In Memoriam: Joe Kohn
The Apple II community's friend for life

Earlier this year, the Apple II community lost a long-standing member, Joe Kohn—author, editor, vendor, evangelist, and friend. To honor his memory and contributions, Juiced.GS invited Joe's friends to share their thoughts and recollections.
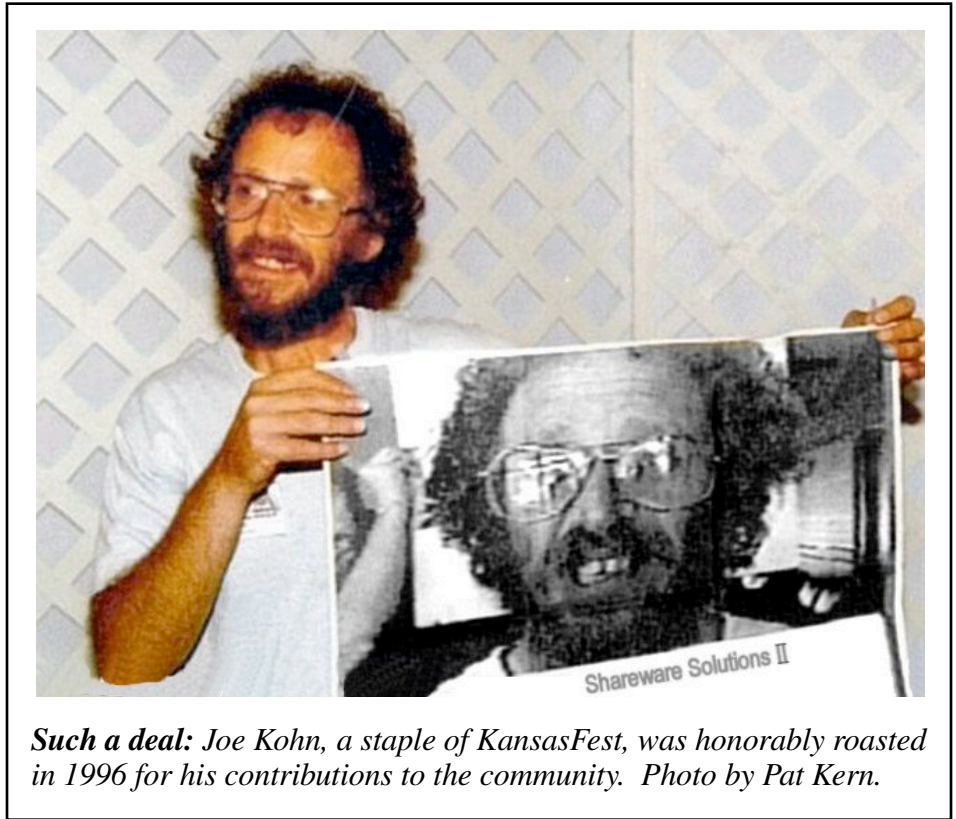
Ryan Suenaga:

Joe Kohn, one of the Apple II computer's biggest advocates, passed away on January 6, 2010, after a year-long battle with lung cancer.

Since Joe's death, I've run into many Apple II users online who didn't know who he was, which tells me that a refresher is needed.

Joe was born in New York and eventually became, like me, a social worker, but unlike me, he didn't stick to that profession forever. He let the Apple II become his profession.

Joe first became known in the Apple II community—at least, outside the Gravenstein Apple Users Group of California's Marin County—as a system operator (sysop) on The Source, an early online service that was eventually purchased by CompuServe. After Joe left The Source, he became a writer for the *Apple IIGS Buyer's Guide*, then later for *inCider/A+*, though he also wrote manuals and reviews for other publications such as *GS+* magazine. When *inCider/A+* folded —and honestly, late in that publication's life, Joe's was the best, if not only, Apple II content worth reading in that publication—

Such a deal: *Joe Kohn, a staple of KansasFest, was honorably roasted in 1996 for his contributions to the community. Photo by Pat Kern.*

instead of joining *II Alive*, Quality Computers's publication that eventually ended up taking on the *inCider/A+* user base, Joe decided to expand his "Shareware Solutions" column by starting his own publication. *Shareware Solutions II* debuted in 1993 to many positive reviews.

Joe complemented *SSII* by selling disks of shareware, which was remarkably profitable in the days before consumer broadband was widespread. He also became the publisher or reseller of various software products, including ContactsGS, Burger Becky Heineman's address manager, as well as the entire WestCode

Software line and many other products.

