

## 11 Koi, Or Is It 12?

December 2016

I was responding to an ad on Sacramento Craigslist – Koi For Sale \$65.

When I arrived at the Fair Oaks address, he was waiting out front with the fish already in a bucket. I lied he said, I don't have 13, I only have 12. I thought I had 13 but they are difficult to count. I looked down into the bucket at the multicolored mass of fish. OK, I said, and handed him the money. These aren't fancy Koi, he said, but I like them anyway. What do you feed them? Oh no! they don't eat during the winter, it's too cold! You better do some reading up on how to take care of them. Thanks, I will.

I was pleased. These were real Koi and at a good price too! Fancy or not, I wouldn't know, but they were a major improvement over the half-dozen Goldfish I had in the pond for several years before they mysteriously died a few months back. I was starting over and this time with real Koi!

It was a cold day when I poured them into the pond, the water must be freezing cold. I wondered if they would make it? Four months later, I had my answer: Yes! They were alive! After pouring them into pond, I never saw them again until late Spring. They disappeared! I supposed it was their version of hibernation but they were nowhere to be seen.

When they reappeared I tried to count them. I counted 11, but he was right, they are difficult to count when they are flitting around. So maybe he sold me only 11, not 12, or one died though I saw no evidence of that, or maybe there were really 12.

They had to be starving and I was ready! I had gone to Crystal Aquarium on Freeport Boulevard about a mile from my house, which turned out to be a dimly lit hole-in-the-wall store jammed floor to ceiling with fish tanks. The place smelled damp and a bit musty.

How many do you have? How big are they? I processed her heavy Chinese accent but before I could respond, she said, 6 to 8 inches? Are they Koi? Or, Goldfish? Do you have a pump? She hesitated, I jumped in: they're Koi, I have a pump, they are in a big fish pond in my backyard.

Here is what you want, she said and handed me a box from the shelf. All natural, Koi love them, brings out their color, less waste. I looked at the label on the small bucket:

Salmon Sticks. I hesitated. All natural, Koi love them, brings out their color. Less waste.

Expensive stuff, I thought. Do they float on the water or sink to the bottom? Koi love them, all natural, brings out their color. Less waste. OK, I said, and handed her my credit card. Next time you come, we might not be here, we move but in same area, you look for us. OK?

Fast forward. You know what? My Koi love those damn Salmon sticks! They crowd around the edge of the pond jostling for position and when I toss in the sticks, they swarm for them. What a scrum! And you know what? It does bring out their color, the red, the yellow, the gold, the orange and even the white – all brightly shimmering. And you know what? Those damn Koi have nearly doubled in size since I began feeding them Salmon Sticks. 6 to 8 inches? Hah! Try 8 to 16!

Is it 11 or 12 Koi? Two teen-age grandchildren counted 12. Sometimes I count 11, sometimes 12. But you know what? They are hard to count!

They might not be fancy Koi, but I love them anyway!