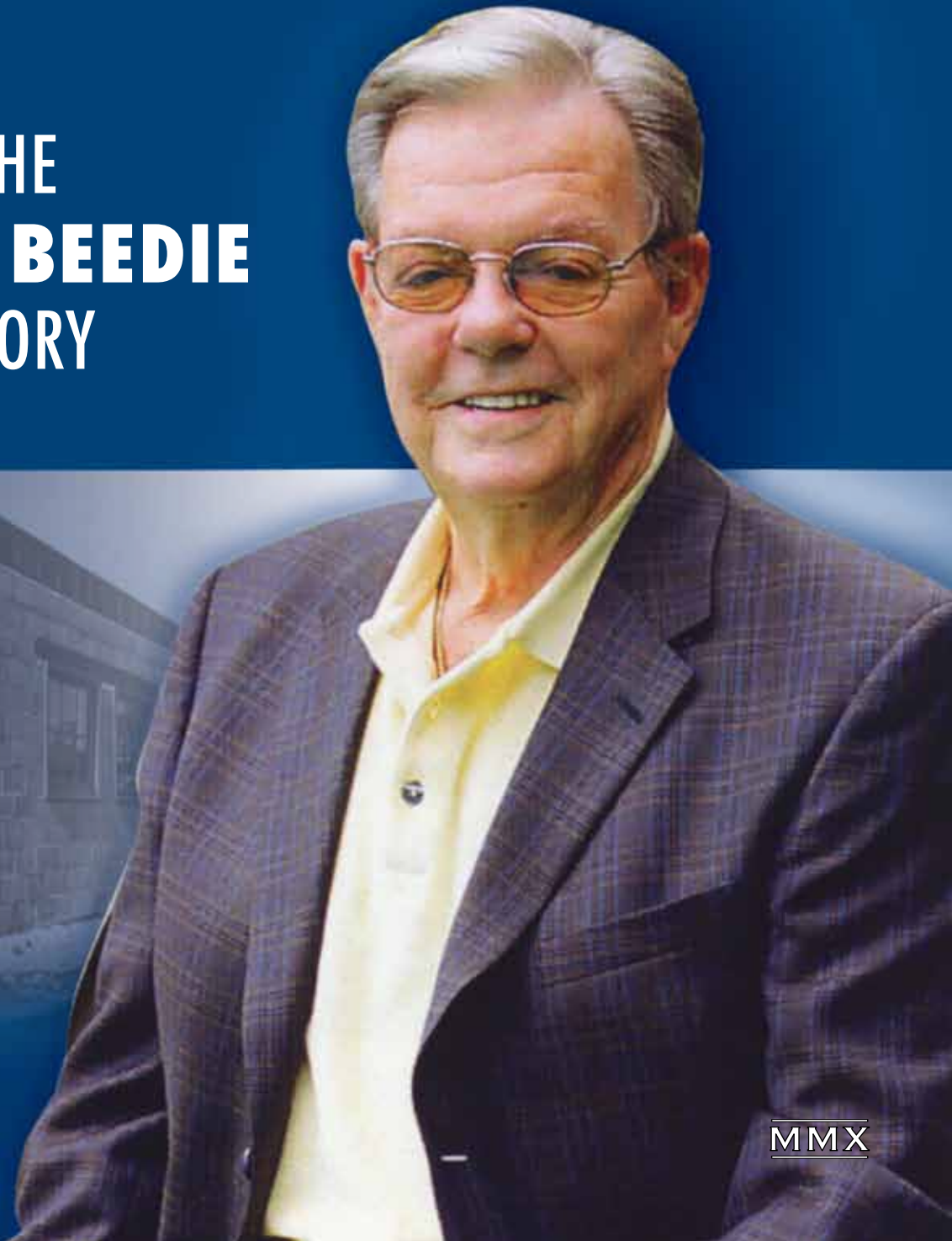


SOMETHING TO BUILD ON

THE KEITH BEEDIE STORY



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**SOMETHING
TO BUILD ON**
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V5T 1B1 CANADA

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CREATIVE DIRECTOR John Wellwood
WRITER Lesley McKnight
DESIGNERS Paola van Turennot
PHOTO RESEARCHERS Heather McLean, John Wellwood
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR Kate Moore
COPYEDITOR Lesley Cameron
PROOFREADERS Marial Shea, Norma Larson

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TO MY DAD

For many years, I tried to convince my dad to get his story down on paper. I am thrilled that he finally agreed and you now have a copy of his memoir in your hands. As you will read, Keith Beedie constructed his first building in 1945 at the age of 19 – a modest hand-built structure of 1,200 square feet. Today, the company he started right after his service in the RCAF is the largest landlord of industrial space in B.C., with over seven million square feet in its portfolio.

But this story is more than just a record of my dad's accomplishments. It is also a window into the man behind the company – what shaped him as a child, his roles as father and husband and his insights into the tough times he weathered.

Finally, as much as this book is a tribute to my dad and his legacy, it is also an opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of the many employees and clients who are such a vital pillar of this story. Our growth and success would not have been possible without their hard work, loyalty and trust.

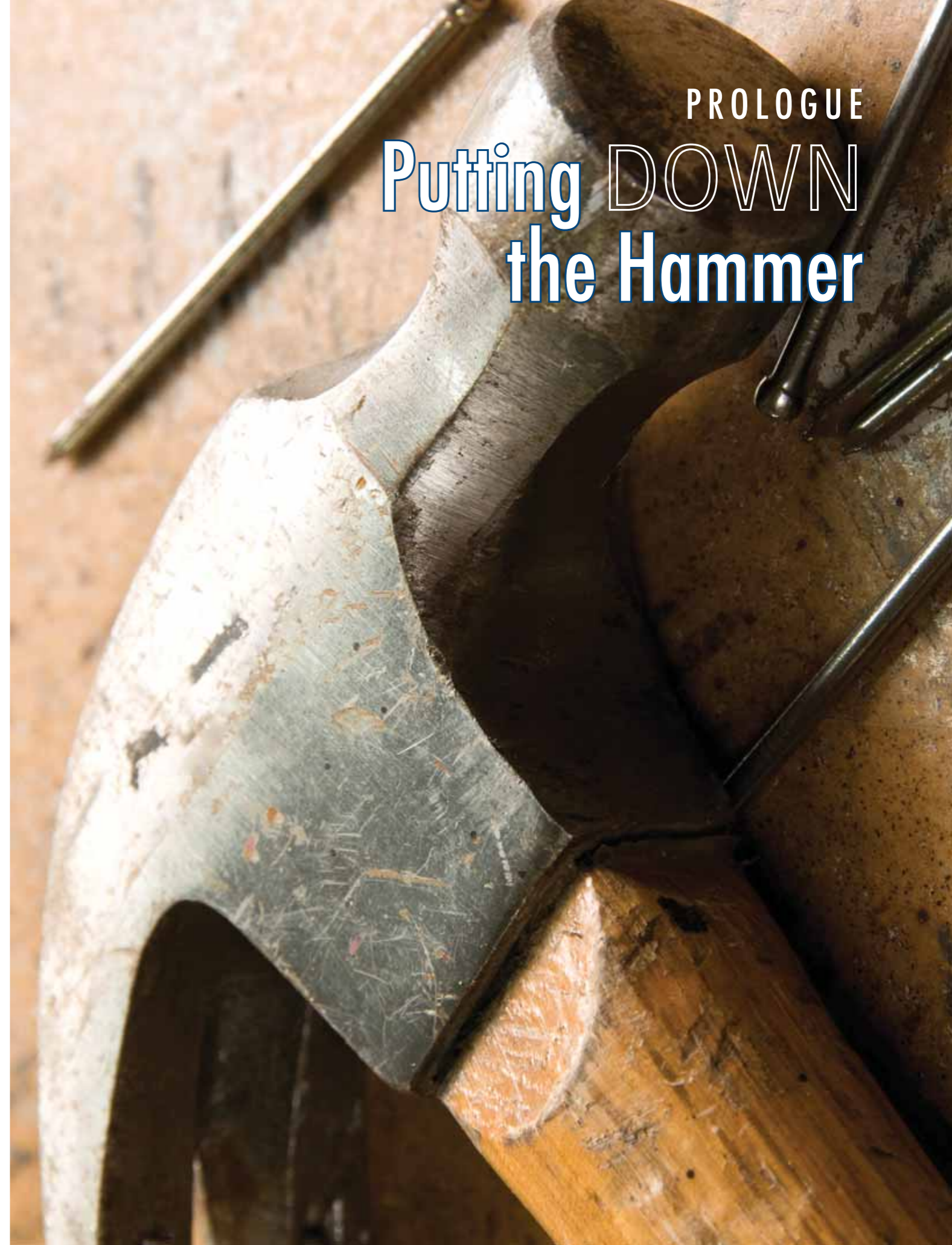
To my dad, you have been an amazing father and mentor. Thank you for showing me what it looks like to relentlessly follow a dream.

Ryan Beedie

PROLOGUE

Putting DOWN the Hammer

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WEST VANCOUVER, 1952

The view from the construction site was spectacular, but Keith wasn't enjoying it. He didn't see the cloud-covered mountains or the whitecaps on Burrard Inlet. He was crouched, head down, frantically pounding nails into a deck. It was two blows of the hammer for a 1¼-inch nail and three blows for a 3½-inch one. Keith barely noticed that his hammer was marking double time compared to those of the others working around him. The pace of his hammer matched the speed of his thoughts. He had a lot on his mind.

Keith paused. He looked up for a moment, but not to admire the view. All he could see swimming in front of his eyes was a mental list of never-ending details: he had to make sure the right supplies were coming, that the sub-trades were organized, that no time would be lost while waiting for building materials to arrive on the work site. There were dozens of things he had to get done that day to make sure that work could start on schedule the next day, never mind the rest of the week.

The thought of the ballooning list filled him with anxiety. Keith had only signed a contract to do framing and maybe a bit of finishing work. But things had rapidly spun out of control. He'd barely seen the general contractor since starting. Lowering his head again, Keith willed the nails to sink into the deck faster. He had to get to a phone. He had at least half a dozen pressing calls to make if this project was going to stay on schedule. His hammer became a blur in front of his eyes. He tried to remember how he'd gotten to this point.

It had started a couple of years earlier when Keith met Charlie Metcalfe, when Charlie was contracted to roof Keith's new house. That turned into he and Charlie working on a few jobs for other people. Then he'd met a couple of guys who were building houses on the North Shore and he and Charlie signed on to do some framing. The money was good, since they could finish about a house a week at \$400 per home. That meant they each got \$200, which wasn't bad. Pretty soon, framing evolved into doing a bit of finishing. One thing led to another.

Somewhere along the way on this job, though, the rules had changed. Keith and Charlie showed up one day to find that they didn't have the materials they needed to do the day's work. The contractor had forgotten to place the order. Instead of giving up the day's pay, Keith went ahead and ordered the things they needed and carried on.

Somewhere along the way on this job, the rules had changed.

He wasn't a contractor. He wasn't being paid to run a site, and no one had told him to take over. He and Charlie were just two guys doing some work for Taygen Construction. He wasn't used to dealing with sub-trades or ordering materials. But before he knew it, he had people at the job site coming to him for direction, counting on him to cover project details and do the ordering for everyone. If he didn't, they all lost time. He felt responsible for everyone getting a full day's work in. It was becoming clear that if he didn't make sure things were running smoothly, no one else was going to worry about it. Keith felt that responsibility keenly. But the problem was finding the time to do both jobs: that of the absentee contractor as well as the one he'd been hired to do.

Keith looked down at his hand gripping the hammer, took a breath and stopped. With startling clarity he saw that he was holding the wrong tool. He didn't need a hammer, he needed a phone. He was using his muscles when he needed to use his brain.

"I don't have time for this," Keith thought to himself. "No more carpentry work for me." He looked at the hammer in his hand and put it down on the deck. With one simple gesture Keith welcomed a new future.

With startling clarity he saw that he was holding the wrong tool. He didn't need a hammer, he needed a phone.



Keith Beedie's photo taken for the passport he got when he was planning to move to California with his young family, 1952.

BURNABY, 2008

Keith Beedie's office walls are lined with photographs and architectural renderings of several buildings that The Beedie Group has worked on recently. Some structures are completed, some are under construction and some are still conceptual. The pictures aren't in frames. They are simply pinned up, so they can be removed quickly to make room for shots of new projects as they get underway.

If Keith were to hang a picture of every building he has ever built, his office would be wallpapered by layer upon layer of drawings.

The pictures would range from houses and warehouses, to industrial parks and a forthcoming massive community development. Millions of square feet of completed buildings.

The Beedie Group's huge development portfolio is the result of more than five decades of Keith's hard work, skilful risk-taking and ambitious vision. It is the culmination of a life's work. But the path was not always clear. Keith didn't start with a trust fund to buy his first property. He didn't study business at university, or mentor under a real estate mogul.

"I never had a grand plan," says Keith. "I just put one foot in front of the other and this is where it led." Growing up, Keith never imagined himself behind the desk he is at now. He didn't picture himself surrounded by pictures of buildings he had built. He didn't envision anything like the life he has created for himself and his family.

"I just put one foot in front of the other and this is where it led."

A large wall map at The Beedie Group offices, covered in coloured push pins, shows the locations of many Beedie projects and properties.



PART
ONE

LAYING THE
FOUNDATION



CHAPTER 1

A BEEDIE is Born



Keith at about three years of age.

THE NOMADIC YEARS

“Vancouver’s Building Activity Shatters All Records!” shouted the newspaper headlines in 1926. That same year, a man who would contribute greatly to future Lower Mainland building activity was born. Keith Beedie was born on June 13 in downtown Vancouver, the first child of Reginald and Evelyn Beedie.

Keith laughs when asked what his parents might have been feeling about his birth. “I don’t recall,” he says. In fact, much of Keith’s recollection of his early life is a blur of multiple houses in different cities and packing and unpacking boxes rather than distinct moments. Not long after his arrival, his father accepted a job opportunity in Calgary.

“My dad worked for General Motors. He started off at McLaughlin Buick near Burrard and Georgia, downtown. He worked his way up from parts boy to parts manager,” Keith says. “Dad was ambitious and when the opportunity to move up came along he accepted a transfer to Calgary. I was three months old when we left Vancouver.” The family’s relocation to the Prairies began a series of moves that would take them to several cities across Western Canada before returning to Vancouver for good in 1937.

“We were in Calgary for a very short time, then Dad got another promotion and we were off to Winnipeg. We went from there to Regina. Then back to Winnipeg. Then back to Regina. Each time was a step up the ladder for Dad.” With so much movement at such a young age, it was hard for Keith to keep track of what happened where. Keith’s sister Joan joined the family three years after he arrived. “I am not even sure where she was born,” Keith says. The cities, house addresses and school names changed so frequently throughout the many moves that it became impossible for Keith to distinguish one place from the other. “In Winnipeg, I know we lived on Sprague Street, close to Portage Avenue. In Regina, one of our houses was on College Avenue ... that was when I went to Davin School.”

The 1930s were far from easy times in Canada. Jobs were hard to come by and money was tight. With a family to support, Keith’s father was keen to keep advancing in a good job that offered financial stability in troubled times, even if it meant being constantly uprooted.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Keith’s dad, Reginald Beedie, hiking along the Pitt River (circa 1924), two years before Keith was born. Evelyn and Keith, when Keith was about six months old, 1926. Keith at about nine months. Keith’s father, Reg, holding Keith, circa 1926.

BELOW: Keith playing ball in 1927.
BOTTOM: Keith and his mom,
Evelyn, in Winnipeg, 1928.



Some places were more affected by the economic struggle than others. Nationwide unemployment reached over 30 percent, but the situation was particularly bad in the Prairies. Winnipeg was suffering when the Beedies lived there, but it was even worse in Regina. Saskatchewan saw its provincial income decline by 90 percent in the space of two years, forcing over 65 percent of the population to rely on government relief.

Keith was relatively insulated from the turmoil around him due to his father's good position with General Motors. For him, the toughest part of moving to each new city was getting used to a different house, a different school and, toughest of all, different kids. One of the most difficult parts of the nomadic life for the young boy was making friends in each new place. "I never made any long-lasting friendships then," Keith says. "As soon as I would make a friend, I was gone. New town, make another friend, gone again. I just don't know many kids that I grew up with. I wish that had been different."

The one time it might have been better to leave an old acquaintance behind, Keith wasn't so lucky. He remembers one playtime gone awry: "In Winnipeg there was a little girl I used to play doctor with. One time, we got into a row and I ended up hitting her on the head with a hockey stick. She was alright, but had to go to hospital. She was pretty mad at me, but it didn't really matter a damn because we left Winnipeg not long after. Years later, when I started at Magee High School in Vancouver ... God Almighty, if she wasn't in the same class!"

The two Beedie kids enjoyed spending hours together...

While he didn't notice it so much growing up, looking back on the early years Keith can now understand why his father was so motivated in his career. "The Depression was terrible for people, jobs were hard to come by, money was tight and Dad had a

family to support. Compared to most, Dad was making good money in those days. He was getting \$250 a month while the family lived on the Prairies, up to \$340 in Vancouver. We could afford to have a maid to help Mom around the house. As an adult, I can see why we lived the way we did. But as a kid, back then, it was a lot harder to comprehend." The maids were local farm girls, happy to get \$5 a day, plus room and board. The hired girls who were close to Keith's mother's size were also given her hand-me-down clothes. At a time when some kids were going hungry, the Beedie family's ability to afford a maid demonstrates the relative comfort in which they lived, even though moving so frequently was difficult.

Keith did have at least one consistent playmate in his sister Joan. "As children, we were very close," says Keith. In spite of their gender and age differences, the two Beedie kids enjoyed spending hours together, building models and playing. They were often companions in mischief. Once, he and his sister got up to no good while they were out with their parents shopping. "While Mom and Dad were busy looking at shoes, we snuck off. In those days, x-rays were brand-new technology and shoe departments had small x-ray machines that you could stick your feet into to see the bones. Joan and I thought it was great fun to put our feet into the machine over and over again. I sometimes wonder today if all that radiation exposure is the reason why today I have some foot problems."

The two kids played together but the sibling fun was tempered by the anxiety their mother had about Joan's health. Keith remembers receiving constant admonishment from his mother to play gently with his sister, as she felt that a dangerous bout with rheumatic fever had weakened Joan's heart. "Mother was so protective of Joan, I never knew if Joan was going to drop dead on the spot, or what."

In spite of the close companionship of Joan, life was often lonely for young Keith. He felt the lack of boyhood friendships keenly and didn't find much comfort in his parents' part-time company. Reg, Keith's dad, was busy working hard and Evelyn was not the type to stay home. "She wanted to be out of the house, playing golf, doing her own thing," Keith says. Her busy schedule didn't leave much time for the two young children.

Keith remembers that friction between he and his mother often caused difficulty with his father. "I used to do things to just to bug my mother."

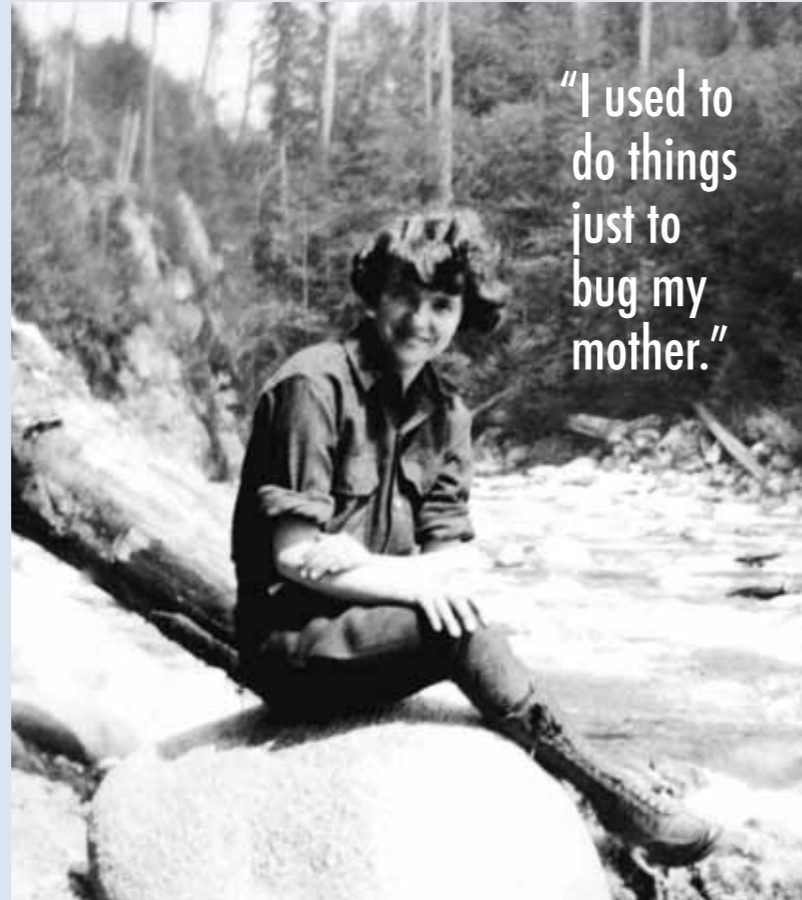


FROM TOP: Keith (left), Reg and Joan share a moment in their backyard, circa 1936. Keith and Joan on the ferry to Vancouver Island, circa 1938.





Keith when he was 10 years old, in Regina, 1936.
RIGHT: Keith's mom loved the outdoors, circa 1924.



"I used to do things just to bug my mother."

We never did get along too well. It would all blow up, then she would tell my father about it and he would deal with me downstairs. He would haul me down by the old furnace, with big duct pipes all around, take off his belt off and wham, right across my rear end. It hurt." One of Keith's earliest memories is of running away when he was four years old, after a disagreement with his mother. "I got as far as a bridge," he says. "I don't remember how I got home, but I know I got the strap from Dad for that one."

The possibility of another more disturbing story concerning Keith's mother was only revealed to him as an adult. Keith is unable to fully straighten his arm as a result of a bad break sustained when he was three. His mother had always told him that he'd tripped over a sandbox while chasing a little girl. Keith didn't remember the incident, so accepted his mother's version of events. However, when Keith was in his late 60s, an aunt told him differently. "She said, 'Forget that business about tripping, your mother did it. I hadn't considered such a thing until then, but knowing my mom as I grew up, it was certainly possible.'"

Though he has difficulty recalling much in the way of warm maternal attention, happier domestic moments with his mother and father do stand out. "In Regina, in 1936, our house on College Avenue had a vacant lot next door. Dad would flood it to make an ice rink for us to play on. While skating around once, I remember looking over to our house and the windows were all steamed up. The minute I saw the windows I knew from all the steam that my mother was making donuts. It felt good." Donuts were a warm treat for a chilly skater to come home to, especially at a time when not everyone was faring as well.

At a time when some kids went hungry, Keith's father was making enough money that the family was able to put plenty of healthy food on the table each meal. "We always had good food and plenty of it when Joan and I were kids. When it came to food, the worst I ever had to deal with was eating things I didn't like: sauerkraut and cabbage salad. We were very lucky."

Keith in front of his father's new Oldsmobile, on the trip from Regina to Vancouver, 1937.



A homemade skating rink was certainly something Keith enjoyed, but few boyhood memories stand out as vividly as the pleasure Keith took in building model airplanes. Even as a small boy, Keith had a fascination with aircraft. His love of planes has stayed with him throughout his life and the roots of his interest can be traced back to constructing balsa and paper model planes with his father. “At five or six, I remember spending time watching my dad making them,” Keith recalls. “I guess I started to like them, too. A few years later I remember Dad and I building a model Curtiss-Robin. It was a high-winged, square, boxy plane that we made with a rubber band to wind the prop. It could really go. It was the first of many.”

In 1937, Keith’s father was transferred back to Vancouver. “People kept saying how lucky we were to be coming here, how mild the weather was and how nice a place it was. When we arrived in Vancouver, I could see that the climate was much better than those other cities we had lived in. I was real happy when I realized this is where we would end up staying.”

The Beedies returned to Vancouver and rented a house on the 5600 block of Angus Drive for six months, then on West Boulevard, near 37th Avenue, in Kerrisdale. “We had the tram tracks right at our back door,” Keith remembers. It was springtime, so Keith finished Grade 6 at Maple Grove Elementary School. Even though the family was not yet settled – there would be two more rental houses before they finally bought a home on Marguerite Street at 33rd Avenue – for Keith it marked the end of the nomadic years.

“When we arrived in Vancouver, I could see that the climate was much better than those other cities we had lived in. I was real happy when I realized this is where we would end up staying.”

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

Keith settled into life in Vancouver. “I started to feel at home,” Keith says. When the Beedies moved, it was only a few blocks, not halfway across the country. Keith attended Maple Grove Elementary School, then Point Grey Junior High in Grade Seven, finally moving to Magee High School in Grade Ten.

Keith’s relationship with school was lukewarm. He went to class, enjoyed his friends and got done what he needed to, but his natural love of learning wasn’t ignited by his academic experiences. “I liked geography well enough, but nothing else,” Keith says. “My worst subjects in school were woodworking and drafting.” An incredible fact given the time Keith spent tinkering with model airplanes, playing with tools, putting things together and rigging up inventions. “I had lots of trial-and-error experience and could do all the things the teachers wanted, just not the way they wanted them done,” Keith says. “And I wasn’t as fussy with the details as I should have been. I didn’t have the patience.” To compensate for all the frustration at school, Keith went home and worked with wood and tools for fun. “Mechanical tasks intrigued me, always have. I want to know how things work, figure it out for myself. I hate to think I can’t do something.” Avoiding schoolwork for his own projects didn’t help Keith’s marks, but his need to understand how things were put together ultimately came in handy. When faced with a problem, Keith knew he could take it apart and find a way to solve it.



“Mechanical tasks intrigued me, always have. I want to know how things work.”

THE CURTISS-ROBIN AND DOUGLAS “WRONGWAY” CORRIGAN

The Curtiss-Robin plane may have caught Keith and his father’s attention due to a small measure of aviation fame the plane received in connection with the legendary flight of Douglas “Wrongway” Corrigan in 1938. After flying non-stop between California and New York, Corrigan filed plans for a trans-Atlantic flight from New York to Dublin, Ireland. The Aviation Authority turned him down, as the long-haul flight was still considered much too far for a factory-built aircraft like the Curtiss-Robin. Corrigan had rescued the plane from the trash heap for the princely sum of \$310 and rebuilt it. A disappointed Corrigan relented and filed new flight plans to return to California. Taking off at dawn the next morning, onlookers were surprised to see the Curtiss-Robin bank sharply 180 degrees after take-off, disappearing into a cloud bank, headed east, not west. The next day Corrigan showed up in Dublin, stepping off his plane and asking sheepishly, “Where am I?” He insisted that he had turned his compass upside down by “mistake” and flown in the wrong direction. Corrigan earned himself a new nickname and instant anti-hero status. His pilot license was suspended for five days, during which time he recrossed the Atlantic, this time by boat. He arrived back in New York and was given a huge tickertape parade. Corrigan’s grand adventure was guaranteed to capture the imagination of a plane-crazy little boy and his dad.



Douglas Corrigan and the Curtiss-Robin at Roosevelt Field in New York in 1938, a few days before his famous transatlantic flight.



Joan in front of the Beedies' Vancouver home, circa 1937.

Keith's teenaged imagination was piqued by the romance and heroism of the soldiers and airmen fighting overseas.

Some of Keith's construction projects were small; others were significant. "One time, I built myself a room in the basement of our house," Keith says. "I made a bunk bed to sleep in, built it really high, close to the ceiling. I used inner tubes for springs and an old mattress. I had the foot of the bed pushed against the wall and made a little trap door to outside, covered by a secret panel. I could climb out whenever I wanted." His parents didn't lavish much praise on him for his ingenuity, but they didn't stop him from experimenting either. "They didn't pay much attention to what I was doing down there. I figure it kept me out of their hair," says Keith.

While constructing fanciful projects was good fun on a slow afternoon, Keith's real love continued to be model airplanes. What had started as a pastime to share with his dad quickly grew into a passion. He spent hours painstakingly putting together miniature versions of his favourite planes. "Hurricanes, Spitfires and the Lysander. They were all as fragile as heck, made of balsa and rice paper. I ran out of room to keep them. I had them hanging from the ceiling, but there were so many that they kept bumping into each other," says Keith.

For a growing boy of 13 with an intense love affair with planes, the outbreak of World War II in 1939 afforded Keith new scope for his hobby. "I remember getting ready for school on the morning of September 3, 1939, and hearing the announcement on the radio that the war had started. My mother was crying," Keith recalls. His imagination was fired by the war news. His passion for flying came alive hearing the stories of flying aces and air battles. In the early days as the war in Europe was gaining momentum, the importance of planes for the Allies was becoming clear. The feeling at the time was that the war would be over quickly if the proper resources could be devoted to the fight. People everywhere were rallying together in Victory Drives to collect material and funds for the war effort. Keith's teenaged imagination was piqued by the romance and heroism of the soldiers and airmen fighting overseas. When he heard about Vancouver's Air Supremacy Drive, he knew he'd found his cause.

Keith's entrepreneurial spirit was ignited. He looked about for ways he could help and landed on a surefire idea. Living about six blocks from the Quilchena Golf Course, where he often caddied, he identified the golfers on their way around the course as an untapped fundraising bonanza. The way the course was set up, the golfers all had to cross Arbutus Street in the middle

of their games. All Keith had to do was erect a lemonade stand on the sidewalk at the crosswalk and offer golfers a cool glass of free lemonade. In exchange, he would ask for a donation to the Air Supremacy Drive. The only thing missing was the stand.

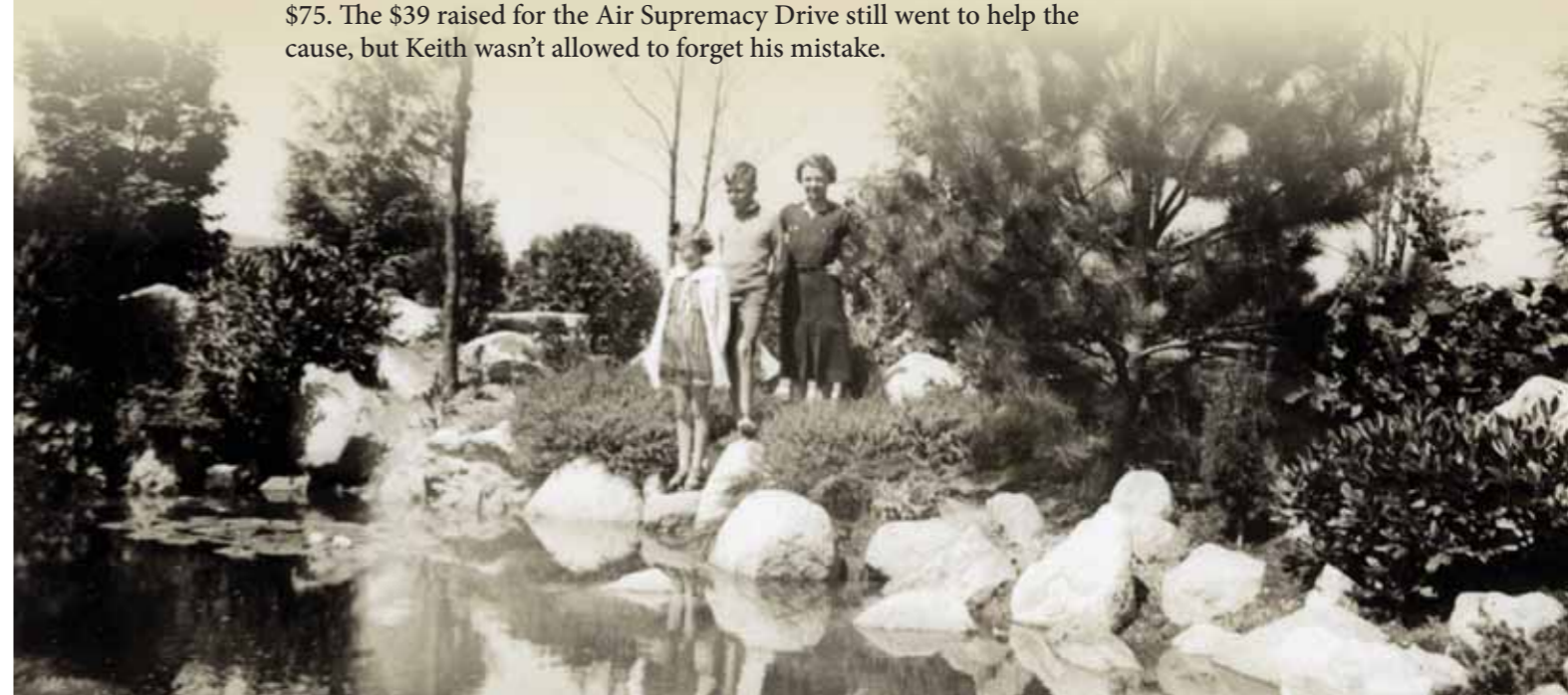
Keith immediately threw himself into his new construction project. "I got really into it," Keith says. He scavenged through the garage and basement for materials. Once he'd built the stand, he added a small roof to offer his patrons shade while they drank their lemonade. Standing back and appraising his work, Keith felt there was something missing. The stand wasn't flashy enough, it wasn't eye-catching. He took another look through the things in the house. He was delighted to find a large roll of shiny silver material that was precisely the type of thing he was looking for to jazz up the structure. "The fabric was ideal. I cut it up and used it all over. I lined the whole thing, tacked it all over the outside. I spent a long time making it perfect, working out all the little wrinkles so it was flawless."