Eventually, as the Apple II community shrank and became less commercially viable, *Shareware Solutions II* came out less and less frequently, with many months in between issues—until the final issue was delivered to subscribers in July 1999 (many received their issues in person, like I did, at KansasFest 1999). Joe never publicly acknowledged it was the final issue. In fact, in my first issue as editor-in-chief of *Juiced.GS* in 2002, I received a letter from a reader asking about the status of *SSII*. I forwarded the note via email and postal mail to Joe asking

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for a response, but I never received one. Sadly, I think it was a sensitive issue for him. He stopped showing up at KansasFests around this time, too, and while he continued to operate as a software publisher, he was less and less present in the Apple II community as time went on.

It had been quite some time since my last contact with Joe, and I was surprised and saddened to learn of his passing. We met several times in person, mostly at KansasFests and a few times in northern California when I visited that area, usually staying with Eric and Sarah Shepherd, when we'd have gatherings sometimes called SheppyFests. Joe and I had our differences and we've had great times together. The Apple II lost one of its greatest advocates when Joe Kohn passed away. My condolences to his family.

Ray MacAnally:

I first met Joe through the Gravenstein Apple Users Group. Joe was writing for *InCider/A+* at the time, and we felt honored to have an actual computer journalist in our midst; as such, Joe was accorded something akin to "rock star" status in our group. It was because of him that we were able to get guest speakers from the large manufacturers and publishers of the day.

I was working as a police officer at the time, and with my strong conservative background, I was somewhat taken aback by Joe's appearance. Joe truly was one of the last of the hippies. Still, I had joined to learn about computers, and Joe had knowledge I needed. I always try to not judge a book by its cover, and as time went by, Joe proved to be a genuinely nice guy as well as very knowledgeable and

with great connections. He also proved to be a lot of fun to be around—very opinionated and very animated are two good descriptions. As long as we stuck to our rule of agreeing to disagree without being disagreeable, we got along fine.

I later went on to be elected club president, and Joe was right there with me all the way. Because of Joe, we were one of the most advanced and healthiest Apple user groups in the country. Eventually, I left the group to concentrate on work and family, but I would swing by his place on the way home from work and we would go out for a slice of pizza.

Now I'm retired. I called Joe the day I moved from California to Florida. I had been trying to convince him to try another course of treatment for his cancer. He was never in denial of his condition and was talking of travelling and seeing places he had never taken the time to see before. When I talked to him this past holiday season, he seemed at ease with the situation and had made his peace. The next time I tried calling, he was already gone.

Like any good friend, Joe leaves a empty hole in my life. I don't feel sorry for Joe, for as they say, he's in a better place. I feel sorry for myself, as I no longer have my friend. To those of you who also knew Joe, either through the Apple II or his recent love for the flowers and nature of Northern California, I feel your pain. To those of you who never met him, I really feel sorry for you.

Steve Gozdziewski:

Imagine your first KansasFest and the anticipation of finally getting to attend such an exciting event. Then imagine finding that

Joe Kohn would be your roommate! That's what happened to me in 1995. What a wonderful start to a special journey I hadn't even imagined yet.

Rooming with Joe Kohn, an Apple II celebrity, made me immediately nervous about my good fortune. It was my first KFest, so I did not yet know anything about the camaraderie and community spirit that is such an important part of KFest.

As it turned out, Joe and I had a zillion things to talk about, and we stayed up a lot later than we expected. We were complementary in our combined experience and also enjoyed many similarities. I think we both learned a lot from each other as we reviewed our past and the future.

While at KFest, we did our separate daytime things, visited with others, and the like—but at the end of the day, we shared our unique histories with each other and anyone who happened to stop by our room.

No doubt being Joe's roommate enhanced my first year there. It worked out so well, we were roommates again in the following years. I think what happened is that we just couldn't drain each other's brain enough during just one KFest!

Joe's exuberance and dedication to the Apple II were manifest in everything he did. He was also one fantastic person outside the computer world. I cherish every moment I had with him at KFest and all we shared together over the years. His passing is a huge loss to me and the Apple II community, but I am thankful that his spirit lives on in all of us and for the time he was allowed to be here.

