

Professor Carel Mieny – the Multi-faceted Man

One can write with ease about many people because there may only be three or fewer interesting dimensions to their lives, but in this case almost every person who knew Prof. Mieny is able to add a different facet to the person that so many knew and loved. It is therefore a challenge to give readers a glimpse into the life of Carel Mieny who had many very diverse and intriguingly interesting pastimes and pursuits apart from his very distinguished academic career and expertise as a surgeon, lecturer, mentor, researcher, and writer.

Prof. Mieny didn't merely show an interest in a myriad of subjects, but he focused on each, becoming most knowledgeable about every subject in which he took an interest. Prof. Mieny could converse with authority and enthusiasm on subjects such as fauna and flora; hunting and angling; food and wine; art and architecture; composers and classical music; world and medical history; literature, politics, travel – the list goes on. Prof. Mieny and his wife Marianne, an excellent cook and hostess, enjoyed entertaining their friends and family with five-star meals. As a generous host, Prof. Mieny was urbane, an excellent conversationalist and raconteur, always interesting and at most times amusing.

One of Prof. Mieny's greatest interests, which contributed in no small way to his ability to show exceptional acumen on so many levels, was his collecting and purchasing of hundreds of books on every subject imaginable; he simply loved books. His library contained first editions, dating from 1794 to the present day; collectors' academic books as well as those of his favourite authors of fiction, to a most impressive collection of Africana. Some of his favourite authors whose books feature in his Africana collection are Eugene Marais, Langenhoven, Louis Leipoldt, Mikro and many others. He was a regular customer at places such as Sotheby's and Jeremy Norman & Co., always in search of rare books. When Prof. Mieny and Marianne decided to down-size and move from their very spacious home, he unfortunately had to sell many of his books. The Africana specialist and other valuers of book collections couldn't believe the extent of the Mieny Collection.

For many years before and during his retirement, Prof. Mieny prepared and delivered fascinating lectures on authors, composers, memorial lectures, as well as academic lectures, as requested. These subjects were of great interest to a wide spectrum of audiences and his ability to gauge his audiences very well and then pitch his lectures to suit them increased the popularity of his lectures. He was generous with his time, lecturing at fund-raisers for charities, interest groups as well as at academic and national cultural meetings. Over the years, one of Prof. Mieny's most popular subjects was "Composers and their Ailments". In all, he prepared and delivered multi-media lectures on sixteen music composers from Bach, Beethoven, Mozart to Wagner. The

"Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns" (South African Academy for Science and Arts) presented him with an honours award for his contributions to all aspects of the Academy.

Prof. Mieny had an interest in following and taking part in sport his whole life and specifically enjoyed playing tennis, golf and then bowls when he got older. He also enjoyed playing social bridge with his wife and friends. For total relaxation, Prof. Mieny would "go to the Bush" to hunt or fish – pastimes which he enjoyed the most. He went on hunting trips annually, for over thirty-five years and in between he loved to go fishing at Dullstroom, while Marianne would enjoy doing nature trails and indulge in her many interests.

His son, Jean-Pierre, has fond memories of his father teaching him chess, golf, table tennis and fly-fishing and enjoying these pastimes with him. One of Jean-Pierre's most joyful memories is catching his first trout in a beautiful river in Dullstroom with the guidance of his dad. He remembers his father as a wise man with a wide general knowledge, a passion and patience to explain difficult concepts, a very good sense of humour and a gift to tell stories. Jean-Pierre said: "I was privileged to have such a loving and caring father, which I only could really appreciate once I had my own children."

From their earliest days together, both Prof. Mieny and Marianne loved to travel and to explore new places, but their enjoyment of travel increased during their time in the UK and in the United States – they could always make a plan to see more that the countries had to offer. As time passed and Prof. Mieny's attendance at overseas Conferences increased, they always planned a tour of the respective country, either before or after the conference. Those tours always included visits to art galleries, off-the-beaten-track, but excellent, Michelin one-star eateries and guesthouses and places of great interest, often referred to as "little-known gems".

In addition to authoring numerous academic books, Prof. Mieny also enjoyed writing and publishing books on his hunting and fishing adventures over five decades; their travel, food and wine experiences across the world; Louis Leipoldt's growth and development years in London; and a book on the unlikely friendship between Louis Leipoldt and Eugene Marais.

Throughout their married life of over sixty years, Prof. Mieny was supported in all his pursuits by his very accomplished wife, Marianne, who offered much information for this reminiscence. When asked what subject didn't interest Carel Mieny very much, her reply was, "Only gardening! He loved a beautiful garden, but left me to get on with it!" and then she added that above all, Prof. Mieny was a truly balanced person, a loving father, husband and a doting grandad who always had the best interests of his family at heart.