Keith's business plan, cause and construction proved irresistible to the golfers who lined up to purchase lemonade. Throughout the day, money poured into the young man's collection for the Air Supremacy Drive. In the end, he raised more than \$39, "a lot of money for those days."

Keith was proud of his endeavour, but it didn't take long for his ingenuity in material collection to show a downside. Reg came home to gather his projector and screen in order to give a presentation at work. After tearing apart the basement looking for the screen, he stormed upstairs to ask the family if they had seen it. Keith's heart sank when he realized that he had cut up his father's screen to decorate his stand. It sank further when his dad informed him that a new one cost \$75. The \$39 raised for the Air Supremacy Drive still went to help the cause, but Keith wasn't allowed to forget his mistake.



FROM TOP: Evelyn Beedie with Joan and Keith in front of the Quilchena Golf Course clubhouse in Vancouver, circa 1938. Joan, Keith and Evelyn.



KEEN TO MAKE A BUCK

Keith took up caddying. He started out by walking the links with his mother.

Keith was motivated to earn money for the war effort, but he was also eager from a young age to find ways to make money for himself. Keith had always wanted a bike. He'd been a stamp collector as a little boy in Regina, but ended up trading all his stamps away in exchange for rides on a friend's bike. Once in Vancouver, Keith's father was unwilling to offer his son an allowance, but he did propose a modest fee in return for household chores. "He wanted me to learn the value of a dollar," says Keith.

In addition to odd jobs around the house, Keith took up caddying. He started out by walking the links with his mother. She showed him the game and taught him all about club selection. His mother was runner-up to city champion one year and golfed every moment she could, so she knew everyone at the local course. She introduced him around and soon he had as much caddying work as he wanted. He got 50 cents per round, plus tips. He enjoyed being outdoors and listening to business being done as the men played. It was better than selling lemonade on the sidelines. In those days caddies carried the bag.

BELOW: Evelyn Beedie and her golf friends, out on the links, 1939. Quilchena Golf Course.



Soon Keith had saved up the money he needed to buy his own bike. His big day had finally arrived. "My father took me to the store and we looked at all the bikes that were lined up.



Eventually Dad talked me into buying a bike called a Durkopp," Keith says. "It was on sale for a good price, so I saved a few bucks. But it was a German-made bike and I sure got yelled at a lot as the war started. I sure would have liked to have a CCM like everybody else." Despite some early misgivings about the bike's brand and appearance, Keith's new set of wheels opened up a fresh world of earning opportunities.

He took an after-school job as a prescription delivery boy for a drugstore at the corner of 37th and West Boulevard, a job he held for more than a year. "It felt like all I did was bike up and down hills," says Keith. "I delivered mostly to the Women's Hospital on Oak Street and the Willow Pavilion, between Oak and Cambie, rain or shine – mostly rain. It was quite a job." In exchange, he received 20 cents an hour, plus free ice cream and chocolate bars. Eventually, he moved inside the drugstore as a soda jerk. His new position was warm and dry, and it came with a 5-cent-an-hour raise.

Never one to take it easy, Keith also worked as a newspaper delivery boy, another job that took him into the West Side of Vancouver. He had a delivery route that covered homes between Arbutus and Granville and 15th Avenue to 25th Avenue. Most of the homes were on huge lots, many up hills with long, steep driveways. When the time came for the monthly payments, Keith had to knock on the kitchen doors out back, often being told by the maids to come back for lack of cash. "It was awful," Keith says. "I had to pick up the papers at a local garage, then stack them in the bike basket on my handlebars," says Keith. "They weighed a ton, especially on Saturdays when they were full of flyers. There were no plastic bags in those days to keep them dry. We just packed them up and covered them in canvas to protect them." The tower of heavy newspapers on the front of his bike made balancing and steering difficult, if not impossible. One rainy day, Keith lost control of his bike in the middle of the intersection of Granville and 25th. "There was too much weight right over the handlebars and did I ever topple over. I was all right, but it was so bad that a motorist stopped to help me. He tried to pick up the papers, but it was no use, they were everywhere." Keith did his best to gather up what he could, but the papers were strewn across the entire intersection and those he salvaged were soaking wet. He had no choice but to make his way back to the shack and make a call to



Keith and Joan with their dog Spot, 1937.

"I delivered mostly to the Women's Hospital ... rain or shine – mostly rain. It was quite a job."

the newspaper office to report the accident and ask for replacements. “They were mad,” says Keith. “And I wasn’t off the hook. They dropped off the extras, which I had to pay for, and I had to finish my route. That was rough.”

Working a couple of jobs meant that Keith usually had a bit of money in his pocket. He spent his cash on supplies for his model airplanes, but he also enjoyed socializing. “In those days, you and a girlfriend

He loved everything about the skating scene: the smooth, fast surface, the crowds and all the pretty girls.



Keith's cherished roller skates were bought for \$15.

could take the streetcar downtown, watch a movie and share a grilled cheese and a Coke, all for a dollar,” says Keith. Another favourite pastime was roller skating. “I learned how to skate on the road in front of the house. Me and some other guys, we’d strap on our skates and play hockey with a tennis ball. It was pretty rough and we were always avoiding cars but we got pretty good at it. Then somebody told me to go try the Roller Bowl on Hornby Street downtown. Boy, it was so nice and smooth compared to the road.” Keith couldn’t use his outdoor wheels inside the Roller Bowl, and after renting a few times, he decided he liked skating enough to buy an indoor pair of his own for \$15. Those skates still sit in Keith’s house today, worn out but in one piece. He soon discovered that he loved everything about the skating scene: the smooth, fast surface, the crowds and all the pretty girls. He was good enough that he sometimes got into the Roller Bowl for free in exchange for acting as a “skate cop.” It was his job to make sure that no one skated too fast and that there was no mischief on the rink.

To earn extra money for Christmas in 1941, Keith took on some casual work at Woodward’s Toyland. It was the pre-Christmas rush and the department store hired people to work around the clock assembling toys and packaging them up. It wasn’t as exciting as spending time on his own company would be. “I was putting together wagons and bikes,” says

Keith. “God, it was boring.” He was just coming off the graveyard shift after spending his third night straight surrounded by dolls and train sets. He was tired and irritable.

The only bright spot in the experience had been chatting a bit to a cute girl who was also working nights. “I kind of liked her,” says Keith. “She’d talk to me a little, but she wasn’t really giving me the time of day the way I wanted.” The two were getting ready to leave in the morning after work and Keith decided he had to do something to get her attention. As she turned to go to the workshop, Keith took drastic action. “I picked up a little kid’s ball that was sitting there. It was made of a soft cloth, so I threw it at her. I don’t really know what I was thinking. I never could throw straight.” The shot, intended as a playful flirtation, misfired badly. Instead of hitting the girl, it flew wide and smashed a bare light bulb hanging from the ceiling. The sparks that flew off as the light shattered went everywhere. Keith watched in horror as the Christmas decorations scattered throughout Toyland ignited and started to burn. The stuffed toys also went up in flames, causing the fire to spread. The smoke and heat set off the sprinklers. Whatever wasn’t being wrecked by the flames was being soaked by water. Keith’s survival instincts took over and the cute girl was quickly forgotten. “I flew down the stairs and didn’t look back,” says Keith. “I never did go back, not even for the three days’ pay they owed me.”

“I don’t really know what I was thinking. I never could throw straight.”

Since he disappeared that morning, never to return, he didn’t learn the fate of the Toyland contents until years later, and then only by accident. When fundraising for a piece of medical equipment he was gifting to Burnaby Hospital, Keith approached the Woodward’s Foundation for a donation. When he met with a Woodward descendent, he introduced himself by sheepishly telling him the story of the bad throw. “I was shocked when he told me that he remembered talk about the incident,” says Keith. “I guess they weren’t too pleased because the water messed up a bunch of the toys.”

Keith never learned the value of the toys destroyed by his bad aim, but the next time he was connected to a Woodward’s Toyland flood there was a dollar figure of over \$1 million in damages. Decades later, The Beedie Group purchased the old Simmons mattress building on Parker Street in Vancouver. The building was being used for storage and the Beedies inherited Woodward’s as a tenant. The department store was using the bottom two floors of the four-storey structure for six months of the year to store toys. The U-shaped structure was an unusual design, spanning a

One rule of the program was particularly disappointing. The Cadets were not permitted to go up in the aircraft.

seldom-used railway line. A six-inch sprinkler line ran from one part of the building over railway tracks to get to another part. Trains passed under the water pipe without incident, until one quiet Saturday when a brand-new boxcar ran down the spur line for the first time in 10 years. The larger boxcar burst the six-inch sprinkler pipe and soaked the toys destined for Toyland. This time around it wasn't Keith's fault, "but what are the odds of that sort of thing happening twice?" asks Keith.

Back in 1942, with the first Toyland episode behind him, Keith fulfilled a childhood dream by joining the Air Cadets. For a kid who loved everything about aviation, it was thrilling to learn about Morse code, shooting techniques and aircraft recognition. The latter was particularly easy for Keith, who had been studying planes on his own for years. He loved being an Air Cadet, but one rule of the program was particularly disappointing. The Cadets were not permitted to go up in the aircraft. That summer, a group of Cadets from around Vancouver were invited to spend a

Keith (back row, fifth from right) when he was 13 years old, with his model airplane club in front of Point Grey Junior High School, circa 1938.



Library and Archives Canada, PA-197486.



A ground crew refuels a Westland Lysander at Patricia Bay, 1944. Keith spent time at the Pat Bay RCAF station on Vancouver Island as a young Air Cadet.

week at the Royal Canadian Air Force station at Pat Bay, on Vancouver Island. Keith was thrilled to be asked to take part. When the big day came, Keith arrived, along with a number of other Air Cadets. As they arrived at the dock, they were told to board the ferry. When everyone was on board, the officer in charge called out for everyone to line up and register. As Keith was getting in line, a boy he'd just met grabbed him by the arm and pulled him behind a small smokestack. "He told me, 'Don't go out there,'" says Keith. "When I protested that they were calling us, he said to stick with him to have a good time."

The officer finished making his list and Keith and his new friend slipped back into the group undetected. "I followed him like a little lamb," says Keith. "He was a street-smart kid." No longer on the officer's list, the two boys were free to move about as they pleased. When they arrived at the station, Keith and his friend slipped away again and talked an airman into letting them have a couple of empty bunks for the week and setting them up in the mess hall for meals. "That meant we didn't have to put up with the rigmarole the rest of the Cadets were put through," says Keith. The next day, the same RCAF pilot asked if they would like to go up in a flying boat, a Stranraer. "Naturally, we said yes," says Keith, who had never been up in a plane.

The two friends had a great flight, hitting speeds of over 90 mph in the old flying boat. As they flew over the station, they looked down to see the Cadets parading up and down in the heat of the day. They shared a good laugh over what they had escaped. However, it wasn't quite so funny when the next day, August 23, the same aircraft crashed in action against a Japanese submarine. Eight crewmen ditched alive, but were never seen again. "When we learned what had happened, we felt very fortunate," says Keith.

Keith and his friend spent the rest of the week learning their way around the station, including going out on a crash boat, before rejoining their group to return home on the ferry. "No one was any the wiser," says Keith of their ruse. "It was a week to remember for a 16-year-old airplane lover."

The RCAF pilot asked if they would like to go up in a flying boat, a Stranraer. "Naturally, we said yes," says Keith.

CHAPTER 2

Learning the HARD Way



Reginald Beedie and a friend pose with her Model T Ford in 1930.

MISCHIEF ON FOUR WHEELS

Keith was now a master of two wheels on his bike and eight wheels on skates, but he was getting to the age when the four wheels on a car were becoming increasingly intriguing. As an employee of General Motors, Keith's dad was entitled to a company car, so the family always had a nice automobile. Unfortunately for Keith, it was etched in stone in the company regulations that the car was never to be driven by family members.

The temptation of the car in the garage proved too much for Keith, particularly with his dad away so frequently on business. "I had my own key made once while Dad was out of town," Keith says. "My mom was golfing all the time, so she was gone a lot. She didn't take a lot of notice of my comings and goings, so when no one was home, I took to giving myself secret driving lessons."

For a while, the car trips went off without a hitch. Keith would take friends on joyrides or out on the town. Suddenly, however, a small glitch appeared that made sneaking around in the company car a little tougher for Keith. "One time another guy and I were out in Dad's car. We had picked up a couple of girls and were taking them on a drive around Stanley Park. We found a place to park and get to know each other a little better. All of sudden, just as we're getting comfortable, the horn started to blow non-stop." Keeping a low profile in a car you shouldn't be driving is made considerably more difficult by a broken horn. It also put a quick end to the friendly mood for the two couples inside. Keith frantically tried to silence the horn, but to no effect. "Eventually I lifted the hood and disconnected the battery cable." That stopped the horn, but it was clear that the outing was spoiled. Unnerved, Keith anxiously reattached the battery, half-expecting the offending horn to restart. He was relieved to discover the car was back to normal. "I wanted to get the heck out of there. I drove it home and put Dad's car right back in the garage."

But Keith couldn't leave the car alone for long. He got his nerve back and tried again. In no time, he was back to his sneaky car habits. "Once, I pulled the car into the parking lot of the Safeway store at the corner of 41st Avenue and Yew Street. I nudged the back wheel on a curb, and would you believe it, the horn started up again?" Keith panicked. Standing out like a sore thumb in Stanley Park was one thing. Kerrisdale, however, was a different story, it was home

"I had my own key made once while Dad was out of town."



FROM TOP: Evelyn, circa 1930. Joan in front of the Beedie home, circa 1938.

turf. “People were looking, and there was a good chance they knew Dad.” Luckily, using the same battery trick, Keith managed a quick escape. “I started to wonder if Dad had the car booby-trapped or something!”

Twice burned, Keith took a break from driving the car until he was confident the horn issue was resolved. When the problem was finally fixed, he felt he was ready for his boldest car caper to date. He really missed being out on the road, even though he had nowhere specific to go. So, when his parents told him they were heading out for a movie one evening, he hatched a plan. “They were going to the Park Theatre, on Cambie Street. After they left in the car, I found out the start and end times for the movie, grabbed my spare car key and headed out the door.” Keith took the bus to Cambie Street and scoured the streets around the theatre until he spotted his father’s car. He jumped in and took off on a pleasure cruise while his parents were inside watching the movie. Feeling confident about his plan, Keith kept an eye on the time. Before the movie let out, he drove the car back to the theatre, expecting to have it parked, waiting for his mom and dad. It had all seemed so flawless, until Keith turned the corner and realized that the parking spot where his father had left the car was taken. With a racing heart, he drove around and around, frantically searching for a spot close enough that his parents might not realize the car had moved. Watching the clock, he knew he was running out of time. The last thing he wanted was for his parents to spot him cruising the streets on their way out of the movie. He found a space one block further down the street from where he’d found the car, parked it and quickly walked away.

“It was a tense trip home on the bus,” Keith says. “I got back, but my parents weren’t there. I waited and waited. Oh my God Almighty, I was terrified.” When his parents finally walked through the door, Keith could hear them arguing. “My dad was insisting that he knew where he’d parked. My mom was telling him that cars don’t just move themselves. I didn’t say a word.” The debate continued, but Keith was never a suspect. He was relieved to have escaped discovery, but he felt uncomfortable about being the cause of his parents’ fight. Many years later, Keith was still bothered by the image of his parents’ argument that day. As his father neared the end of his battle with cancer in 1975, Keith could keep quiet no longer. Approaching his sick father as he lay dying in Royal Columbian Hospital, Keith quietly confessed his role in the car mystery. “I had to tell him,” Keith says. “Even as weak as he was, dad slapped his knee and said, ‘I knew it!’ Two days later he passed away.” Case closed, conscience soothed.

“My mom was telling him that cars don’t just move themselves. I didn’t say a word.”

BOEING DAYS AND CATALINA LOVE

From then on, even when Reg was out of town, the car stayed put. Instead, Keith limited himself to going for drives with his father, resigned to the fact that he wasn’t the one driving. One day Keith joined his father on a trip to visit a friend at the Boeing Plant 2 that was located on Georgia Street. The sight of the operations at the plant thrilled Keith. He was agog at all the activity. Boeing, the aircraft manufacturer, had three plants running in Vancouver in the 1930s and 1940s: one on Terminal Avenue, a second close to Stanley Park and a third, much larger, operation out at the airport. For a kid who had grown up building planes out of balsa wood, there was nothing more exciting than going to the place where they made the real thing.

At that time, Plant 2 was building wings for the Mosquito. The planes were made of wood, which was an unusual choice. As Keith describes it, “the planes were a half-assed kind of secret,” which only made the whole operation there more exciting to observe. While his dad chatted, Keith took in every detail of what was going on around him. “Planes, planes, planes were all I could think about,” he says. It would have been impossible for Reg to not notice Keith’s intense interest in plane construction. In 1942, with Grade 10 nearly done and school summer holidays coming up, he used his connections to get Keith a job as a gopher at Plant 3, at the airport.

“Planes, planes, planes were all I could think about.”

THE MOSQUITO

One of Keith’s favourite planes from World War II was the de Havilland Mosquito, first introduced in 1941. It was the fastest operational aircraft at the time (a record it held for two years), with a top speed of 439 mph and was originally designed to be an unarmed bomber. However, the Mosquito quickly proved more versatile than anticipated. It was built out of wood, using advanced construction methods that easily shaped the wooden frame.

It was lightweight and very fast, and was soon performing as a day- and night-time, high- and low-altitude, tactical and marine bomber. The wooden plane was not picked up by the German radar, making it undetectable. It famously flew over Berlin in 1943, knocking out the main broadcasting station in the middle of a speech by Hermann Göring, causing his legendary hatred of the aircraft to become even more personal.

The Mosquito proved to be such a menace to the Germans that shooting down a single aircraft counted as two victories. After incredible success for the Allies in World War II, production on the “Wooden Wonder” or “Timber Terror,” as it became known, ceased in 1950. The total number produced was 7,781.



The summer job fulfilled every one of Keith's greatest wishes. Not only was he around planes all day every day at the Boeing plant, his job as a general gopher entitled him to a coveted yellow button, #6625, a pass that allowed Keith access to every part of the plant.

The colour-coded button system at Boeing ensured that people didn't stray into areas where they shouldn't be. With the war in full force, security was an important issue and the proper colour of badge needed to be worn in plain sight at all times. A curious boy with a love of planes certainly wouldn't have been permitted to satisfy his every wandering whim unchecked. But as an official gopher with the near-magical yellow button, Keith had what amounted to an all-access pass. "I was able to see everything that was going on around the plant and I soaked up how the planes were produced, start to finish. It was amazing. I loved that kind of thing."

Once, Keith found out the hard way that all-access can mean too much access for an over-eager kid. While delivering paperwork on his rounds, he discovered a couple of plane blueprints lying out in the open. The sight of all the aircraft dimensions was irresistible. He took a quick look around, rolled the paper up and smuggled the plans home, excited about being able to build a miniature version based on real specifications. It was a dream come true. He quickly discovered that the dream was too good. When his father realized that his son was in possession of classified plans, he panicked. "Dad made me feel like I was breaching national security bringing these home. He just about had a fit," says Keith. Reg ordered his son to pack the plans back up and return them to exactly where he'd found them. Keith, terrified that he was going to end up in jail at 16, did as he was told. But not before he sketched out all the plans he could. He built a model based on his drawings, secretly wondering exactly how much trouble he'd be in if anyone found out about the source of his information.

At the end of his summer vacation, heading back to school at Magee seemed like punishment to Keith. Spending endless hours in the classroom being fed information from books paled in comparison with the hands-on learning at Boeing and the thrill of proximity to such important and exciting work. It didn't take long before the lure of the plant proved irresistible. Keith decided that he couldn't wait until the following summer to get back to the planes. The war effort was growing and Keith believed deeply in the importance of the aircraft he was helping to build. No more balsa wood facsimiles for Keith; he was determined to build real planes out of aluminum. It was model airplane building writ large.

"Dad made me feel like I was breaching national security ... He just about had a fit."

BOEING IN B.C.

While many think of Boeing as a uniquely Seattle-area company, the airplane manufacturers have a strong connection with B.C.'s Lower Mainland. The Canadian division was started when the company purchased the Hoffer-Beeching shipyard in Coal Harbour in 1927. The location produced yachts, fishing boats and ferries, and when it reopened as a Boeing operation in 1929, it added Model 40A mailplanes to its product lines. It became Boeing's first seaplane manufacturing and test site. The company founder, William Boeing, took advantage of the yacht-building facilities, commissioning his own 125-foot yacht, the *Taconite*, in 1930. The original boat still operates under the same name as a charter yacht in Vancouver.

In 1939, with the start of World War II, Boeing began work on a huge factory, later known as Plant 3, on Sea Island in Richmond. During the war, Boeing Aircraft of Canada built 362 PBV Catalina flying boats and amphibians designed by Consolidated Aircraft of San Diego and 16 British-designed Blackburn Shark torpedo aircraft. The midsections of nearly a thousand B-29 bombers were also built in Richmond, before being shipped to Renton, Washington, for completion.

The plant on Sea Island started with just 175 workers when it opened, but the orders prompted by the war swelled that number to over 7,000 by 1945. As soon as victory was declared against Japan in August, the plant was closed, ending an interesting chapter in Vancouver's wartime history and leaving the 7,000 workers unemployed. The Coal Harbour manufacturing facility was also closed and was sold to the BC Packers by November 1945.



FROM TOP: A Catalina at the Boeing Sea Island plant, 1942. Boeing employees and officials gather to watch the first bomber roll out of the Sea Island plant in 1942.

Keith quit school and returned to Boeing, this time taking a full-time position riveting Catalina wings in Ship 33. No longer a gopher, he lost his yellow button and was more restricted in his movements around the plant. On the upside, however, he knew planes inside and out, a great benefit when you are assembling them. His work was impressive and he was soon recognized as one of the fastest and most accurate riveters in the shop, no mean feat since there were three shifts and dozens of riveters working on the wings. Sometimes, though, pride in his speed and efficiency got him into trouble.

Riveting wasn't a solitary job. Each riveter was partnered up with a buckler. A buckler was a person who manoeuvred a metal bar that had to be held behind the rivets as they were driven into the metal of the plane parts. Since Keith was working on wings, his buckler had to climb inside the wing to get access to the rivet ends. "The buckler had to be a slim gal

Workers assembling a PBV airplane at Boeing's Sea Island plant.



Photos from top: City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 1184-1185, CVA 1184-1148 and CVA 1184-1166, Jack Lindsay.



Reg (left) and Keith
in 1943.

**'When the whistle goes,
finish the rivet you're on
and quit. End of story.'**

to get right in the wing's tight spaces, but even so, it wasn't like it was easy for her. At the very end of the wing, she would be reaching right out to get the last of the rivets. It took three or four minutes to crawl from one end of the wing to the other, because it was darn difficult to get through the ribs." The more you worked with one person, the better the routine you could get into to work quickly.

One day, Keith was partnered with a new bucker. The pair worked together well enough for most of the day. As the five-minute clean-up whistle started to blow, Keith was near the end of a wing, with one last string of rivets to complete. "It would have taken me maybe 30, 40 seconds or less to get them done. But the bucker signalled that she wanted to come out. I figured, if she came out, it would take someone else three or four minutes to get all the way back in there to finish the job. I wanted to finish, so I did. She complained to the union shop steward." Keith was reprimanded for ignoring the whistle. He was incensed. To his mind, it didn't make sense to quit just seconds away from completing a job. He knew he had made the obvious choice to continue working. It seemed a simple matter of efficiency. "I figured that if she came out, another bucker would have to spend about four minutes to get in and then four minutes to get out, with the riveter waiting for eight minutes." Keith figured that it didn't make sense to spend an extra 16 minutes on a job that could take less than one minute after the clean-up whistle. "That was my first dealing with a union and I've had no respect for them ever since. The steward said, 'When the whistle goes, finish the rivet you're on and quit. End of story.' He told me, 'If I see you working after the whistle again, you're out of here.' Well, it happened again."

As a result of his run-in with the shop steward, Keith was transferred from riveting, despite his speed and accuracy. He didn't have just his job to lose because of his altercation, but also the perks that came with the job. He was moved to the lofting department, tasked with completing tiny templates for plane parts. "The work was so finicky and time-consuming. Two or three days to do one tiny piece! I told them that no plane that used any of my templates would be able to fly. The work drove me nuts. I lasted three days."

Fortunately, Keith had been spending every evening at the Roller Bowl. He went roller skating every night for an entire year. His evenings were spent getting to know lots of new people, doing waltzes, the four-step and the fourteen-step. One of his partners was a talented dancer.

"She was a great skater," says Keith. "When I met her I didn't realize she worked at Boeing, and she didn't realize that I did. It just didn't come up in conversation." Once it did, she revealed to Keith that she was the head of the Boeing Social Club. "She organized and ran all the parties and picnics. Now that there were three shifts of people working, it was too much for her. She needed help. She got me the job as her assistant in addition to my regular work." In no time, Keith was putting together parties and organizing roller-skating trips to rinks around Washington State. Most importantly, being the assistant to the head of the Boeing Social Club came with a big perk: a yellow button.

Keith was 17 years old, looking forward to joining the Air Force. He'd hoped to spend the time he had until then building the planes he imagined he'd be flying. His plan had been on track until his encounter with the union. Instead, Keith joined the RCAF at 17½, then left Boeing behind to work with the City of Vancouver as a rod man, the person who holds the vertical measure for city surveyors. He had to wait until he was 18 – a whole six months away – to be sent for training. There was nothing to do but wait. The only thing Keith wanted to do was join the fight. The news, filled with reports of daring exploits and dangerous adventure, was almost more than he could bear. In his imagination, he was in the cockpit of a Spitfire, flying over Europe, fighting the Germans. In reality, he was a rod man, putting in time at the City, just waiting. As a rod man, he felt even more isolated from the action than he had working at Boeing. The months crawled by until June rolled around. Keith was ready to go.

**There was
nothing to do
but wait. The
only thing
Keith wanted
to do was join
the fight.**





A Catalina patrol float plane, circa 1944.

Photo: City of Vancouver Archives, P.I.4.

THE CATALINA

After working on the wings of so many Catalinas, Keith developed a lifelong love of the plane. In a small but significant way, he helped construct one of the most widely used aircraft in World War II. Often considered awkward or clumsy, the “flying boat” proved to be an extraordinarily dependable machine. It had an exceptional operational range, and it could land on water anywhere in the open ocean, making it a very versatile aircraft. A construction cost of only \$90,000 added to its popularity. The Catalina had a wide range of uses, from anti-submarine warfare, to marine patrol and search and rescue, to night-attack capabilities. It even served as a commercial passenger plane for two years during the war, flying for Quantas in Australia.

The Catalina was so successful that, unlike many other war planes, it was commonly found in commercial use in peacetime. Many were converted for aerial firefighting, and others were used for mail service to remote areas. The last active military Catalina wasn't retired until the 1980s. An estimated 4,051 were built.

Despite a deep affection for the Catalina – and despite a couple of close calls – Keith has never been up in his favourite plane. Ironically, Betty has flown in one. She went up with her sister's husband, Frank, who was an aircraft mechanic going north for a repair job, before she met Keith. For Betty it was fun, but no big deal; for Keith, such a chance would have been a dream come true.

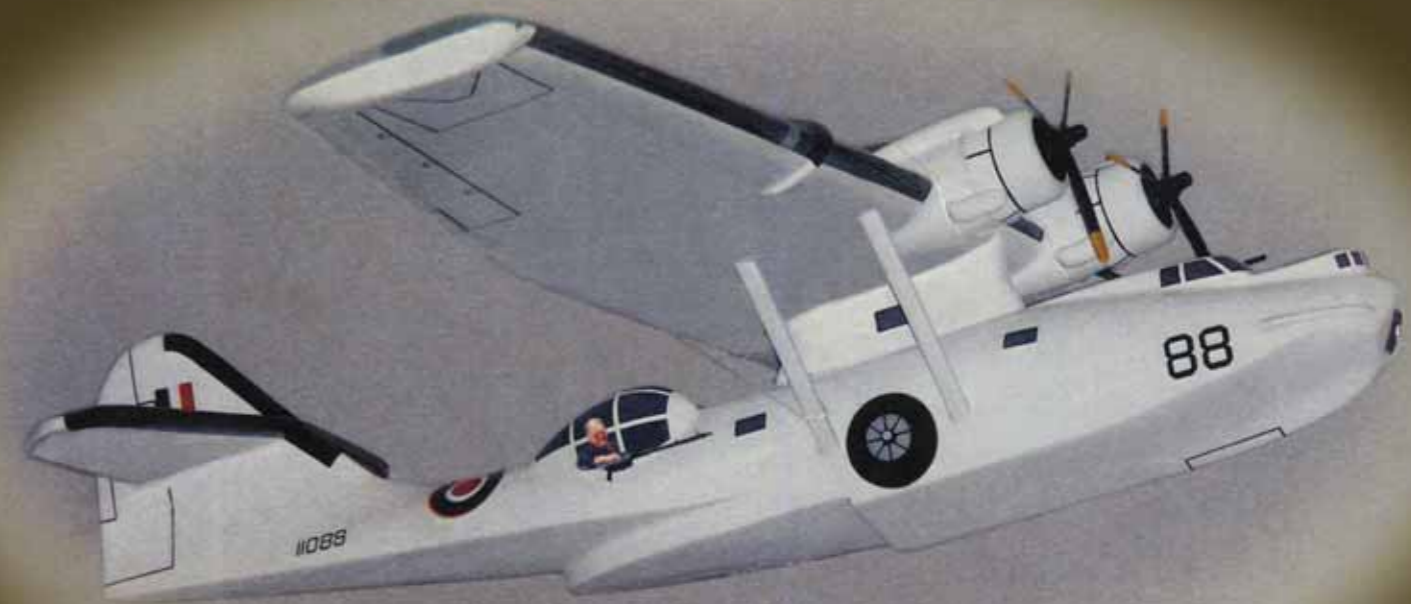
Years later, George Hayhoe noticed a Catalina parked outside the Nanaimo airport. It looked as though it had been there for years, slowly falling apart. Knowing how much Keith loved the plane, George told him what he'd seen. Keith immediately contacted the Comox Air Museum to find out if they would be interested in displaying the Catalina if he could purchase it. “I spoke to Captain Day, who was very excited at the idea,” says Keith.

Keith managed to track down the owner of the plane, a captain in the Miramar military. After a number of emails back and forth, the two agreed on a purchase price of \$80,000 for the Catalina. “I knew I needed to get an agreement from the museum before I went through with it, though,” says Keith. While Captain Day was keen, the final decision had to go to a committee. The problem was that most of the committee was on summer vacation and they wouldn't be able to hand down a decision for at least two months. Keith explained that he couldn't wait that long. Instead, he contacted Stocky Edwards, a renowned RCAF fighter pilot of his acquaintance who sat on the same committee. Stocky said he would expedite the committee's decision. “A few days later, I got a letter from Comox. They said ‘no,’ because they had no way to transport the plane, no place to store it and not enough volunteers to refurbish it. I was extremely disappointed after all the time I had spent on it.” The plane still sits exposed to the elements in the Nanaimo Airport.

EXCERPT FROM “THE WAR WORKER,” BY DAVID TAYLOR

David Taylor, an amateur poet, worked at the Boeing plant in Vancouver. He wrote this poem about his experiences during the war. Taylor gifted the poem to the Sea Island Historical Society. The poem gives a taste of what life at Boeing would have felt like for workers like Keith.

Out on Sea Island at Boeing's big plant
the War Workers labor away.
They're building Catalina and Canso, aircraft
to hasten the dawn of V-day.
The big planes are starting to take on their shape
as they move out of Shop ninety nine.
Each day they keep growing like some living thing
as they move down the assembly line.
Some planes now completed are out on the tarmac
the Airforce inspection is through.
This scene brings a thrill that would never be told,
by old War Workers like me and like you.
Then it's on with the routine of building more
aircraft, for the boys overseas are still dying.
We must “Carry On” as the War Posters say “Buy
Bonds” just to help “Keep ‘Em Flying.”



CHAPTER 3

Home and AWAY



Keith as a young RCAF recruit, 1944.

HURRY UP AND WAIT

In June 1944, Keith Beedie's excitement mounted as he got closer to the day he could finally leave for Manning Depot. The week of his birthday proved to be historic, and not just for Keith. June 6, 1944, was D-Day. The huge Allied offensive landed 130,000 troops on the beaches of Normandy by air and sea. It signalled the beginning of the end of World War II and elation swept through the Allied countries. People started to talk about the troops coming home. Keith was as relieved as any to hear of this success on the French coast, but his happiness was tinged by disappointment. He knew the tide had turned and the time he had left to contribute to the war effort was shrinking. If he wanted to get overseas, he had to get over there fast.

Keith woke up on the morning of his birthday on June 13 with one idea: no more waiting for his parents or anyone else to give the okay, he was an adult. Right after breakfast Keith headed down to the recruitment office to pick up his train ticket. "I met another guy at the recruitment office," says Keith. "There were two train tickets on the desk. I grabbed one and he took the other."

