The Shipley Story…

An article appearing in the winter 1998-99 “Campaign for Clarkson Update,” detailed the account of the entrepreneurship of Charles and Lucia Shipley. In 1983, Clarkson recognized the Shipleys’ many contributions to science. In fact, Professor Matijevic nominated Charlie Shipley for an honorary degree which Clarkson bestowed upon him the following May.

The relationship with the Shipleys and the Shipley Company actually began in 1972 when Egon was approached by the Shipleys to be a consultant for their company as a direct result of his worldwide pre-eminence in the field of colloid chemistry. The Shipley Company had become embroiled in a patent interference lawsuit with Kollmorgen Corporation, a competitor. The litigation centered on the physical nature of certain palladium-tin catalyst technology used for electroless plating. Electroless plating is a process used to plate copper and nickel onto non-conductive surfaces. The Shipleys pioneered this technology and claimed their compositions to be colloidal while Kollmorgen claimed the same compositions to be true solutions. Each company had a patent issued for essentially identical compositions, but with different claims. Dr. Matijevic was engaged as an expert to establish and characterize the colloidal nature of these compositions. In so doing, Egon turned to a graduate student for assistance in conducting the experimentation required. I was that graduate student.

The work led not only to a settlement of the litigation but also to an award winning paper published by Egon, Dr. Petr Zuman and myself. It also led to my first job after leaving Clarkson with my Ph.D. —as senior research chemist for the Shipley Company. As Egon once put it to me, it was the start of an entire career and for that I am eternally grateful. His words to me then were characteristically prophetic. Since then, I went on to develop palladium catalysts of my own compositions, which, in themselves, became well known and widely used products in the printed circuit fabrication and plating on plastics industries.

As a result of this history, The Shipley Company and the Shipley Foundation have played a major role with Clarkson which lives on today under the Shipley Center.

The greatest joy for me lies in the fact that this started not only a career, but a personal friendship with Egon that lasted for many years all the way up to his recent passing. Not once did I visit the Clarkson campus without visiting Egon, sitting in his office, sharing a bottle of wine or a dinner. I will miss him.