

EMIL NORTON BIO

Emil Norton was born in 1922 in Kodiak, Alaska graduating from Kodiak High School in 1939 when he was just 16 years old. Emil's parents were Phillitsata Chernoff, who passed away just before Emil's first birthday (Emil was raised by oldest sister, Edith and then his sister, May), and John Norton, who had left Finland when he was 16 years old. According to Emil's account, his father "got on a sailing ship and sailed around Finland and then to New York. When he got to New York, they asked him how old are you John? He told them he was born in 1870. They said he was too young and made him go back aboard the ship. They sailed around the Cape of Good Hope to South America and up to the California side. Of that time, Emil recalls his father saying, "We didn't have to go up to touch the sails for three months almost!" He sailed to San Francisco and got on another wood schooner to Coos Bay, Oregon and loaded with lumber went back to San Francisco. He sailed out of San Francisco on a wood sloop and landed on Wood Island. He was a sea otter hunter and eventually moved to back to Kodiak.

Emil was 14 years old when he went to work at the Kadiak Cannery, putting codes on boxes, and then worked at Kraft's Store for the original owner, Otto Kraft. According to Emil at time of 2011 interview, "Let me show you my social security card. I got this on September 1, 1937. I had to get that social security card, so I could work at the Kadiak Cannery. I have been paying into social security since 1937!"

Asked about Kodiak when he was young, Emil recalled, "Alaska Steamship boats used to come in and land at Erskine's Dock. I got drafted and asked the Draft Board if I could go to Seattle and join the Navy and they said okay. So I went to Seattle on one of those Alaska Steamship boats. When I got there they told me "you're in the Army now!" They said the Draft Board had sent my papers down to Seattle and I had been drafted, and they sent me back up to Alaska to get things straightened out. I was in the Army boot camp in California for 17 weeks. After boot camp I was sent back to Seattle and then to Florida. They put us on a ship to Africa and then to Naples, Italy. From there we got on a big truck to Rome. We actually chased the Germans on foot to Genoa, Italy. Three of us were chasing some Germans and just when I was about to shoot, the German held up a white flag and surrendered. After that I went home on an airplane from Naples to Casablanca to Dakar, Africa. When we got off the plane it was so hot we all started sweating. We went to Brazil and to Florida and from there they were going to send us to Japan, but we found out the war was over."

In 1952, Emil married Frieda Lorenson who had grown up on Bear Island across from Port Bailey, and their first child, Cathy, was born in 1953 with children Felecia, Emil and Victoria born in later years.

Emil served on the NOK Board of Directors from 1990 until the time of his death on January 7, 2013 at the age of 90. Emil viewed getting the Alutiiq Center built as one of the major highlights of his time on the Board as well as the creation of NOK's subsidiary, KOMAN, Inc.

In October of 2012, Emil was honored by the Alaska Federation of Natives as Elder of the Year.

Emil believed strongly in giving back to the community, serving Kodiak in many volunteer Board positions beyond his service to NOK including Kodiak City Council, Kodiak Island Borough School Board, Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development, Koniag Inc. and Senior Citizens of Kodiak.

Emil will be long remembered for his dedication and service to Natives of Kodiak.