and won that. In 1961 he entered and won the professional Mr. Universe. Six years later he entered and again won the professional Mr. Universe. That was the year some upstart from Austria . . . Blackshenegger (the audience laughed). . . some thingamajig or something, came over. There was another hiatus and I think because the standards in bodybuilding and

physical culture had developed so that people were beginning to say well, Bill Pearl was good back then but he can't beat the guys now. Anyway, Bill Pearl came out of retirement and in 1971 he once again won the professional Mr. Universe making him a four time Mr. Universe winner. Not all of us can become like Greek gods but we can strive. And in striving we do become better than we were. That alone justifies the effort and is the foundation of our creed. But some do achieve those lofty ideals. They serve to inspire us. They motivate us to greater efforts to raise our sights to greater limits. Bill Pearl is such a man who is a shining example. Indeed, he is a pearl of a man. I went to the Oxford Dictionary to look up the word pearl. It says 'a pearl is a concretion within the shell of an oyster with remarkable luster and highly prized as a gem.' Surely Bill Pearl has muscles like concrete? And who doubts that he has a beautiful luster? Or that he is a true gentleman? Now, all the oysters in the sea bed just remain oysters unless some pivotal ingredient comes in and does something magical to produce the wonderful pearl. The ingredient that enabled Bill Pearl to become the shining pearl that he is is with us here tonight He is none other than 1946 Mr. California Leo Stern."

More applause.

"So let us honor Bill Pearl and give him the ovation he deserves," at which point there was a thunderous ovation.

Bill stood up and looked incredible. He never looks bad. The room grew silent with anticipation as he took the microphone, and in a deep, resounding voice said, "I can't tell you what an honor this is. If I were to be really truthful I can probably look at every table in this room and find somebody who has had a dramatic effect on my bodybuilding career and me as an individual. John Grimek, Joe Abbenda, Reg Ireland, Bert Loveday, Terry O'Neil, Roy Duval, John Citrone, good friends of mine. I could go on and on. All through the audience people like you have helped me be who I am today." Bill then summed up his feelings by reciting a touching poem entitled "Touching Elbows" by an unknown author. He concluded, obviously engulfed by emotion, by saying, "I love you all so very much," and he received a standing ovation which was possibly the longest and most exuberant I have yet heard at any reunion.

But the evening's events were not over. We were all rewed up for the post dinner party during which I displayed my love for the gorgeous grand piano by caressing the keyboard until the wee hours. My being surrounded by charming Dianne Bennett and other vivacious ladies requesting songs understandably inspired me. Leo Stern requested "The Shadow of Your Smile," a hauntingly beautiful favorite of mine which I first heard in London when I was there to compete in the 1965 NABBA Universe. This was the biggest and best Oscar Heidenstam reunion yet. I eagerly look forward to next year and to keeping my promise to an elegant lady named Beryl Martin: The Best Is Yet To Come.