



Knud Poul (or “K.P.”) Stecher was born **9 February 1921** in Odense, Denmark. His parents were Alf and Marie (called “Misse”) Stecher. Knud, their eldest son, was named after his mother’s father, Knud Isaksen, a merchant in Odense. Knud and his younger brother Arne Helge Stecher (1925 – 1998) were raised in Odense in an apartment at Skiphusvej 80, a working-class neighborhood; their mother ran a tiny shop with embroidery and sewing notions from the ground-floor of the brick building. “Fru Stecher” remained a beloved figure in that neighborhood for many decades. In June of 1940 (was it 1941?), Knud graduated from the academic high school *Odense Cathedral School* (established in 1283) in the math and physics track with very high marks. On 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1940, Denmark had been occupied by Germany; Knud and his younger brother joined a local resistance group.

Knud P. Stecher soon began studying engineering in Copenhagen at *Denmark’s Technical University* (at that time called *Polyteknisk Lærestanstalt* located on Sølvgade), where Niels Bohr served as professor; however, the Second World War caused some delay in his studies. As a resistance member, he participated in underground activities and helped shelter and ferry Jewish refugees by boat to neutral Sweden in October 1943. As a 23-year old, he then fled by boat at night to Sweden himself (having escaped the Germans in Denmark by crawling out of the back of a chicken coop). In Sweden, Knud enlisted in the Danish Brigade (also known as *Danforce*), joining the 5,000 Danish soldiers, among them his father and his brother, training to assist the Allies. When Germany finally capitulated, Knud returned by ship to Denmark on 7 May 1945 with the entire Brigade; these Danish “freedom fighters” marched from Helsingør to Copenhagen (50 kilometers), celebrated by cheering Danes who lined the streets and waved Danish flags.

The war was over. Knud finished his engineering degree and worked in Copenhagen, bicycling through the cold, windy streets – the rain fogged up his glasses! He met his wife-to-be Inger Tranberg at the home of mutual friends in Copenhagen; the two spoke of their shared dreams of travel to America. On 15 March 1953, the 32-year old Knud married Inger in *Gammel Harlev Kirke*, a small country church in Jutland, and celebrated at a family dinner party at “Slauslet” in Skibby (the farm of Inger’s aunt, Helena Due). One week after the wedding, the newly-weds left Copenhagen and sailed by ship to New York; they were each allowed to take only \$50 out of Denmark, due to the postwar economy. The couple passed through Ellis Island in early April 1953 (the last year Ellis Island functioned as an immigration center) and from New York City traveled by train to Montreal and eventually settled in an apartment in Toronto (Point Credit), Canada. In Toronto, Knud socialized with other Danish engineers and his two daughters Kirsten and Marianne were born. In September 1957, after four freezing winters in Canada, Knud and Inger packed their belongings into their Packard, attached a small trailer with their modest furniture and put their two baby daughters on the back seat! Ready for adventure, K.P. took the wheel and drove westward on Highway 66 to California, arriving in early October in Mill Valley where the first Redwood tree was spotted along Highway 101. There Knud and Inger decided to settle down (Inger’s paternal uncle lived in San Francisco, “Uncle Al” and his wife Johanna). As he had done in Ontario, Knud quickly passed his professional licensing exams in Civil and Structural Engineering for the State of California. He worked for the Kaiser Corporation and later for Bechtel Engineering. Knud was always known as “Paul” among his American colleagues and wonderful neighbors in Mill Valley.

In the winter of 1962, Knud and Inger had purchased their first family home on Lomita Drive in Mill Valley and soon thereafter their son Michael Stecher was born in San Francisco on 5 August. In 1963, following

an extended family stay in Denmark, Knud, Inger and the girls were "naturalized" as U.S. citizens. After long days at his engineering job in San Francisco, K. P. kept active at home by building expansions, new rooms and new wings to the family home on Lomita Drive. Mixing and pouring concrete, electrical and plumbing work were among his hobbies! The three Stecher children were Dad's building assistants, whether the job was hammering wood roofing shakes or nailing hardwood flooring. Knud avoided a mid-life crisis by purchasing a beloved TR-4 (Triumph Sports car, 1964). Knud's mother from Odense, known in the family as "farmor" visited Mill Valley twice in her later years, including for Knud and Inger's 25th wedding anniversary in 1978, which was celebrated with a festive dinner party in the grand dining room which Knud had built himself.

K.P. Stecher retired from Betchel in 1986, just in time for the arrival of the first grandchildren in 1987. In the course of his structural engineering career Knud had worked on bridges, sky-scrapers, air-control towers and foundations for nuclear power plants. He also served on the California Earthquake board. The couple also made numerous trips back home to Denmark to visit family and friends, including for his younger's brother's 60th summer birthday in 1995, which coincided with Denmark's 50th-year celebration of the Liberation and VE day. Knud and Inger enjoyed their retirement by active participation in Danish-American associations, especially the Danish Soldiers Club, and summer road-trips to Seattle to visit with their two daughters and five grandsons: Viggo, Leif, Andreas, Brian and Evan. Knud Poul passed away quietly 4 August 2000.

*Written by Marianne Stecher, in celebration of our father's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021.*