By Thursday, June 15, he was on his way out of Vancouver by train, headed for Number 3 Manning Depot in Edmonton. When he arrived at the train station early Saturday morning, he recognized a fellow from the recruitment office. They struck up a conversation and made arrangements to spend the trip together. Looking at their tickets, however, they discovered that they were not on the same train. The other fellow pulled out on the first train, while Keith waited for half an hour before departing on the second section. Keith was raring to go, so the 30 minutes seemed an eternity. He would have been a lot more impatient to get going had he known what that half-hour would cost him.

Up the track in Blue River, B.C., a massive flood had poured over the railway tracks. The engineer on the first train pressed on through the rising water. Keith's train wasn't so lucky. "Our engineer stopped. He was afraid, I guess. I don't know," Keith says. The sidelined train waited for more than 24 hours for the water to subside. The boys on the train soon settled in for a long wait. Some pulled out bottles of liquor stashed for the journey and shared them with companions. Anything to help the time pass quickly. "I remember a guy named Carnaghan, up from California. He told me how surprised he was that Vancouver was so gray, and said that buildings in California were all different colours. I remember being quite surprised to hear that," says Keith. "While we were discussing this, he pulled out a flask of bourbon. I'd never tasted it before but I found I liked it. Wow,

Keith was raring to go, so the 30 minutes seemed an eternity.

A Hawker Hurricane at one of the RCAF's training units during WW II, 1942.



Photo: Library and Archives Canada, PA-145309.
Poster: Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Library, WP2.R14.F3.

MANNING DEPOT

During the war years, RCAF training started at one of the five Manning Depots, located in Toronto, Brandon, Edmonton, Quebec City and Lachine. It was a vital first step in the process of taking raw recruits and turning them into skilled, confident, competent airmen. The depots took recruits to a basic level of physical and mental fitness that would enable them to serve overseas. It would be clear to those in charge of the exercises and drills who was holding up under the pressure of life at the Manning Depots and who was not going to go the distance.

When recruits arrived, they absorbed rigorous military discipline and learned the basics of aviation. They were taught regulations and Air Force history, and learned the skills and tools required for plane navigation. When they weren't learning about flying, they were put through military drills and taught about weaponry. There were marches to be endured and inoculations to be tolerated. It was a quick way to make men out of boys who were coming straight from their mothers' kitchens.



what nice-tasting stuff it was. I don't know how much I had, but it didn't take much. I don't remember a hell of a lot about the rest of the wait. There were no berths so I passed out sleeping upright in my seat. I may have gotten a better sleep because of it."

The following day the train got underway again. Keith finally arrived late Friday evening at the Edmonton Manning Depot, housed in the stadium where the Edmonton Eskimos had played football before the war and would play again at the war's conclusion. Keith was assigned to Flight 109 and told where he would be sleeping for the next six weeks. He was housed in a hut with 30 to 40 other men, but there wasn't much time for sleeping. Keith and his fellow prospective pilots were put through the wringer, spending sun-up to sundown in training exercises, conditioning, drills and weapons lessons. Keith kept an eye out for his friend from the recruitment office and discovered that he had been assigned to Flight 108. At the end of his six weeks at Manning Depot, Keith was given the rank of Aircraftman Second Class (AC2). "I was burning to get stationed to a flight training school. I knew I had something to offer. I'd done well on the exercises, the shooting drills. I knew planes inside and out. I was pretty sure I wasn't going to be a pilot, but they didn't need any. But maybe an air gunner? I just wanted to get overseas, for heaven's sake," says Keith.

Word came down that Flight 109 was to double up at Manning Depot, which meant Keith wasn't heading to flight training any time soon, if at all. "Another six weeks of doing the same thing in Edmonton! Then we heard that Edmonton was closing down, so I got a third set of six weeks in Toronto. I was upset," Keith recalls. It didn't help him get over his disappointment to hear that Flight 108 had already been posted to training school. Had he been on the first section of the train leaving Vancouver, it would have been him heading off to learn to fly.

Adding insult to injury, a rash of sickness struck the troop train that Keith took from Edmonton to Toronto. "The guys in our car had all eaten something that gave us diarrhea. There were only two toilets and that just wasn't enough. Guys were left with no other option but to pull down their pants, open the window and let it go." The train didn't stop at any stations on the journey, and an unfortunate incident occurred as they sped through one on their way. "We flew past a platform that had

"I was burning to get stationed to a flight training school. I knew I had something to offer."

The Westland-Lysander, the model airplane that Keith kept when he moved east.

As he stood surrounded by the miniature planes that represented so much hard work and his boyhood dreams of flying, Keith had an idea ...

some people standing on it, just as someone was doing his business out the window. That must have been a horrible thing for them, as they were very close to the cars.”

Prior to Keith’s leaving for Edmonton, his father received news that he was being transferred to Toronto in the near future, so Keith had to pack his things up into boxes. As he did, he came to the heartbreaking realization that the model airplanes he had spent most of his childhood painstakingly crafting would not survive the trip east. As he stood surrounded by the miniature planes that represented so much hard work and his boyhood dreams of flying, Keith had an idea. He gathered the models and to each one he attached a firecracker. He moved his planes to an upstairs window, overlooking the backyard. “It was pretty high up, so I lit the crackers and threw them out, one by one. They seemed to soar for a moment, then boom!” Keith spent part of an evening launching his precious collection and watching as each one erupted into flames before plummeting into the yard below. “It seemed like a good end for them, one last flight,” Keith says.

At the end of all the destruction, one plane was left: the 12-inch model of the Westland Lysander. “The thought of wrecking that one bothered me more than the others,” says Keith. “It was an oddball plane; those were always the ones I loved. I built it out of balsa stringers and balsa sheet from which I had hand-carved all the wing ribs and other parts, putting in controls, elevators, a prop, a rudder, even landing lights in the wheel pants. They all worked. I never covered it because I loved looking at all the little parts inside.” Unable to part with the Lysander, Keith did his best to wrap it carefully with cotton batten and newspaper. He tucked it carefully into a chest, right on top so that nothing heavy would damage the fragile frame. He meticulously labelled the outside with as many “This Side Up” stickers as he could fit. Keith told his parents he would try to see them in Ontario and set out, leaving the last vestige of his precious model plane collection packed safely, waiting for the movers.

Glum at the prospect of six more weeks at a Manning Depot, Keith arrived in Toronto. His mood was not brightened by what awaited him. The only good thing was the discovery that his parents had arrived

in Toronto as well, and had an apartment only a few blocks away from Number 1 Manning Depot. But then, “I went through my things and found my chest upside down,” Keith says. “The Lysander was flatter than a pancake. Crushed. Somebody didn’t give a damn and just put the chest upside down somewhere along the trip. It was gone. I’d spent so long on it.” The plane was beyond repair. In frustration, he destroyed what remained and threw it in the garbage. “I was in the Air Force. I couldn’t cry. I was a man.” Keith walked away, leaving the last of his childhood in the trash.

The third six-week stint, at Toronto’s Manning Depot, went by even more slowly than the first two in Edmonton. Keith’s dream of going overseas was fading. The monotony of repeating the same exercises was broken by a couple of bright spots, though. He managed to sneak home every few nights for a home-cooked meal – a treat, considering the mess hall food. The other highlight was touring the local roller skating rinks. Keith and a fellow he knew from Vancouver used their 48- and 72-hour passes to “go somewhere, anywhere and skate, skate, skate,” says Keith. He kept his roller skates in a case, the outside of which he decorated with stickers from each new place he visited. A favourite destination was Buffalo, which had an active roller-skating community. Skating was a social activity and Keith met lots of people on his trips around the local area.

While in Buffalo on one overnight pass, he met a girl who liked him well enough to invite him home to dinner with her parents. Keith must have made a good impression. “Her father seemed to think well of me,” says Keith. “He told me that if I wanted a job when I was out of the service, I could come back to Buffalo and work in his company.” But even with these pleasant diversions to keep his mind occupied, the weeks of training crawled by.



Keith and his roller-skating partner, Norma Christiansen, out on the town, 1945.

Keith and a fellow he knew from Vancouver used their 48- and 72-hour passes to “go somewhere, anywhere and skate, skate, skate,” says Keith.

The thing that most upset Keith about not doing flying school was missing the chance to get airborne. Even though he had spent three years in the Air Cadets while in Vancouver, and a year and a half at Boeing, he had only been up in a plane once. Determined to get up in the sky, he and a friend went out to the airport on Toronto's Centre Island on a free day. The airport was busy and the two young men asked two RCAF pilots if they could hitch a ride to anywhere, just for the opportunity to fly. As luck would have it, an old Avro was making a run up to Goderich to drop off some parachutes at the air station. The two young men were given the thumbs-up to tag along. Keith was thrilled. The excitement of flying made him temporarily forget the letdown of still being stuck in Canada.

The plane touched down in Goderich and Keith and his friend were told to hop out. "The pilot didn't even turn off the props. The guys told us that since they'd given us a ride, we could run the parachutes inside for them and save them the trouble of stopping. I guess they had somewhere to go," says Keith. When they leaned down to pick up the parachutes Keith's friend happened to grab hold of the ripcord. One tug and the entire parachute deployed in a heartbeat. With the plane's twin engines still going full tilt, there was a strong wind on the runway. Keith looked up in shock, just in time to see his buddy shooting across the airfield, still holding on tightly. "He was about 50 feet away by the time he let go," laughs Keith. "I'll never forget that sight as long as I live."

The flight to Goderich was one-way only, so the two had to find their own way back to Toronto. It wasn't a simple prospect. They managed to hitchhike partway to a town called Clinton, which had an RCAF base. "However, the place was barely an airport," recalls Keith. "It was just a big concrete building. The only reason it existed was to teach radar to American officers." Keith and his friend looked around and commented to each other how horrible it would be to be posted in Clinton. It wasn't an easy place to pick up a ride either, and as they had a limited amount of time before they had to report back to Manning Depot, they boarded a "milk-run" train back to Toronto. The train moved so slowly and stopped so frequently that Keith's friend commented that the cowcatcher on the front should be moved to the back so "the cows wouldn't run into us." Keith lost himself in laughter for the second time that day.

The train moved so slowly and stopped so frequently that Keith's friend commented that the cowcatcher on the front should be moved to the back so "the cows wouldn't run into us."

DISAPPOINTMENT AND GROWING UP FAST

The hilarity of the day trip was forgotten in short order. When Keith returned to Manning Depot, he was informed that at the conclusion of his six weeks he would be posted to Clinton. "I had no idea what I would do," says Keith. "I knew I'd just be sitting around looking at the American officers." The backwater air station was a far cry from Keith's original intent in joining the Air Force. In fact, he never did get trained to fly. "It was a disappointment for me. A very big disappointment," Keith says. Later, Keith heard rumours that the fellow he had met at the recruitment office, who was in Flight 108, had made it overseas and had been shot down. He was never able to verify that story, but occasionally Keith wondered how things would have turned out if he had picked up the other ticket on the Recruitment Office desk and had been on that first train out of Vancouver in June 1944.

At the end of his service, Keith returned to Vancouver. While he was posted in Clinton, his mother had suddenly left his father in Toronto and returned to Vancouver. His parents would never live together again. They divorced sometime later and both would remarry twice. Keith still isn't sure what went wrong in his parents' marriage. "They didn't ever talk much about that stuff," says Keith. Having

Keith's RCAF discharge papers. He signed up in March 1944 and was discharged in December of the same year.





FROM TOP: Keith in 1946. Keith with his close friend Hugh McCardell in the 1980s. They met in junior high school. After his discharge in 1944, Keith lived at Hugh's home for a while.

junior high school friend Hugh McCardell returned from his stint in the Air Force. Keith then lived with Hugh at his parents' house and thought about what to do next.

Keith's time in the Air Force hadn't worked out as he had hoped when he joined up, filled with dreams of flying aspirations and brave ideals. But his time in the service had brought him into adulthood, teaching him important lessons about independence and personal responsibility. The timing was good as it turned out. The situation he returned to in Vancouver was changed. His childhood home had dissolved in divorce and he was on his own, free to decide who he wanted to be.

He was on his own, free to decide who he wanted to be.

moved on and grown up, Keith didn't feel very affected by their separation. His father returned to Vancouver not long after Keith's mother. He had asked General Motors for a transfer back to British Columbia, even proposing a pay cut or demotion to make it work. He was told that there was no place in the company for someone so unmotivated. Disappointed by the company's lack of loyalty after his 20 years of solid service, Reg quit. He moved back to Vancouver and started working as a manufacturer's agent for products in the automotive industry. He would later exclaim to Keith that he would have quit General Motors years earlier had he known how much better it was to work for himself, setting his own hours and schedule.

For a short period, Keith lived in an old hotel on Granville Street, paying the princely sum of \$1 a day. He looked into enlisting in the Army, but they were no longer accepting recruits. He tried the Merchant Marines and got a similar response. "Then I lived in three room-and-board houses that were operated by the parents of three different girls I met roller skating," says Keith. Six months after moving home to Vancouver, Keith's

CHAPTER 4

Setting up SHOP



Keith when he was 19 years old, at the front door of his first building, at Selkirk Street and 71st Avenue in Vancouver, 1946.

MAKING DO

When Keith returned to Vancouver his future was wide open. “I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do,” says Keith. One of the benefits offered to servicemen was the Canadian version of the American G.I. Bill, which provided educational opportunities to help men re-establish themselves after the war. Keith took advantage of the chance to get some training, enrolling in an automotive mechanics course at Vancouver Technical High School. “I knew I liked taking things apart,” says Keith. “I figured I may as well do something useful and learn how to put them back together, too.” He didn’t know what type of job he wanted, but he thought tinkering with engines would be fun.

Spending his days in the school shop surrounded by cars, the old Durkopp bike that had served Keith so well as a teenager no longer seemed like a fitting mode of transportation for an ambitious young man. He wanted a car of his own. There was one hitch. He had considerable driving experience from cruising around in his dad’s car, but he had never taken the test to get a driver’s licence. He approached a friend of his, Ted Thorpe, who had an Auburn convertible, and asked to borrow it for the test. “It wasn’t even a real convertible,” Keith says. “It didn’t have a top at all.” His friend loaned him the car and Keith headed to the Department of Motor Vehicles, downtown on Georgia Street. He arrived at the office at 4:30 p.m. “The place closed at five,” Keith remembers. “The guy behind the desk didn’t seem too happy to see me. Must have been anxious to get home, or something.” The examiner gave Keith the test, which he started filling out. After watching Keith read over a couple of questions carefully before making his choice, the examiner lost patience and grabbed the sheet out of Keith’s hands. “He put the piece of celluloid with holes in it that they use for marking on top of my test and just ticked all the answers. He got to the end and said, ‘I guess I should mark one or two wrong to make it look good.’” Keith looked on, shocked. With the written test out of the way, the two went outside to complete the driving portion of the exam. While Keith was inside, it had started to rain. The examiner took one look at the Auburn with no top, turned around and headed back inside. “You think I’m going out in the rain in that?” he asked Keith. They returned to the office where the examiner filled out Keith’s licence and handed it over. “And that was it,” says Keith with a laugh.

He didn’t know what type of job he wanted, but he thought tinkering with engines would be fun.

Now he had a licence but no car. Keith’s friend Fred Banbury introduced him to a woman he knew who was trying to sell her 1925 Willys Overland. She’d had it up on blocks through the war and now she wanted it gone. “I didn’t have any money,” says Keith, “so I offered her a trade. My portable gramophone for her car. I’d purchased the gramophone in 1941 for around 15 bucks. She took the deal, so I had myself a car.” The Willys Overland wasn’t a typical automobile. It had no fuel pump – it used gravity to propel gas into the engine – and the oil moved via a “splash feed” system. Most unusual of all, the car had an oil clutch. “A normal clutch can’t get a spot of oil on it or it malfunctions. This one ran in oil. But you couldn’t shift gears unless you were running at exactly the right speed,” remembers Keith. The clutch proved difficult to use, so Keith sought help from his mechanics instructor, hoping an expert might be able to shed some light on the inner workings of the temperamental car. The instructor told Keith to bring the car to class and they would investigate. A week or two later the instructor had tried everything but the clutch was still a problem. “He gave up,” says Keith. “I just figured out how to use it as it was by shifting at the right speed. No wonder the gramophone had been an appealing trade for the previous owner.”

A Vancouver Sun article (2002) looks at Keith’s love of cars. He’s owned a lot, but has a soft spot for his first, a 1925 Willys Overland that he bought in 1945.



"I dropped the oil pan and saw that the con rod bearings were practically worn out, so my buddies and I cut the tongues off our shoes, wrapped them around the bearings and were able to get ourselves home that way."



Vancouver Technical School
in the late 1930s.

Having more or less mastered the finicky clutch, Keith set about modifying the interior of the car to suit his needs. He altered the front seat so that it reclined completely, connecting to the back seat and forming a bed. He and his friends were then able to use the Overland to take trips around the Lower Mainland, sleeping in the car instead of tenting. A favourite destination was Cultus Lake. The oddities of the Overland made each trip an adventure. “One time we were on our way to Cultus, when somewhere around Surrey the car

started to make a funny ‘clunk, clunk, clunk;’” says Keith. He lifted the hood to check the oil and saw that it was extraordinarily low. They added some oil and thought the problem was licked. It wasn’t. No sooner were they back underway than the bearings started to make a racket. They pulled over once again and dropped the oil pan to see that the con rod bearings were almost completely worn out. It was a situation that called for considerable innovation. “We all cut the tongues off our shoes. We wrapped them around the bearings and the problem was temporarily solved,” laughs Keith, except, of course, that they needed new shoes and had to keep adding oil.

The course at Vancouver Tech ended, leaving Keith with a mechanics certificate but still no real idea of what to do with his life. However, he needed to earn money, so he went looking for a job. One of the first to turn up was at a gas station at the corner of 4th Avenue and Alma Street. He took the position and started pumping gas. He was at work one day in November 1945 when Fred Banbury turned up. They got to talking, with Fred asking Keith how he was doing and what his plans were. Keith didn’t have much of an answer for his friend. Fred glanced around the gas station, looked at his friend and asked a question that changed the course of Keith’s life. “Is this all you want for yourself?”

“Is this all
you want for
yourself?”



TAKING RISKS

*Only those who will risk going too far can possibly
find out how far one can go.*

—T.S. ELIOT

It was a direct question and one that required Keith to stop and think for a moment. Keith had been focused on finding work to occupy himself and earn money after coming out of the service, but when he’d taken the job at the gas station, he’d known it wasn’t his life’s ambition to pump gas. He stopped for a moment and considered Fred’s question: is this what I want to do with my life? Work in a gas station? His answer came easily: he wanted more.

Fred’s question wasn’t casual. He was looking for a partner at his small woodworking shop. Fred was working on wooden “dancing dollies” for Woodward’s Toyland. They were little figures made of quarter-inch plywood with joints at the arms, legs and hips that would jiggle when shaken. They hung from a rod held by a person’s left hand, dangling until the doll’s feet just touched a paddle, connected to a thin plywood stick. When a person sat on the stick, held the figure over the paddle and tapped the stick with their hand, the little figures started to dance. They were very popular with kids and Fred had a contract to deliver them to Woodward’s for Christmas. He was running out of time. He needed Keith’s help.

It would have been easy for Keith to tell Fred that he already had a steady, decent job. He had worked hard at his mechanics course but was not using his skills at the gas station, doing menial chores and pumping gas. His entrepreneurial spirit was piqued. Fred had asked the right question at the right time. “I quit the gas station that day,” says Keith. “I went in and told the owner that he would have to get his son to pump the gas and I left.”

**Fred had asked the
right question at the
right time. “I quit the
gas station that day.”**

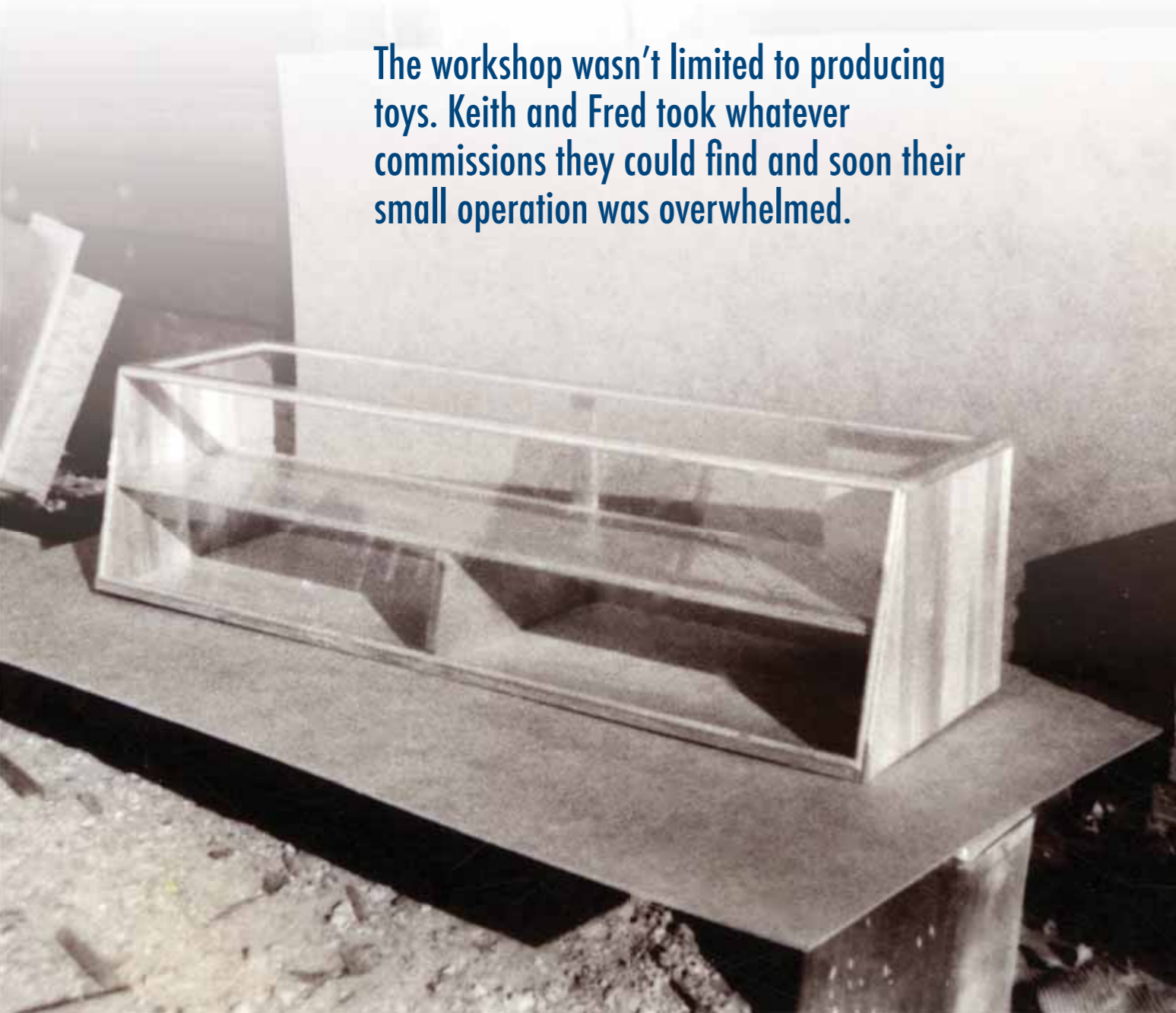
Fred and Keith went into business together. To get the capital he needed to buy a half-share in the business, Keith cashed in a life insurance policy that his father had taken out on him when he was seven years old. “He had signed it over to me on my 18th birthday,” Keith says.

“The cash surrender value was only a couple of hundred dollars, but it was exactly what I needed to buy 50 percent of Fred’s shop.” It would turn out to be a very good investment.

Keith joined Fred in the basement workshop on Howe Street in downtown Vancouver and they started producing the dancing dollies as quickly as they could. “We did that for a few weeks,” recalls Keith. “Then Christmas came and it was all over. We did okay, though.” It was a humble beginning for a business empire, but one that Keith remembers fondly. “I’ve liked dancing dollies ever since.”

One of the bookcases Keith and his partner Fred Banbury were building in 1945.

The workshop wasn’t limited to producing toys. Keith and Fred took whatever commissions they could find and soon their small operation was overwhelmed.



EVERY PROBLEM HAS A SOLUTION

*We make a living by what we get,
but we make a life by what we give.*

—WINSTON CHURCHILL

One of the biggest problems the partners faced was obtaining the materials they needed to do their work. Directly above them was a company that produced mantle radios. When they asked Keith and Fred if they could make some radio cabinets the boys were keen, but they weren’t sure where they could find the material required for the job. The partners put their heads together. “They wanted them made out of walnut,” recalls Keith, “but the price of the walnut plywood we looked at was ludicrous.”

After trying to source materials, Keith and Fred quickly realized that they would have to get creative to find affordable wood. “A single sheet of walnut would have cost us more than we would get for the finished product,” Keith says. Working like that, they wouldn’t be in business for long. Keith hit on the idea of approaching furniture producers to see if they had any wood scraps for purchase. The first place they decided to ask was Hammond Furniture, whose factory was located at the corner of Clark and Venables. Without much beyond the kernel of an idea, and because both of their cars were broken down, the two headed out on the streetcar to talk to someone at Hammond.

Neither Keith nor Fred had discussed how they were going to proceed once they reached the factory. “When we walked in the front doors, there was a woman sitting at a counter with a typewriter in front of her,” says Keith. “Well, we didn’t really know what to say, so we just explained very quickly what we needed. She offered a quick ‘no,’ insisting that the business didn’t supply materials.” To the two inexperienced entrepreneurs, her response seemed definitive. They weren’t sure who the woman was, or on what authority she had turned them down. They also had no idea what their next move would be. Within a minute of walking through the door, they were turning around to leave. That should have been the end of the story. Instead, they were about to meet the man who would have the single greatest influence on Keith’s business future.

As they headed out of the factory, an office door behind the woman opened. Wally Hammond himself strode out and clapped the boys on their shoulders. “He asked us why we were there,” says Keith. “When



Fred Banbury at the entrance of their Marpole workshop, 1946.

we explained what we were trying to do, he told us to follow him.” Wally led them to the back of the factory where he showed Fred and Keith a stack of walnut bed ends formed in a popular “waterfall” style. Due to slight damage, they had been rejected. Wally told them they could have one to experiment with and that they should bring back a finished radio cabinet for him to see. A grateful Keith and Fred hauled a bed end back to the workshop with them on the streetcar.

Because it was right after the war, they loved the pillbox shape.

The boys wanted to design a cabinet that would take advantage of the waterfall shape of the wood. During the war, there had been gun mounts called pillboxes with rounded side walls and they built a radio cabinet to resemble the pillbox. Their prototype looked great with a real radio inside, with Lucite rods and accessories, coloured cellophane behind cut-outs and little lights to make it all glow. With the prototype finished, they took the streetcar back to Hammond Furniture

to show it to Wally. “It was just getting dark when we got on the streetcar,” says Keith. “The little lights attracted quite a bit of attention. People gathered around, asking what it was. When they heard it was a radio, folks wanted to know where they could get one. Because it was right after the war, they loved the pillbox shape.” They weren’t the only ones. When Keith and Fred showed the casing to Wally Hammond, he was impressed. He told the boys they could have all the reject bed ends in the factory for \$1 apiece. It was a great price and it helped Wally clear up some space. They made the deal on the spot. Only the formalities were left to be worked out. “We had no money to pay him, so he insisted we could pay him later. What a guy he was. He asked us to send our truck to pick the bed ends up,” Keith remembers. “We sheepishly

said we didn’t have a truck. ‘No problem,’ he told us. He was happy to deliver them.” They gave him the workshop address and returned home on the streetcar, thrilled with how things were turning out.

When the truck arrived with the delivery of bed ends, the boys were slightly taken aback by the number of pieces. The workshop was modest in size and it quickly became apparent that they would have difficulty fitting all the pieces inside. Once they had covered every available surface in the shop, thinking on their feet, they stacked



A rendering (by Darcy Forcier) of the 1946 radio cabinet Keith and Fred built. The cabinet was made from “waterfall” walnut.

the surplus just outside the door. They watched as the last one was unloaded, pleased but overwhelmed by the sheer number of bed ends they had taken delivery of. Just as the truck was pulling away, Wally Hammond turned up. “He just wanted to make sure the delivery had gone smoothly,” says Keith. “Then he asked to see the shop.” They led him inside, past the bed ends stacked outside, barely able to move between the ones leaned against all the walls, lying sideways, in every spot imaginable. “He took one look and asked to use the phone immediately,” says Keith. “He called the factory to stop the second truck, full of the same amount again!”

Worried, Keith and Fred tried to reassure Wally that they would take however many bed ends he had, they just needed a bit of time. Wally walked around the shop again, taking stock of their equipment. There wasn’t much in the tiny space: a table saw, a band saw, a sander, a four-inch joiner and a spray gun. He recognized that their equipment was barely up to the task they had set themselves. He made them an offer. He told them to go out and get themselves a proper workshop. When they had found a place, he told them to call him. They could use his account at A.R. Williams Machinery to buy whatever new equipment they needed. “We knew the outlet well,” Keith says. “It was just down the street from us and we used to walk by the window, drooling at all the new planers, joiners, saws and sanders. They had everything you could ever want there.”

In shock, Keith and Fred accepted his generous proposal. With the prospect of new tools looming, the two boys looked everywhere to find a building to rent for a large workshop. Their excitement rapidly turned to frustration as their search failed to turn up a single place to suit their purposes. Without a proper shop, they wouldn’t be able to take Wally Hammond up on his offer. Desperate times called for desperate measures. After a week of non-stop looking and worried that they risked losing their big chance, they decided to build their own workshop on a piece of land they could buy from the city. “We bought a 50-foot lot in Marpole for \$190,” says Keith. Before they could break ground on any sort of building, they needed a permit. Keith proceeded to Vancouver City Hall first thing on a Monday morning, with only a few hand-drawn plans. Before noon on the same day, he was on his way out, permit in hand. “Things just don’t



Laying screens for the concrete floor of the Marpole workshop.

Worried that they risked losing their big chance, they decided to build their own workshop.



Much of the work on doors and windows in the Marpole workshop was done by Keith and Fred.

work like that any more. We were pretty naïve, two inexperienced 19-year-olds, building a 1,200-square-foot concrete block workshop from scratch.” They would do everything themselves, including the electrical work, which had proved to be a problem. Keith, in an effort to save money, had purchased the smallest diameter pipe conduit that would take seven wires. They’d needed to pull the wires through the pipe conduit and had had to attach the wires to the bumper of a car to get the job done. “When the inspector came,” says Keith, “he told me we couldn’t fit seven wires in that size of conduit. When we said we did, he said, ‘Well then, okay,’ and he signed off.” They worked hard and when the building was complete, they called up Wally Hammond and invited him to come see it. He couldn’t believe they had built it themselves.

“I think about that moment often, what he offered us,” says Keith. “What would make a guy do that for two young kids? I just don’t know. We hadn’t talked to him much, so it’s not like he knew us. He just wanted to see us

make it, I guess. I know one thing for sure, though. If he hadn’t done what he did, I sure as hell wouldn’t be where I am now. Building that shop is what got me started in the construction business.” Wally made good on his offer and the boys purchased the equipment they needed on Hammond credit. They then worked diligently to pay back each and every cent they owed, since they were both aware that, in truth, they owed Wally far more than money. “When I think of it,” says Keith, “I get shivers.”

Ironically, after all the effort made to accommodate the mountain of walnut bed ends they had found to manufacture the radio cabinets, they only made 17. Their upstairs neighbours brought in a new supply of cabinets from back east before disappearing to do business elsewhere. The bed ends were used instead to make tables and desks. When the ends ran out, they purchased oak and other woods to continue making furniture. Many years later, when he was coaching boys in softball, Keith stopped by the family home of

“If he hadn’t done what he did, I sure as hell wouldn’t be where I am now.”

a teenager joining the team. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a coffee table that looked eerily familiar. He asked the family if they would mind if he quickly turned it over to look on the other side. A little confused, they took everything off to allow Keith to flip it. Sure enough, his name was on the bottom of the table. It was one of the ones he had made so long ago. Keith was happy to see that his workmanship had stood the test of time. “Turns out the glue held,” laughs Keith.

After numerous years and too many deals to count, Keith has never forgotten the trust extended to him by a stranger. Wally Hammond didn’t live to see just how Keith well fulfilled his promise. He died of cancer at 34 years old, long before the success of The Beedie Group demonstrated how important his gesture of faith was to a 19-year-old boy. Years later Keith tried to track down some descendents of Hammond in an attempt to reciprocate his kindness, but he was unable to find any. “I still get choked up, even so many years later, when I think about that man,” says Keith.



FROM TOP: Keith in front of the Marpole workshop, 1946. The cinder-block walls of the workshop were never painted or waterproofed – and they never leaked.



CHAPTER 5 BUILDING on Building



Foundation footings are in place at a residential construction site in the 1950s.

