



Bruce McCornack Stevenson

1917-1991

A co-founder of the SDS Lumber Company of Bingen, Washington, Bruce McCornack Stevenson provided the mechanical and engineering expertise that made the venture a success. While he dedicated his professional years to SDS, Bruce found a healthy balance in life that included family and the pursuit of a wide range of personal interests.

Born on April 4, 1917, in Portland, Oregon, Bruce was the fourth of Donald McCornack Stevenson and Angeline Williams Stevenson's six children. An Oregon native and graduate of the University of Oregon, Bruce's father was a general contractor who worked in several towns around the state, constructing roads, bridges, and buildings. Bruce's mother was also an Oregon native and a graduate of U of O. She taught English, but gave up teaching to raise her family.

When Bruce was a toddler, the family settled in Portland's Overlook neighborhood, on the east side of the Willamette River. In 1923, Donald

Stevenson teamed up with Harold J. Broughton to found the Broughton Lumber Company in Underwood and Willard, Washington. Donald spent the week at the mill—a few hours away before Interstate Highway 84 ran along the Columbia River—and returned to Portland on weekends.

Though Bruce attended school in Portland, the Stevenson family spent summers and holidays together in Willard, near Broughton's sawmill. Donald Stevenson had a strong work ethic that he passed on to his children, and Bruce had his first task in Willard at about the age of five. He and his siblings would hunt for loose rail spikes, which were reused when train tracks were picked up and moved as part of the logging operation. The children were paid a penny for a rail spike.

Bruce was especially close to his brother Wally, who was about 17 months younger. The two brothers spent time around the mill and in the woods, taking

on greater and greater responsibilities. By the time he was a teenager, Bruce was showing a great deal of interest in machinery—and an aptitude for tinkering. When he was in high school, he owned an Indian Scout motorcycle, which he disassembled and reassembled for fun and self-instruction.

Bruce graduated from Portland's Jefferson High School in 1935. It was the height of the Great Depression, and his older sisters Elinor and Jean were already enrolled in college, which strained the family budget. As a result, Bruce attended a fifth year of high school at Portland's Benson Polytechnic High School, then an all-boys school.

In fall 1936, Bruce entered the University of Washington, together with his brother Wally. Both men pledged Beta Theta Pi fraternity, which had been their father's fraternity at the University of Oregon. They also both joined the U.S. Navy through the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) program. Bruce majored in Mechanical Engineering.

While Bruce still spent parts of summers at the mill in Willard, he also had to fulfill his duties as a naval officer. During this time, he developed a lifelong interest in ships and an appreciation for the ocean. He also showed himself a capable sailor, once spotting land before the regular crew, much to the skipper's chagrin. In July 1937, he was aboard the battleship *U.S.S. Colorado* when it was assigned to search for Amelia Earhart in the vicinity of Howland Island in the South Pacific.

Bruce began his regular navy service in June 1941, just six months before the U.S. entered World War II. He took on greater responsibilities as the war advanced and eventually became the commanding officer of the salvage tug *ATR-53*. Among many tasks, Bruce and his crew helped clear harbor entrances and establish breakwaters. The crew included a diver,

and Bruce also designed and built an air mask for himself so that he could dive as well. During one harbor-clearing mission, Bruce salvaged a ship's bell from a sunken Japanese vessel—a treasure that remains with his family today. By the conclusion of the war, Bruce had advanced to the rank of lieutenant commander.

Even during wartime, Bruce took on new responsibilities on the home front. On March 27, 1943, wearing his uniform, he married Mary Hoyt in Spokane, Washington. A native of Spokane, Mary had also been a student at the University of Washington.

Before and during the first years of the war, Mary worked in Spokane for United Airlines. United's commercial planes became part of the war effort, and Mary found herself scheduling flights for the military. After she and Bruce married, she worked in San Francisco for Standard Oil.

Bruce and Mary's first child, Laura, was born during wartime, on February 17, 1945. Two more daughters followed: Anne (b. December 23, 1947) and Leslie (b. April 11, 1950). A patient and fair father, Bruce insisted that his daughters be independent, resourceful, and responsible. They each had to learn to change a tire before Bruce would allow them to drive.

Shortly after the war, Bruce joined with Wally to start their own lumber company. Wally had returned from the service ahead of Bruce and had begun to scout out business opportunities. The two brothers took on a third partner, Frank "Dauby" Daubenspeck, who had been the Broughton mill foreman at Willard for more than two decades. Dauby had been a hero to Bruce and Wally since they had been boys, and his experience,

intelligence, and strength made him a perfect partner in the new business.

