



Ferdi B. Stern, Jr.

The SEM History series would not be complete without an article about Ferdi Stern. The “Friendly Society” has been blessed with many great individual members, but none of them have been more loyal and dedicated than Ferdi Stern. I met Ferdi for the first time in about 1946 when I was a graduate student at Purdue and Ferdi came to Erv Stitz’s lab to demonstrate the use of Stresscoat. Soon thereafter began a period of more than four decades when Ferdi and I were regular attendees of SESA/SEM meetings. His friendly smile, mild manner, and concern for the Society made it easy for everyone to like him. There are many things that I would like to write about Ferdi, but most of them were said much

better in an eloquent article that Fred Bailey wrote soon after Ferdi’s death. We are pleased to reproduce Fred’s article below.

One thing that Fred did not mention was Ferdi’s love for fishing. (Anyone who loves fishing and the SESA *has* to be outstanding). He used to fish with Greer Ellis. Ferdi and I tried for more than two decades to work in fishing trips whenever the SESA/SEM meeting was held at a “suitable” location. Conflicting schedules usually got in the way, but I remember one fishing trip in Ferdi’s hometown of New Orleans. We rented a johnboat with an outboard motor and set off into the Gulf of Mexico. The fish didn’t really cooperate but Ferdi carefully cleaned the little ones we caught and took them to his mother, who lived in an apartment near the SEM meeting hotel. She was absolutely delighted, so that made us happy too. Ferdi was a good colleague, a great friend and obviously an excellent son.

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FERDI STERN: AN APPRECIATION

By Fred C. Bailey

Ferdi Stern died on December 27, 1992 after a long struggle with cancer. For some years he had been dealing with his own health problems as well as those of Del, his wife, who

has been living in a convalescent home. Through it all, Ferdi maintained his positive outlook on the world around him and lived his life to the fullest extent possible.

Ferdi's connection with SESA/SEM predates the Society's history. He was part of the group at MIT in the late 1930's and early 1940's that was working with deForest and Ruge on developing the devices and techniques that would for many years predominate in the experimental stress analyst's arsenal. This led to a long affiliation with the Magnaflux Corporation, during which time Ferdi, to many of us, became Mr. Stresscoat, even though he represented the entire range of the company's products and even though he had lots of high powered company in the brittle coating field. He recollected with glee the spirited defenses of photoelasticity that certain prominent SESA members were driven to upon hearing the early papers describing brittle coating techniques.

Support of the Society was an article of faith with Ferdi. He was always asking, "What can I do?", and served as conscience for many of us when we were either temporarily uninspired or just plain lazy. A lot of his best work was done in this way, even though he held membership in many committees over the years. He walked like a man with a mission: Not fast, but not slow, slightly bent forward from the waist, moving gently from side to side, eyes straight ahead, always ready to catch one up with a question.

He was interested in all aspects of SESA/SEM, and made time for these interests despite heavy commitments to manning exhibit booths. He served on the (then) Executive Committee and, but for a proscription against representatives of vendors holding the top offices in the Society, would have been eligible for consideration for these offices. In retrospect, this seems unfair since we consultants and professors certainly didn't hide our professional virtues, such as they have been, before, during or after our service in these offices. To my knowledge it never bothered Ferdi, though; he was happy to do whatever he could to help achieve the common goal. His efforts were recognized when he was honored in 1970 with the Tatnall Award for "Long and distinguished service to the Society". However, receiving the award was not the end for Ferdi. He continued his service to SEM right up to the time of his death. His most recent objective being to raise funds for the SEM Education Foundation. Ferdi got me actively involved with SESA. I thanked him by recommending that the Executive Committee abolish the post to which I had been appointed. But the habit was born and as a consequence the Society has been a large part of my life and Ferdi was there all of the way. It has been a few months since we last sipped preprandial martinis together, but at our last visit ten days ago he acknowledged that it was only because he had to make some choices on what he was treating and the form of therapy. We spent a good deal of time talking about the Society and had hoped to preserve some of his recollections, but this didn't get very far for a number of reasons. First, there were the usual problems with reliability of memory. Then, by the time one had edited out the actions of some of the stronger and/or more extinct personalities in order not to offend anyone, the history that was left was sophmorially bland.

Ferdi was deeply interested in SEM to the end, and was always fretting over something or other having to do with the Society. He is leaving a powerful legacy: A robust and exciting Society that he personally mothered for almost fifty years.■

Fred C. Bailey
December 28, 1992