TAKING AIM

The workshop in Marpole was a busy place. Keith and Fred were putting in long days making furniture, tables and anything else they could sell. Keith expanded greatly on the foundation of what he learned in woodworking class at Magee High School. Fred was handy and had a little more experience, all of which Keith soaked up eagerly. "I had a lot to pick up on," Keith says. "Fred's brother was a sign painter and he'd worked with him a number of times. We had a paint booth in the back that we used to lacquer things we'd built, but I'd never spray-painted anything before. Fred and his brother taught me and I got pretty good at it." Keith kept track of his progress and improvement; he loved the challenge of beating his own best paint times.

Keith and Fred were improving. Their business aptitude and their practical skills were growing every day. They were capable of working at a brisk pace, but production wasn't consistent. It was a struggle, wavering between busy times when there weren't enough hours in the day to complete orders and slow times when the two young men had to look for alternative work to supplement their incomes.

An aerial view of the Marpole neighbourhood where Keith had his workshop, showing the nearby Canadian Forest Products Eburne Sawmill, 1948.



Vancouver Public Library, 80494.

SELLING UP

Keith and Fred continued to work on every project that came their way. One evening, as the two men were working late in the workshop to fill an order, they noticed a man who had sauntered down the back lane casually examining their building and operations. After having a good look, he approached the pair and asked them a few questions about their business. At the end of his inquiries, he introduced himself as Mr. Beatty and offered Keith and Fred \$5,000 for the building if they could be out by the end of the month. He explained that he was starting a company to manufacture plywood sheets covered with a walnut finish and he thought their workshop would perfectly suit his purposes. He wanted to start right away, which meant they had to get out fast. “That was huge money for back then,” says Keith. “We were making 30 cents an hour.” It was a good offer, but the two didn’t know what would happen to their business if they sold the workshop.

Despite the relative success that Keith and Fred were enjoying, Keith was beginning to suspect that he wasn’t meant to work in that partnership. “Fred was, for the majority of the time, a nine-to-five guy and I wanted to put in as many hours as required to make sure we completed our orders on time,” says Keith. The temptation of a good offer for the building was the push he needed to broach the possibility of dissolving his partnership with Fred. “I told him we could stay friends, but sorry, that’s the way it was,” says Keith. “So, we broke up the business.” Keith and Fred accepted Beatty’s offer. In addition to the money they had spent purchasing the property, Keith and Fred estimated they had put a couple of thousand dollars’ worth of materials into building the workshop. “Plus, a whole lot of work,” says Keith. “But for that price, we were happy to sell the building.”

On their last job, Fred and Keith completely outfitted a Catholic church in the West End of Vancouver in the late 1940s. They did all the work in oak and manufactured the pews, confessionals, communion rail, holy water font and a couple of other miscellaneous items. It was the biggest job they had ever done. When Keith went to collect the payment, the priest kept putting him off and putting him off. Keith finally went to the head of the diocese in downtown Vancouver and was told that they had no power over the priest’s actions. Keith found this hard to believe.

Keith was beginning to suspect that he wasn’t meant to work in that partnership.

Fred and Keith desperately needed the money, so Keith went to the priest’s home, which was adjacent to the church. He was told by the priest’s attendant that the priest was at home, but he was busy. Keith informed him he was going to sit and wait for the priest, even if it took all night, because Keith was desperate to get paid. Keith was told he couldn’t stay, but he refused to leave. One thing Keith had noticed when he came into the lobby was a pair of white, ankle-sized rubber boots that was the style for women in those days and this made him kind of suspicious. After about an hour, the priest came downstairs tying up his shirt, and behind him there was a good looking lady doing up her blouse. When he saw Keith the priest almost fell off of the stairs. Keith stood up, walked over and said “Father, I need my money.” The priest said “just a moment,” went into his office and a few minutes later came out and said, “I had the cheque all made up, I was going to mail it to you tomorrow, but seeing as you are here, here is your payment.” Keith wondered what motivated the priest to finally pay him that night.

During the sale and move out of the workshop, Fred, Keith and Fred’s brother Max entered into an agreement with the Pacific National Exhibition to build all the show fronts, ticket booths and entrance gates for the Fair. Although the boys made their deal with the PNE, they had sold the rights to operate the Midway during the Fair to a man named R. Gordon Hilker. Getting the work done in time for the PNE was a real push. Keith, Fred and Max started work on the various structures in their workshop before moving operations to an empty building on Hastings Street to be closer to the Fairgrounds. Nearly everything was finished in time, but the day before the gates were due to open, the ticket booths were still unpainted. “I stayed until 5:00 a.m. that night, spraying a fast-drying paint on all the booths,” says Keith. “First thing the next morning, Max arrived with his truck and we set up the booths barely in time for the 10:00 a.m. opening.”

The boys were relieved to have completed the work just under the wire. Unfortunately, halfway through the two-week Fair, R. Gordon Hilker went bankrupt. Since they hadn’t yet been paid, Keith approached a Veterans Affairs lawyer for some advice on how to proceed. “He told me we were legally entitled to close off the ticket booths and block the entrance until we got our money,” says Keith. “But since there were only three days to go on the Fair, it didn’t seem like the proper thing to do.” Instead they went to the Midway manager, Dave Dauphinee,

Photo: City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 180-1533, Artray.



The main entrance to the PNE, 1948.

Nearly everything was finished in time, but the day before the gates were due to open, the ticket booths were still unpainted.

“Life is all about meeting people ... Fred Banbury brought me an opportunity, that’s for sure.”

who had made the deal in the first place and he assured them that the PNE was good for their payment. However, when the money came due, Dauphinee was overruled. Non-payment on the contract caused Keith major problems, since he had used his own credit to buy the materials from Alexander Murray. The debt took him years to pay off. Dauphinee regretted how things had turned out, promising Keith a booth free of charge for the next Fair, suggesting he could set up an ice cream stand. “I ran it for 10 days the next year and barely broke even,” says Keith. “I decided it wasn’t a way of life that interested me.”

After the PNE, Fred and Keith parted amicably and Fred moved to Yahk, B.C., where he worked for the rest of his life as a carpenter. “I don’t know how things would be different if Fred hadn’t walked into the gas station that day in 1945,” says Keith. “Life is all about meeting people. He had a business idea that he couldn’t make work on his own. You take some opportunities and leave others. Fred Banbury brought me an opportunity, that’s for sure.”

Keith and Fred set about working out the details of the break-up. As they negotiated, a friend named Carey Degear expressed interest in teaming up with Keith. Despite his misgivings about partnerships, Keith started to wonder if his problems had been with Fred and not with his ability to share a business. Ignoring his instincts, Keith allowed Fred to sell his half of their company to Carey. “I lost one partner and got another. I’m still not sure why I did that.” Carey was a good person and a hard worker, but he was plagued by health problems, the biggest of which was chronic and debilitating ulcers. “He’d had half his stomach removed before I even met him,” says Keith. “He was constantly drinking milk to ease the pain.”

Keith may have gained a new partner, but he was missing a workshop. He and Carey had to decide what they wanted to do, and where they would do it. Carey was a skilled woodworker so he and Keith decided to carve a niche for themselves by making quality office furniture and kitchen cabinets. The deal to sell the workshop in Marpole had left Keith with a nice cash profit, ready to pour into something else. He knew that, based on the products they wanted to build, the new business would need a lot more space. Thinking about how well the last purchase and workshop construction had turned out, he and Carey turned to the City of Vancouver to see what properties were available. It didn’t take long to settle on a nice site near the corner

of 17th Avenue on Fraser Street. They paid \$900 for the land and had plans approved to construct a 3,000-square-foot workshop, though Keith later regretted that he didn’t buy the next-door corner lot for \$1,100.

The building he’d made with Fred was concrete block. This time Keith decided to try a wood-frame structure with cedar siding. “I went down to look at the site,” says Keith. “The whole place was made up with 15 feet of this stuff called ‘peat.’ I was so new to the game that I had no idea what it was. We asked Carey’s engineer uncle what we should do.” The news they got was not good. The peat was unstable for building and Keith was strongly advised to use pilings to support the structure. “The only problem was that putting in pilings was going to cost more than the land did,” says Keith. The part of him that loved the challenge of building bunk-bed springs out of inner tubes as a kid welcomed the challenge of devising a workshop that would stay solid on top of a mass of spongy peat. Keith hit the drawing board.

The property was three feet below street level, so Keith decided the first step was to construct large, thin concrete pads for foundations. “Next, Carey and I rigged up a system with posts, beams and joists, and put three-inch double tongue and groove car decking for the ground floor,” says Keith, who took pains to ensure that the shop floor remained a light load. He figured that as the building settled on the peat below they could crawl down underneath the building and alternately jack and shim the beams. In theory, he thought he would be able to keep the building level by adjusting the balance once every couple of months, but the reviews he received for his plan were less than positive. “No one thought it would work,” says Keith. “People thought we were crazy, but I had gained a fair bit of confidence in my building skills so we decided to go ahead with the plan. We had no problem with the Vancouver city building inspector – the good old days!”



Keith in another one of his cars, 1951.

“We had no problem with the Vancouver city building inspector – the good old days!”

BEAT THE PEAT

The building went up and the plan to beat the peat appeared to be working. Keith and Carey moved in the equipment from the old workshop in Marpole and purchased additional machinery to help them craft the desks, tables and cabinetry they wanted to sell. Once again Keith was on a steep learning curve, but in no time he and Carey were putting out high-quality furniture.

Since they were making larger pieces than he and Fred had made in Marpole, they could command higher prices for their work. “The initial sale out of that shop was for a group of tables we sold for \$700,” says Keith. It was the biggest single cheque Carey and Keith had earned in the furniture business and they were thrilled. “I was such a kid,” says Keith. “That money felt different than any other I had made. It felt like a big deal. I marched into the Royal Bank with the cheque and asked to see the manager.” The manager was summoned, but he wasn’t impressed when he realized he’d been brought out to deal with a simple deposit. “There I was, all excited about \$700. I had no idea.”

One of Keith’s handcrafted record cabinets.

“That money felt different than any other I had made. It felt like a big deal.”



THE BUILDER TAKES A WIFE

The \$700 order was followed by others; the pace of production quickened. The furniture was selling well and the building was kept level. Keith and Carey felt good about how things were going. They worked hard during the day to fill the steady stream of orders and in the evening they would sometimes go out to blow off steam. In addition to sharing a business, the partners shared an after-hours passion – roller skating. They had met while skating at the Roller Bowl several years before and spent regular nights out after the shop was closed. One evening, as they were skating around the rink, the pair happened to hook up with two young ladies who were best friends, Lee and Doris. The foursome clicked and started skating together casually. One evening, it became clear that both young men were interested in walking the girls home. The question was, who would go with whom? “It was a problem that Carey and I decided to settle with the flip of a coin,” says Keith. So Carey and Doris went in one direction and Keith and Lee went in another.



Keith and Lee (Leona Candaele), 1946.

Both couples hit it off and started dating. “Lee was lots of fun,” says Keith. “She was a nice-looking girl, just a tiny bit of a thing, only 5 feet 2 inches and 105 pounds. We had some good times together.” It wasn’t long before Keith asked Lee to marry him. “That’s how things worked in those days,” says Keith. “That’s the way it went.” Lee accepted his proposal and the two were married on September 13, 1947. Keith was 21 years old.

Keith had a business to support himself and Lee, but he didn’t have a home for his new bride. “As a wedding gift, my parents gave us a frame, hitch and wheels to build a house trailer. The plan was for me to build a trailer we could live in,” he says. While Keith set about putting together a structure to fit on the trailer frame, he and Lee moved into a motel near Renfrew and 22nd Avenue. On mild autumn evenings, Keith worked on the trailer. In no time, he had a 25-foot-long by 8-foot-wide mini-home. They parked the trailer in the backyard of the workshop. “I was quite proud of my handiwork and remember the trailer as comfortable enough. But it wasn’t really a very good place to live. That trailer was cramped but it was livable, just barely.” At least Keith didn’t have far to go to get to work.

“That’s how things worked in those days.”



Lana Beedie was born on September 15, 1948.

Keith was giving everything he had to get the suite complete before the baby's arrival.

No sooner did Keith complete the trailer than Lee let him know it wouldn't work for long. Less than three months into their marriage, Lee was pregnant. "We didn't plan to start a family so quickly," says Keith. "You want it to happen, but it wasn't thought out." Neither one of them believed the trailer would serve a family, so Keith came up with a new plan. The couple would move into Lee's parents' place at 20th Avenue and Main Street and Keith would build a suite above the workshop. Once again, his evenings were taken up by construction, but this time he was working outside in bitter winter weather.

Although business was going well, there wasn't a lot of money to throw around. Building materials were expensive in the post-war years, so Keith economized by buying second-hand lumber for the upstairs suite. He figured he had made a great deal when he found some used 3- x 6-inch double tongue and groove decking for the floor. His confidence quickly faded. It was wintertime and the sunlight was long gone by the time he finished work each evening and climbed the ladder to start on the suite. It was the coldest part of the day. The only light he had to work with was a weak beam cast by a streetlight on Fraser Street. The used wood was frozen solid and Keith was soon chilled to the bone, prying each board off the pile and painstakingly removing rusty, twisted 6-inch nails. "The worst of all," says Keith "was cleaning the ice out of the grooves, even nastier than the nails. The truth is, it was all horrible."

Keith was giving everything he had to get the suite complete before the baby's arrival. But he hadn't counted on the prep work for the boards taking so long; the best he could hope for under the severe conditions was a couple of boards per evening. At that rate, he knew he wasn't going to be done before the due date. His response was to hunker down and work harder.

With Lee comfortable at her parents' house, Keith sold the trailer. Even with all the hours he'd spent building it and how little they'd used it, he wasn't sad to see it go. "It didn't bother me. I'm only sentimental about cars, houses and my office. Besides, I had a baby on the way to worry about."

Keith and Lee's daughter, Lana, was born on September 15, 1948, one year and two days after their wedding. By early 1949, Keith had finished the suite for his new family. It was 1,000 square feet and had two bedrooms. He checked underneath the building to make sure everything was working to keep the structure level, especially with

the added weight of the second floor. He was pleased to see that his gamble of avoiding the expense and complication of pilings had paid off. Even so, the accommodations were far from luxurious. "Can you imagine a wood-frame building with a two-bedroom suite above a noisy woodworking shop, complete with a spray-paint booth and heated by an old 45-gallon drum stove? It wasn't exactly perfect or safe for a baby, but it worked."

To Keith and Carey's frustration, though, the business wasn't growing the way the partners would have liked. What had started as a thriving enterprise was showing signs of trouble. Carey's health was suffering and the two men found that, after the initial bounce of opening, sales had declined drastically. "We were making quality furniture, office desks and bedroom furniture, but there was tons of the same stuff flooding in from back east," says Keith. "It was all mass produced, and we couldn't compete with the low prices." Once again, Keith began to question his partnership. "It just didn't work," he realized. It was becoming clear that he needed out of the business. The question was, how to get out and what to do next.

"It wasn't exactly perfect or safe for a baby, but it worked."

The new Fraser Street woodworking shop with the Beedie family's suite above. Lee and Lana are on the deck.



CHAPTER 6

Going it ALONE



Keith in front of one of his homes, 1946.

HOME, SWEAT HOME

Once more, Keith was faced with the dilemma of how to approach a partner about dissolving a business. His problem was compounded by his own uncertainty about his future. He had more responsibility than ever, but he knew his current arrangement wasn't feasible for the long term. He broke the news to Carey, and ultimately they decided that neither partner would buy out the other. Instead, they sold the building and machinery and walked away from the business. The workshop and the suite above it were purchased by McFarlan Seeds. The machinery was sold off bit by bit. Carey, who had married Lee's friend Doris, went to work as a carpenter at a local refinery.

Not long after, Keith heard that McFarlan Seeds had sold the building again, this time to the Construction Labourers' Union. Given the unique design of the building, the irony wasn't lost on Keith. "The thought of it as the headquarters for a construction union made me laugh," says Keith. "Thanks to the peat problems, that place hadn't been built to any sort of code, that's for sure." When Keith drove by the workshop a year later, he wasn't surprised to see that the structure had settled badly. Clearly, no one had been climbing underneath to adjust anything. The church next door eventually purchased the land and the building was demolished.

The sale left Keith free of the business, but in selling the shop he had also sold the family home. For the third time in less than three years he had to come up with a new housing solution. Once more, he decided that his best option was to build something himself. He'd mastered a trailer and then an apartment, so Keith figured it was time to try his hand at building a house. He followed what had become a familiar routine and approached the City of Vancouver about buying some land. With lots of options to choose from, Keith settled on a duplex-zoned lot on Knight Road, which he purchased for \$750.

He'd mastered a trailer and then an apartment, so Keith figured it was time to try his hand at building a house.

When Keith went to inspect the property, he found that it too was on peat, though not as deep as the building on Fraser Street. The buildings under construction on either side of the lot had complex and expensive foundation work. Keith didn't like the idea of such a costly undertaking, nor did he like the thought of that much weight on the property after his experience on Fraser Street. He decided on a simple foundation using lightweight concrete. Because the house was on a duplex-zoned lot, it was an up-and-down construction, with a full suite on grade in the rear and the

GETTING THE PERMIT: REFLECTIONS ON THEN AND NOW

When Keith started applying for permits in the 1940s, the process was more basic than it is today. Applications were dealt with as they crossed the desk of the municipal clerk, making wait times and red tape less of an issue. The building codes and bylaws relating to construction were simpler and more intuitive, allowing for a streamlined procedure. When push came to shove, permit applications seldom held up work. Keith even found himself in situations where he was able to apply for permits as the work progressed. He developed a strong reputation for integrity and good faith, and cultivated relationships with the people in the permit offices. As a result, many officials knew him by name and would help him expedite the paperwork.

By contrast, today's permits are a complex and time-consuming component of the work done by The Beedie Group. As the years passed, new legislation and bylaws kept growing, making the permit process more and more complicated. Nowadays, you cannot walk into a city hall with an application in hand and walk out 10 minutes later with a building permit. The stacks of paper required for the applications and the level of knowledge required to fill them out make it impossible for the layman to get a start. "It drives me crazy," says Keith. "It doesn't even make sense. In some cases, we can build a warehouse in less time that it takes to get a permit. Someone like me would have a tough time even getting into the business now."

Keith compares the permit process:

Then: "My first permit cost \$ 10 and took 10 minutes."

Now: "The average time for permit approval is five to six months. There are 10 different things you have to spend money on first, from engineers to landscape architects. Then you have to deal with people in the permit offices who don't know as much as the people you hired. Our permit and DCC costs for the latest 450,000-square-foot Home Depot building were close to \$ 1,120,062.48. Now that's inflation."

Then: "Someone wants a building, you get to work right away and make necessary changes as you go along."

Now: "You need the final plans completed before you even apply for a permit. The delay can kill you; you have so much money tied up in the property before you even have a green light. The seasons change and present new construction challenges, or your client wants changes, but you don't have time to reapply for a new permit. It's a very different game."

A 1975 document showing planning approval for a Beedie project.

A. L. Parr,
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING.
NOV 14 1975

owner(s) of the above de
scribed property, acknowledge and agree to the conditions attach
application for Preliminary Plan Approval No. _____
Seal.

main floor on grade with the front street. Keith built an 8-foot concrete retaining wall and a well-reinforced foundation with a lightweight footing that he buttressed to the retaining wall. The buttresses were designed to be within the walls of the basement suite. It all worked well and when Keith went by the house recently, the house was still sitting straight and solid.

Keith was determined to teach himself anything he didn't know about constructing a house from the ground up. He found a great resource next door where a new home was being built by a carpenter named Bob Hay, who was breaking ground at the same time. Bob was experienced and whatever Keith didn't know Bob would tell him. His advice proved invaluable and Keith made good progress. "We were both working alone," says Keith. "I would help him out when he needed an extra pair of hands and vice versa. You need more than one guy sometimes." Even doing all the work himself, the money pouring into the house was adding up quickly. He was running through his profits from the sale of the business and he needed to find work to get some cash flowing in. "No income with so many expenses wasn't going to work for long," says Keith.

He found a job with Garvin Ice and Fuel, a company that installed oil furnaces. "Back then, everyone had sawdust or coal," says Keith. "I was putting an oil furnace in my place on Knight, but that was the brand-new thing. It had a thermostat and everything, very fancy. But most people were still doing coal or sawdust." It had been a long time since Keith had worked for anyone other than himself. He quickly remembered why it didn't suit him. "I used to get my day's work done by 10:30 in the morning. Then I would ask for more. The guy I was with would just tell me to take the rest of the day off, but I knew I would only get paid for the time I was there." Keith found that he couldn't work any slower or drag the job out the way many associates did. Padding your time this way was a familiar tactic that Keith had encountered when he worked at the Boeing plant, but it still didn't sit right with him. He carried on for two weeks, doing the best he could because he needed the money. The hours were long, his days given to Garvin and his evenings to building his own home.

One day he was out on a job, cutting holes for heat registers into the floor of a neat, older-type house. "I had to drill holes into the hardwood, and a keyhole saw would cut out the rest," says Keith. A colleague would then install the heating pipes to the registers. "I was getting all the holes done, when this guy yells at me from below, asking when I was going to get to the one in the living room. I yelled back

BEEDIE GROUP
THEN & NOW

FIRST BUILDING (1945):
1,200 square feet and
12 feet high.

BREWER'S DISTRIBUTING BUILDING (2009):
451,000 square feet

375 buildings the size
of Keith's first structure
could fit inside.
More than 750 if they
were stacked.



Brewers' Distributors facility.

that I'd already done it. He couldn't see it." Keith had done his hole as laid out by the boss, but a concrete wall and a dormer meant that the hole was inaccessible. His partner couldn't do the job, so Keith started brainstorming about how to make it work. "Forget about it, this guy told me," says Keith. "He said he'd just run the pipe to the wall, so it would look like it worked even though it couldn't connect to

anything." Keith was shocked when his partner explained that since they wouldn't be paid for any extra work, they would leave it like that. "I didn't like that answer or attitude," says Keith, "so I quit on the spot." Inefficiency had been hard to take, but dishonesty was impossible for Keith to ignore.

Unemployed again, Keith threw himself into working on his house. With the help of Bob Hay he made terrific progress, picking up new skills each step of the way. "Bob taught me how to frame a wall and lift it into place," says Keith. "He taught me so many little things, like stair risers, for instance. It sounds easy, but if each stair doesn't have the same rise, you're in trouble. His help saved me a lot of time." Bob found Keith an eager student with an able mind and a natural aptitude. He knew Keith was out of work at that time, so he offered him work as a helper on some of his construction jobs. Always keen to learn and work, Keith accepted. A few months later they formed a partnership and Keith was able to obtain construction materials wholesale through a connection from his woodworking days. "Our first job was a basement suite," says Keith. "We worked well together." But there was one detail that Keith had failed to point out to Bob. When it came time to bill for the job, Bob charged the client just the wholesale price for supplies, without any markup. When Keith learned of the savings passed on to the client, he wasn't happy. "I was there when the guy pulled a wad the size of my fist out of his pocket and peeled off a few bills to pay us. The invoice, which Bob had made out unbeknownst to me, was for less than the original quote," says Keith. "It wasn't like he couldn't afford to pay. After all,

"Bob taught me how to frame a wall and lift it into place."

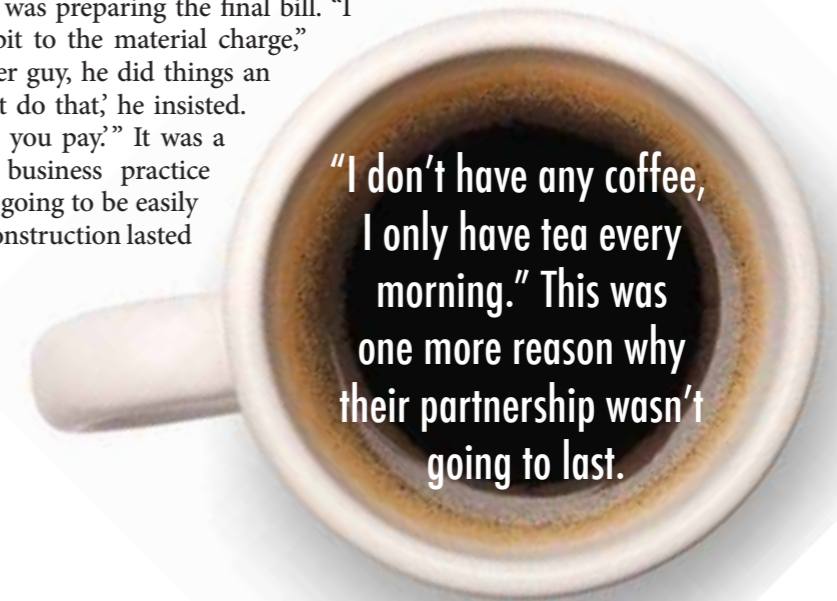


it was our connection that got the competitive price, which included a markup. So that difference came out of our pockets."

Bob and Keith went out of town for a couple of days on a remodelling job that Bob had lined up. The owner of the house that they were working in let them stay in his cabin nearby. In the morning, when Keith woke up at about 6:30 with Bob banging about, Keith thought, "I just need a couple of cups of coffee to get me going." Much to his chagrin, Bob said, "I don't have any coffee, I only have tea every morning." This was one more reason why their partnership wasn't going to last.

The next time Bob and Keith worked together, Keith felt he had to say something when Bob was preparing the final bill. "I told him we had to add a bit to the material charge," Keith says. "Bob was an older guy, he did things an old-fashioned way. 'You can't do that,' he insisted. 'You can't charge more than you pay.'" It was a fundamental difference in business practice that Keith could see was not going to be easily resolved. "Hay and Beedie Construction lasted about a month," says Keith.

"I don't have any coffee, I only have tea every morning." This was one more reason why their partnership wasn't going to last.



THE NEW FRAME OF REFERENCE

In the meantime, Keith's house was framed and ready to be roofed. Roofing, however, presented a small problem. It was a part of the process that he didn't know and that couldn't be tackled alone, or even with Bob Hay's help. Keith needed someone to give him a hand, someone strong whom he could count on for a few days. A friend suggested a buddy named Charlie Metcalfe. He was a fireman who did some construction work on the side. Keith was told he was a good roofer and gave him a call.



The first day that Charlie showed up, Keith was immediately impressed by his strength and work ethic. Charlie dove into the job. He was a powerful man and tasks like lifting and moving heavy materials that took Keith a couple trips to complete were dispatched quickly. "I hadn't met many guys in my life who worked hard like me," says Keith. "Charlie did." As the pair toiled away on the roof of the house, Keith figured he had met a kindred spirit. Later in the day, Keith climbed down the ladder to make a supply run. On his return, he had a clear sight line of the shingles because the house was on the low side of the street. "The shingle lines were all crooked," Keith says. "It looked horrible." Keith rushed up the ladder to confront the fireman. "Charlie looked up at me and said he could work fast, or he could work straight. I told him to bloody well work straight." Digging a bit deeper, Keith uncovered the truth – Charlie had never worked on a roof before. Keith's was his very first.

Aside from being less than pleased at Charlie's looseness with the facts, Keith was blown away by everything else about how the man worked. The two sorted out the roofing question and buckled down to finish the job. It was done quickly and the lines were perfected. "Not bad for two rookies," says Keith, which gave him an idea. Since Keith wasn't working and needed more money to finish his house, he thought he might shop the two men's new roofing skills around to see if they could pick up work. Taking a cue from Charlie's creative approach to listing job skills, Keith set out in his car to see who might need some roofing. "I came across a subdivision where a guy was doing a bunch of houses. I approached him and he told me to give him a price." Keith wasn't sure what to bid, so he and Charlie conferred and came up with a number. "Apparently, it was a lot better than the other guys," says Keith. "Suddenly we were professional roofers."

Eager to start the project, Keith headed out to get a load of shingles. He arrived at the supplier and loaded up as much as his vehicle could hold – about half a roof's worth of shingles. He went to pay, but since he had no credit at the outlet, he had to pay cash. His own cash. "The purchase took every last cent I had," says Keith. He drove back to the job site and he and Charlie got to work. By noon, they had half the roof on and were out of shingles. Keith was broke and had no choice but to approach the contractor for a draw. "He just laughed at me," Keith says. "I can't pay you for half a roof," he told me. "Well, I can't finish the roof with half the shingles," I told him. He gave me some money." Keith got the shingles he needed and he and Charlie finished the roof.

"The purchase took every last cent I had."

Keith's father-in-law Gus Candaele (left), Lana and Keith at a Hatzic Lake work site in 1952.



CALIFORNIA DREAMS



FROM TOP: Lana, when she was three years old, with Keith's 1950 Ford, in Birch Bay, 1951. The family spent many years vacationing there. Lana at about age three.

Doing a bit of roofing with Charlie and some odd jobs on the side was providing Keith with enough money to support his young family, but he wasn't content. He had finished building his home on Knight Road when he hit on an idea that had been kicking around the back of his mind ever since he had started building things for a living. He wanted to try his hand at making movie sets. Now that he had accumulated some skills and confidence, he thought it might be the right time to give it a shot. "Lee seemed okay with the idea," says

Keith. "Heck, we were going to Hollywood." One of his father's sisters, Aunt Vi, and her son, Murray, lived in Los Angeles and she offered to look for a place for the family to live. In the meantime, Keith started to tie up loose ends in Vancouver in preparation for the move. Job one was to sell the house he had just spent the better part of a year building from the ground up. It didn't take long. "I got an offer of \$10,000 pretty quickly," says Keith. "I jumped on it. It was the biggest chunk of money I had ever seen in my life." After paying off the mortgage and taking into account the money put in for materials, not to mention his labour, Keith had about \$5,000 left from the sale. He was impressed with the margin and it occurred to him that you could make a good living building houses, but he was California bound.

Keith sold everything they couldn't carry with them. Their home had gone to the highest bidder and so did all of their furniture, much of it built by Keith himself. "A lot of that stuff had been turned out in the old workshop," says Keith. "They were some nice pieces, bird's eye maple, expensive stuff I was proud of. I don't know where they've gotten to now, but I sometimes think it would be nice to have some of them. They were all built to last." Unencumbered by possessions, Keith was ready to start over in Hollywood.

Keith had taken care of the considerable paperwork for the move, which included joining the carpenters' union so he could work in the States. The new owners of the house had quickly taken possession, so the family needed to find somewhere to stay until they had word that their travel documents had been processed. Keith moved his family



into an Auto Court at the corner of Nelson Street and Kingsway, in Burnaby. "Now it's one of the intersections bordering Metrotown," says Keith. "But then, the area wasn't built up at all. It was filled with big trees and some houses." They lived there for three or four weeks and when word came that their paperwork was ready, he and Lee were eager to be gone.

They loaded up their car with the few things they had kept. All that remained was a quick trip to the United States Consulate to pick up the official documents and they would be on their way. He headed downtown to make the final arrangements. When he arrived at the Consulate and the last of the forms were presented to Keith to sign, he was informed by the clerk that they would have to process a \$5 charge for each member of the family to gain admission to the United States. Keith stared wide-eyed at the clerk. It was the first he had heard of any additional expense. "As far as I could tell, that was nothing but a head tax," says Keith. The clerk tried to explain the fee, but Keith was having none of it. "I said, 'I'm not paying to go to the States, to hell with it!'" Keith stormed out of the office, leaving all the documentation for the move on the desk of the clerk. "I really wanted to go, but I can get pretty stubborn about stupid little things," says Keith. Fifteen dollars was all that stood between Keith and California.

Hollywood was out. The house was gone, as was most of their furniture. Keith had cash from the sale of the house and some furniture, but didn't have a job or any real prospects for work. Once more, Keith was at a crossroads and the way forward was unclear. It was a fresh start, but not quite the one he had imagined

All that remained was a quick trip to the United States Consulate to pick up the official documents.



CHAPTER 7

Letting in the ENTREPRENEUR



After the plans to move to California fell through, Keith needed to start earning money.

PICKING UP THE HAMMER

The sudden abandonment of the plan to move to California meant that Keith had to quickly find a place for his family to live and a way to earn money. The fastest answer was to move back in with Lee's parents, who were now living in an apartment in New Westminster. Lee was happy to be at home and have the support of her parents to help her care for Lana. It was a good temporary solution while the couple looked for a new home. Lee's father owned and operated a small taxi business, so Keith figured that while he searched for other work he could drive a cab. "I liked driving, I needed to make money and I had some spare time, so I got my taxi licence," says Keith.



On his first day on the job, Keith climbed into one of his father-in-law's taxis and headed out to pick up a fare. A woman got into the back seat of the car and recited to Keith an address that he had never heard of and had no idea how to find. He started to drive, hoping that he was at least heading in the right direction. As he wandered aimlessly through New Westminster, his passenger finally lost patience. "She snapped," says Keith. "'Where the hell are you going?' she yelled at me. I finally asked her to tell me how to get there. I told her I wouldn't even charge her for the ride. I just wanted to get rid of her." He dropped his angry fare off at her destination and went right back home. He hung up the keys to the car and never picked them up again.

Taxi driving clearly wasn't for him and Keith didn't think New Westminster was either. Eager to move out of his in-laws' home, Keith decided to build another home for his family. Immediately, he thought of the area where they had been staying while they waited for their papers to come through for the move to California. He had loved the undeveloped residential area of Burnaby around the Auto Court. When he decided to look for a lot to build, it was the first place he went to explore. A property on Halley Street caught Keith's eye right away. "It was a big lot," says Keith. "It had beautiful, huge trees in the back of it. It was a gorgeous spot." He bought it for \$700 and set to work making plans for a house. "It was a quick one to build, with no basement and just two bedrooms. I got it up pretty fast."

