



William Franklin Daubenspeck

1901-1968

A co-founder of the SDS Lumber Company of Bingen, Washington, William Franklin Daubenspeck—who was always known as “Frank” or “Dauby”—embodied the greatest virtues of the rugged 20th century lumber industry. A self-made and virtually self-educated man, Dauby rose from mill hand to mill superintendent to mill owner. Though he eventually took on the responsibilities of ownership, he eagerly tackled the most physically grueling tasks throughout his life.

The only son of Albert and Mary Schneider Daubenspeck, Dauby was born on February 21, 1901, in Muncie, Indiana. He had two older sisters, Dot and Thelma, and one younger sister, Betty. Dauby’s family moved west, and he was raised in Stevenson, Washington. He had little formal education.

At the age of 12, Dauby was hopping freight cars and traveling in search of work in Washington’s wheat fields. As a youth, Dauby was strong and hardy enough to hold down a man’s job. At some point, he returned to the Stevenson area, and in

1923, he was hired by the recently formed Broughton Lumber Company. Broughton had two mills, an upper sawmill at Willard, Washington, and a lower resaw and planing mill at Hood, Washington (part of the town of Underwood), on the Columbia River. The two mills were connected by a nine-mile long lumber flume, which was the last of its kind in the U.S. when the Broughton mills closed in 1986.

Though Dauby was only 22, his talent, strength, intelligence, and leadership skills were quickly recognized by Broughton co-founder Donald M. Stevenson. Dauby became superintendent of the Willard mill—a job that he held for nearly 23 years.

Lena Ellen Hooker, who was a year younger than Dauby, remembered seeing him as a boy, riding barefoot on a cow. She asked someone his name and was told that it was “Daubenspeck”—a name she found quite amusing. She took that name herself when she and Dauby were married on June 3, 1926, in Chehalis, Washington.

Lena was Dauby's partner and helpmate throughout the rest of his days, a traditional housewife and later the mother of an adopted daughter.

Lena often spoke of their early days at Willard, in mill housing, as the happiest days of her life. The families living in Willard were all friends with one another. A favorite summer treat came when Dauby or another mill worker would drive to Umatilla and come back with a load of watermelons that were shared by all.

Living in Willard posed challenges as well. For a time, Lena had to climb a ladder to get buckets of water out of the flume for household use. One of Lena's favorite stories was of the time a rat got into their home in the middle of the night. Dauby simply fired his shotgun—killing the rat, as well as destroying Lena's knickknack shelf and the wall on which it hung.

Dauby met his future business partners, Bruce and Wally Stevenson, at the Willard mill. The sons of Dauby's boss, Bruce and Wally were just boys at the time—16 and 17 years younger than Dauby, respectively—and they looked up to the older man. Dauby was a hero to them, not only because he was strong and charismatic, but also because he was kind to kids and was willing to join in on the fun.

“Dauby usually worked late to get the mill ready for the next day,” recalled Wally. “One of our favorite things to do was gather slimy moss out of the flume, climb up to the catwalks above the mill, and pepper Dauby with the moss. He would run us down and throw us into the mill pond.”

Broughton Lumber thrived in the 1920s and 1930s, and Dauby played a critical role in its success. During World War II, lumber was vital for the war effort, and Dauby helped keep the mill operational. He had considered striking out on his own, but Don Stevenson convinced him to stay on through the war. In 1945, Dauby finally gave up his position as superintendent of the Willard mill. He had thoughts of purchasing land on the coast and going into commercial harvesting of cranberries.

Unknown to Dauby, Don Stevenson suggested to his sons Bruce and Wally that they approach Dauby about forming a partnership. Don knew that Dauby wanted to be a business owner and that his sons would never find a better partner. In December 1945, Dauby joined Bruce and Wally in purchasing the assets of the Nordby Lumber and Box Company of Bingen, Washington, for \$28,003. Together, the three men called their business, “SDS Lumber Company,” drawing on the initials of their last names.

The three partners made upgrades to the mill, and Dauby's decision-making and genius for mill operations played an instrumental role in getting the company up and running. Operations began in March 1946, with a crew of 26 running steam-powered, belt-and-pulley machinery. On the first day, equipment broke down, and the partners ran all over the mill, trying to keep production going. Dauby brushed aside Bruce and Wally's discouragement with a laugh; he knew that they would succeed.

SDS was fortunate enough to win an initial contract from a house builder in California. The builder advanced the partners \$10,000, which financed the

start of the company's operations. Nevertheless, Dauby, Bruce, and Wally worked right alongside the crew to cut lumber.

SDS of course could not run on muscle and machinery alone; the company also needed to run its office. Fortunately, the Nordby Lumber and Box Company had hired an experienced secretary in October 1945, Dorothy Winebarger (Dorothy Henkle after her marriage). Dorothy was raised in nearby Trout Lake, Washington, but she had worked in Portland from 1942 to 1945. She was hired as SDS's office manager, a decision that has paid dividends for more than half a century.

Dauby, like his business partners, recognized Dorothy as a real gift, from the time that SDS started and into the decades that followed. She took a personal interest in the company's success and learned the business well. She was also a trusted advisor to many of the mill employees, who freely confided in her. She lent a hand in the partners' personal lives as well. In many regards, she became a family member; Dauby and Lena often referred to her as their "other daughter." When Dorothy married the cherished local doctor, Wayne Henkle, MD, in 1967, two pillars of the community were united. As of summer 2006, she continues to work for SDS a few days each week. She is now in her seventh decade of employment with the company.

