

Johann Devold
Koppernaes
Norwegian Immigrant
by Friend Larry
Doane
1951



JOHAN DEVOLD KOPPERNAES

I had the good Fortune to meet Johan on his first day in Canada in the spring or early summer of 1951.

Johan grew up in Alesund, Norway and spent most of his childhood years under the occupation of Nazi Germany. Before the Second World War, his family has operated a fish plant and a number of fishing boats. The family's assets were confiscated by the Nazi's, but they survived until the end of the war. Following the war, they began rebuilding the business and became successful entrepreneurs once again.

In 1951, Johan was in the position of being unable to assume the leadership of the company due to the Norwegian and pursue his education in Washington State, where there was a fairly significant Norwegian population.

Johan's travel to North America brought him to Pier 21 where he was to transfer from his ship to a train taking him to the west coast of the United States. However, Johan ran afoul of some immigration difficulties when he arrived at Pier 21. He was fortunate, however, that Mr. Geoff Christie was in charge of immigration at that time. Mr. Christie was in the difficult position of having to keep Johan under his control over night. He made Johan an offer; either come home with him for the night or spend the night locked up in a room in the immigration shed. Johan didn't have any problem figuring out that going home with Mr. Christie would probably be his best option.

At the time, my girlfriend (now my wife) was a best friend with Mr. Christie's daughter. Janet called that night and asked if she and Johan could join us for a beach party we were attending in Hubbards. I had arranged to borrow my mother's car, which meant we had room for four people, so we said yes. Johan had a wonderful time immersed in the social life of teenagers in Nova Scotia. His English was limited, but he knew how to say 'girls' and 'beer'. In fact, Johan had so much fun that night he decided to stay in Nova Scotia instead of going to the Seattle area.

A few months after arriving in Halifax, Johan began his engineering studies at Dalhousie University and then Nova Scotia technical college. He married a local girl, Barbara Longley, and became a professional engineer. Johan and Barbara had five lovely children; three of whom are still living in Nova Scotia. Johan is now retired, but for many years operated his own engineering consulting firm and became well known for his expertise in designing fish processing plants.

I am pleased to be able to say that my wife and I have been friends of Johan and Barbara for over 50 years, beginning the first day Johan spent in Canada. I think Johan would agree that the kind treatment he received at Pier 21 was a primary turning point in his life.