In December 1945, the three men—whose surname initials formed the business name, “SDS Lumber Company”—purchased the bankrupt Nordby Lumber and Box Company of Bingen, Washington. Located a few miles east of Broughton Lumber, the facility required initial upgrades, but by March 1946, a crew of 26 was turning out lumber. In the beginning, the company had no timberlands or logging, and all three partners joined their employees on the mill floor. The business purchased its first trucks from army surplus.

Like so many lumber companies of the era, SDS experienced the setback of a cataclysmic fire, which burned the company’s first steam-powered sawmill to the ground in January 1948. The partners took fast action, bringing in a portable electricity-powered speed mill, which had the crew cutting lumber again within two weeks.

SDS made an early investment in establishing its own machine shop, and it was a natural fit for Bruce to oversee this operation. In the first decades of the business, Bruce led the effort to design and construct all of the company’s buildings and customized sawmill machinery. Mary Stevenson remembered that Bruce literally brought his work home, laying out models of equipment on the living room floor as he considered new designs. Eventually, she surprised him with the gift of a drafting table in the house—so that she could reclaim her kitchen and dining room tables.

Keith McCoy, a friend, as well as advisor and insurance agent to SDS, recalled that Bruce’s talents brought a competitive advantage to the company: “I would say that Bruce was a mechanical genius. He

developed and built many things for the mill and woods operations that other mills just didn’t have.”

SDS grew steadily, helped by the post-war building boom to be sure, but also propelled forward by the ingenuity, hard work, and smart decisions of the three partners. The company began to acquire timberlands, which supplemented timber purchases from public and private lands. SDS survived the downturn of the timber industry in the 1980s in part because it could draw on its own forests when logging on public lands became severely restricted.

Throughout the years, Bruce maintained his interest in boats and kept up his maritime skills. In the summers of the 1950s and early 1960s, Bruce and Wally took turns skippering the *Black Prince*, a 104-foot cabin cruiser, formerly an air-sea rescue boat that their father had purchased in a sale of military surplus. The cruises took their families through the beautiful waterways off British Columbia and Alaska.

After the *Black Prince* was sold, Bruce purchased a 50-foot trawler, the *Glacier Bear*, which he kept docked on Lake Union in Seattle. This stalwart boat was clad in ironbark, a hard, protective wood that had enabled the vessel’s former owner to moor along ice during bear-hunting expeditions. Bruce was also an avid fisherman, traveling as far as the remote Christmas Island in the South Pacific to fish for bonefish on the island’s white sand flats. He also became the half owner of a sport fishing boat, the *Marleen*, out of Kona, Hawaii.

It made perfect sense for Bruce to put his knowledge of boats to use at SDS. For decades, the company had relied on contractors to move wood chips by barge down the Columbia River to paper mills. To better manage and profit from this part

of the operation, Bruce designed the company's first tugboat, the *Dauby*, named for co-founder Frank Daubenspeck. This beautiful 86-foot tug, referred to as "the teakwood palace" by the SDS marine crew, was launched in 1984. Other boats were added to the SDS navy, and today SDS provides tug services to other companies as well as barging its own products.

Bruce also put his engineering and mechanical talents to artistic pursuits. For years, the work crews at SDS marveled at how he would take scrap metal and broken parts and weld them into sculptures of animals and other objects. He was also a skilled sketcher. Bruce and Mary shared an interest in art, and the Portland Art Museum and the Maryhill Museum of Art became beneficiaries of the Mary Hoyt Stevenson Foundation, which Bruce established in his wife's honor.

At heart, Bruce had a fun-loving spirit and a sneaky sense of humor. He always enjoyed a good practical joke and advised his daughters to "keep them guessing" that you were the prankster. His jokes often relied on his mechanical skills. As a teenager, he once attached a car's brake line to the horn, so that the horn sounded whenever the driver braked.

For all his practical joking, Bruce strove to be fair-minded and to treat everyone—family, friends, employees, and associates—with the respect that they deserved. Bruce tried not to let illness disrupt his enjoyment of life. He survived prostate cancer, but leukemia followed, and he died on June 23, 1991, at the age of 74. Like the other founders of SDS, Bruce left behind a long legacy. The company that he co-founded continues to succeed today, and Bruce is remembered with love, admiration, and appreciation by his family, co-workers, and community.

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