
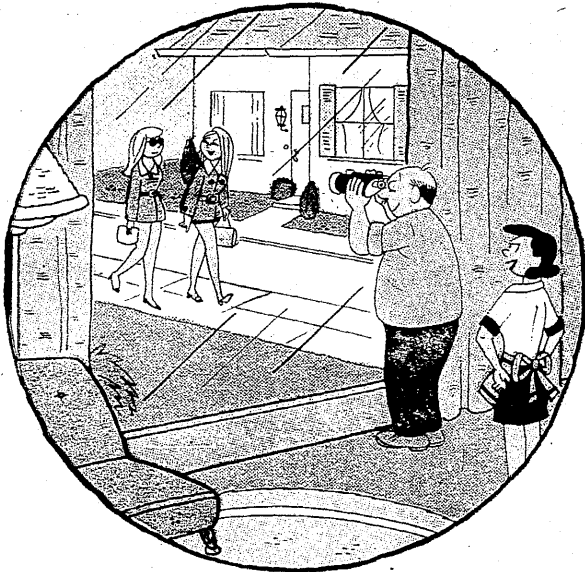


The BETTER HALF

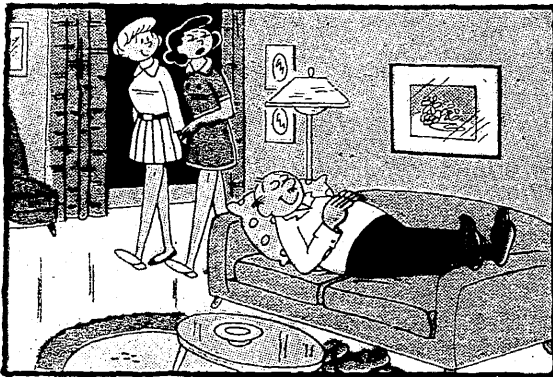
BY BOB BARNES



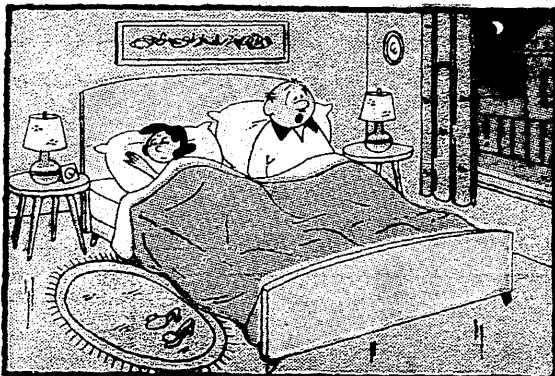
Don Duncan's
Driftwood Diary



"Trying to bridge the generation gap?"



"Stanley is the only human I know who can take a 'trip' on beef stroganoff."



"When you're counting sheep, does one marked 30% dacron count as much as the regular ones."

The professor and his inventions

WHEN Prof. Frederick K. Kirsten died in 1952, at the age of 67, Seattle lost not only a remarkable inventor but a genuine individualist.

Fortunately, the Kirsten name lives on through the Kirsten Pipe Co., 1807 N. W. Dock Place, only smoking-pipe manufacturer west of the Mississippi. Gene Kirsten, the professor's son, runs the business, which utilizes the same precision equipment designed and largely built by his father more than 30 years ago.

"We sold 50,000 pipes last year," Gene said. "It was our best year ever. We don't have a salesman. It's all mail order. I suppose I could go across the country and take orders from retailers for 200,000 pipes. But we couldn't produce that many and maintain our quality."

The Kirsten, as any pipe-puffer knows, is the Cadillac of pipes — distinguished by a graceful metal stem that cools the smoke and condenses out impurities. It was invented by Professor Kirsten in 1936 after his physician advised him to give up cigars. When he had his first model ready, he demonstrated it for his physician, who found it so "clean" he wanted one for himself.

"Necessity" was the mother of several of the nearly 100 inventions patented by the late University of Washington aeronautical-engineering professor.

ONCE, after a sleepless night, Professor Kirsten decided the sure cure for insomnia was a new type of bed. He proceeded to devise "The Utopian Bed," a super slumber box. There was a tension control, to regulate the bed's hardness and softness. And there were adjustable hot and cold air jets that played across the sleeper's body and made blankets unnecessary.

No, it didn't revolutionize the bed industry, but the professor had a grand time with it, as he did with most of his inventions.

"Dad could have been the world's greatest salesman if he hadn't been an engineer," Gene said. And, indeed, old friends of the professor still remember how he would jump up and down and talk a blue streak when he was enthused about an idea.

In the depths of the depression — when



Frederick K. Kirsten

nobody, but nobody, had any money to throw around — Professor Kirsten decided the university needed a huge wind tunnel to test aeronautical designs.

Bubbling with enthusiasm, he went to the Legislature and, almost miraculously, landed a \$200,000 grant. Then he went to The Boeing Co. and got the same amount in matching money.

When he ran low on funds, he went into the machine shop and made huge rotor blades himself and had Gene sand them.

From the day the Kirsten Wind Tunnel Laboratory was opened, it began bringing in money. And it still is doing so.

IN THE 1930s, Kirsten also became concerned about the slowness of traditional methods for bringing fires under control. So he invented a device to project fire-extinguishing dust through a hose and nozzle in an aerated mass. The invention was credited with putting out several potentially dangerous fires in state institutions. However, during one demonstration the invention exploded, fracturing the professor's wrist.

Illuminated advertising signs were just coming into their own when Professor Kirsten designed two "neon" signs that operated on ordinary 110-220 current. They were attached to the old Hotel Edmond Meany.

