

A Tribute to Joe Stauber

by Keith Meacham

If you got to meet Joe Stauber just once, you came away with the feeling you had met a very nice person. And, that's what Joe was, a really nice guy. I am proud to call Joe my friend.



Ironically, I met Joe through another rail-fan friend, Jim Vogel. Jim and I used to meet at the Soo's Marshfield Depot and while the time away discussing numerous topics, most times involving participation of the Soo Line Operator, who also remains a friend of mine. One particular night, Jim stopped in with some color photos of Soo diesels and some black & white prints of Soo steam. I asked Jim, in astonishment, where he had come across these treasures, and Jim rattled off Joe's name and address. It was the beginning of a long friendship.

Joe lived with his brother, William, since Joe had been divorced from his one and only spouse, a woman that chose an "alternate lifestyle." Joe felt compelled to keep watch over his brother, which was sort of a dying wish of his Mother that Joe watch Bill. Joe did so, although Joe was hardly tied down by taking care of Bill. I met Bill... he, too, was a nice guy, but Bill's health was never good. When I met Bill he had severe scoliosis in his back. Although Bill didn't have the good nature of Joe, I found Bill to be a nice gentleman as well.

Joe and the family he originated from were not native to Marshfield. Joe was born and spent the first 20-odd years of his life in Chicago, Ill. Joe was drafted in the Army in 1942, and spent the next 4 years in the Army Air Corps. He was lucky; he didn't ship out overseas until Japan was nearly defeated. While in the Army, Joe developed a "love" of sorts for the B-25, which coincided with Joe's second love of flight. Joe's first love, though, was of trains. He had a cab ride on Soo Line Class H-22 2714 from Marshfield to Stevens Point at the tender age of 7; it was something he never forgot.

Joe returned to Chicago after being discharged out of the Army in 1946, and got a Job as a boilermaker's helper in the Chicago & North Western Roundhouse at Proviso Yard, in Melrose Park, Illinois. Here Joe gained further appreciation of the steam locomotive by hands-on working on them day after day. Joe admitted that had the C&NW not gotten rid of steam (the reason Joe did not stay with the C&NW - he was furloughed) he would have stayed in the roundhouse repairing steamers.

When Joe was released from the C&NW, Joe, his father, mother, and brother Bill moved to Marshfield, Wisconsin, in approximately 1949. Joe took a job with the Marshfield Milling Company as a warehouseman, a position he held until he retired in 1982. In a brief period early in his career with the Milling Company, Joe was laid-off from his job there, and took a temporary position with the C&NW... again, working as a boilermaker's helper in the C&NW roundhouse in Marshfield. Joe was only there a very short period, I believe 6 to 8 months, before the encroaching diesel vanquished his second term of employment with the railroad... again.

Since Joe couldn't work for the railroad, he did the next best thing: model railroading. This included an incessant photography of railroads, which included every facet. Joe started his railroad photography with an older black & white box camera. I still have the multitude of black and white photos he snapped with that camera. Joe, like many rail buffs coming through the

steam to diesel period, traveled quite extensively across the country recording the last steam holdouts where it could be found. One such jaunt for Joe was Two Harbors, Minnesota., where along the lines of Duluth, Missabe & Iron Range steam power sat stored, awaiting it's final fate.

Joe, though, couldn't turn his back on diesels, although he passed on and missed far more than you want to know. Joe realized early, about the time the Duluth, South Shore & Atlantic, the Wisconsin Central, and the Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie merged to form the Soo Line Railroad Company, that he was about to witness the passing of yet another era into a new, and began, somewhat belatedly, recording Soo's diesels in their maroon & gold and the black & pale yellow color schemes. When I purchased my slide collection from Joe, how much maroon & gold colored power he had captured on film in an astonishingly short period astonished me. Joe caught most of the Soo Power he had in the old colors in the very short period of 1965 to 1967!

Joe tracked down nearly every diesel the Soo Line owned, except for the Alco FA-1's. Joe regretted that he never pursued the FA's. He was still tracking what very little steam was out there yet.

