



“A Pioneer of Wonder”
Remembering Frank Kelly

So many were saddened by the news of the passing of Frank K. Kelly on June 11th, one day before his 96th birthday. Frank was a member of the Institute and made several insightful presentations at the Institute including the Founding Day Lecture of 2006. His was a full life, with a remarkable variety of intense experiences from which he learned of both the promise and problems of human life. From the streets of Kansas City and the beaches of Normandy to the pinnacles of Presidential power, he bore witness to the stark realities of the 20th century while engaged in active participation to transform those realities. Living through a century filled with violence and deprivation, he still developed an optimistic vision for a future without war and injustice. His deep belief in the glorious potential of every human being inspired many at a time when the promise of a new century was darkened by the problems of the past. Frank Kelly revealed the sources of his optimism in his Founding Day address as follows:

“All my life, I have felt connected to the stars. As a boy, I walked at night in the garden of my grandfather King’s house, looking up at the dazzling lights in the sky. I didn’t feel dwarfed by them or overcome by their intensity. I saw them as playgrounds for my mind and spirit – and I still do. One world was not enough for me. I wrote stories about the explorations of the stars that I knew human beings would undertake.”

“As I went through my long life I encountered one glorious being after another. I began to become aware of the tremendous role played by humanity in the development of the amazing planet called the Earth.”

“I became aware of the spiritual wisdom of the saints and prophets; the writers of the Gospels and the soaring poets, ranging from Rumi to Shakespeare; the creators of great music, ranging from the singers of songs in all languages to the deep composers, Bach and Puccini and Beethoven, realizing that there were no limits to the creations pouring forth from the human soul. I found everlasting pleasure in the lines of William Blake—The one “who kisses joy as it flies lives in eternity’s sunrise.” ...

“We are evolutionary giants with origins linked to the cosmic explosion that brought the universe into being. We are composed of whirling atoms and

glowing molecules beyond our comprehension. Albert Einstein, the greatest thinker of the 20th century, who brought us into the nuclear age, which may destroy us all, decided that we were created by a Spirit we could never understand. We can never understand how far we have come and how far we may have to go. We are electromagnetic fields of energy and yet many of us may become Glorious Beings rising like mountains on new horizons.“

Frank affirmed this faith in spite of his recognition of the great capacity of mankind to do evil things. Recently, at a forum this past April at the Institute, we were warned of the dangers facing mankind:

“Humanity is in a tragic situation. You are surrounded by more dangers than any generation before you. And yet you have more strength, more technological knowledge, more allies to help you than any previous people who came into existence in the years past. How do I dare to make such statements to you? I dare because I have lived in this body for more than 90 years – and I have experienced many miracles.”

One challenge Frank Kelly dared to confront was the threat of nuclear war and war generally. He served as Vice-President of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation since its founding. He gave tireless support for efforts to bring peace to a volatile world by using dialogue rather than war to settle conflicts. When he hosted the film *Nuclear Weapons and the Human Future* at the Institute, he addressed the question of why men go to war and how we might end the threat of war. His comments were summarized by one attendee as follows:

What creates war? War develops out of the desire to protect oneself without consideration for the welfare of others. Insisting on one’s own way, disregarding dialogue, refusing to compromise or see things from the perspective of others or to work out solutions using positive, inclusive attitudes leaves brute force and terror to appear as viable solutions to problems. The failure to recognize that truthfulness in personal affairs should extend to world affairs obscures dialogue. Regarding others as needing or deserving less than we do, or being afraid that if others get what they need we will have less, leads to war. These are all powerful forces in the service of fear and alienation. Thoughts such as these pollute and deaden the imagination and the heart. So, how do we turn away from a world dominated by fear and move towards a world alive with hope, respect and admiration for each other? We could begin, Frank believed, by recognizing that thought is more powerful than any nuclear weapon. In fact, it is thought which produces war and weapons of war, and it is thought which puts them to use to dominate and destroy.

It is thoughtful analysis of our vulnerability to false calculations about the necessity of war or violence that is part of Frank Kelly’s legacy to mankind. He urges us to ask bold questions such as ‘What kind of world would it be if thoughts of loving-kindness predominated’? Frank Kelly’s example shows us that such a world is possible, and is created by each and every loving thought and act made each and every hour of the day by each and every human being, regardless of

race, religion, gender, education or social status. As a Founding Fellow of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Frank contributed to a circle of fresh dialogue about ending war, promoting economic justice and reforming the American constitutional system. His sense of citizenship was deep, broad and probing.

This “glorious being” will be hugely missed. A world without his joy, his smile, his humor and exhortations to think big and work harder is a world a little empty of something precious. But, as Frank believed, through imagination and compassionate service, we can keep bright the memory of one who “kisses joy as it flies” and “lives in eternity’s sunrise.” Thus, can we work for the vision expressed in the poem “Locksley Hall” of Lord Tennyson that Frank often quoted and said that President Harry Truman carried in his wallet.

“For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that could be;
Saw the heavens filled with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;
Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain’d a ghastly dew
From the nations’ airy navies grappling in the central blue;
Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle-flags were furled
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.”

Edited by Carolyn Dorrance

Frank Kelly’s [2006 IWC Founding Day Lecture](#)

Frank Kelly’s April 2010 Forum at the Institute of World Culture entitled [“Glorious Beings: Creating a New World Culture.”](#)