Dauby was a rugged individual, and Dorothy saw him at his toughest. On one occasion, she heard him in his office mumbling and cursing. She went back to investigate and saw that Dauby was stitching up a cut in his wrist with fishing line. "He couldn't get the knot tied, so I

had to tie it," she said. Dauby went right back to work.

Wally also recalled that Dauby worked through physical pain without a thought. Once, cutting a board, Dauby sliced the pad off the tip of his finger. "He didn't even pause in the middle of sawing," Wally said. Dauby invariably treated wounds with axle grease.

Members of the crew recalled that, in his prime, Dauby could do the work of several men. His physical strength received an unlikely test when Wally's brother-in-law, Dick Brown, came to work in the mill one summer. Dick was a member of the University of Washington's track team and specialized in the 440. Joking around, Dauby said that he could beat Dick in a 100-yard dash, and that he would give Dick a 10-yard lead. Dauby was in his late 40s at the time, and the younger man accepted the challenge. The distance was measured off in the lumber yard, Dick took his 10-yard lead, and they were off. Dauby won easily.

SDS thrived with Dauby supervising the mill, Bruce focusing on engineering and mechanics, and Wally managing business operations. By the early 1960s, the company had about 500 employees who worked in various sawmills and a plywood plant. In the summer months, as many as 150 truckloads of logs would roll onto mill property every day.

Wally recalled that the key to SDS's business success was the strength of the partnership. "Dauby, Bruce, and I had an excellent partnership. We appreciated each other's work, and all pitched in equally. We never argued; we agreed. Partnerships like ours are very rare. Bruce

and I considered Dauby an unbelievable partner and a great friend.”

Dauby was invaluable in managing the company’s large crew. The workers respected Dauby and knew that he had begun as a mill hand just like them. Dauby was fair and always willing to address workers’ problems—though he had little patience for idleness or complaint. As a result of Dauby’s leadership, SDS maintained a friendly atmosphere between its workers and owner-managers.

Dauby’s self-confidence, self-reliance, and experiences as a young man helped him put every challenge in perspective. He was always optimistic, accepted adversity, and would minimize any problem. His energy and goodwill saw Bruce, Wally, and the rest of the company through the setback of a devastating mill fire in January 1948. Within two weeks of the fire, the company was cutting lumber again with a portable speed mill. When Wally or Bruce worried about a decision or a new venture, Dauby took it in stride. “If it doesn’t work out,” he would say, “we’ll do something else.”

At the same time, Dauby understood that it was important to plan for the future, and he encouraged the high school students who worked summers in the mill to focus on their education. In fact, Dorothy Henkle recalled that Dauby would work these teens especially hard near the end of the summer so that they were eager to go back to school and pursue careers beyond the mill.

When Dauby and Lena were in their 50s, they adopted their niece Susan Gayle McKee (now Reese), and suddenly had the joys and responsibilities of parenthood.

Dauby’s emphasis on education and self-improvement clearly had an impact on his daughter: She was her high school’s valedictorian and went on to be a professor at Portland State University.

Susan says that her father “is still my hero. He was the perfect father, and I lived for my weekends at the mill or in the woods. He led by the example of his own absolute respect for every person he met, of every tree he surveyed. And he made life a lot of fun, no matter what the task.”

Though Dauby worked tirelessly, he was also a devoted outdoorsman. He enjoyed fishing and hunting, and traveled several times to Alaska to pursue both activities. He also hunted deer and elk in Idaho. His toughness came in handy on one hunting trip: Deep in the forest, he broke his ankle, but did not want to ruin the fun for everyone else. He simply wrapped his ankle, fashioned a crutch from a branch, and hiked out at the end of the trip.

As an avid angler, Dauby planned to build a large lake of his own alongside the White Salmon River. His intention was to stock the lake with rainbow trout and let kids fish there. Unfortunately, Dauby never saw this plan become a reality, but he spent many happy days with his family, fishing from a dock on nearby Northwestern Lake, where they kept a trailer.

When he was diagnosed with kidney cancer, he sold his portion of SDS to Wally and Bruce in order to provide for Lena for the rest of her life. Though ill, Dauby chose to continue working until near the time of his death. He died on September 26, 1968, at the age of 67. Dorothy provided assistance and

companionship to Lena for many years as a friend, and at Dauby's request.

Dauby was very generous and believed in sharing with people whom he felt were working hard to help themselves. Upon his death, many people came forward to share stories about how Dauby had helped them, financially and as a friend, through difficult periods in their lives. No one, not even Lena, knew about these instances. Notoriety was never a motivating force for Dauby. Lena died on December 10, 1998, at the age of 96, still in love with her husband who had died 30 years earlier.

Though Dauby never built his trout-fishing lake, Daubenspeck Park in Bingen now

bears his name. In addition, Bruce and Wally Stevenson named the first tug of the SDS fleet the "Dauby" in their partner's honor. Dauby's name and spirit live on, but his passing can also be seen to mark a transition in the Northwest and, indeed, in the United States as a whole. When Dauby was young, circumstances in the rural Northwest demanded that if he wanted to succeed in life, he had to rely on his own strength, intelligence, and determination. He admirably fulfilled the possibilities that life presented to him, and to those who knew him best, he was a man who was friendly, accessible, and heroic all at once.

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