It appeared that Keith was comfortably on his way to establishing himself and that he'd put all the pieces in place for a happy life. But life wasn't all rosy. "Lee was having a hard time after having the baby," says Keith. "She was struggling." Keith was distressed to find the fun-

"'Where the hell are you going?' she yelled at me."



Lee Candae just before she met Keith, circa 1945.

“Lee was having a hard time after having the baby ... She was struggling.”

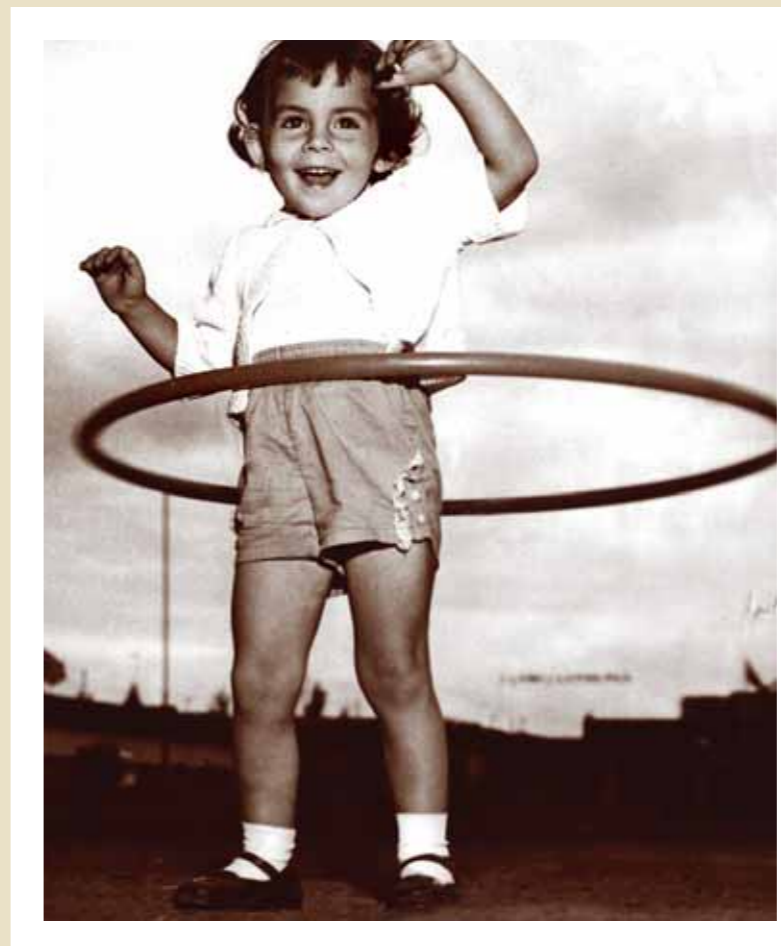
loving girl he'd met roller skating was gone. Lee was terrified to be alone and now that the couple no longer lived over the workshop with Keith working below, she had to have her mother stay with her while Keith was gone. “I couldn't leave her by herself at all,” Keith says. “It was a breakdown. She really changed.” Keith was out of the house frequently, working hard to bring in money and hone his skills. He had lots of things pulling him out of the house and an unhappy wife wasn't an appealing draw home. He was away more and more.

Keith was unsure how to help Lee cope with her problems. He encouraged her to see a doctor and hoped that professional advice would allow her to put her difficulties behind her. After a particularly tough week, Keith confided in a neighbour from across the street. “He was a nice retired guy,” says Keith. “He had come over to help me move something and when we were done with that, we chatted for while.” Keith described some of the couple's issues to his neighbour. “I said, ‘Hopefully, she'll be all right soon since she's getting some medicine.’ He told me ‘I've seen your wife and I've noticed how she's talking. My wife was the same. She never got over it.’ I said, ‘You've got to be kidding.’” This wasn't what Keith wanted to hear. He was worried his neighbour was right. He and Lee were drifting apart.

While Keith was hard at work getting the new house built, he and Charlie picked up where they had left off before the aborted California move. Doing a bit of roofing work here and there, Keith and Charlie met a pair of house builders, Tom Taylor and John Jenner, who asked them if they did any framing. Without missing a beat, the two answered yes, even though their framing experience was fairly limited. It hadn't been that long since Bob Hay had introduced Keith to framing, step by step, but the lessons were fresh in his mind so he knew that both he and Charlie were up to the challenge. Neither one was afraid of hard work. They accepted the terms that Taylor and Jenner offered – \$400 per house.

The job sites were in North Vancouver and West Vancouver, and with the commute to get there, the days they put in were long. The deal was that Keith and Charlie had to frame the houses, set the door and window frames and put in the drain tile. They also had to haul in concrete by the wheelbarrow load to pour after making all the foundation forms. The pair averaged approximately a house per week. “So we were making about \$200 a week, each,” says Keith. “It was decent money for those days.” It was good pay, but it wasn't easy work.

The framing was going well, but after completing about a dozen houses, Taylor and Jenner were contracting Keith and Charlie to do more and more on each job site. They would get called back after the plastering had been done to work on some finishing. Soon Keith was calling the sub-trades and coordinating the other crews on the site. He was around the sites more than the builders were and it became apparent by the number of details falling through the cracks that Taylor and Jenner had overextended themselves. The men on the jobs were reporting to Keith to be told what to do. He was ordering materials and managing deliveries. He was basically handling everything about the projects, while the builders were nowhere to be found. Gradually, a shift began to take place. Keith was spending more time on the management end than the labour end of the construction. It was 1953 and Keith was about to put down his hammer and start a new business.



Tanis Beedie testing out a Hula Hoop at the 1959 PNE.

TAKING CONTROL



A Beedie-built home from the 1960s.

Taylor and Jenner were handling a number of contracts to build split-level houses on the North Shore. As the projects started to fall apart, Keith picked up the slack and kept each one on track. Without him there to keep things running smoothly, the jobs would have collapsed into chaos. He was taking on more and more, far beyond the framing and finishing that he and Charlie were contracted to complete. In short order, Taylor and Jenner went broke. “I don’t know what they were doing,” says Keith. “They had just gone out and bought brand-new Chevys when the cash dried up. Of course, they owed me money, too.” They did finally get Keith some of

the money they owed him, but they offered him something else, too. “They had two or three contracts that they weren’t going to be able to fulfill,” Keith says. “They hadn’t even started them, so I agreed to take them over.”

It was a leap of faith. The Taylor and Jenner contracts weren’t deals that Keith had put together and he was starting from scratch. “I’d never done a full building contract before in my life, let alone the pricing,” says Keith. “I’d done most of the bits involved, but never the whole thing. And certainly not on my own. Those three houses were really how the ball got rolling.” But the timing was perfect for Keith to strike out by himself. He had just begun to recognize that his strength was not in wielding tools, but in managing and coordinating. And now he had the ideal environment in which to cut his teeth. The risk was low, since without Keith stepping in to take control, the deals were dead. “I had to talk to clients and handle the front end of things, which was brand-new to me,” says Keith. “God, I was nervous. I didn’t know if I was going to be able to pull it off, but I didn’t have anything to lose.” With Charlie working hard by his side, he completed the deals that Taylor and Jenner had put together. It proved to Keith that he was capable of more. “I finished those places and then I was excited about what I could do next,” says Keith.

Keith had crossed a threshold from casual labourer to house builder. It was more than a full-time job putting together all

“I’d never done a full building contract before in my life, let alone the pricing.”

the deals, negotiating all the sub-trades and staying on top of all the work to be done and problems to be solved. A new ambition began to take shape for Keith – and it was big. He’d come home late one night from a full day at the job site. The house was quiet with the family sound asleep. He hadn’t sat down all day, except to drive from one place to another. “I went into the bathroom and turned out the light,” says Keith. “I just wanted to sit and think. The moon was out and the moonlight was coming in through the window. I remember thinking, ‘If I could just get a million dollars I’d never have to worry about anything anymore.’ I figured we could live off the interest and I thought, ‘Someday, maybe I’m going to get that.’” It was something to shoot for, a new dream.

“Some of my very first memories are of sitting on the floor and listening to my dad talk about his day. I was fascinated.”

—LANA BRINDLEY, KEITH’S DAUGHTER

As a result of building split-levels in North Vancouver, Keith wanted one for himself. He bought a corner lot property on Forrest Avenue in Burnaby and proceeded to build a three-bedroom split-level with a double garage. He parked his car in one half of the garage and had his workshop in the other half.

He was still a long way from a million dollars, so when the chance to make money appeared, Keith jumped at it, even when he wasn’t expecting it. One weekend while he was working in the shop making cabinets for one of his construction projects, he brought Lana with him to do her own experimenting with tools and wood scraps. She was a curious five-year-old, showing some of Keith’s early interest in building. With Keith busily focused on his work, Lana fashioned a sign out of some old boards. At her request, he painted the words “For Sale” on the wood and she headed around to the front of the yard. It isn’t clear exactly what Lana was trying to sell, but she propped the sign up on the lawn. A passing motorist noticed the sign and pulled over, asking the little girl what was for sale. Lana brought the stranger around the back to see her dad. “Within about 10 minutes, I’d sold our house,” says Keith. “He offered a great price, so I said yes.” The profit Keith would realize on the sale of the house proved irresistible, even though completing the deal meant

Framing a split-level home for a client in the Halley Street neighbourhood, 1955.



that once again Keith's family was homeless. This time, at least, he had Lana to blame when he told Lee that they were moving.

"I was only five, but I made that little sign and stuck it in the ditch. I have no recollection of asking Dad to write the words 'for sale,' but I think I started something for Dad. He figured if he could build one house that someone would buy, he could build more."

—LANA BRINDLEY, KEITH'S DAUGHTER

The house was sold and Keith wanted to move back to Halley Street, so he bought another lot on the same street, this time for \$1,500. Once again, he drew up plans to build a house. But another house would take time to put up and that didn't solve his pressing need for a place to live right now. As a temporary measure, the three Beedies moved into a nearby nine-unit apartment building that Keith had constructed and now managed. "It was a tiny two-bedroom place," says Keith. After growing accustomed to the space afforded by his own house, apartment living was not a pleasurable experience. "It was terrible," says Keith. He was motivated to get the family back into their own home. Between the manager's job, building contract houses and being hard at work constructing his own place, his plate was full.

While working on a small subdivision in Surrey, Keith discovered an extra incentive to complete the second house on Halley Street quickly. Lee announced one morning that she was pregnant again. The family of three moved out of the two-bedroom apartment and into their big new home with time to spare. One evening, not long after settling in, Keith arrived home from work to grab a quick bite to eat before heading off to see a Canucks game with Charlie. "I walked in," says Keith "and there's Lee making funny sounds. I was still thinking about making the game, so I jumped in the car to take her to Burnaby Hospital as fast as I could." In those days, men weren't expected – or encouraged – to be with their wives while they were in labour, so Keith was about to make a quick getaway. The baby had other plans, though. "We were in the elevator in the hospital when Lee's water broke," says Keith. "Then boom diddy boom we had another little girl." Keith said hello to his new daughter before making his way on to

the game. He arrived by eight o'clock, sitting down next to Charlie in their usual seats at the very top row of the old Forum. As he took his seat, Keith casually mentioned that he had a new baby daughter. Charlie was shocked. "I had just seen him at work at five o'clock. It all happened that quickly," says Keith.

**"I walked in ...
and there's Lee
making funny
sounds."**



Tanis Beedie, Keith and Lee's second child, was born in 1955.

Fifteen months later, Lee went into labour with the couple's third child, Colin. Keith did what men were expected to do in the 1950s: he drove his wife to the hospital and after a while returned home. He was awoken in the middle of the night to Dr. Rideout's phone call informing him that he had a son. "I'll never forget how he said it," Keith says. "His comment was, 'You have a new baby ... and you put a handle on this one!' I laughed."

Despite how busy he was, when the next opportunity came up, Keith knew he had to jump at it. John Boulby was a friend from Keith's high school days. John had gone to a different school, but the two boys had known one another through mutual friends. John's father was a real estate developer, and to introduce his son to the business he had given him control over one of his projects, Central Park Garden Village in Burnaby. He was planning a huge subdivision of about 300 lots. John approached Keith to see if he was interested in building some houses in the subdivision. Keith immediately thought of the split-level houses he had just finished in North and West Vancouver. "They were all over the North Shore because of the steep slopes, but there weren't any in Burnaby yet," says Keith. "I knew they would be as popular as all heck. People don't always want a full basement, so I thought they would sell one after another." He came up with a design for a versatile split-level and took a drive with John Boulby around the development site.

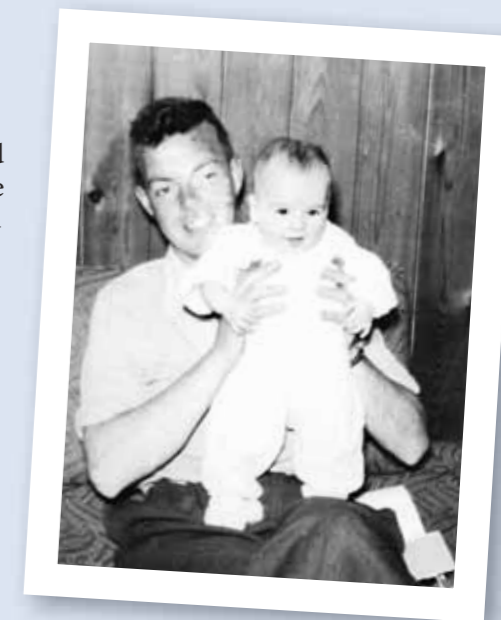
"We drove around to see which lots were big enough for the design," says Keith. There were about 30 lots in the subdivision that would fit the split-level plan, selling for \$1,100 apiece. Keith made a list of the appropriate lots and then made a big decision. He offered John a \$10 deposit on each of the 30 lots. "I knew that if I built split-level houses, they would sell. There wasn't anything like them in the Vancouver/Burnaby area. Driving around like that, buying up land, it was something else." He paid his deposit and set to work.

"Our Sunday family ritual was driving around to job sites. My favourite thing was going to a site where there was a building to demolish. My dad would let us throw rocks at the windows to break them. Work sites were like giant playgrounds to us."

—TANIS RUBINI, KEITH'S DAUGHTER

"After touring the job sites on Sundays, we used to go eat at White Spot. I loved that part."

—LANA BRINDLEY, KEITH'S DAUGHTER



Keith with son, Colin, circa 1957.

INCORPORATION

By 1956 the work at Central Park Garden Village was continuing at a brisk pace. The split-level houses were selling just as Keith had expected. The designs proved to be so popular that he was selling each home before it was completed. Profits from one sale were funnelled into the construction of the next house. Keith was selling each house for \$13,500, but in those days, if they were building CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation) mortgaged homes, they needed to hold them to a price set by CMHC. “They put a ceiling on the maximum of the house,” says Keith. “They decided on a price of \$12,500 for my places, but I couldn’t do it the way I wanted for that little. So I would put another thousand into them to finish them the way I liked. The purchaser paid that extra. Then CMHC would pay us a certain percentage of the mortgage, contingent upon a final inspection when the house was done.”

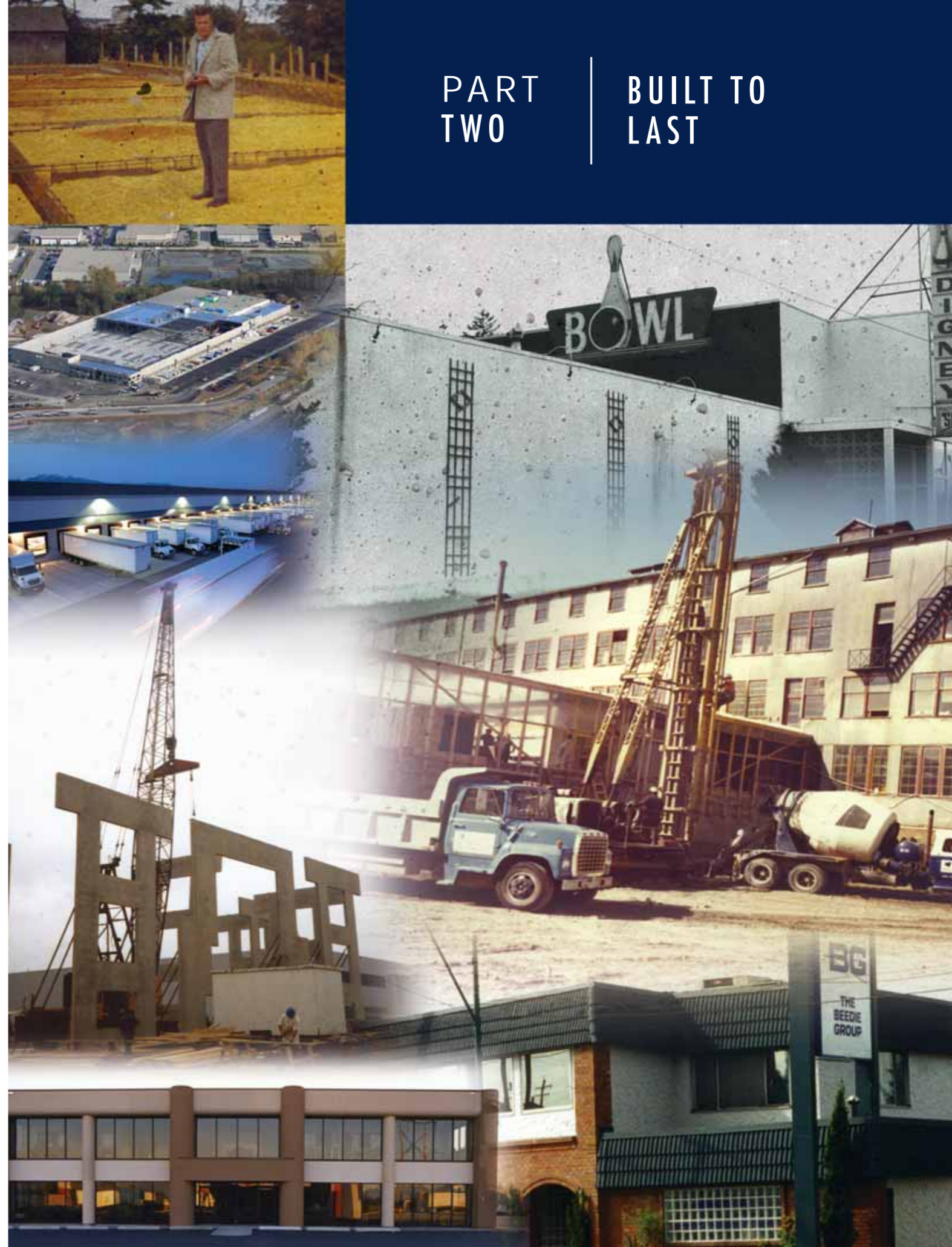


To Keith’s frustration, some of the inspectors were incredibly fussy. “Those goddamn guys could drive you nuts,” says Keith. “They could find some tiny thing and make a world of trouble for me.” Fortunately, it was a mixed bag with the inspectors and sometimes Keith got lucky. “I remember an inspector stopping by once,” says Keith. “He went through the whole house and commented that there wasn’t much he could find wrong. Right at the end of the inspection, he headed out the rear sliding glass door. There should have been some stairs to a patio two feet below the floor. We hadn’t built that yet.” The inspector jumped down from the door. Keith held his breath, waiting for the barrage of complaints sure to come. Instead, he was shocked when the inspector scribbled on a piece of paper that everything was fine. “He passed the house and I got my money,” says Keith. “I couldn’t believe it since I think he’d even split his pants on the way down.” Keith only wished it were always so easy.

Now Keith had three kids to support. He was grateful that the houses he was building were selling and generating a steady income. As he took on more jobs, he realized that the scope of his business had grown beyond a simple one-man operation. He was paying multiple wages, putting out considerable sums of money on materials and juggling different projects. The time had come to make it official. In 1954, Keith incorporated Beedie Construction.

“My dad has always been a great father. He has always made me feel safe, because I have always known he’d be there for me whenever I’ve needed him.”

—COLIN BEEDIE, KEITH’S SON



PART
TWO

BUILT TO
LAST

CHAPTER 8

If it wasn't for
BAD LUCK,
I'd have
NO LUCK at all ...



LAWSUITS AND LAWYERS AND
COURTROOMS, OH MY!

Beedie Construction was up and running. Incorporating didn't change the business much. Keith kept it lean and simple, continuing to use his house as his office and Charlie Metcalfe as his superintendent. Charlie had quit firefighting as the work with Keith was coming consistently enough to merit a career change. Mentally, creating Beedie Construction Ltd. was a big step for Keith. He gave his name to the company and dedicated himself to its growth and reputation.

"I was 10 or so when my dad quit firefighting to work with Keith. I imagine it was hard to give up that security for a future he didn't know. I remember that my mom wasn't too happy about it."
—TED METCALFE, SUPERINTENDENT (RETIRED)

Keith didn't have to wait long to see his new commitment put to the test. The houses in Central Park Garden Village continued to go up. The first one constructed there under the Beedie Construction Ltd. letterhead was another of the split-level homes that Keith had been having such success with and had been built for the Thompson family. The subdivision was filling in quickly, and at that time, there were no sewers to complicate matters. Builders were responsible for installing septic systems to support the plumbing. On the Thompson house, Keith had wanted to put the septic tank in the backyard and the septic field in the front because of the site grades. The Burnaby engineers in charge insisted that the field had to be in the back with the tank. Keith's instincts told him that arrangement was flawed but he had no choice but to comply. He put the tank and field in the back, completed the house and handed it over to the Thompsons.

Not long afterwards, Keith was walking down the lane at the subdivision while working on another project. As he passed by the Thompsons' place, Mrs. Thompson came running out of the house calling his name. "She was shouting and waving at me," says Keith. "Apparently she'd been trying to get a hold of me through her realtor, but I hadn't heard a thing from him." She told Keith she had something to show him and led him into her house and down into the basement. "The downstairs reeked," says Keith. "She walked me over to her laundry tubs and told me to look inside." What Keith saw turned his stomach. The tubs were filled with septic. Keith's doubts about the septic system were confirmed. The tank and field had backed up, forcing raw sewage up the pipes into the basement. "She told me it had been that way for two or three days," says Keith. "I felt

**What Keith saw
turned his stomach.
The tubs were filled
with septic.**

sick for them. Even though it was pouring out and I was dressed up, I grabbed a shovel and went outside. I dug down enough to connect to a ditch by the lane to relieve the pressure causing the overflow.”

Keith felt he had done his best for the family, trying to help them out of their crisis. He was unhappy that the Thompsons were saddled with a malfunctioning system in a house he had built, but he was relieved that the issues arose out of Burnaby’s city engineers’ policy and not through his own fault.

“Keith has an enormous sense of fairness. He is unique in business in that he loves to drive a hard bargain but does not like to take advantage of people. When he sees that someone has made an honest mistake, he doesn’t seize on it. The overriding feeling I get from him is honesty.”

—ANNE KOBER, LAWYER

Mr. Thompson, however, didn’t see it that way. He launched a lawsuit against Beedie Construction, alleging that the contract that both parties signed with the realtor had Keith guaranteeing the septic system. “It turned out the realtor had written a guarantee on the back of the contract,” says Keith. “I would never have guaranteed that system, never in my life. I still hadn’t seen that clause when I walked into the courtroom.” The judge in the case was Sherwood Lett, who later became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia. Keith had high hopes that the case would quickly be settled in his favour once the

Burnaby engineer subpoenaed explained the situation. “The Burnaby guy told the truth,” says Keith. “He told the court that I’d been told to do it that way.” The Thompsons’ lawyer argued that Beedie Construction’s liability lay elsewhere. “He said the issue was how long I took to fix it,” says Keith. “My lawyer didn’t even comment on that or explain that I fixed it the day I found out.” Another troubling factor in the case was that Sherwood Lett had a visiting judge from the United States sitting with him on the bench. Keith felt that

Lett was spending more time talking to the visitor than listening to the details of the case. In his judgment, Judge Lett awarded the Thompsons \$1,500 to be paid by Beedie Construction. “They only paid \$12,000 for the house, including \$1,100 for the lot,” says Keith. “That fine was a big chunk of money.” It was only the second job on the books for Beedie Construction Ltd. “It was my first time going to court and it really set the tone for the future and how I feel about the justice system. It wasn’t the best start,” says Keith.

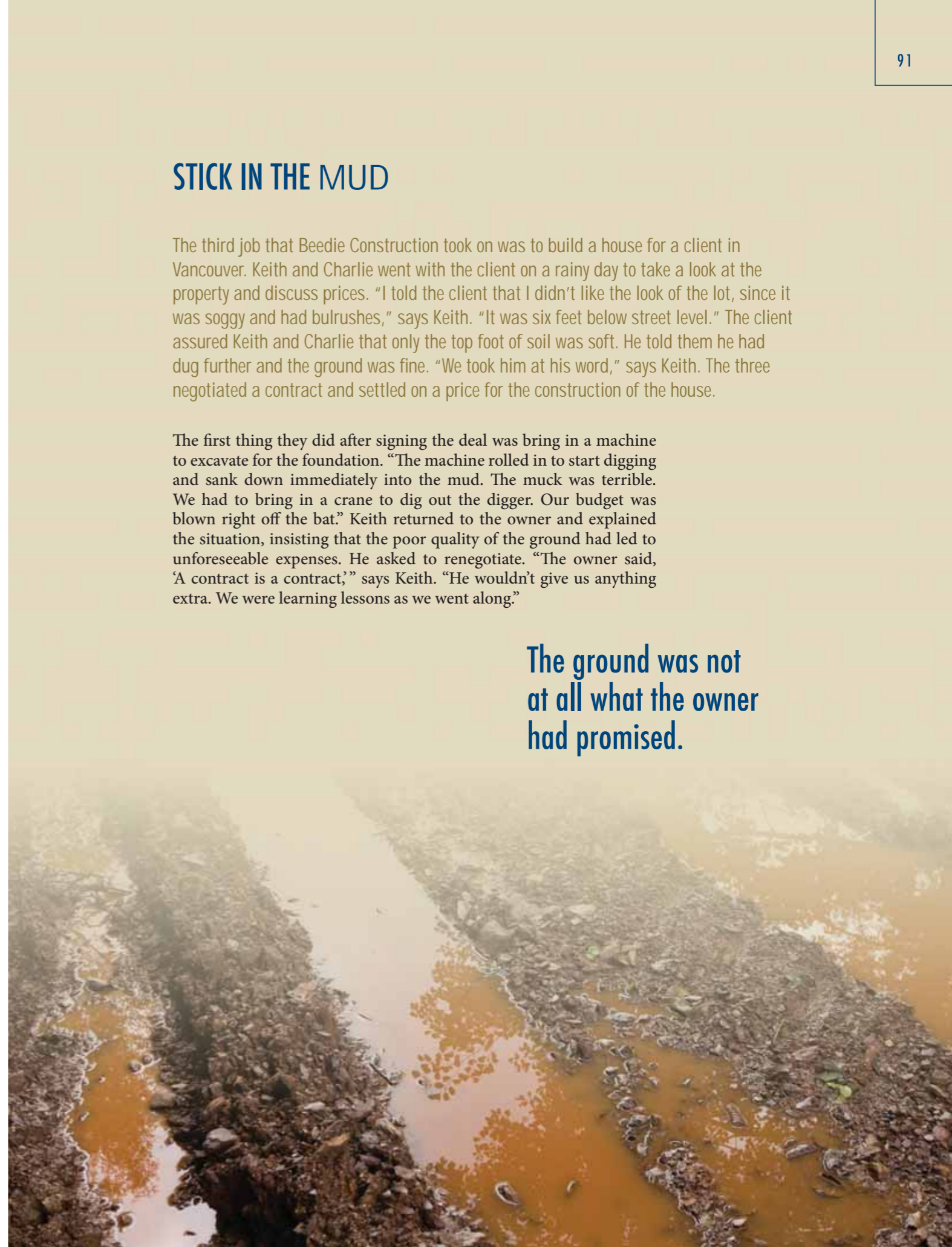
Keith felt he had done his best for the family.

STICK IN THE MUD

The third job that Beedie Construction took on was to build a house for a client in Vancouver. Keith and Charlie went with the client on a rainy day to take a look at the property and discuss prices. “I told the client that I didn’t like the look of the lot, since it was soggy and had bulrushes,” says Keith. “It was six feet below street level.” The client assured Keith and Charlie that only the top foot of soil was soft. He told them he had dug further and the ground was fine. “We took him at his word,” says Keith. The three negotiated a contract and settled on a price for the construction of the house.

The first thing they did after signing the deal was bring in a machine to excavate for the foundation. “The machine rolled in to start digging and sank down immediately into the mud. The muck was terrible. We had to bring in a crane to dig out the digger. Our budget was blown right off the bat.” Keith returned to the owner and explained the situation, insisting that the poor quality of the ground had led to unforeseeable expenses. He asked to renegotiate. “The owner said, ‘A contract is a contract,’” says Keith. “He wouldn’t give us anything extra. We were learning lessons as we went along.”

The ground was not at all what the owner had promised.



Keith was stuck with a big crane bill, but worse, he wasn't sure how to proceed with the building. The ground was not at all what the owner had promised. Keith was building in a marsh. The owner went out of town and Charlie and Keith got creative in his absence. "We dug some sloppy trenches and laid down 3- x 12-inch cedar planks to make it level," says Keith. "They were basically floating." The plan was to then pour the foundation on top of the planks. But first, they had to pass an inspection. "We made sure it was a rainy day, so the inspector wouldn't want to climb down into the mud for a closer look," says Keith. "He looked down from street level and he could see the forms, so he passed it." Keith and Charlie lost no time in pouring the concrete and putting in the drain tile. By the time the client returned to town and came by the building site, he was shocked to find them already framing his house. "The whole place was balanced on the mud. It wasn't how I did things, but at that point we just wanted to finish the thing and get the hell out," says Keith. Due to the lies, he had already lost money on the deal and he wanted it complete.

When the house was done, Keith went to the client for the final draw on the contract. As they walked around the house together for a final inspection Keith was furious as the owner started pointing out little flaws in the finishing. "He said he didn't like the placement of the electric outlets," says Keith. "He insisted that wall plugs had to be moved because his iron cord wouldn't reach the area he wanted to iron in, that kind of stuff." He refused to hand over the final payment. Keith couldn't believe it. Keith got a lawyer, demanding payment and complaining that the client was crooked and crazy. The contract had gone through the CMHC, so they launched an investigation to get to the bottom of the matter.

One evening, while the lawyers were still looking into the client's contract with regards to final payment, Keith and Charlie went with their wives to a masquerade party. Keith had rented a Native Indian costume and Charlie was dressed as a cowboy. "We were so frustrated by the situation," says Keith. "We got a few drinks in us and since we weren't far away, we decided to pay him a visit." It was after two o'clock in the morning when an inebriated Keith and Charlie arrived on the owner's doorstep. They banged on the door to wake him up. He came to the back door and peeked out the window. "One look at us in our costumes, mine complete with a little hatchet,



"One look at us in our costumes, mine complete with a little hatchet, sent him screaming back to phone the police."

sent him screaming back to phone the police. He was terrified," says Keith. While he bolted, Keith and Charlie ran laughing back to their car. They figured it didn't help the situation, but they had fun scaring the owner.

The next day, Keith received a phone call from his lawyer. "He told me that the client had called the bank to complain about us," says Keith. "He said that we had appeared at his place in the middle of the night, dressed to kill and waving an axe. 'Now we know why you thought he was nuts,' the lawyer told me." Eventually, Keith got all the money owed him on the deal. "And that guy got a cheap house on a crappy piece of land," says Keith. "That, and the scare of his life."

"Keith can have a bit of fun. I remember one time I came into the Beedie office to talk business and I showed Keith a little \$9 fake camera I picked up, the kind you screw onto the outside of your building to trick people into thinking there's surveillance. I asked Keith if he would play along with me. I went downstairs to the lower offices and pretended I was trying to find a spot for the camera. I was getting some evil glares, but I said 'Hey, don't shoot the messenger. I just do what the big guy says.' I made a big show of it, even getting Keith on speaker phone at one point saying move the camera to the left a bit. People were really getting worried, so I finally let everyone in on the joke. It was very funny. Keith was a very good sport."

—AXEL GRINGMUTH, ETS ELECTRIC LTD.

Two of the very first projects taken on by Beedie Construction Ltd. had not gone according to plan, but Keith wasn't discouraged. He was breaking ground on building the 30 lots he had originally purchased at Central Park Garden Village. Other than the septic issue on the Thompson property, construction on the subdivision in Burnaby was going well. Keith noticed that his split-level houses were selling better than most of his competitors' homes. "They were selling these regular basement bungalow places," says Keith. "Mine were selling like hotcakes." Keith was pleased that the lots he had purchased at \$1,100 and \$1,200 had turned out to be the prize locations in the subdivision. He had bought them because they fit his split-level design, with a carport on the side of the house. They were all corner locations or wide lots with no lane, and all had views, unlike most of the lower-priced properties he had passed on. Those appeared to be more difficult to unload. "The other builders didn't like it that I had all the corner view lots tied up," says Keith. "It taught me a lesson: tie up the land if you can. I still do that today."