The Soo Line wasn't Joe's only Railroad Subject; I have a healthy representation of Chicago & North Western diesels in my slide collection, every diesel the Green Bay & Western owned, except for the HH-600 model Switcher 101 and, of course, the GBW FA-1's. I have the S-1's, the S-2's, and everything else, in two paint schemes where applicable. Joe was quick, no doubt about it! He also shot Milwaukee Road, some Burlington during the transition years of Burlington Northern, and some other sundries that he captured on film at the right moment, or had a request for from someone he was selling/trading his slides with.



Joe Stauber about 1 year before he contracted Leukemia. Location: Marshfield,

Joe didn't confine his photography to trains. He shot sunsets, waterfalls, fire trucks (of all things), you name it. Trains were the main focus, but anything worthy of his attention that looked good through his viewfinder most likely ended up on film.

Joe left me his entire collection of slides he shot on a road trip he his friend Donny Deering took in the early 1960's out west. Joe shot everything he could on that trip: lava flows in

Washington, salt-flats in Utah, the Grand Canyon. Joe made a nearly perfect photographic record of the sights and scenes of his journey.

Joe traded and sold his slides across the country, and consequently the railroad related shots he made have ended up in many collections. A number have been published in books and magazines, as well, but not by Joe. You can usually bet, and be accurate 91% of the time, that if a locomotive shot was taken in the likes of Marshfield, Wisconsin Rapids, Adams, or Wausau, Wisconsin, it was the work of Joe Stauber.

Joe was pretty nonchalant - almost dubious - about his talent as a photographer. Compliment him on a photo, he would shrug and say, "All I did was push the shutter button." That was Joe.

Joe was athletic so long as his knees allowed him to be. When I met Joe he was still playing softball in the summer, and bowling in two leagues in the winter. Joe loved softball as much as anything, and he was a damn good player to boot. Alas, softball, and all the years of heavy lifting while working for the milling company eventually took their toll on his knees. Joe continued to play softball into his 70th year, but for the prior two seasons he could not run the base paths. He had to have a pinch runner. In bowling, Joe eventually could not make his normal four-step approach to the foul line to deliver the ball, but had to, instead, walk to the foul line and throw the ball standing there. It was getting darn near impossible for Joe to ascend or descend the stairway into the clubhouse our model railroad club we once had here in Marshfield. But he did it; he just didn't break any speed records doing so.

Joe wanted no sympathy from anyone - least of all, those of us (myself included) that were Joe's good friends. He had purchased a cane to walk with, but just the mere mention from one of those of us that were members of the train club to help Joe into a chair, or follow him up the steps, Joe considered that an insult, and Joe would *not* use his cane - or, later, his walker -



Joe Stauber, May 11th, 1982

when he came down to the train club. Joe had pride. I have found out since, that, even though Joe would not admit it, or give in to it, he was in extreme pain because of those knees but he never let it slow him down. Same thing later with his Leukemia.... in going through the slides he left me, I can see the changes in his handwriting towards the end... as it got sloppy as Joe began to get sicker.

Joe loved being the center of attention. If you weren't picking on him, he would, invariably, become depressed and leave, because he thought you were mad at him! Because of that, Joe became the butt of a good many non-insults, and he loved it. That, too, was Joe.

Joe's knees had become bad enough that he sought to have replacement knee surgery done in late 1997. After one examination, the Doctor advised Joe to lose some weight. Joe did.... far too much and far too fast, which tipped those of us off that there was something seriously wrong with Joe. In April of 1998, Joe went in to pick up his girlfriend, Millie, from the Marshfield Clinic. Millie, quite ironically, had just come through cancer her self, and was up at the Marshfield Clinic for a six-month check up. Joe, as was always his credo, was there to help his "Sewweetie", as he called Millie. On the way to Millie's house from the Marshfield Clinic, Joe began driving like he was drunk. He drove *through* a couple stop signs and was weaving around on the road just like he was drunk. When Joe arrived at Millie's home, he deposited himself in a chair, where he stayed. He responded

