

We All Start Somewhere

In 1995, I took a hiatus from my carpentry job in Oregon, packed up my Datsun 510 wagon, and headed to Colorado for a summer of training at Solar Energy International (SEI). I'd spent a couple of years reading whatever I could dig up on solar energy and figured it was time to dive in. That summer, and three people I met because of it, changed my life. And, as I would come to learn, they changed the lives of thousands of other people as well.

Johnny Weiss, a cofounder of SEI, taught some of the first days' coursework. Johnny also came from a construction background. He's smart, approachable, has a great sense of humor, and (what sealed the deal for me) could answer any question about solar energy I could think of.

After my "solar" summer in Colorado, I headed back to Oregon—and to pounding nails. But landing a job installing solar was where my head was at. So I contacted *Home Power's* art director, Ben Root, who I'd met that same summer at SEI. Ben introduced me to Bob-O Schultze, an installer who was a close friend and neighbor of Ben's employers, Richard and Karen Perez, publishers of *Home Power*.

Like most RE installers who helped pioneer the industry, Bob-O had cut his teeth on renewable energy systems by living with them, in his case on a remote mining claim in Northern California's Salmon River country. When Richard decided to make publishing *Home Power* a full-time job, he passed on his installation business, Electron Connection, to Bob-O. My on-the-job training with Bob-O came both at the job sites and in the cab of his pickup, where we'd talk equipment, wire sizing, code—you name it—during the long drive to our next remote, off-grid installation.



Courtesy Joe Schwartz

Johnny Weiss leads an SEI PV installation workshop at Uncle Bud's Hut, Colorado Rockies, summer 1995.

On weekends, I'd drive the six miles up the rutted Yellow Dog Trail to Richard and Karen's homestead, where I worked on construction projects and upgrades to their off-grid PV and wind power systems. Richard is the first truly visionary person I've met. Physics, technology, and politics are his passions, and he has an unwavering belief that renewables will not only lessen our environmental impact on the planet, but also make people more independent and free.

The list of people who have been instrumental in moving renewable energy forward is long and growing. Mentors are everywhere and excited to share what they know. Johnny, Bob-O, and Richard are three people out of thousands who have devoted their lives to changing the way we make and use energy, and have changed countless people's lives in the process. I'm certainly one of them.

—Joe Schwartz, for the *Home Power* crew

Think About It...

"If you don't start somewhere, you're gonna go nowhere."

—Bob Marley