**Eventually,
Keith got all
the money
owed him on
the deal.**

BEEDIE
GROUP
CASE
STUDY:THE
VALUE
OF A
HAND
SHAKE

In 1980 Canadian Tire was getting into the Vancouver market and needed a distribution facility. The day after negotiations with Keith were derailed by the company's long list of demands, Keith was approached by businessman Hugh Eland, who expressed an interest in building on the same property, at 8335 Winston Street, Burnaby, for his company, Toys and Wheels. That night they worked out an agreement and shook hands on it. Beedie was to do a list of specifications that had been verbally agreed upon by Keith and Hugh. The following day Canadian Tire's agent came back announcing that they were ready to resume negotiations. When Keith told them they were too late, Canadian Tire's agent pointed out that it was offering more, and besides, Keith had not signed the contract with Eland. Keith informed the agent that his handshake was the same as a signed contract. The building was constructed in partnership with Hugh Eland and Beedie Construction.

Thirty years later, Hugh Eland is still a joint-venture partner with Beedie for the building at 8335 Winston Street.



The building that Keith constructed for Hugh Eland, at 8335 Winston Street, Burnaby, 1980.

NEW DIGS

Business was going well enough by 1956 that Keith decided it was time to move his office out of his house. An opportunity arose to buy a building at 5367 Kingsway, which was originally 3321 Kingsway, a number that would eventually be part of his phone number. "I loved the location," says Keith. "It was almost the dead centre of Metro Vancouver. It was close to where I lived and where the kids went to school. I jumped on it." Keith bought the building for a \$4,000 down payment on a \$12,000 total purchase price. "It was a shed, really," says Keith. "It was a long building, set about two feet below street level. Kingsway wasn't a busy road and in 1956 it was still partially gravel." The structure was nowhere near move-in condition and Keith estimated that it would take at least a month to fix it up. In the meantime, he moved the company office out of his house and into a motel room he rented close by so he could supervise the renovations.



Keith in his old Kingsway office in the mid-1980s.

The building had been a boot factory during the war, churning out footwear for servicemen. "When we took over the place, the whole back end was full of boot pieces and old firehoses," says Keith. "I don't know what they were doing with the hoses, making soles out of them, I guess." At the front was a tiny office with two small windows and a door. Keith cleaned up the inside, painted the wooden exterior and built a small carport. He left the front as office space and the back as a workshop. "The shop part worked out well," says Keith. "We used it for years to make cabinetry, fixtures, window boxes, any little things houses needed." When the renovations were complete, Keith moved from the motel into his brand-new office space. Beedie Construction was growing up and Keith decided that, now he had an office, it was time to find himself a secretary. He hired a woman named Lola, who also took on the company accounting. She had a small desk inside the door where she answered phones and kept the books. Looking around him at what he had built, Keith was proud of how far he had come.

THE KINGSWAY OFFICE

When Keith rebuilt the Beedie Construction headquarters on Kingsway in 1956, it wasn't just an office he was creating. He was laying the foundation for an entire business. Perhaps that was why it was hard for Keith to consider moving into new offices once Beedie Construction had outgrown the space.

When the office was completed, three-quarters of the building was taken up by Keith's workshop. The work space enabled him to do custom cabinetry and other finishing items for the homes he was building. Despite the square footage the workshop occupied, there was still empty office space, which Keith rented to other businesses. As time passed and the company expanded, the workshop shrank and Beedie employees gradually took over tenant-occupied spaces. To make more room, the carport was enclosed and converted into offices. Soon, the whole building was given over to Beedie Construction, and before long, the existing space was too cramped.

Numerous renovations over the years have extended the life of the building, including the construction of a second floor. "I believe we renovated seven times," says Keith. "I lost track of how often we reconfigured the space, changed the interior around, shuffled departments or altered the outside." The growing business meant more people needed to be hired, each requiring some place to work in the office. The building, which had started at 3,000 square feet, had ballooned into a 7,000-square-foot, two-storey structure.

Clients and sub-trades with whom Keith has worked all share stories about meetings and Christmas parties in the increasingly tight quarters. But Keith couldn't be convinced to look for a new office. "I never did think we'd outgrown it," says Keith. "Although, I did have to admit that seven parking spots for 43 people was tough to make work."

Ryan Beedie, on the other hand, knew that the time had come to consider a new location when Keith proposed that the cramped accounting department move to new digs down the street. After years of creative space maximization and innovative renovations, the curtain finally closed on 5367 Kingsway.

The Beedie Group's former offices
at 5367 Kingsway in Burnaby.



"Keith is proud to be in Burnaby. I don't think he wants to leave his roots behind. It's admirable."

—KELLY McKNIGHT, RBC ROYAL BANK

At the same time as he was moving into the new company headquarters, Keith was finishing work on the last house in Central Park Garden Village for the Watson family. Everything was done, except for the final touches. As he had with all the homes in the subdivision, Keith offered to add wood planters by the front door for an extra charge. Watson had paid for everything but the planters. "He asked if I wanted cash or a cheque and I said cash would be fine," says Keith. "I put the \$25 he gave me into my pocket and forgot all about it." Watson and his wife, who worked for the Canada Revenue Agency, noticed the cash going into Keith's pocket and it started them thinking. "In those days, the CRA would give you a 10 percent share of any money they seized from tips about evasion," says Keith. "They took a complete stab in the dark and reported me." Keith had no idea he was under investigation.

"A horrible-looking little man with a moustache just like Hitler's was sitting behind my desk grinning ..."

Months later when Keith arrived at his office, he walked in to see a frantic Lola. "A horrible-looking little man with a moustache just like Hitler's was sitting behind my desk grinning," says Keith. "I asked him what the hell he thought he was doing. He said, 'I'm here from the CRA and I'm looking at your accounts.' I could tell right away he was the zealous type of person who loves to go after the smallest infraction. I saw him sitting there behind my desk, smug as all get-out, and decided I wasn't going to be pushed around."

An RCMP officer was standing guard at the door and several men were filling boxes with papers and ledgers. The phone was ringing, with an upset Lee at the other end, asking what to do as the house was being raided, too. Keith quickly took measure of the situation, telling Lee to ask to see a warrant. He hung up and asked the same question of the tax men in the office. They pulled out the warrant and asked, "You are Beedie, correct?" Keith grabbed the paperwork and saw that the address listed was for the temporary office he had used in the motel down the street. He showed the police sergeant the error. "The RCMP officer smiled and said, 'Get out, you guys.' He was happy to throw them out on their ears." The investigators had to drop what they had and leave.

**“I can’t work
in a place like
this, with police
running around.”**

When they returned with the proper warrant, the authorities found nothing out of the ordinary in the company books. The tax man protested and spouted theories about what he thought was “really” going on. “But, with no evidence, lots of conjecture and one bit of hearsay, they figured any investigation would wind up in a dead end. So they assessed me some overdue taxes of about \$2,000 including interest and penalties and left it at that,” says Keith.

To make matters worse, Lola informed Keith that she was quitting. “She said, ‘I can’t work in a place like this, with police running around,’” says Keith. “I tried to tell her that it would never happen again.” It was no use. Lola handed in her notice. As she packed her things to go, she told Keith what he already knew: the company didn’t have enough money to cover the tax bill. Keith went to the tax office, unsure of how to get out of the mess he was in. “I walked in and told someone there that I didn’t know what the heck I was going to do. We were a small company and didn’t have that kind of money lying around,” says Keith. “He looked at me and asked me one question, ‘Who owns the building?’” Keith knew they already had the answer. “I do,” he said.



CHAPTER 9

It Takes a VILLAGE



Keith and his new 1962 Mercury Park Lane in front of the Kingsway office.

APPEASEMENT



Keith and Vern Keller at the Beedie Christmas party, 1995. Vern was also celebrating 47 years with the company.

Beedie Construction was just getting off the ground. Keith had a few jobs under his belt and money was beginning to come into the business. But he was worried that doling out the amount of money the company was retroactively assessed for taxes would send Beedie Construction under. After working hard to establish himself, Keith was unwilling to be felled by an unjust assessment. He was keen to listen to any suggestions that would allow the company to stay afloat.

When the CRA agent asked him who owned the building that housed Beedie Construction, Keith feared the worst. He had just completed renovating the office and setting himself up. It would hurt to lose it, particularly under such circumstances. “They held all the cards,” says Keith. “I had no choice but to hear the tax officer out.” The solution the Canada Revenue agent suggested took Keith by surprise as he hadn’t even considered the possibility. “I owned the building personally,” says Keith, “so he told me to sell it to the company instead. I didn’t see how that would help since I would have to pay taxes on the income.” The taxman explained how to claim the profit as capital gains, which he could then put against his tax losses. All he had to do was get the money on the books theoretically. “It worked,” says Keith. “Once I knew I could get out from under that threat it was a huge relief. In the end, it cost me nothing, really. I was able to pay the big guys and carry on.”

“The biggest lesson I learned from my dad is how to see a project through from the beginning to the end. No matter what issues come up, there is a solution if you look hard enough. He doesn’t give up on anything. Even in his 80s, he has far more energy than I do.”

—TANIS RUBINI, KEITH’S DAUGHTER

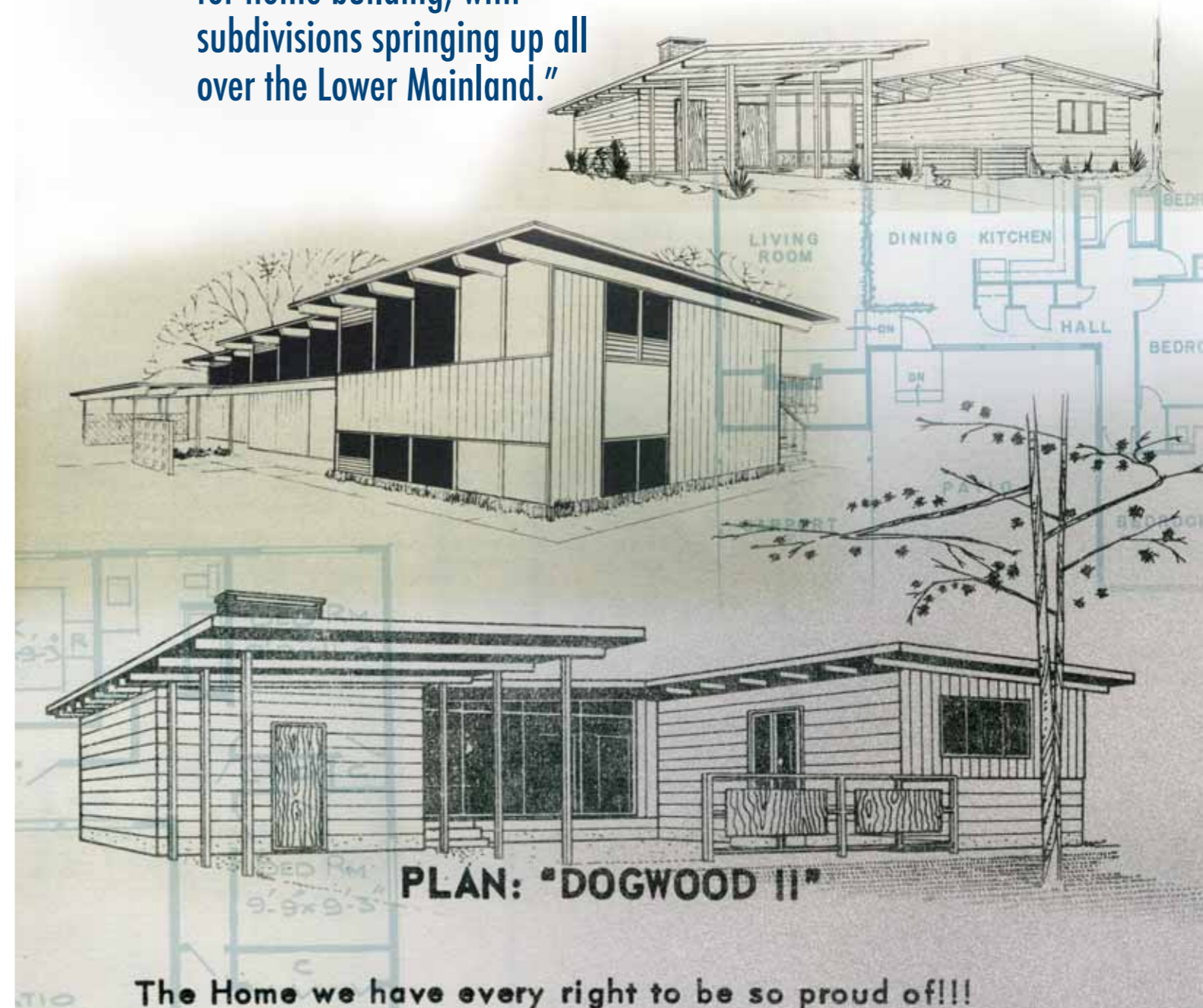
It was a frustrating lesson, but a valuable one. Keith instructed everyone he worked with to keep fastidious bookkeeping records to ensure that in the future he would be able to prove his tax status. He didn’t want to suffer through a similar incident again. The only real loss incurred was the abrupt departure of Lola. Keith embarked on a search for a new secretary. He offered the position to a woman named Mrs. Betty Beattie. “The first day she asked if she could bring her collie dog to work,” says Keith. “I told her I loved dogs, so go ahead. It turned out that I got along well with the dog, but Betty was a bit of a dodo.” She came and went, along with a series of other secretaries who didn’t quite fit. In the meantime, Keith’s two-man operation was expanding; to keep up with the growing workload he hired Charlie Metcalfe’s son, Ted, and Vern Keller.

“In 1956, I worked for Keith Beedie when I was on summer break after Grade 10. I only lasted three months. I couldn’t stand it. The weather got cold in September and I quit. The following summer, I started again and stayed on. Once I came back, I put my heart into it, started paying attention and learning.”

—TED METCALFE, SUPERINTENDENT (RETIRED)

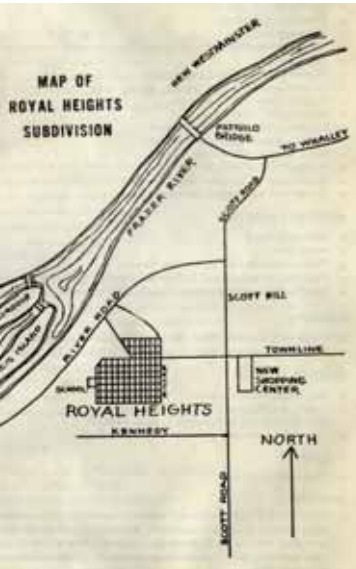
“It was a golden age for home building, with subdivisions springing up all over the Lower Mainland.”

Keith’s 1961 brochure featured a selection of great looking modern homes.



The Home we have every right to be so proud of!!!

TWO SCOOPS ... OR A HOUSE?



With another little Beedie to feed and more employees to keep busy, Keith threw himself into the company. He took on project after project, mostly residential homes and smaller construction jobs. Keith always had a couple of contract homes on the go around the Lower Mainland, but construction was wrapping up on the remaining lots in Central Park Garden Village. It was time to look for another big project. In 1957, a new subdivision being created by Keith's father-in-law caught his eye. Keith purchased a number of lots for around \$900 each, including one for himself. "One of the first houses I built was for us," says Keith. "The subdivision was nice and I calculated that being out there meant I could keep an eye on what was going on." He sold the house on Halley Street and moved the family to Surrey.

It was a golden age for home building, with subdivisions springing up all over the Lower Mainland. "New neighbourhoods would appear in a matter of weeks, not months or years. It went this way: build a road; dig ditches; install overhead wires, water service and a septic tank; and you were ready to go. Permits were no problem to acquire and the lack of red tape allowed us to turn around a project really quickly. It was a very different time and there were a lot fewer hoops to jump through at city hall." A business friend of Keith's was developing a good-sized subdivision in North Delta called Royal Heights. Keith bought a number of lots and came up with five interchangeable house plans. "I assigned letters to each plan: A through E," says Keith. "I took the five plans to Delta and they gave me back a stack of permit applications. When I was ready to start work on a new lot I simply called and told them, 'Building C application is in the mail with a \$10 cheque to cover processing. I want an inspector tomorrow.' It was that easy."

"Keith was always concerned about his key people staying active with work. He didn't want to lose anyone. A lot of times, we'd start jobs without permits because we needed work for the guys. We were never just numbers to Keith."

—TED METCALFE, SUPERINTENDENT (RETIRED)

With his family now in one of the houses in the subdivision, Charlie, Ted and Vern worked feverishly to construct the houses. The house designs and site location proved popular. A few weekends in a row Keith

set up a small booth at the end of the new subdivision street from which he sold homes. "It was like flogging ice cream, like back in my PNE days. One Sunday, I sold six," says Keith. He was offering the houses for \$13,400, a figure that left him approximately \$4,000 in profit per home. The \$24,000 weekend was a good indication that Beedie Construction's star was on the rise.

Living in North Delta made lots of sense to Keith, who found it easier to work on the new subdivision. But for Lee and the kids, the set-up was not ideal and they were anxious to go back to Burnaby. Mindful of this, Keith had his eye on the last undeveloped property back on Halley Street. It was a corner lot, with a beautiful view of the mountains. He had to have it. In 1958, Keith managed to find out the status of the empty lot. "Someone had died and left the property to a young girl," Keith says. "But she didn't get possession of it until her 21st birthday." Keith managed to discover the date of the girl's birthday and her address in Burnaby. Knowing that he wasn't the only one interested in obtaining the lot, he seized the moment. "Right before midnight, the night before her birthday, I was on her doorstep," Keith says. On the stroke of midnight, he knocked on the door. When the girl appeared, he offered her \$5,000 for the land she'd owned for all of about 30 seconds. "I said, 'Here's a cash deposit and a contract. Tomorrow our lawyers can get together and I'll get you the balance.' I think her answer was, 'Uh, ok.' She signed and it was mine." Keith's hunch paid off. The next day he had people calling him asking if he wanted to sell. After paying \$700 for the first Halley lot and \$1,500 for the second, the high price was hard to take. "Five thousand for that lot. I still don't like to think about it," says Keith.



After paying \$700 for the first Halley lot and \$1,500 for the second, the high price of \$5,000 was hard to take.

Keith's Halley Street home.

Keith embarked, once again, on the task of constructing a family home. Capitalizing on the view, he planned huge dining and living room windows for the house. While he was hard at work on Halley, the company continued to produce houses in the subdivision in North Delta, and broke ground on a nine-lot subdivision in Coquitlam. "Those really were the good old days," says Keith. "It took less than 90 days from the start of a small subdivision to build a house for a family to move into."



FROM TOP: The brochure for the Royal Heights subdivision in North Delta let prospective buyers know about amenities, such as a nearby shopping centre, as well as the Beedie New Home Warranty that guaranteed quality workmanship.



JUMPING INTO THE DEEP END

Running a modest-sized operation, one of Keith's challenges was maintaining a steady flow of work and finding the perfect balance to ensure that Beedie Construction employees were neither overburdened nor underworked. By accident, Keith started a sideline installing liner swimming pools as the 1950s drew to a close. The pools were terrific filler projects to keep things moving between larger jobs.

Previously, pools had only been for the very wealthy because they required a constant stream of water to maintain cleanliness. Liner pools were a new technology, coming with a filter allowing the system to circulate the same water. When Keith started work on a new pool for a client in Vancouver, the City didn't want to hear anything about filters and circulation. They were not keen on any kind of pool because of the water question. They reckoned that since they charged all houses a flat rate for water – and a pool would use far

more water than was reasonable – the City would lose out if they didn't go to the expense of installing a special meter. “I tried to tell them that with the new liner pools, consumption was not an issue. You never had to change the water, you just topped up what you lost in evaporation. I even told them there was more water wasted watering a lawn than keeping a pool,” Keith says. “But they wouldn't listen, started quoting me some old pool bylaw and sent a crew to put in a special water meter anyway.” Sure enough, less than a year later they came back to Keith's customer and removed the meter and mothballed the old bylaw. “I felt I had something to do with that,” says Keith.

In 1958 the pool sideline offered Beedie Construction another unexpected benefit. One evening when Keith and Charlie were at a Canucks game, an announcement came over the loudspeaker. The announcer explained that Phil Maloney, the team's star player, was heading back to his hometown in Ontario and the team was concerned that if Maloney went home on the off-season, he might not come back to play for the Canucks the following season. He had had his best season ever and the team was motivated to keep him. The announcer asked if anyone had some work available to keep Maloney west until the season started again. In those days, the Vancouver Canucks were in the WHL, one step below the NHL. Players didn't earn anything close to the money they do today and they often had to work in the off-season. “I whipped down to the bench right away,” says Keith. “I got over to Maloney and told him we were doing pool construction and it would be a good way to keep himself fit. He took the job.”



The swimming pool at one of the Halley Street houses.

A long relationship with Canucks players emerged from that initial offer. Keith kept Phil Maloney employed for the next few off-seasons and developed friendly ties with other hockey players. Keith even hosted pool parties for the players and their families. Keith started sponsoring the Canucks' softball team, buying all their uniforms. The team toured the Lower Mainland, playing in all the local municipalities. “One of the players loved sliding into every base,” recalls Keith. “He slid even when he didn't have to, tearing his pants. I joked with him that if he wasn't more careful, he'd have to pay for his own uniforms. Those times with Phil and the Canucks were good.”

For Keith, who was already a huge Canucks fan, his ties to the team strengthened as he got to know the players. Eventually, though, the pool business came to an end. “It was a barely-break-even kind of thing,” says Keith. “But it kept Phil working in the summers, so it was worth it.”

Between family, the parties with the hockey team and staying close to other friends, Keith was working hard and playing hard. One evening it almost caught up with him. “Two other guys and I had been downtown on a Friday night,” says Keith. “We came home to my house to have a few more drinks.” When his friends left, Keith lay down in bed to sleep. Next thing he knew, he was being shaken awake by one of the friends who had just left but had returned for his jacket. He'd come back to a house full of smoke. The couch in the living room was on fire. “I was just lucky that he'd come back to get a jacket he'd forgotten. We all smoked in those days and someone must have left a lit cigarette somehow.” Keith jumped up in a panic and the two friends managed to shove the torched chesterfield out onto the front yard. Keith felt lucky to be alive. “I would have been a goner if he hadn't shown up,” says Keith. “The house was filled with smoke and the couch was burning like Hell.” He'd dodged a bullet thanks to his forgetful friend, but he had a heck of a time explaining the charred couch on the front lawn to Lee when she returned from a week at Birch Bay.



Between family, the parties with the hockey team and staying close to other friends, Keith was working hard and playing hard.

Part of Keith's success rested on speaking directly to the customer. In each brochure he produced, Keith wrote an open letter (with his photo) to prospective customers, extolling the company's expertise and commitment to excellence.

STRIKES AND GUTTER BALLS

Having branched out from residential homes with the liner pools, Keith was beginning to hanker after larger and more varied jobs. In 1959 a prominent resident of Burnaby, Mr. A.C. Digney, approached Keith with an unconventional construction job. Digney wasn't interested in a new home, or even a swimming pool. What he wanted was his own 10-lane bowling alley.

The Digney home was a lovely residence on Bonsor Avenue, with a big backyard to be used for the bowling alley, located east of the Simpson Sears department store. This was in the days before Burnaby had a planning department and building logistics were settled by the parties involved. Digney asked the department store if his bowlers could use the Simpsons Sears parking lot for their cars in exchange for the store getting to have their own bowling team. They immediately struck the deal and Digney acquired a permit. The large concrete block structure was a bigger job than Keith had done before, but it seemed manageable. Beedie Construction signed on to build the bowling alley. Besides, Keith loved a new challenge and wasn't afraid of learning on the job. He just hadn't figured on the lesson he was about to learn. Keith was about to meet the union again.

Digney wasn't interested in a new home, or even a swimming pool. What he wanted was his own 10-lane bowling alley.

Charlie and Vern got to work, digging out the area for the foundation and setting the forms for the concrete. On a Friday afternoon as they were getting set up for the Monday cement delivery, they were paid a visit by the local union. "These guys just sauntered up to us and casually said that if we were running a non-union site, it wasn't going to work," says Keith. "One thing I knew was that I didn't want to be a union organization. But they were quite powerful at the time." The union informed Keith that if he continued using non-unionized labour, they would be forced to set up a picket on Monday morning, which would prevent the cement trucks from driving onto the site. No concrete for a concrete foundation would be a problem.

Unimpressed with the union reps' tone, Keith got creative. "A friend of mine had a cement mixer and another friend had the materials needed to make concrete," says Keith. "Over the weekend, I had the sand and gravel dumped on an empty lot Digney owned off-site and had all the cement powder delivered on-site." When the picketers arrived bright and early Monday morning, Charlie and Vern were already hard at work mixing their own concrete using their own truck and loader to transport the

sand and gravel. "There we were, going back and forth right under the union's noses," says Keith. "Two black Cadillacs pulled up with union heads inside to watch." Undaunted, the small construction crew carried on and completed the foundation. Keith was pleased to discover that not only had he thwarted the union, but mixing his own concrete had actually cost him less than trucking in ready-mixed cement. He had won the battle.

After the foundations were completed, they began building the concrete block walls. The unions were still making their presence felt, but the sub-trades Keith hired didn't mind crossing the picket line. The trouble came when it was time to erect the huge glue-lam beams. That work required a crane. "All crane operators were unionized," says Keith. "We were finally forced to join the union in order to get a crane on-site."

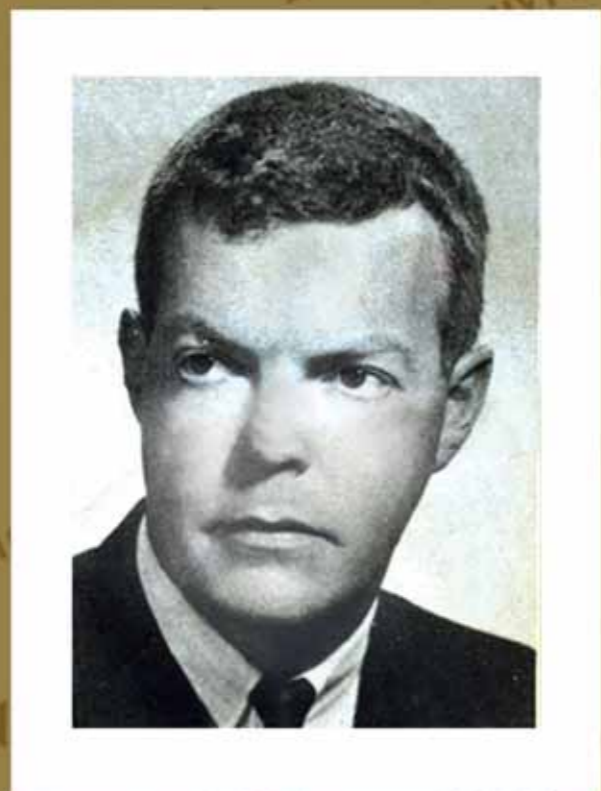
Mixing his own concrete had actually cost him less than trucking in ready-mixed cement. He had won the battle.

The Digney bowling alley that Keith built in 1959. The project was the source of many union troubles.



CHAPTER 10

Living the DREAM



Keith's picture on a flyer welcoming PNE fairgoers to the last Prize Home he would build for the Exhibition, 1964.

PNE PRIZE HOMES

By 1960 Keith had built swimming pools, a bowling alley, his own workshops and office building, and many homes. He had gone from needing Bob Hay's help in 1952 to figure out how to frame a wall, to designing and constructing entire subdivisions. He was gaining confidence in his skills and a reputation as a savvy, no-nonsense builder. So when he saw *Chatelaine* magazine's Home of the Year contest, his interest was piqued. Contestants had to draw plans for an original home design and submit them for judging. A winner would then be chosen for each province across the country. Each winner had to build their house and use it as a display home for two weeks. In exchange, *Chatelaine* would provide top-of-the-line furnishings for the interior rooms.

Keith quickly came up with a house plan and submitted it to the magazine. When he was notified that he had won for B.C., he was pleased at first, but also aware that he was on the hook to build the thing. He immediately began formulating a plan that would leverage the contest to his advantage.

Keith approached a man he knew from the Pacific National Exhibition who was in charge of the Prize Homes and offered him a deal he couldn't refuse. "I'd done some work helping out on the prize homes in the past, so I had an idea of how they worked," says Keith. The PNE Prize Home was a complete package with a house, property and furnishings offered as the grand prize in the Exhibition's raffle. For the two weeks of the Fair, people could tour the home that was prominently placed on the PNE grounds. The draw on the last day always came with a lot of fanfare and news coverage. Later, the house would be moved to its final location, a lot the PNE had purchased somewhere in the Lower Mainland. "Normally, the PNE had to pay for the house and put in all the furnishings themselves. I told them that I would build the house and furnish it for them for \$10,000. It was a great deal, so they jumped at it." The \$10,000 fee covered Keith's labour and a small profit, so to acquire the materials he needed Keith offered suppliers advertising space outside the display home and in the brochure in return for materials. He would use the *Chatelaine* furniture inside. The place would look fantastic. It was a great opportunity to get Beedie Construction's name out as he'd be able to offer touring fairgoers company brochures. There was even a large sign outside promoting the company.

Beedie Construction Company brochures offered a range of homes to suit people's needs.





Floor plan of the 1963 PNE Prize Home.

Keith set to work on the Prize Home, building it on location at the PNE. The house went up beautifully, plus there was the added bonus of having the run of the home for the duration of the Fair, “which was a good time,” says Keith. Thousands of people a day went through the Beedie Construction home and congratulated Keith on the impressive workmanship and design. On the last day of the Fair, a happy winner was drawn to receive the house. This signalled the last part of the deal Keith had made with the PNE: to move the structure to the lot that was part of the prize. Ultimately, Keith was even able to assist the Prize Home committee in buying a couple of lots for future Prize Homes in Burnaby. “My commitment was to have the house where it belonged within seven days from the end of the Fair,” says Keith. “We had also arranged with

the PNE to have use of the house for two weeks after the move as our display home in the annual Parade of Homes.” Keith was able to get the house moved uneventfully in under a week from the close of the Fair. Impressed, the PNE people asked Keith if he would be willing to do it all over again next year.

“My very first job was handing out pamphlets for one of Dad’s PNE show homes. One of the houses had a fountain out front. Dad brought home the coins for me to count out so he could take them to the Red Cross.”

—LANA BRINDLEY, KEITH’S DAUGHTER



LEFT TO RIGHT: The 1960 PNE Prize Home being set up on its lot. The 1962 PNE Prize Home that Charlie Metcalfe helped to move.

Everything had worked out well, so Keith said yes. In the end, he would build the Prize Home for five consecutive years. “We really got our name out there with the PNE homes. Given the crowds at the Fair the exposure was very good,” says Keith. With the exception of a few humorous hiccoughs, the Prize Home gig went smoothly. “You could get some funny winners, though,” Keith says. One lady, upon moving into her fully furnished, completely landscaped show home called Keith to complain. “She had found a tiny chip in the glass of a chandelier,” Keith says. “She wanted someone over there pronto to fix it, and raised hell when nobody showed up the next day.”

Every once in a while, the year’s Prize Home would generate leads that would result in work for Beedie Construction. “Once a woman called me to ask where I had gotten a specific marble fireplace for the display because she wanted one just like it for a house she was building,” says Keith. “I asked her who was doing it for her. When she said she didn’t know, I told her we could build it. I laughed because her answer was, ‘Oh, do you make houses?’” Keith ended up building her a house on Cambie Street in Vancouver.

“When my dad was building the homes for the PNE, it was a family event. We looked forward to hanging out at the Fair. We got free passes for the rides, so we went on everything as many times as we wanted. Lana and I loved the last two weeks of August.”

—TANIS RUBINI, KEITH’S DAUGHTER

The very first year, the post-and-beam construction of the Prize Home yielded an interesting contract. Keith was approached at the PNE by a UBC professor named Pavalov who was going to build a house out by the university. He had design plans for a similar post-and-

“We really got our name out there with the PNE homes.”

GIVING AWAY THE HOME

Started in 1934, the Prize Home lottery is still a family favourite at the PNE. The idea of giving away a complete home was unheard of at the time, so the buzz around the draw was immense. The original 1934 home, built on-site on the fairgrounds, was only 800 square feet. Clydesdales delivered the house to its permanent location, half a block away. Tickets sold for a quarter each and the winner was announced on the radio. The winner that year was a man name Leonard Frewin, a Vancouver mechanic. When he heard his name called out on the radio as the recipient of the house, he immediately drove to his girlfriend’s house to ask her to marry him. Her father had been denying the couple his blessing because Leonard didn’t have enough money to buy a house. The pair married with her father’s permission and lived in the house for over 60 years.

Today, tickets sell for \$25 for five and the house is usually more than 3,000 square feet and valued at around \$1.3 million. It’s unlikely that Clydesdales could move that one.



Keith and his salesman Aubrey Perry in Hawaii, 1960

beam construction that had been drawn up by renowned Vancouver architects Arthur Erickson and Jeff Massey. He asked Keith to have a look at his blueprints and come up with a bid to build it. “I worked out a number, but before I gave it to him I cautioned him that I’d factored in a few changes,” says Keith. “There were three or four elements I got rid of. I figured that they didn’t bring much to the house, and were as expensive as hell.”

