

# William C. Kelly

*June 14, 1919 — March 20, 1999*

William Cary (Bill) Kelly, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Fruit and Vegetable Science at Cornell University, died at his daughter's home in California after a brief struggle with lung cancer. Bill Kelly was born in Memphis, Tennessee. He received his B.S. degree in 1940 from the University of Tennessee, his M.S. degree in 1941 from Ohio State University, and his Ph.D. degree in Vegetable Crops at Cornell University in 1945.

Bill married Judith Neil, December 27, 1942. They had four children—David, Karen, Steven, and Nancy—and seven grandchildren. Judy Kelly died in 1990 after a very protracted illness.

Bill's first position after the Ph.D. degree was as Horticulturist at the U.S. Plant Soil and Nutrition Laboratory in Ithaca. In 1948, he was appointed Assistant Professor in the Department of Vegetable Crops, where he conducted research and extension work in mineral nutrition and vegetable crop physiology. Although gifted in both research and extension, it was teaching and advising students that became Professor Kelly's real passion. He taught "Vegetable Crop Physiology" and "Research Methods in Vegetable Crops" for 30 years, and "Organic Gardening" for 11 years. In all of these courses, Bill took a personal approach to his students. For example, he typically knew the name, major subject, and interests of each of the 80 or so students enrolled in his two-hour course in organic gardening.

Bill Kelly pioneered new teaching methods. In his class in organic gardening, he did not lecture; students who previously had participated in the course made short presentations, followed by lively class discussions under Bill's supervision. In teaching vegetable physiology, he relied heavily upon classic research papers to make his points, and in so doing helped his students learn how to interpret and appreciate research. Students were organized into teams, and the members of each team worked cooperatively to "dig into" the research literature and develop answers to assigned problems. The product of these exercises provided the focus for a discussion period that Bill held weekly with each team. Students were expected to defend their conclusions based upon experimental data from the research articles. "Look at the data, not the abstract," was the constant reminder. Examinations were not written, but were given orally to the teams as an extension of the weekly discussion periods. In this way, Professor Kelly gave students experience in critical thinking, assimilation of information, and oral defense of one's position.

Bill Kelly's teaching assistants were encouraged to experiment, and he often adapted their ideas into the framework of his courses. Because of their association with Bill, graduate students wanted to teach and wanted to learn

to be better teachers. In recognition of his innovative teaching, Dr. Kelly received the Distinguished Graduate Teaching M.A. Blake Award from the American Society of Horticultural Science, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Edgerton Teaching Career Award, and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Professor of Merit Award.

Because of the personable traits evident in Bill's teaching style, he was much sought after as an advisor. Professor Kelly advised both graduate and undergraduate students, and over the years became a leading mentor for the department. He was known and loved for his warmth, independent thought, keen insight, honest criticism, and straightforward suggestions. He had a way of being supportive yet making people think for themselves. During the turbulent Vietnam era, when many professors were viewed with suspicion, Bill found ways to break through the barriers. His friendly counsel and non-judgmental attitude helped scores of undergraduate and graduate students survive those years. No count is available of the total number of undergraduate students for whom Bill served as advisor; but by the time of his retirement, he was advising 25-30 undergraduates per year, most from outside his department. Dr. Kelly's graduate advising was equally remarkable. He directed studies for 32 M.S. and 25 Ph.D. candidates and served on approximately 120 graduate student committees in the fields of International Agriculture and Vegetable Crops.

Bill Kelly was also appreciated for his technical abilities and common sense insights. He was a master of experimental design and analysis, and his ability with statistics served not only his own graduate students, but also many other graduate students inside and outside of the department. Faculty members frequently consulted with Bill, too. His memory for detail was remarkable; he never ceased to surprise with his ability to recall names of former students, authors of relevant papers, or obscure published material that might be helpful to the person who was asking him for advice.

Dr. Kelly's sabbatical leaves took him to the Philippines, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. With H.C. Thompson, he co-authored the fifth edition of *Vegetable Crops*, the most influential college text on commercial vegetables. For more than 20 years, this classic publication was by far the leading college text on the subject.

Dr. Kelly was a member of the American Society of Horticultural Science, American Society of Plant Physiologists, American Association for Advancement of Science, Empire State Soil Fertility Association, International Society for Horticultural Science, Sigma Xi, Phi Kappa Phi, Gamma Sigma Delta, and Alpha Zeta. In addition to his teaching awards, he was a Fellow of the American Association for Advancement of Science.

Bill Kelly became Professor Emeritus in 1983 but continued his contributions to the department. In his retirement years, he found many ways to keep his mind sharp. He took courses in crafts, especially at the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown, and collected antique tools. He enjoyed educational travel experiences, which he often combined with visits to his family. He continued to attend scientific meetings, where he was always a center of attention from former students; and when at home he hardly ever missed a departmental seminar. On Monday nights, Bill carried on his life-long love of bowling with other members of his department in the Ag Bowling League. Bill Kelly was one who helped shape the former Department of Vegetable Crops, and he will be remembered with affection by his former students and colleagues from around the world.

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