To the Editor:

I would like to complement you for selecting the article entitled “Kurt Semm and an Automatic Insufflator” by Dr. Grzegorz S. Litynski published in the April-June 1998 issue of the Journal of the Society of Laparoendoscopic Surgeons.

Such stories broaden the spectrum of professionals, because if we do not know where we are coming from, we do not know where we are going to.

I met Mr. Ludwig Streifeneder of Eder Instruments, mentioned in the encounter between Professor Semm and Dr. Cohen, in a classical Bavarian style. Mr. Streifeneder was an outstanding craftsman and technicians but, perhaps, not the greatest businessman. He contributed significantly to the advances of endoscopy in the United States, as he built the first Schindler gastroscope in the United States well before World War II.

I met Mr. Streifeneder in the mid 1960’s when he also represented Richard Wolf of Germany. We exhibited jointly for a number of years, and I considered him a fatherly friend until his death.

As early as 1970, I recognized the importance of a specialty electrosurgical generator for laparoscopy and warned that the use of the Bovie would increase injuries and accidents due to the waveform and peak-to-peak voltages. About that time I met Professor Semm, because we had built, in collaboration with Spiess, a combination unit which combined a light source, the Elektrotom 120, a special electrosurgical generator and an automatic insufflator. Since we deviated from the Semm design, we also did not put on it “Nach Semm” – he complained.

By 1972, burn injuries with the Bovie had become a major source of concern as I had predicted and the American Association of Gynecologic Laparoscopists (AAGL) devoted a significant portion of their scientific session to dealing with injury cases and law suits.

Professor Semm, through his manufacturing company Wisap, introduced a thermocoagulator and we had, in collaboration with Eder and Wolf, introduced the bipolar approach. I convinced Dr. Kleppinger to go that route and he became a strong, articulated promoter of bipolar laparoscopy.

During the AAGL convention, a great debate erupted between Professor Semm speaking in favor of his thermocoagulator and a number of physicians and myself, who promoted bipolar electrosurgery. Professor Semm, who was very upset, stormed out of the lecture hall, came by our booth and told me I was a high-frequency man, not objective. Then he went to his scientific exhibit, pulled his posters off the wall, threw them into his suitcase and said he would never come to this uncivilized audience. He also used some classical Bavarian language.

Nevertheless, Professor Semm did come back and continued to contribute to the advancement of laparoscopy. Without Kurt Semm, endoscopic technology would have not progressed as rapidly as it did.

Karl Hausner  
President  
ELMED INCORPORATED  
60 West Fay Avenue  
Addison, IL 60101-5106, USA  
Tel: (630) 543-2792  
Fax: (630) 543-2101