Keith’s estimated price for the job came in at \$30,000, less than half the cost of his competitors’ bids. His prospective client was shocked and asked him how he managed to come in so low. Keith explained that he cut costs by eliminating items like \$900 special-order hardware from Sweden, replacing it with locally available \$100 options. His biggest savings was changing the siding on the house. The architects had planned for grooved siding that was three-eighths of an inch different from a common measurement. Having the boards custom made would cost a fortune. “Plus,” said Keith, “the house was 70 feet back from the street. No one could tell the goddamn difference.” Erickson was out of town when Keith approached the architects with the changes. Erickson’s partner, Massey, okayed the alterations and Keith got the job. He put on the less expensive siding, but the change didn’t escape Erickson’s notice when he returned from his vacation. “When he saw it, he wanted it ripped off and replaced,” says Keith. “I said he could do it himself if he wanted to.” In the end, Pavalov was happy with the job Keith did and paid him in full. “But not another Erickson and Massey referral ever came my way,” says Keith. “Which was just fine.”

Keith was earning a reputation for providing good value and superior workmanship. Business was going well and work was steady. The subdivisions continued to sell well and Beedie Construction had enough other projects coming through the pipes to keep everyone working hard. Keith was pleased to be riding the peaks and valleys of the construction business with a growing assurance. With the completion of each project, Keith was able to add more items to his expanding list of skills. The future seemed bright.

“Keith has been so generous with helping me, giving me knowledge and advice about things in this business that usually take a lifetime to understand. It’s like the expression, ‘Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime.’ He was a mentor to me, always willing to teach what he had learned himself through experience.”

—TOM GREENOUGH, TOMTAR ROOFING

THE FUTURE GROWS DIM

In 1962 Beedie Construction was continuing to work on the subdivision in North Delta. Keith had had enough success in that market that when he heard about 20 partially built homes for sale in Surrey, he was interested. The lots were being developed by a syndicate that had run into money trouble. Apparently the builder they had hired to construct the three-bedroom, no-basement houses had left them in various stages of construction. He’d been collecting money from the developers but hadn’t bothered paying the subcontractors. “Ultimately, the builder kept all the money he’d received and took off overseas, leaving a pile of unpaid bills for the developer,” says Keith. The outstanding amounts owing were too much for the syndicate to cover and they were forced to sell. “They got a hold of me to see if I wanted the package,” says Keith. “I thought it was a heck of a good deal.”

Keith snapped up the 20 properties and completed the homes. Initially, he was offering the houses for the same price as the subdivision in North Delta: \$13,400. At that price, there was a tidy profit. Within the year, however, the market took a sharp downturn. So sharp that, only months later, Keith was having difficulty selling any houses. “I ended up offering them at a loss for \$7,800, just to get people into them, paying the taxes and utilities.” Discounts were as deep as \$6,000, but the soft market was making it difficult for Keith to unload them. Plus, buyers moved in having put nothing down and Keith was carrying the mortgages. What had originally looked like a great deal was turning into a nightmare. “It got so bad that the only thing I was looking to do by then was to reduce my losses,” says Keith.

“I know there were times in the life of the business that Keith’s had to watch how many paper clips he bought because those cents mattered.”

—RON BAGAN, COLLIERS INTERNATIONAL

The homes in Surrey weren’t Keith’s only projects to take a battering. Suddenly, his position on a number of sites was looking precarious. Margins were tight, and getting tighter every day as the market continued

“It got so bad that the only thing I was looking to do by then was to reduce my losses.”

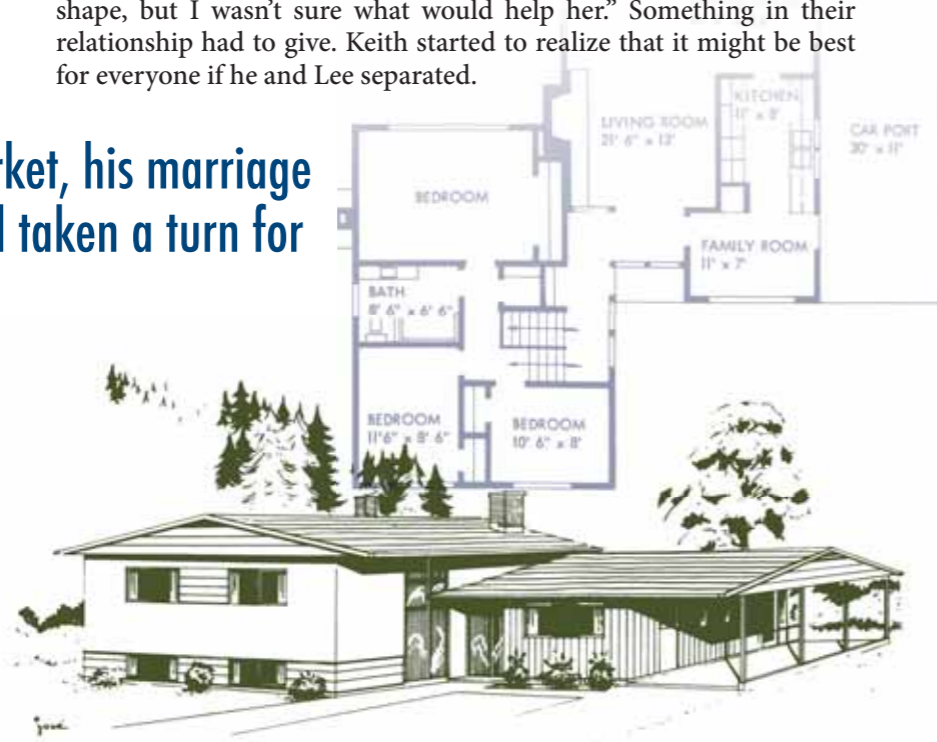


A framed paper clip given to Keith in recognition of his well-known budget-savvy ways.

to slide. For the first time since he had started in construction, Keith began to worry that he might not make it through the year.

Keith's work life was stressful, and he wasn't finding much relief at home. Like the market, his marriage with Lee had taken a turn for the worse. The depression she had suffered with the births of Lana, Tanis and Colin had intensified and she was finding it difficult to cope on the home front. "I was working long hours, on my way to work early and sometimes not back until the kids were in bed," says Keith, "so I wasn't much help. Things slowly deteriorated." Lee wasn't getting regular treatment for her depression and resorted to self-medicating with alcohol and prescription drugs. Eventually Keith became concerned for the welfare of their children. "Sometimes Lee would call me at work a hundred times a day. It felt as though every other call was from home," says Keith. "I could tell from Lee's voice that she was in rough shape, but I wasn't sure what would help her." Something in their relationship had to give. Keith started to realize that it might be best for everyone if he and Lee separated.

Like the market, his marriage with Lee had taken a turn for the worse.



The Kincaid, one of the stylish homes offered by Beedie Construction in its 1961 brochure.

THE KINCAID

FLOOR AREA 1297 SQ. FT
OVERALL DIMENSIONS 40 x 46'
PLUS CARPORT

FROM BAD TO WORSE

Keith had a lot on his plate. Each day he owed more and more money, plus he was facing the prospect of financing two households if he and Lee couldn't make a go of things. It seemed as though things couldn't get worse. But his run of bad luck wasn't over. Since his run-in with the CRA, Keith had been working with accountants to ensure that his records were well ordered and up-to-date. One accountant he'd hired in 1962 seemed like a good fit in the company. The fellow had been doing a good job and over time he and Keith became friends. Keith even loaned him money for a down payment on a house he wanted to buy in Burnaby.

One day the bank called Keith with information that implicated the accountant in forging Beedie Construction cheques. Keith was shocked. "He seemed a good enough type of guy," says Keith. "At first, I didn't believe it." In all, he had passed approximately \$30,000 worth of bad cheques. It couldn't have come at a worse time. Keith considered his options and thought about calling the police to report the crime. He also knew that the man had a wife and two young kids to support. In the end, despite the potentially catastrophic consequences for Beedie Construction, he decided not to take any legal action. "I told him, 'You straighten out and I'll give you another chance to redeem yourself. I hope you appreciate what I'm trying to do here,'" says Keith.

Two months after the forgeries came to light, things were looking no better for Keith. He lost accounting books, cheques, petty cash and a calculator after a break-in at the office. The market continued to go downhill and bills and interest payments were piling up. For a man who prided himself on staying in the black, the situation was untenable. "It was tough, all right," says Keith. "I started to worry I was in over my head." In addition, life at home with Lee had deteriorated to the point where he realized that he needed to move out of the family home on Halley.

Faced with a possible divorce, mounting debt and a persistent soft market, Keith was at an all-time low. "Everywhere I looked, there were problems," says Keith. He wasn't sure what to do next. He called a meeting with another group of accountants and asked them what his next steps should be. Their best advice was for Beedie Construction to file for bankruptcy. After all his hard work, Keith couldn't imagine that this was how Beedie Construction would end. He wasn't ready to give up.

"Determination, determination, determination. Dad has more than anyone I know. He had so much drive that he was going to keep going until he made it, no matter what. To me, it is amazing that he started out with so little but was able to become what he is today with nothing except a dream and hard work to go on."

—LANA BRINDLEY, KEITH'S DAUGHTER



In the 1960s, Beedie Construction got into more commercial work that included a Midas Muffler outlet.

CHAPTER 11

Looking UP



Keith doing business on the phone in the early 1960s, around the time he met Betty Smith.

HEADS, I WIN

Years earlier, while out on a double date, Keith had flipped a coin to determine which girl he would walk home. That coin toss resulted in a marriage and three children. Despite how tough things were with Lee, he decided to let fate rule again. The facts of his financial situation were grim, but something in him didn't feel ready to give up, despite strong evidence that it was time to cut his losses. At an impasse, he sat down with a coin and a question. Tails, he would declare bankruptcy; heads, he would soldier on with Beedie Construction. Keith took a deep breath and flicked the coin into the air. The coin flew through the air and came down tails. He had his answer, but he didn't like it. Seeing the tails side of the coin, Keith realized how much he wanted to carry on and make a go of the company.



Determined not to declare bankruptcy, Keith approached the Royal Bank of Canada. "They listened to my story," says Keith. "They were very positive about Beedie Construction and set me up with a plan. I paid every cent I promised." It was touch and go for a while, between meeting the payments and keeping up with the interest charges. But Keith knew he was in the fight of his life to rescue the company he had worked so hard to establish, and he was not going to lose. He also asked all the sub-trades to put their overdue invoices to one side for a full year, plus extend him further credit. They agreed – a strong testament to the strength of the relationships Keith built with his sub-trades.

"The Beedie name carries a lot of respect within the Royal Bank. Keith Beedie is known right across the country at RBC for his business ethic and credit worthiness. Keith has quietly progressed through the years, building up an incredible arsenal of properties. There was no huge breakthrough. Keith's success is due to his perseverance through good and bad markets."

—KELLY MCKNIGHT, RBC ROYAL BANK

The year 1963 had been tough, with a broken marriage, a failing market, coping with a fraudulent accountant and trips to the bank with his hat in his hand in order to save his company. It hadn't been a banner year for Keith, but one event was about to change his luck.

A LUCKY ENCOUNTER

In March 1963, a friend of Keith's invited him for drinks at the members-only Press Club in downtown Vancouver. Once inside, a very attractive woman caught Keith's eye. He went over and introduced himself. He learned that her name was Betty and she was a receptionist

at the office of the *Vancouver Sun*. They spent the rest of the evening dancing together, getting to know one another and exchanging information. Keith learned that Betty was 28 years old and had recently returned to Vancouver from London, England, where she and her sister had worked for more than a year. Before that, she told him, she had been living in Los Angeles for five years, working in the head office of the Ice Capades. Talking to Betty, Keith suddenly found he'd forgotten his troubles and was feeling relaxed with his striking new companion. He was enjoying himself for the first time in a long time. "She was one good-looking gal," says Keith. "We just seemed to click. It was so comfortable just being with Betty that I didn't want the evening to end."

When the Press Club closed down for the night, Keith invited Betty to join him at The Living Room, an after-hours club down the street. "She took some convincing," says Keith, "but I talked her into coming with me." As they sat and shared a couple of drinks, Keith realized that he didn't want to say goodbye to Betty. He had to figure out a way to see her again. When she showed him a bracelet she was wearing, he took his chance. "By accident, I dropped the bracelet on the floor," says Keith. "I picked it up and slipped it into my pocket." When Betty saw her jewelry disappear into Keith's pants pocket, she was outraged. She told him to give it back, right away. A sly Keith told her that he would give it back "on our next date."

"He traded that bracelet for my phone number. It was sneaky."

—BETTY BEEDIE, KEITH'S WIFE

His ploy worked and she agreed to another meeting. Keith and Betty went out together frequently over the next few weeks and formed a strong connection. They had drinks at the Ritz Hotel and went to watch the Canucks play. Spending time with Betty was like an antidote to the gloom Keith was experiencing in the rest of his life. Even as they said goodbye at the end of a date, he would be looking forward to the next.

Betty and Keith out on a date in 1964.



"She took some convincing ... but I talked her into coming with me."

"A couple of months after we got together, I remember walking for the bus and having this very sudden thought pop into my head that I was going to marry that guy. I just knew."

—BETTY BEEDIE

A few weeks after meeting, Betty announced that she was heading up to Lac La Hache to visit her sister Dorothy and brother-in-law Frank for the Easter weekend. Keith wasn't prepared for the intense disappointment he felt at the prospect of a few days without her. "I wanted to see her," says Keith. "I couldn't wait for the long weekend to be over." He decided to do something rash.

"I knew it was a crazy idea but I decided to drive up to Lac La Hache, uninvited, for the weekend," says Keith. "I had a T-Bird at the time, so I jumped in and started driving." Unfortunately for Keith, he neglected to check the brakes before he headed out. "Somewhere around Hope, suddenly I didn't have any brakes." Relying on the manual gears of the car, and the emergency brake, Keith made it all the way to the lake in one piece. "It was dangerous and a couple of corners made my hair stand up," says Keith. After numerous nerve-wracking close calls and treacherous hills, Keith somehow managed to track down the right house. As he pulled up the long driveway in his growling T-Bird, he could see Betty in the window of her sister's house doing the dishes. She was shocked to see him. So were her sister and brother-in-law.

"We were in the kitchen of their place around 9:00 p.m. and we were drying some dishes, and these lights flashed in the kitchen window. They asked me if I was expecting company and I said, 'No' and well, here it was Keith! And I'd probably only known him for three weeks, and I was shocked! How did he get there and how did he know where to go?"

—BETTY BEEDIE

Betty came out of the house to meet Keith, who was standing beside his car, grinning sheepishly. When she asked what he was doing there, he found he had no good excuse for his unannounced arrival. Softening in the face of Keith's impetuous gesture, as well as the state of his brakes, Betty escorted him inside to meet her bewildered family. They didn't seem overly impressed. "Frank wouldn't even get out of his chair in the living room," says Keith. "He barely looked up from the TV." Frank was asserting himself as a protective brother-in-law and it seemed suspicious to him that some guy Betty barely knew had driven

Keith wasn't prepared for the intense disappointment he felt at the prospect of a few days without her.

four hours just to see her over the weekend. His opinion of Keith did not improve when Keith asked Betty to stay overnight with him in the motel across the street. “She said ‘no,’” says Keith. “She was pretty square that way.” As a concession, Betty agreed to accompany him to the motel restaurant for a beer before saying goodnight. The next morning, she joined him for breakfast.

Luckily for Keith, Frank was a mechanic and he volunteered to check the T-Bird’s brakes. “Probably so he could get rid of me,” says Keith. Within 10 minutes he had replaced a part and sent Keith on his way. Once Frank had seen the persistence of the flashy young man in the T-Bird, he wasted no time in warning Betty against Keith. “He told her to watch out for me,” says Keith. “He thought I was trying to take advantage of her.”

BEEDIE
GROUP
**CASE
STUDY:**

SOLVE
PROBLEMS
BEFORE
THEY
ARISE

The property on
Number 5 Road in
Richmond.

Around 1975, Keith arranged to buy some agricultural land on Number 5 Road, near the intersection with Steveston Highway, in Richmond. At the time of the purchase, he was unaware that land from Number 5 Road to the Massey Tunnel was controlled by the Ministry of Highways, possibly compromising ready access to his property. Studying the problem, he noticed some residential properties adjoining his new property that weren’t controlled by the ministry. In a quick move Keith arranged to purchase one of the homes, to give him the access he needed.



THE BACHELOR

Keith and Betty were getting along, but there were obstacles to the romance. Keith knew his relationship with Lee was over, but legally he was still married. It was complicated for Betty; she knew the situation was tough for Keith but dating a married man made her very uncomfortable. Plus, he had three kids he was trying to look after as his wife’s condition deteriorated. There was a lot going on that complicated the new relationship. “I had been dating Betty for three months when she finally said she couldn’t go on that way anymore,” says Keith. “She told me she cared for me, but that I had to break up with Lee officially or she was done. She gave me two weeks.” Keith knew it was the right thing to do. He called Betty the next day and told her he was going to be a free man.

Keith started divorce proceedings right away. In the 1960s this was a lengthy process that involved hiring a detective to find just cause for the end of the marriage. While the divorce application was underway, Keith decided to look for a place for Betty and him to live in as soon as they could be together. One weekend, he asked her to join him downtown for a day of apartment hunting. “I’d found one I liked and I hoped she’d like it, too,” says Keith. The apartment was in one of the first high-rises in the West End and it had a fantastic view, but Betty’s first comment was that she didn’t like heights. Keith kept asking her to look out the window. She continued to resist until she finally she asked him why he was so concerned with her opinion. “I said, ‘Well, aren’t you going to move in with me?’ She looked at me like I was crazy and said, ‘No way!’ Oops.”

“Well, aren’t you going to move in with me? ... She looked at me like I was crazy and said, ‘No way!’”

Keith gave up on the view suite after learning the hard way that he was looking for a place for himself alone. He moved into a small bachelor apartment close to the Belmont Hotel in downtown Vancouver, leaving Lee and the kids in the house on Halley and, much to his disappointment, Betty in her own place. Not long after he had settled into his new place, he woke up one morning to some news on the radio. “It was Easter morning,” says Keith. “The first thing I heard was about some house fire overnight in Burnaby. A woman and her kids had been rescued unharmed.” No names were mentioned, but Keith had an uneasy feeling. His suspicions were confirmed after he rushed to Burnaby and discovered the fire had been at his house on Halley

Street. It was only luck that had prevented a tragedy. A passing off-duty fireman, on his way home in the middle of the night, had noticed the flames and had helped everyone out. Keith was overcome with relief that Lee and the children were unharmed. Remembering the fire in the living room of the same house, Keith couldn't help but think the place was jinxed. He didn't want his family living there anymore. It wasn't a total disaster, though, because they had good insurance. Lee moved into an apartment with the children, while Keith fixed the house up and sold it to a Dr. Roy, who still lives there today.

Betty's reluctance to move in with him was disappointing, but it didn't dampen Keith's affection for her. He found himself looking for a way to express to her how strong his feelings for her were growing. Her birthday was approaching on May 11, so he hatched a plan to surprise her. He decided to bake a cake, but he didn't have the necessary equipment. "I found what I wanted in a store I had built on Edmonds Street where I could buy all the stuff you needed for cheap," says Keith. "I went down there just before Betty's birthday, bought a cake pan and some mix and set to work." Even with the advantage of a cake mix, he quickly realized that he was way out of his depth. "I had to knock on a few neighbours' doors for help, but it eventually worked out."

Relieved that his first foray into baking had worked out, Keith put the rest of his plan into action. He casually invited Betty out for drink to celebrate after work at the Belmont. When they were finishing up and preparing to leave, Betty commented that she had to make a quick trip to the powder room. Keith saw a way to execute his surprise. "I told her to wait until we got back to my place, since it was only a couple blocks away." When they got upstairs and she hurried to the bathroom, Keith quickly pulled out the cake, replete with candles, and turned out the lights. Betty emerged to see Keith proudly smiling at her surprise. "She couldn't believe it." She knew that only true love could have motivated Keith to spend an entire afternoon baking.

The Reliable Finishers' bill for work done after the Halley Street fire, 1963.

RELIABLE Finishers		
1134 Edmonds Street, Vancouver, B.C.		
AD TO	K. B. Beadie,	
	5347 Epenewy,	
	South Armahy	
TERMS:		
1	Upright Piano	
	Strip & Refinish.	
	Overhall, Tune Up.	
1	L/Oak Bedroom Suite	
	2 Chest of Drawers	
	4 Bed Sds	
	Strip & Refinish to Satin	
1	Walnut Bedroom Suite	
	1 Tr. Dresser	
	1 Chair	
	1 Night Table (Strip Top)	
	4 Bed Sds	
1	Grained Bedroom Suite	
	1 Dresser	
	1 Bookie Chest	
	2 Night Tables	
	1 Book-Cass Head	
	8 Metal Bed Sds	100 00
	1 Metal Bed Frame	45 00
	1 Ironing Board	15 00
3	Mirrors	
3	Bed Springs	
3	Lounges	
2	Arborite Living Room Tables	
1	Wicker Tea Trolley & Tray	141 50
1	1 Set TV Trays	
1	Arborite Kitchen Table	
	Clean & Finish Where Necessary.	
1	Kitchen Chairs	38 00
4	Recover Seats & Backs, Clean & Paint Metal.	40 00
1	Vacuum Cleaner	121 00
	Clean & Check	
	Roy Stevens Tri-Cleaning ..	
	Refrigerator Refinishing .. (Copy Malonac) ..	
	Indis Washer ..	
	Indis Dryer ..	
	Garage Return (Logan Cartage)(Bills Released) ..	
		\$ 865 50

BIRTHDAY SURPRISES

Since that first cake Keith baked to surprise Betty on the first birthday of hers that they celebrated together, the Beedies have played a friendly little game of birthday one-upmanship over the years. One year, Keith paid for the whole family, including Betty's sisters and brothers-in-law, to go on a surprise trip to Las Vegas.



To keep the secret, the relatives flew down to Las Vegas on an earlier plane, while Betty, Keith and two other couples flew out half an hour later. When their plane touched down at midnight, Betty mentioned she was tired and was looking forward to getting into bed. Keith was worried, as everyone was waiting in the suite to surprise her. Much to Betty's chagrin, Keith suggested a quick drink in the suite with the other couples. "Betty was unhappy," says Keith. "She just wanted to sleep." Instead, when they walked through the suite door, a big "Happy Birthday" erupted from inside. "Betty took off about a foot in the air," remembers Keith.

As a surprise for Betty's 65th birthday in 1999, Keith organized the same group of family to join them on a repositioning cruise from L.A. to Vancouver. Again, he flew the family down and told them to meet in the ship's party room at 4:00 p.m. He cautioned everyone not to let Betty see them before that. A series of mix-ups during boarding and a couple of near misses running into the other guests threatened to spoil the surprise. Once on the ship, instead of heading to the party room, Betty said she wanted to go to the stateroom to clean up after the long drive. Luckily Keith had arranged for a note from the Captain inviting them to the party room. Betty, never one to miss a function, spruced up and went with Keith to the party room, just in time for the gang to jump out and shout "Happy Birthday." The next three days were spent celebrating and connecting with friends and relatives. "A lot of the nieces and nephews, some of whom live in Kelowna, have never had much time together," says Keith. "Those three days gave them a good chance to know each other. Ryan told me later that it was a great experience for the cousins, too."

Another time, for Keith's 60th birthday, Betty hired a boat for a cruise up Indian Arm and around West Vancouver. Keith thought he was going for dinner at the Bayshore Hotel with friends, but instead, he was led through the hotel and out the rear fire escape doors. Outside was the boat, once again adorned with a surprise "Happy Birthday Keith" sign. The boat was filled with partygoers, including John Williams, a friend who had flown all the way from Australia to celebrate.

Betty has also organized some huge bashes for Keith. One was his 65th birthday party at the Grouse Nest. Keith had been told it was a party for his daughter-in-law, Cindy. However, on the way up the mountain in the gondola, the mists cleared to reveal a huge "Happy Birthday Keith" banner on the restaurant. "I was completely fooled," says Keith.

For Keith's 80th birthday, Ryan and Cindy hosted the party at their West Vancouver home. As a surprise, they hired Dal Richards and his orchestra to play. There were hula dancers and a surprise visit by Amanda Tapping, star of *Stargate SG-1*, and her family. Amanda, who had said she could only stay for half an hour as she had another function the same evening, ended up having such a good time that she stayed right until the end. "It was a fantastic evening," says Keith.



"I started as Keith's tailor and quickly became his friend. Keith has been successful in every aspect of his life. He has achieved more than any other person I've known. He is a pillar of strength to his family and his staff. He gets their love and honour in return. Keith has taught me some of the true values in life and he's given me great advice over the years. Our friendship has lasted decades and I know I could never have found a better friend than Keith."

—JOHN WILLIAMS, FRIEND

FROM TOP: Celebrating Betty's 52nd birthday, 1986. Betty and Keith's 25th wedding anniversary in 1991.

FAMILY CELEBRATIONS

A tradition was born when Keith surprised Betty with a cake on the first birthday she celebrated with him. About every five years they plan a great birthday bash for each other that involves a host of family and friends. They are often a surprise, always spectacular fun.

1 Ryan (left), Betty and Keith with the cake for Betty's 75th birthday, 2009. 2 Ryan with his grandmother, Irene Smith, in 1986. 3 Ryan and Keith at Keith's 76th birthday, 2002. 4 Keith's nephew Chris Johnson shows Keith some of his artwork. 5 Keith, Betty and Ryan celebrate Ryan's 18th birthday, 1986. 6 Ryan's 25th birthday. 7 At Keith's 75th birthday party in Vancouver. Betty organized a Hawaiian night on a yacht, 2001. 8 Keith and Betty at his 60th. 9 Keith's 59th birthday. 10 Betty and Keith on deck for his 75th in 2001. 11 Keith pondering the two cakes at his 65th birthday. 12 Betty and Keith at the Family Ball, 2004. 13 Betty's birthday in 1985. 14 At Keith's 80th birthday party with Amanda Tapping and her family, (l-r) Olivia, Eric, Amanda, Betty and Keith, 2006. 15 Keith and Betty take to the floor, 2006. 16 At Keith's surprise 70th birthday party in 1996, 100 friends gathered at the Burnaby Heritage Park Carousel. Keith only knew that he and Betty were to be at the park for a photo shoot commemorating their donation to restore a carousel horse. After the surprise everyone went to nearby Hart House restaurant for dinner.



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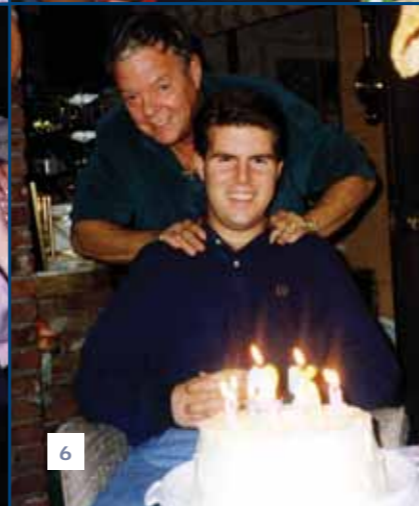
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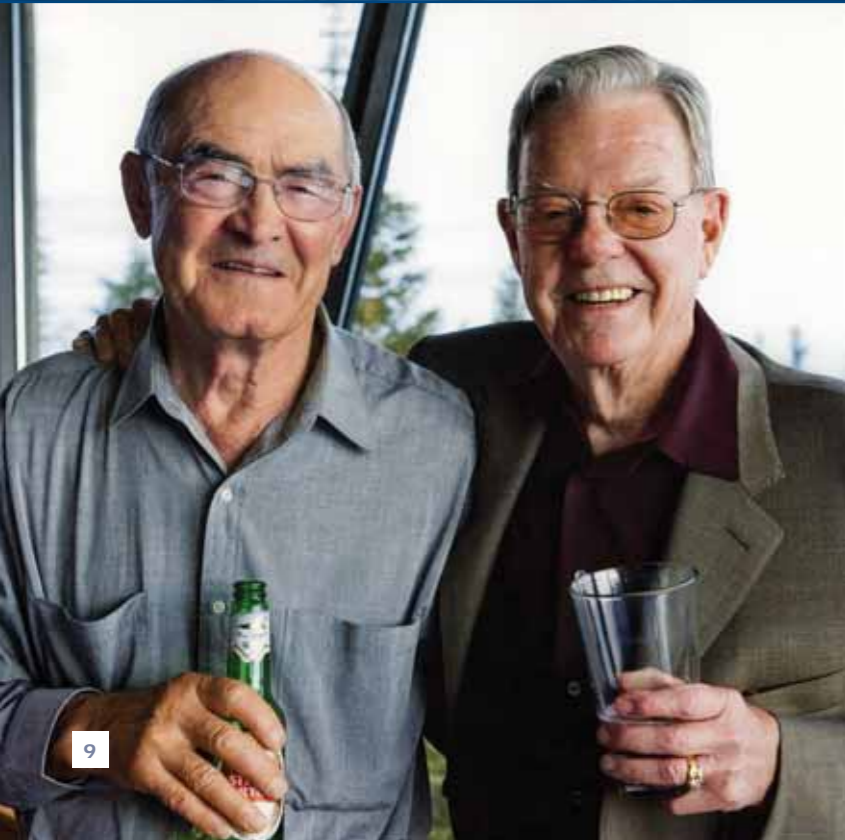
15



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1 Grandkids help Betty's dad celebrate his 71st birthday.
 2 Keith helps granddaughter Grace celebrate her 10th birthday, 2009. 3 For Keith's 59th, he got a rowing machine, 1985. Betty figures this is the only time he used it. 4 Betty's mom, Irene, with grandkids for her 81st birthday: (l-r, back) Chris and Darren, (front) David, Leigh-Ann, Irene, Lisa and Ryan, 1987. 5 Sharing the memories at the 25th wedding anniversary, 1991. 6 A family brunch in Kelowna, 2008. 7 Betty's 50th birthday party featured a variety of entertainments. 8 Colin is about to get a candle snuffing assist from Andy Rubini at his 35th birthday. 9 Keith and his brother-in-law Frank Kratzer at Betty's 75th, 2009. 10 Betty's mom, Irene, celebrates her 71st with the grandkids. 11 Olivia and her mom, Amanda, with Keith, 2006. 12 Keith's 64th birthday with (l-r) Christina, Lianna and Andy, 1990. 13 Keith at his 71st birthday horsing around with his grandson Trevor, 1997. 14 At Keith's 80th birthday party, Dal Richards (right) and his band played into the night, 2006. 15 Paige Beedie gives grandmother Betty a big birthday hug, 2009. 16 Irene Smith's 60th birthday: (l-r, back) Carol Lorenz, Betty's dad David Smith, Keith and John Lorenz, (front) Irene, Colin and Tanis, 1966. 17 The party gets under way for Keith's 60th. To keep Keith in the dark, Betty told him she had a dinner reservation at nearby Trader Vic's, 1986.



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Christmas with the kids in 1963 at Keith's new apartment, (l-r) Colin, Keith, Tanis and Lana.

Finally, Keith got word through his lawyer that he had a court date for his divorce hearing. When he and his lawyer arrived at the New Westminster Courthouse, they learned that their appointment was in the court annex, about half a block away. The confusion between the two locations meant that Keith stood alone before the judge with his lawyer and Lee's lawyer, as Lee hadn't arrived. "Just as the judge was granting the divorce, I could see Lee through a window, running towards us," says Keith. "I went out the door and met her in the hallway to tell her it was over and we were divorced. Lee looked unhappy and had to sit down in a chair for a moment. I found myself feeling sad that our marriage had come to this, but at the same time I was happy that I was free to be with Betty."

In those days, custody of the children of a marriage was almost always awarded to the mother, but the state of Lee's health raised a big question for the judge. Lana was old enough, nearly 16, to choose to live with a girlfriend, but young Tanis and Colin required close care. Lee was possibly unfit to look after the youngest children, but Keith worked all day and lived in a tiny apartment downtown. The options were limited, so the kids stayed with Lee for the time being. Despite some misgivings about Lee's state of mind, Keith let it be, but before long, his hand was forced. "I got a phone call from Tanis about one of Lee's boyfriends hurting her thumb or something," says Keith. "She was crying and carrying on, so I thought, enough of that. I told her I was on my way. The whole way I was wondering, how big was this boyfriend." When Keith arrived, the friend was gone. He helped Tanis calm down and resolved to get a court order granting him custody of the younger children.

Keith wasn't sure where the three of them would live, or how he would juggle his work and family commitments, but a solution soon appeared. Keith met a client who was interested in building a print shop on a lot he had already picked out on Lane Street, about two blocks away from Keith's office. The client didn't own the lot, so Keith went to look into buying it himself. "The owner of the lot had an older house right next door," says Keith. "He told me he would only sell if I took the house, too." Initially Keith didn't want it, but he quickly

realized that the house presented an opportunity. He bought the lot and the house and got to work building the Printcraft shop.

In those days, custody of the children of a marriage was almost always awarded to the mother, but the state of Lee's health raised a big question for the judge.