to no questions; he had a starry-eyed look, with an odd grin on his face. Joe had become incoherent. We later kidded Joe about that, when he would tell us he had become incoherent we'd ask, "You mean, worse than normal? How could you tell? Was it different than any other day?" Millie called Gene Greenwald, the secretary/treasurer of our train club, and a personal friend of mine and to Joe. When Gene arrived, Joe was sitting in a chair with a starry-eyed look, and an odd grin on his face. He simply didn't know where he was, or who was with him, nor could Joe get out of the chair he was in. Gene hustled Joe to the emergency room at St. Joseph's Hospital once he was finally able to get Joe up and about. He was admitted immediately to the Hospital, and a day later was found to have Leukemia. Joe spent the entire Summer of 1998 in the Hospital on chemotherapy. He was released, given a relatively clean bill of health, and was on-hand for our train club's show in October 1998 here in Marshfield, though he couldn't do much to help, which bothered Joe. He always pitched in, even though our concern for his health only served to nettle him. As far as Joe was concerned, he felt as good as the day he retired, just let him do his thing.

Joe continued to photograph trains, though now what had been the Soo Line was now the Wisconsin Central Limited. Under the WC, we began to see locomotives from railroads we had never expected to see in Marshfield before: Southern Pacific, Rio Grande, Conrail, Union Pacific, Canadian National, Canadian Pacific, Illinois Central... a veritable parade of railroads we never experienced before with the Soo Line. Joe found it all very fascinating, but, as he was very quick to point out, it all happened so fast, came and went too quickly, and operated at such erratic times, it became nearly impossible to keep up with it all.

Even after chemo, and with bad knees, Joe continued to shoot locomotives, but from inside his car. He simply couldn't trust himself doing a lot of getting in or out of his car.



Joe Stauber, May of 1963

About 6 months after his last chemo treatment, Joe stopped down to the clubhouse with the sad news the doctor had given him less than three months to live. (Joe and Gene played poker together for years; before Joe told me the news, I had already heard it from Gene, as they had played cards two nights before and Joe gave the bad news to the fellows he played cards with.) At that time, Joe asked me, very matter-of-factly, if I would be a pallbearer for his funeral. I didn't hesitate; I said yes on the spot. In fact, I was honored he asked me, and told Joe that, and still feel it was the ending to a *great friendship*.

Joe was gone in three weeks. I held-up through the service pretty well until one short moment in the funeral service at the Church, all was quiet for a few seconds... and the mournful air horn of a Wisconsin Central train passing through Marshfield (two blocks south of the Church we were in!) pierced the momentary silence....when the women in back of me moaned, "Oh....a *train*... Joe..." I couldn't keep myself from crying. Remembering that moment has me near tears right now. I can't help but draw the parallel that the train was leaving as we all sat saying our final good-byes to Joe; there was an irony to it all, as if the WC was saying their final good-bye to a grand guy... the "Final Highball" for Joe. The timing was impeccable. Perhaps God had a hand in the moment.

Joe left me all the slides that remained that he had not converted to video, numerous homemade picture books he himself had made by meticulously cutting out photographs of the subject he was saving, and his camera, among other things.

When I opened up the back of Joe's camera after his passing, it was fully loaded, ready for action. "Obviously", I dryly observed, "someone hadn't been expecting to make a hasty departure from this life!" My first Photo taken with Joe's Camera was made earlier in 2001 of Georgia Pacific/Arkansas, Louisiana & Mississippi NW-2 1001 at Port Edwards. It took me a while to settle in to the idea of using that camera... after all, it had been Joe's. I still consider that camera to belong to Joe.

In memory of Joe and his talent for shooting photographs, I have made my personal collection available to Todd Taylor to get his site up and running. It's fitting to do so for Joe... one of the best friends a guy could ever have.

Thank You, Todd, for this idea of a memorial page for Joe. He wouldn't approve, but... he's not here to argue with us, either.

I miss you Ol' Buddy. Like you always said to me when leaving the Clubhouse: "I'll See You In Church If The Windows Are Clean!"

- Keith Meacham



Also from the World Famous Road Trip of 1960, Joe posing on the rear of a D&RGW caboose. Yes, the caboose really is that small! No Location given. A Donnie Deering