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ODDER

Reunion: Cherl-Ho Lee is happy to return to his Danish family

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The Larsen family was in the 1970 host of the young Korean Cherl-Ho Lee (second from the left), who was in Denmark to learn something about agriculture. A summer holiday at Kristen Larsen (first from the left) and Inger Larsen (seated) led to his being given a Danish family. Photo: Søren E. Alwan

In 1970, a young Korean came to a summer stay with a family at Gylling. He came to feel like part of the family and has kept in touch ever since.

Gylling: In 1970, Cherl-Ho Lee came to Denmark to go to the agricultural school in Malling. After two months there was a summer holiday, and the young Korean man came into the internship of the married couple Kristen and Inger Larsen, who had a farm at Gylling.

The acquaintance evolved. Cherl-Ho Lee was in Denmark for five years, came to the agricultural school in Copenhagen and got a Licentiat (PhD) degree. But every holiday and to the harvest he returned.

- The farm was my home in Denmark. When I got here, I was 24 years old. Jette was nine years old and her younger brother seven. Then I carried Jette to bed when she slept, now she has become grandma, says Cherl-Ho Lee and nods towards Jette Dahlgaard Pedersen, who is part of his Danish family.

He is visiting with his wife Seung-Ok Ro, the couple's oldest daughter Jungsil Lee and son-in-law Yongjeen Jin and grandson Daniel Jin. And over a cup of coffee on the terrace, Cherl-Ho Lee can tell you many stories. He still speaks Danish, and only occasionally he turns to English.

FAMILY ON THE RUN

In the period 1964-1972, several Koreans studied at Malling Agricultural School on a Danida programme. One of them was Cherl-Ho Lee. He was born in 1945 in what is now North Korea. His father was a teacher and owned several properties and a rice mill, but all properties were nationalized and his father sent seven years in jail. Three years into the Korean War, the family, which was sailed away on an American military ship, fled. The father's fate is unknown.



Cherl-Ho Lee's family fled from what is now called North Korea. He came to Malling Agricultural School on a Danida program. Photo: Søren E. Alwan

First day was hard

But the first day with the Danish family was tough. Up at five to milk and work, and that's how the day went into battle. The young Korean man was not accustomed to working that way. And it was limited how much Danish he had learned at school in Malling.

- When I went to bed, I was sore. But the most difficult was the evening coffee. They sat and talked to me for two hours. How am I going to handle it? In my room, I wrote 10 Danish words in my book, "says Cherl-Ho Lee.

- Then we should make phrases based on the words he had written, remember Kristen Larsen.

- The next day they used the sentences, and when I got back to the agricultural school after the summer holidays, I could talk and understand Danish, says Cherl-Ho.

He can look back on a brilliant academic career, and as a 74 year old, he is professor Emeritus and chairman of the Korea Food Security Research Foundation.



Kristen and Inger Larsen were hosts when Cherl-Ho Lee married Seung-Ok Ro, and the Danes have twice visited the family in Korea. Photo: Søren E. Alwan

Married in Gylling

While he studied in Denmark, he visited Korea. As the tradition then offered, the family had found him a wife.

- My sister introduced me to her. And in February 1974 she came with me to Copenhagen, says Cherl-Ho Lee.

She got the same job as a nurse, and the couple was later married. They are Protestants, but were not baptized.

- So we were baptized in Gylling Church on Friday and married Saturday. In here there were 52 for dining. And at the wedding, Kristen took my father's

place. The Korean ambassador was also with us, the same was many of our friends from Copenhagen, remembers Cherl-Ho Lee.

The eldest daughter was born in Denmark before the family moved to the United States, where he worked for four years at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Here the couple got their second daughter, and then they moved to Korea where their third daughter was born.

It is now 10 years since the two families have seen each other lately, so there are new members of the family with and enough to talk about over the coffee.



The hosts Kristen and Inger Larsen have become 82 and 81 years old, and they still take pleasure for the guest they first met in 1970. Since then, the families have grown a lot. Photo: Søren E. Alwan



Kristen and Inger Larsen still live at Gylling and are delighted to have a visit from Cherl-Ho Lee and Seung-Ok Ro. Photo: Søren E. Alwan