Tribute to Joe Kelly
By Chuck Kelly

When Joe and I introduced ourselves to a room full of seminar attendees it became evident that we shared the same last name. Not only was our last name the same but we both spelled Kelly “K E L L Y.” It became routine very early on for Joe to adamantly and somewhat humorously interrupt my introduction with “…and we are not related.” He was, of course, warming up the crowd, as he could do so well. I can say truly it would have been an honor for me to actually be related to Joe Kelly.

It was, however, my good fortune to be introduced to Joe soon after my employment with SDMyers. It was a privilege to be given the opportunity to work with Joe for many years. It is indeed an honor to call him friend, teacher, coach, example and mentor. He was a credit to his profession and to SDMyers.

Very soon after I was hired as a Sales Technician at S.D. Myers, Transformer Consultants, I attended the Transformer Maintenance Institute’s Half Century Transformer Seminar. Stan Myers, the Company founder and Joe Kelly were the Instructors. The seminar was affectionately known as the “Stan and Joe Show.” I confess, I knew little to nothing about transformers. It soon became apparent these gentlemen were passionate about transformer maintenance. Stan, the Electrical Engineer saw the transformer as an electrical device; Joe, the Chemist, saw the transformer as a chemical reactor.

The Half Century Seminar remains the core curriculum of the Training and Education department and the Transformer Maintenance Guide an essential resource for any transformer maintenance practitioner. on both of which Joe has indelibly written his name.

Joe sat in the back of the room taking notes as I stumbled through those early days of becoming an Instructor. After class he would write and/or draw on napkins, or a hotel note pad, some teaching points for that day. What a teacher and mentor he was for me, Mike Horning and others. To say he had the patience of Job to help us along our pathway would be an understatement.

My travels with Joe were many. Nearly every state in the United States and several countries. I learned from Joe not only about transformers but how to order a beer in several different languages.

Our passports were “confiscated” in Suriname, South America, not to be given back until the day we departed. Joe was nervous all week. We found out later this was a common practice for contractors to have their passports held until work was completed.
We were refused entry to Canada due to some work permit issues. At one point the Immigration Officer said to Joe “So... Canada does not have any transformer experts to do these classes that you’re coming here to do?” Joe’s reply: “well all your experts must be out of country now so you may have to settle for us!” I still get pulled aside to the Immigration Office when I go to Canada!

It was clear to me that Joe was proud of his Irish heritage and proud to be living in the United States of America and of his military service. Often when our schedule allowed, Joe would attend mass in another city.

Joe and I never really discussed politics or religion. However, once when national and international affairs were particularly troubling, chaotic and in turmoil, I asked Joe what was his view. Looking heavenward, he replied only that “we will all be accountable for what we do here on earth.” Profound!

We who knew you as a mentor and friend will miss you and we will never forget you.

Chuck Kelly 08/30/2017

Forever Grateful to Joe

By Mike Horning

Joe Kelly was a character.

For years now while I’m out doing seminars people will say they have taken the course years ago. They won’t remember much about the course but they remember Joe. It happened just last week. Need I say more? Those of you who knew him know that he was unforgettable.

I know I will never forget.

In 1995 I started training to be an instructor in the TMI department (which is now T&E). I had been through a TMI course and never thought I could actually be one of those guys! But there I went, scared more than you can believe.

Joe was a mentor in the truest sense. He advised, counseled and (sometimes strongly) suggested ways for me to improve. He not only mentored you in training courses, but also got you involved in technical organizations. This expands your knowledge base. So he would get you involved in Doble, IEEE, ASTM committees, and various others societies. His goal was to make this company the best by making the people he worked with the best. Maybe if you hang around with some of the best it rubs off? Reverse osmosis?

One of Joe’s favorite sayings was: “I taught him everything he knows, just didn’t teach him everything I know.” Joe was funny. But he really would teach you everything he knew if you were ready to learn it.
Back to seminars for a minute. After you thought you were ready to be an instructor—and believe me I studied, listened to tapes, and practiced in front of a mirror for what seemed like months (Joe don’t want you reading no slides)—you would do a dry run. Terror struck as I drove to 180 South Avenue that day knowing I have to give my presentation to Joe and others in the “Glass Conference Room.” I remember Joe, John Drotos and Dick Croghan, and maybe more being in that room with paper and pencils in hand. There could have been a thousand people in that room but I wanted to please Joe, the “Godfather of TMI.” So I’m gave my presentation and they wrote notes. Seemed to me they were writing a lot! At least they were not shaking their heads and writing as that may have put me over the edge. Turns out it wasn’t too awful and they let me continue to do these practice sessions until I was “good enough I suppose” to go out on the road and start presenting a few sessions.

On the road with Joe, just because you were given the opportunity to present some sessions doesn’t mean the mentoring stops. When I would do a session, Joe would sit in the back of the room and take notes. At the end of the day we would reconvene with a “refreshment” and discuss what I screwed up. It was a learning experience I’ll never forget. It made me better. My goal was to complete a seminar with Joe and have no notes and nothing to discuss. A lofty goal but we got there, finally!

I worked and traveled with Joe for the better part of ten years. We got to that comfortable level where he knew what I was going to say and I knew what he was going to say. With minimum critiquing taking place, stories of his life, of his family, of places he and Marge have traveled and friends they had around the world became a regular feature. Often repeated but never unwelcome. He had a great sense of humor.

He took me on my first international trip. He coached me on the culture of each county we visited and how not to act like a stupid American. Marge accompanied him/us on many of these trips so we had a tour guide. She researched and planned interesting things for us to see and do. They were there when a “bandito” relieved me of my cash in Argentina and they lent me funds until we got home. As I remember it he gave me about $20 bucks a day and said not to spend it all in one place.

You showed me a lot and taught me a lot. I thank you for that.

For the last 12 years we would get together every 3-4 months or so to catch up with one another as friends often do. Started out just me and Joe, burger and a brew, just catching up and telling stories. And Joe could tell a story. A few others heard what we were doing and wanted to join us. First Chuck, then Randy and Scott. Then Dennis, Lynn and Big Jim. Mark, John, Ron, Martin, Ernie, Bobby, Bill, Joe, Larry and George all attended on occasion. Many if not all came out to “date night with JJK” for one reason—to visit with Joe. That says a lot right there! In the last few years it got a little harder for him to hear all that was going on. Yes, he was moving slower but always ready to go when I picked him up and always was appreciative and thanked me for a great visit with everyone.

Twelve of us last got together for date night on August 8th and a good time was had by all!

Joe said on the way home that he would be in trouble with Marge, that she had told him to buy me a burger that night. Someone else took care of the bill for us so…. I’ll keep that raincheck my friend. We
said our goodbyes and planned to do it again as long as he was able and for whatever reason I thanked him for being a friend and mentor and told him I loved him.

I’m thankful for that and forever grateful to Joe.

Joe and me in Ghana. Circa 2000

Mike Horning