Juiced.GS Tribute: Remembering Joe Kohn

The gang's all here: *David Stephens, Joe Kohn, Steve Gozdziewski, Tony Ward, and Jim O'Reilly at KFest 1995. Photo by Eric Shepherd.*

Richard Bennett:

Joe and I shared three things. We shared the same rather outspoken critics, and yet as criticism is a form of flattery, we rarely discussed it. We shared a passion for all types of music. I remember Joe and I climbing an Avila stairwell once, telling me about some or other Grateful Dead concert he was at in the 1960s, and suddenly blurting out that in 1978 a friend had dragged him along to see a then-notorious but unknown to him band called The Sex Pistols, at their final and now legendary concert in San Francisco. I don't often suffer idols, but Joe had me standing there speechless, stuttering a million questions at once. He laughed and said, "Oh, you're a punk?"

We also shared a fanatical love of the Apple II, and while in later years we'd both left much of that world behind us, I'm sure Joe would still be looking back on those days with great fondness. Whatever your opinion, *Shareware Solutions II* and the relationships with the developers and publishers that Joe forged behind the scenes will remain a part of Apple II folklore, and you just can't argue with that.

Geoff Weiss:

I had the great fortune of interacting with Joe during the development of the Spectrum Internet Suite Web browser. He was incredibly valuable as part of the promotion of SIS and part of the beta testing team. He was brought in after four months, and it was great fun having Joe on board. He would be easily amazed how quickly Ewen Wannop and I would introduce new features. Joe was nothing but positive energy and wanted to share his enthusiasm, which provided us with incredible satisfaction as part of the programming experience.

There were certain aspects of SIS that Ewen and I considered revolutionary, and other parts which were just a natural extension of the Apple IIGS. Because Joe primarily surfed the Web with Lynx on an 80-column text screen, he was enamored that, on average, over one hundred characters would fit on a line with SIS. Joe even commented about this in his *SSII* review, perplexing Ewen and me, as we didn't consider it significant compared to the program's other GUI aspects. But Joe's world was words, and he thought it was important how many would show up on a page.

Before Joe was involved with SIS, Ewen and I looked at caching Web pages to disk for faster display. We determined that it was not going to work in the Spectrum environment, and we let Joe know this when he was first trying things out. Two months later, a limited means of caching was found to be possible and achieved, and we did so without telling anybody that it was coming. A beta was released with the new code and a comment that indicated caching had been implemented. Joe mentioned the next day that he wasn't planning to do anything with SIS the previous night, but ended up staying up very late to experience Web browsing in a much more pleasurable manner.

Joe cared much for the independent development of Apple II products during the late 1990s and at the turn of the century. He enjoyed hyping what an Apple II could do, even to a point where it was not understood by all. One can still share the thrill that Joe Kohn found by reading his words that he left behind in past issues of *Shareware Solutions II* or old forum postings. This is the Joe that should be remembered by the Apple II community.

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Max Jones:

The mid-1990s was a transitional period for the Apple II community. Many of the people and companies that had helped build such a large and dedicated following for the first personal computer were migrating to other platforms. Those remaining were struggling to find appropriate niches to fill.

It was a critical time, and Joe Kohn emerged as a larger-than-life figure for many of us who were searching for leadership support. I know he appeared that way to me.

I had grown to respect Joe and his contributions to the Apple II community, primarily through his writing in various publications, including his own, *Shareware Solutions II*. Later, I understood that his work in the fledgling online community was equally significant.

When I began developing a prototype for *Juiced.GS* in the summer of 1995, I was initially motivated by Joe's annual desktop publishing contest in *Shareware Solutions II*. I was a bit shy at first about sending my AppleWorks GS pages to him. But Joe always struck me through his writing as approachable and supportive, so I forged ahead. His reaction was far more encouraging than I even expected. It was, in large part, Joe's positive reaction both publicly and privately that ultimately brought me to launch *Juiced.GS* as a IIGS-specific magazine.

When I finally met Joe for the first time at KansasFest 1996, it was as if we'd already been friends for life. His personality, energy, and charisma were contagious, and it was easy to see why he had become such a uniting force around which to rally the Apple II community.

I have exceptionally fond memories of those years. They were special for many reasons, but it was people such as Joe Kohn who helped make them so. He put his heart and soul into the Apple II for years, and the Apple II community was better because of it.

Tony Diaz and Ewen Wannop, in cooperation with Joe Kohn's estate, have preserved Joe's contributions to the Apple II community by making the full library of Shareware Solutions II back issues available as free, legal, PDF downloads. Find Joe's legacy online at

http://snipurl.com/juiced-ssii

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Joe's memory to the charity or organization of your choice.

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