When Professor Kirsten learned the codling moth was playing havoc with Eastern Washington apple orchards, he developed a "death-dealing" violet-ray lamp to rid orchards of the pest.

Long before the nation was air-pollution conscious, the professor invented an "air-washing" machine that cleansed factory air of foreign dust matter by a vortex principle. His machine proved especially valuable in removing wood flour from the air and was a boon to the early plastics industry.

During the Second World War, Kirsten — an outspoken foe of Adolf Hitler — invented a parabolic sound-reflecting air-raid siren which could be heard as far away as Everett when powered by a small motor.

With patriotic zeal, Kirsten put his plant on a war footing and went into the production of light-metal parts for aircraft and marine industries. The Kirsten Pipe Co. continues to produce small precision parts for The Boeing Co.

The professor's greatest invention, he always felt, was the cycloidal marine propeller — a device that enabled large vessels literally to turn on a dime, go into docks sideways and make abrupt stops at high speeds.

It is used extensively in Europe today, although only a few American vessels have been outfitted with the propeller.



The famous Kirsten pipe, with its distinctive stem and bowl design

Gene Kirsten says of the cycloidal propeller, "It means scrapping most of the cherished principles of naval architecture." Like so many of Kirsten's inventions, it was ahead of its time, and his years of work to adapt the propeller to aircraft never did come to fruition.

PROFESSOR KIRSTEN frequently chided industry for wanting results too fast from basic science. He felt that a really good idea needed about 20 years to mature. During the Second World War, he frequently sounded off on "greedy" labor unions, industrialists "trying to make exorbitant profits," unimaginative government expenditures and a university community that was afraid to pioneer in new fields.

That touched most bases. Still, the professor was beloved by those who knew him, and many of his old friends spin "Kirsten anecdotes" to this day.

After the war, Professor Kirsten spoke frequently about the brave new world he felt could be ushered in by technology. He believed that machines conceivably could perform 95 per cent of all industrial labor and reduce the work week to less than two hours. But he fretted over whether the leisure time would be spent in mind-expanding pursuits.

Ever the visionary, he flatly predicted before a Rotary Club luncheon that the first Tacoma Narrows Bridge "will collapse any day now." When the Rotarians walked away from the luncheon, they were startled to see newspaper headlines, "Tacoma Narrows Bridge Falls."

One of Gene's favorite stories concerns his father's fabled competitiveness. He hated to be outsmarted by anyone. And when he had "the most brilliant student I've ever known" in one of his aeronautical - engineering classes, he decided to teach the young man a lesson. He came home one Friday night and announced he was going to concoct a fiendishly difficult mathematical problem and stump the young man.

"Dad spent the entire weekend on it, day and night, leaving for school Monday morning red-eyed from lack of sleep, but with a self-satisfied smile on his face," Gene said.

In the classroom, the professor proceeded to write his super mathematical problem on the blackboard. And then, quite casually, he said, "Perhaps Mr. — would come up and show the class how to solve it."

The young man stood before the blackboard in deep meditation for several minutes while Professor Kirsten silently gloated. Then the young man made a few flourishes with the chalk, snapped off an answer, underlined it and said, "That should do it." It did.

"Dad was so shocked, he brooded about it for weeks," Gene said, with a chuckle.

Secretly, however, the professor must

have enjoyed the young man's brilliance. It fit the professor's own life.

BORN IN GROSSENHAIN, Germany, he shipped out from Hamburg as a cabin boy on a three-masted sailing vessel in 1902, bound for America. It was a fantastically difficult 18-month voyage around the Horn, fraught with storms that threatened death and marked by several near mutinies.

When the vessel finally put into Tacoma, 17-year-old Frederick Kirsten and another young man jumped ship. They were given drugged drinks in a Tacoma saloon and they woke up aboard another ship—victims of the old "Shanghai" trick.

Young Kirsten wasn't about to set sail again. He and his friend overpowered a watchman, jumped ship again and spent the night in the woods near Roy, Pierce County. Kirsten had read, in German, the tales of James Fenimore Cooper and he was convinced Indians lurked behind every tree ready to scalp him.

The next day, Kirsten met Henry Frey, a German farmer living in Roy. Frey offered Kirsten \$10 a month and room and board to do chores.

Kirsten wound up marrying the farmer's daughter, Agatha, and they lived happily until both died just eight days apart.

Eager to get an education, Kirsten enrolled in the university. Having picked up English through reading far into the night, he performed brilliantly. The highlight of his academic career, he always said, was getting an A in freshman English.

UNIMPRESSED by graduate studies—"You've got to get out and work and make your mark," he always said—Kirsten went into private industry as an electrical engineer. When he returned to the university as a professor a few years later, it was to further his newest dream—establishment of a first-rate aeronautical - engineering school.

Shortly thereafter, with that old "salesman's talent" working for him, he convinced the Guggenheim Foundation it should finance Guggenheim Hall on the campus.

Professor Kirsten was proud in later years when many of the "boys" who studied under him became top officials of The Boeing Co. and other aerospace firms.

Kirsten's brother, Walter, was foreman of the university's aeronautical precision-instrument shop for many years, and he was an extraordinary inventor in his own right. Walter still resides in Seattle.

There must be thousands of Seattle men who have in their pipe racks the distinctive smoking instrument with the name "Kirsten" on the side. Whether the pipe is 10, 20, or even 30 years old, all parts are still being produced, as precisely tooled as they were when Professor Kirsten first decided he wouldn't give up smoking without a fight.