"In the meantime, I got rid of the apartment downtown and moved into the ground-level suite of the house," says Keith. "The upstairs of the place was rented." There was only a single bedroom and Keith had the kids, but he did the best he could in the difficult situation, building bunk beds in a small room he constructed for the kids to sleep in. Lana had been staying at a friend's house while the children were with Lee; however, when we moved in she came back to the family and was a great help with the kids. He had one important ally: Betty. "Beautiful gal that she is," says Keith, "after work at the *Vancouver Sun* she would come all the way out to us on the bus." Betty told Keith that she would make dinners, buy groceries and prepare school lunches, get the kids new clothes and tidy up. "She was only 29," says Keith. "She took us on. I can't believe what she did for us."



Christmas day 1963, (l-r) Tanis, Lana, Colin, Keith's mom, Evelyn, and Betty.

"It had to be love! Because taking the bus and the streetcar and whatever else from downtown all the way to Burnaby and then making dinner and all the rest ... but it was helping him out."

—BETTY BEEDIE, KEITH'S WIFE

"That tiny basement suite only had one bedroom. Dad took the laundry room area and put up a couple of little walls, giving each of us our own small cubicle to live in. You know, it was kind of fun. We were in it together. He was working so hard, trying to put things back together at work. We were a team."

—LANA BRINDLEY, KEITH'S DAUGHTER

Unfortunately, in another scrap of bad luck, Keith had temporarily lost his driver's licence for getting caught speeding one too many times. However, the new basement suite was close enough that he was able to ride his bicycle to work in the morning for the short time he wasn't able to drive. In just a few months his life had taken some big turns. His beautiful home overlooking Halley was sold; his marriage was over; he had sole custody of his kids in a small one-plus-bedroom place; and he was hard at work, paying off the money he owed the bank from his refinancing. Keith was hopeful that everything would turn out, but he couldn't be sure. The one source of calm and happiness in his turbulent life was Betty.

The one source of calm and happiness in his turbulent life was Betty.

CHAPTER 12

GREENER Pastures



Keith on vacation in Penticton, circa 1964.

STARTING OVER

Now that some of the big issues in Keith's life were being addressed, he renewed his focus on building his way back up in the construction industry. He started searching for the next direction that Beedie Construction needed to take, blissfully ignorant of what he was about to encounter.

"I found out that my accountant, who had been passing bad cheques in 1963, was still forging, months later," says Keith (see page 115). He discovered this when he took a phone call from a heating contractor, asking when he could expect payment for his work. As the accountant was at lunch, Keith went to check the cheque stubs and found numerous stubs indicating that the money for the payments had been taken out of the business account. It was clear the cash had been stolen by the accountant.

"I had given him a second chance then, hoping he would straighten out. But this time, I was in no mood to show any leniency. He had crossed that line of trust twice. I was furious. I confronted him and he confessed that he had taken the money to cover gambling debts. So I went to the RCMP with his confession, threw the book at him and fired him, too." Keith didn't have any way to recover the money that had been stolen, but he did look into retrieving the money owed him from the loan for the down payment of the accountant's Burnaby home. He was distressed to discover that the house had a second mortgage on it, two years' property taxes owing and no equity left. "But I said I would take the house back anyway," says Keith.

"I was in no mood to show any leniency. He had crossed that line of trust twice. I was furious."

On the surface, the situation looked bad, but the heavily mortgaged house presented an opportunity for Keith. He was not getting back any of the money he lost, but he suddenly had a decent place for his children to live. Keith moved into the house and proceeded with the charges against the accountant. In the meantime, he made a disturbing discovery. In the back of a closet he discovered a box of cancelled cheques that had been stolen in the break-in at the office months before. He realized that not only had the accountant been forging, he had also been behind the break-in. However, on a trip to the police station to sign some paperwork concerning the charges, Keith was asked to confirm where he lived. When Keith gave his new address, the RCMP officer immediately recognized that the house he was living in was part of the complaint he was levelling against the accountant. "They took one look at the document and said that my accepting the house changed everything," says Keith. "They insisted they could no longer take action."



Keith and Betty at Christmas, 1965.

As Keith and Betty's relationship intensified, so did the warnings from her brother-in-law, Frank. He started warning her about the relationship and the trouble she could be getting into. One evening when Keith and Betty hosted a small party at his place, Keith's old friend Charlie Metcalfe also voiced concern. "He took me aside and said I should be careful," says Keith. "He thought she could be some kind of gold digger. He didn't know I was dead broke. There was no gold to dig for." The reality was quite different. As Keith and Betty's relationship developed, she loaned him \$3,000 to help him through the tough times.

Despite all his difficulties, Keith discovered that he was optimistic about the future. Maybe meeting Betty had halted Keith's run of bad luck, or maybe it was just the fresh perspective that having her in his life gave him, but getting together with Betty signalled a change in Keith's fortune. "She made it all work," says Keith. "Everything clicked."

"Keith is very fair – his word is his bond, he's honourable. He just has so many qualities that I love. Keith's a really good human being."

—BETTY BEEDIE, KEITH'S WIFE

"Betty is a huge part of Keith's success. She's his rock. They're a true team."

—RON BAGAN, COLLIER INTERNATIONAL

Things were looking up, but the departure of the forger meant that the company needed a new accountant. "I needed someone good," says Keith. "Someone who could come in and clean up the awful mess he'd left." Norma Patry, the older sister of one of Lana's school friends, was between jobs and offered her services to Keith. She came on board for \$300 a month, low pay for someone to manage Beedie Construction's books but all that Keith could afford at the time. Above the company's offices Keith had built space that he'd rented out to about seven different tenants. In addition to keeping the company books and doing some secretarial duties, Norma was expected to answer all the tenants' phones and take messages. "She had a separate phone for each one," says Keith. "Sometimes three or four phones would ring at the same time. Not once did I see her get exasperated. She was an excellent accountant, great secretary and terrific girl. She was a gem." With an honest person handling the books, Keith could get out of crisis management and start planning the future of Beedie Construction. Norma stayed with Keith for only four years, when she left to get married, but her efficiency and hard work were critical when the company was in such a fragile state.

With an honest person handling the books, Keith could get out of crisis management.

"There is an old saying in the banking world that some people can stretch their nickels into manhole covers. Keith is one of those guys. He could cost out a two-by-four or tell you the price of a single nail. It's good business."

—KELLY McKNIGHT, RBC ROYAL BANK

The slump of 1962/63 had taught Keith a valuable lesson: he would no longer rely on the residential market for all his work. After the success of the Printcraft job, he decided that custom building for businesses had big potential.

Switching directions signalled the end of his relationship with the PNE Prize Homes. The 1964 house – his last – was the straw that broke the camel's back. When the time came to transport the home at the end of the Fair, the movers hired by the PNE were stumped by how to get the job done. "It was a two-storey structure, so it was a bit complicated," says Keith. "But we had built it knowing that it would have to come apart. So we inserted pockets in the Gyproc that



Tanis and Colin, 1963.

BEEDIE GROUP CASE STUDY:

CUT THROUGH RED TAPE

FROM TOP: The renovation and construction of the Parker Street building before the new siding was put up. The same building with the new siding.

When Keith bought 1000 Parker in 1974, parts of the building were clad in the original, and unsightly, wood siding. In 1990, to improve street appeal, the building front was upgraded with new windows and inexpensive vinyl house cladding. Officials at City Hall got alarmed and notified Keith that the siding he was putting up wasn't "fire rated" for a commercial property, and would have to be taken off. Beedie Construction pointed out that the old wood siding, which the city was prepared to approve remaining underneath the new siding, was a much bigger fire hazard than the vinyl. Uncertain how to respond to the obvious logic, the city eventually decided that the new siding could stay.

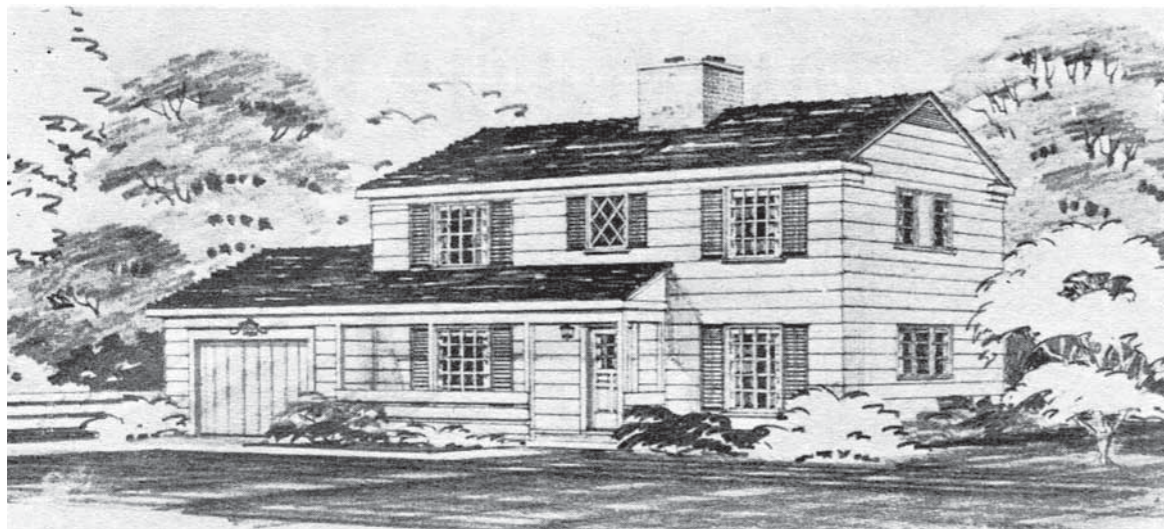


“I reminded them that I’d warned them off those lots and said sorry, I couldn’t help.”

could house beams that ran under the entire second floor. The beams provided all the support you needed to lift the top floor off the bottom.” Charlie Metcalfe grew impatient watching the bewildered movers dither over how to get the house apart and onto trailers. Eventually, Charlie told the site supervisor to take a coffee break and leave his guys with him. “By the time he came back,” says Keith, “Charlie had it all sorted out. He was that kind of guy.” The house was moved that night, but Keith had had it with the whole PNE process. He told the management that he would no longer be able to produce the Prize Homes.

The house move was a headache but Keith could see another problem that he didn’t want to have to fix for the PNE. Against his explicit advice, the PNE had bought two lots that Keith could see were poor value. “The lots were on a ravine that I knew had been filled, so they would likely settle,” says Keith. “I told them, ‘You’ll regret buying there. The site is probably going to need piles and it will cost you a fortune.’ But they were convinced they were getting a great deal.” Keith wasn’t surprised to get a call the next February, six months after the 1965 Fair, asking for his help. The house hadn’t been moved because the new builders were having trouble putting in a foundation. “So much for getting everything moved within a week,” says Keith. “I was glad to be out of it. I reminded them that I’d warned them off those lots and said sorry, I couldn’t help.” Keith’s timing was impeccable.

The Beedie “Colonial” home featured in one of Keith’s brochures.



GETTING THE JOB

Keith’s shift to industrial and commercial buildings meant that projects were yielding better and longer-lasting returns. As a bonus, the work was more challenging and fun. Encouraged by some early projects, Keith dove into the market and started fishing for new projects. In no time, he had a promising nibble.

“In 1964 I got a phone call from Cece Walker, a long-time associate of mine, asking me to meet him at the Astor Hotel for lunch to talk business,” says Keith. He arrived to meet representatives from Glidden Paint who were in town to discuss a buyout of Cece’s company, Walker Brothers Paint. The only outstanding issue in the negotiations for the buyout was that Glidden wanted more warehouse space than Walker Brothers offered. Cece Walker owned an empty lot next door, so they proposed building a new 25,000-square-foot building on the combined properties. They wanted to know if Keith was the man to do it. While the Glidden guys talked about what they wanted and enjoyed a lengthy liquid lunch, Keith sipped water and took copious notes. By 3:00 p.m. he had heard enough. He told the men he would get back to them.

Keith hurried back to the office and started drawing. The building he designed was nothing fancy, just a concrete block box with a loading bay where they had requested, but he drew a full plan, complete with elevations. “Charlie came in and helped me work out an estimate,” says Keith. “I stayed until late that night, dictating all the specifications, then left it for Norma to type up, since she got in far earlier than I ever did.” When Keith arrived in the office the next morning, Norma had created a full package from the material he had left. “I called Cece and asked if the Glidden guys were still in town. I suggested lunch again.” When Keith arrived for lunch, the Glidden reps were slightly hungover from the night before. They grumpily asked, “Didn’t we give you all the information you need yesterday?” Keith said he had everything he needed and handed over the package. “It was the plans, the estimate, the specs, the whole damn thing,” says Keith. The Glidden guys were shocked and told Keith they would look over the material. They left town the next day.



“Keith was strong at the helm of the company. In other organizations, decisions took weeks and weeks. At Beedie, it was a tighter, more organized, better controlled environment because Keith clears things up immediately.”

—AXEL GRINGMUTH, ETS ELECTRIC LTD.

Cece Walker, on the other hand, was impressed and gave Keith the go-ahead handshake. “Cece and I had a quick meeting to finalize a few construction details and I started building the warehouse right away,” says Keith. “It went very smoothly; no long meetings, no change of direction. I gave Cece a price, but no formal budget. I’d just call him up and say I need money. He’d say, ‘C’mon over’ and give me \$20,000 or \$25,000. That’s how it was in those days. A lot of the work we did back then was based on personal connections and mutual trust, and things usually worked out really well.”

“Keith Beedie is a man of his word. What he says is as good as paper.”
—RON BAGAN, COLLIERS INTERNATIONAL

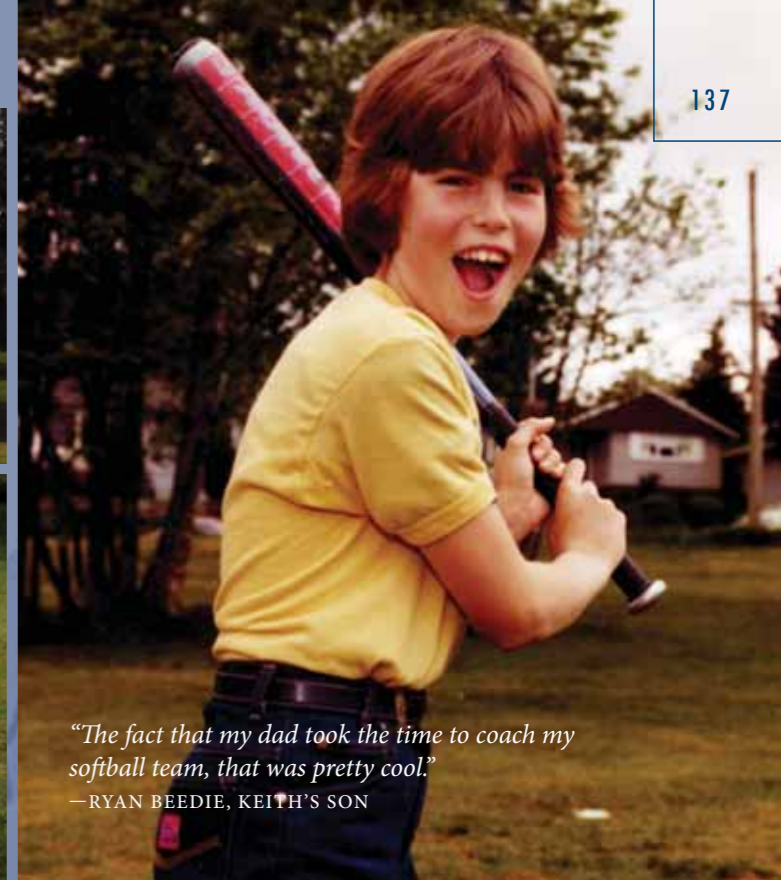
Keith finished the building within months and arrived at Cece Walker’s office for the final payment. He got his last cheque and the two men were chatting over a cup of coffee when a messenger arrived from Glidden. They had sent a package with a signed contract and plans inside. “Cece picked up the phone with me there and called Glidden,” says Keith. “He asked them, ‘What’s this contract for?’ They answered, ‘The new building.’ Cece told them it was completed and he had just handed over the last payment. There was dead silence on the other line.” Glidden said they would have to get back to him and hung up. Cece and Keith shared a good laugh. “That was the end of that,” says Keith. “Cece sold it to Glidden and everything went fine.” Keith learned that doing business that way suited him. Take care of things quickly and cleanly. To this day, he doesn’t like to leave his desk in the evening with unattended work on it.

BEEDIE
GROUP
CASE
STUDY:

WASTE
NOTHING

One of Keith’s best known rules is “waste nothing.” In 1980, a new company, Cola Industries, approached him about building and leasing a facility on a Beedie site in Langley City. Because the firm was just starting up, they did not want to commit to an overly ambitious building program. But Cola wanted to keep its options open for expansion, if needed. Keith listened to their needs and Beedie Construction delivered a 50,000-square-foot tilt-up building at 20350 No. 10 Highway, with the north wall of the building designed so that it could be removed should Cola need more room down the road. Cola went broke a few years later and the building is still owned by Beedie and leased to other tenants.

The former Cola building, now occupied by Lami Glass.



“The fact that my dad took the time to coach my softball team, that was pretty cool.”
—RYAN BEEDIE, KEITH’S SON

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Westburn Park, near Keith’s homes in Burnaby, where he coached his kids’ teams for about 15 years. Ryan up to bat. Ryan’s baseball team, 1981.

KEITH THE COACH

Life running Beedie Construction was busy and didn’t leave as much time for family as Keith would have always liked. One way that he managed to share time with his kids was through sports, both watching and participating in various activities.

Colin was an avid sports player and Keith supported him by attending games whenever he could. One year, when Colin was eight or nine years old, Keith arrived at Westburn Park to watch him play baseball. He couldn’t help but notice that the coach’s son, who was a weak player, was pitching, while Colin sat on the bench. When Keith asked the coach why he didn’t try Colin on the mound the coach asked if Colin could pitch. He had no idea what the kids were capable of. Keith was certain he could do a better job, and he did.

The next season, Keith asked if he could be the assistant coach on his friend Bill Chucko’s team. Colin and Bill’s son, Dave, were a great combination, as were the coaches. The team was very successful and Keith the Coach was born.

Lana was nine years old when Keith started coaching nine- and ten-year-old girls at Westburn Park in 1957. Lana was one of the best players and he coached her until she was about 15 years old.

Since then, Keith has coached each of his kids in baseball. “I just decided it was something I had to make time for,” says Keith. “Luckily, the baseball season wasn’t very long. A couple of times a week for around six weeks. I enjoyed it. I knew the rules and liked spending the time with the kids.” It was an activity the family could enjoy together and a commitment Keith could make to the kids and their teams. Interestingly, one of his former players, Kelly McKnight, is now his senior account manager at RBC, and another, Dave Chucko, is the company auditor.



FOSTER PARENTS

Keith and Betty heard about the work that Foster Parents Plan was doing around the world and became involved in helping the Bautista family in Manila, the Philippines. Since 1974, they have assisted Victoria Bautista and her 13 children, especially her daughter Victoria, who went on to graduate from university. Victoria's son Keith John is named after Keith. Keith and Betty travelled to Manila in 1975 to meet the Bautista family. Over the years Keith and Betty kept in touch and provided support to the Bautistas, even after their formal role in the Foster Parents program was concluded. The families continue to communicate.

1 Abdulia Bautista with some of her 27 grandchildren, circa 1990s. 2 Victoria and husband Jhun Hernandez, 1990. 3 Keith John Hernandez at five-and-a-half months, 1989. 4 Keith John in Chicago, when he was about 14 years old, circa 2003. 5 Abdulia and her family in a picture taken in Manila. 6 Betty and Keith at their first meeting with Victoria and Mario in Manila, 1975. 7 Betty and Keith with Mario Cotas and his mother, 1975. 8 Keith John wrote to Lolo Keith and Lola Betty in 2002, when he was 13 years old. 9 Victoria and Keith John at his school graduation, 2002. 10 Victoria at her university graduation in 1985. 11 Keith John at three and a half months with one of his uncles. 12 Abdulia at 72 years.



09/15/02
Dearest, Lolo Keith and Lola Betty

Hi, im Keith John, from the Philippines. How are you there! I hope all of you are doing fine. My mother and i are doing great and in good health. I am 13yrs. old now and presently studying at Espiritu Santo Parochial school, im 4th. year high school.

I would like to thank you for the birthday gift that you send to me, im very happy for that because you do still remember me. I asked my mom to buy me a new pair of shoes.

Lolo Keith, lola betty, I wish we could be able to see each other again or I wish to hear and received pictures together with letter from you. I'll wait for that.



FLEXING MUSCLE

By this time, Keith had paid off all the debt he had owed the Royal Bank and Beedie Construction's slate was clean. It was clear that Keith had been right not to go with the coin toss. Instead of going bankrupt, the company had defied the odds and survived, and business was picking up speed. "I learned something about how I wanted to run the business," says Keith. "I didn't want to be so dangerously leveraged again."

The next big project that came along in 1965 was another learning experience. It introduced Keith to the world of leasing. Burroughs Business Machines, a prominent U.S. computer company based in Detroit, wanted to lease a custom-built 6,000-square-foot single-floor office space in downtown Vancouver. A real estate agent named Suchy approached Keith about the project. He had lined up a client who wanted to buy the package of the completed building as well as the signed Burroughs lease. Suchy was on the hunt for a developer who was prepared to buy the lot, design the building to Burroughs' specifications and get it permit-approved and built, and then he would sell the whole package to his client.

"One of the things I have learned from Keith is to analyze risk, make a decision you feel comfortable with and then never look back. If you aren't cool enough to deal with the risk, you shouldn't be in the game."

—STEVE ASHFORTH, GLASTECH CONTRACTING

There was just one problem for Suchy. None of the major developers in town were interested in a 6,000-square-foot building contract; it was too small to be worthwhile. Suchy had shopped the deal all over town, with no takers. Since Keith was just getting his feet wet in the commercial building industry in the fall of 1965, he heard Suchy out and figured he would give the deal a try. That's when he learned of another complication. The Vancouver branch of Burroughs had to vacate their existing office space by May 1, 1966. That didn't leave Keith much time to put the deal together and get the new office finished.

Keith didn't have the payment for the \$125,000 lot the owners wanted at Burnaby and Burrard Street. Instead, he made arrangements with the owner that promised him his money once the deal was complete. With that figured out, Keith and the local Burroughs manager got to work planning the building. He got an artist's rendering of Keith's design, which he took to City Hall. "The City didn't particularly like it," says Keith. "But they passed it anyway, so that was another hurdle cleared."

Keith had the land, the design and the permit. What he didn't have was the Burroughs head office sign-off on the plans and the lease. Time passed and by late November Keith was starting to sweat the May 1, 1966, completion deadline for the building. "When I still hadn't heard anything by Christmas," says Keith, "I told the local guy that we'd better get on a goddamn plane and talk to the head guys in person, otherwise they were going to be out on the street. I'd put a lot of time into it, damn it."

On a Friday morning, the two men flew to Toronto to meet with the executives in the Canadian head office, where Keith learned that the Canada branch had okayed the plans. They were waiting for approval from the Detroit office, the company's world headquarters. Undaunted, Keith arranged a meeting the next day, Saturday, with the company heads and dragged the terrified Vancouver manager with him onto a Detroit-bound train. "I had the flu and a hell of a headache," says Keith. "I wasn't in any mood to meet with these guys." Keith burst into the meeting and told the top three executives in the company that he was walking out with signed plans or he was walking away from the project. "I am breaking my ass to get this thing done," Keith told them, "so just sign the bloody plans." Sensing he was serious, the businessmen sat and took a look at the specifications Keith had brought with him. Right away, they were nitpicking things like which way office doors swung and the type of slate to be used. "This is the kind of crap that's holding you up?" Keith asked in disbelief.

They sorted out all the remaining issues and made adjustments to the specs, but since it was a Saturday, there was no secretary to run the blueprint machine to get a final copy ready for signing. Much to the horror of the Vancouver manager, Keith started giving commands like a drill sergeant to the executives, ordering them to operate the machines and trim the plans. "They were actually laughing," says Keith. "They said no one had talked like that to them in years. My shin was bruised from all the kicks the Vancouver guy was firing at me under the table. Christ, I figured they were just people and I was doing them a favour."

There had been a terrific snowstorm and Keith and the Vancouver manager decided to stay overnight in Detroit. "We really wanted to go to a Playboy Bunny Club to see what that was all about. When we got there, the club was going to close because there were so few people, as a result of the snowstorm. But we talked them into staying open for an extra hour. It was kind of nice – we had all the Bunnies hanging around our table for that hour. The next day we took the train to Toronto and

"I am breaking my ass to get this thing done ... so just sign the bloody plans."



The Burroughs Business Machines building that Keith built in downtown Vancouver in 1965.





Keith and Betty were married on April 28, 1966. The ceremony was private, but 100 friends and family toasted the couple at the reception. Keith calls his marriage to Betty “the happiest day of my life.”

had the revised specs and plans signed by Ken Bennett, the head of the Canadian division. When we went to get the company seal for the contract, it was locked in a drawer and, because it was a Sunday, his secretary – the only one who had the key – was out skiing. We had a plane to catch, but Ken asked if we could trust him to seal the contract and get it to us as soon as possible. Of course we agreed.”

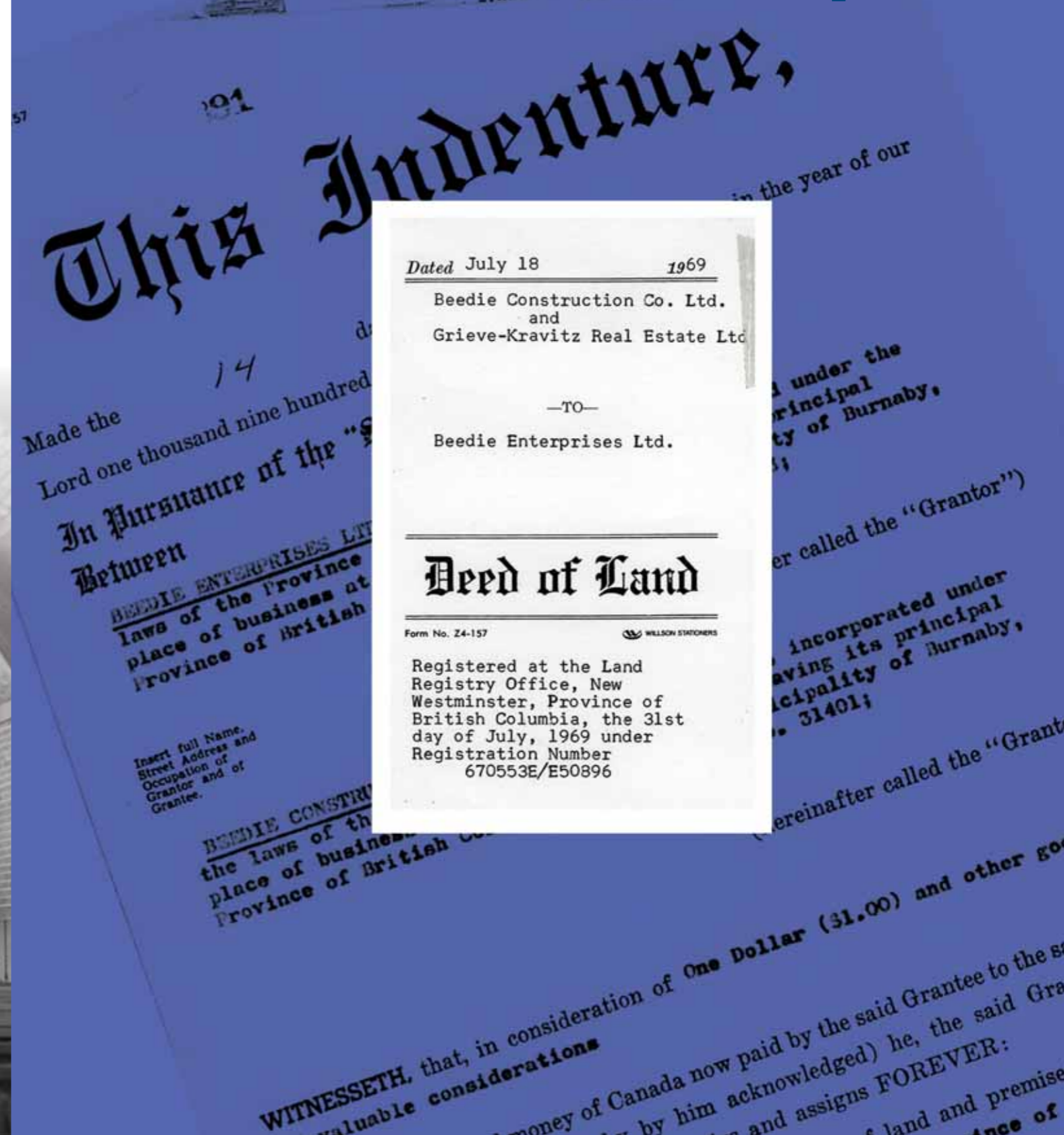
Keith flew back to Vancouver with the signed plans and broke ground on the building in early 1966, starting construction in the dead of winter. Working full out under Ted Metcalfe’s supervision, his crew managed to get the building completed with only days to spare before the May 1 deadline. Keith sold the package through Suchy, just as planned. “I cleared a \$25,000 profit on the building and another \$25,000 on the lease package,” says Keith. “Once the deal was done and I had a chance to go over everything we had just done, I thought, so this is what you do.”

The Burroughs Business Machine deal got the wheels in Keith’s head turning over leases and their value. He decided it was a concept he wanted to pursue further. He had also made another decision while working on the Burroughs job; he’d asked Betty to marry him and she’d accepted. On April 28, 1966, Keith married Betty at St. Paul’s United Church in Burnaby. “Marrying Betty is the best thing I have ever done in my life,” says Keith. Things were definitely improving.

“When I told my girlfriend that I was marrying Keith, she couldn’t believe it. Some guy with three kids? She thought I was crazy. I knew that I’d be crazy not to.”

—BETTY BEEDIE,
KEITH’S WIFE

CHAPTER 13 BUILDERS Keepers



Dated July 18 1969

Beedie Construction Co. Ltd.
and
Grieve-Kravitz Real Estate Ltd.

—TO—

Beedie Enterprises Ltd.

Deed of Land

Form No. Z4-157 WILSON STATIONERS

Registered at the Land
Registry Office, New
Westminster, Province of
British Columbia, the 31st
day of July, 1969 under
Registration Number
670553E/E50896

LEASE OR OWN

The shift in focus from residential housing to commercial building suited Keith. Jobs kept coming and his comfort with the scope of the larger projects increased, too. Between the long hours he put in at work and the commitments he had at home to Betty and the kids, there was barely enough time in the day.

Every once in a while, Keith's hectic pace caught up with him. In the middle of making the plans and specs for a project constructing a 19,000-square-foot, two-storey building now occupied by Robinson Water Works at Cambie and 7th Avenue in Vancouver, Keith started to feel unwell. The sensation of sickness was unfamiliar to Keith, who had never lost a day of work to illness.

Each time the Vancouver Canucks played on home ice, Keith made sure he caught the game. Despite putting in a full day's work and feeling increasingly ill, Keith was determined to catch that evening's hockey game. "Once I got to the Forum, where the Canucks were playing, I felt even worse," says Keith. "But I was not about to break my record of seeing every game. So I got to my seat, sat down for one minute and said, 'Okay, I've seen it.' Then I ran out." Keith knew it must be bad if he couldn't even get excited about hockey, but he still wasn't willing to go home to rest. He figured the least he could do was sit quietly and get some more work done. He returned home and did paperwork for the Robinson Water Works building, then called Norma to come pick up the specs he'd worked on. When he handed over what he had done to Norma to type out, she took one look at it and asked, "What the heck

A small strip mall in Port Coquitlam, built by Keith in the 1960s.



is that?" Keith had a high fever and had scribbled gibberish all over his work. "It didn't make a lick of sense," says Keith. "At that point, I had to admit I was sick. Betty took one look at me and put me to bed." It turned out not to be a little flu or a sniffle. Keith had the chicken pox.

With his interest piqued by the set-up of the Burroughs leasing arrangement, Keith started to look into opportunities for Beedie Construction to build and hold onto buildings. For years, every cent of the profits from a completed project had been sunk into the next job just to make the cash flow work. Jobs were good and plentiful but there was little or no equity growth for Beedie Construction, so Keith started to consider keeping something. "I remember having a conversation with Betty in a restaurant downtown," says Keith, "talking about how it made sense to keep control over some buildings. The question was, how can we afford it? The banks wouldn't lend us that much money." Keith and Betty talked it over and Keith came up with a plan. If he sold every second building, he could raise the equity he needed to then borrow the rest. If possible, sell a building, keep a building and continue alternating. "It was a difficult situation, since you have to pay taxes in there, too, but even though it was tight, it worked."

"Things started going really well when Keith got into holding onto buildings. When you're straight-up building warehouses and houses, you win some and lose some. You can have one bad job a year and you won't make any money. Holding on was key."

—TED METCALFE, SUPERINTENDENT (RETIRED)

Keith knew he had to make a start somewhere and so he decided to hold onto a building he was working on in Port Coquitlam. He had three tenants lined up to occupy a 10,000-square-foot commercial building. He drew up a design and headed to the planning department to get permit approval. When he got up to the desk, the building inspector did a double take. "He asked me if I was Mr. Beedie," says Keith. "I recognized him. He was a Central Housing and Mortgage Inspector who had been on a few of my sites. He told me he was just filling in at the permit desk for a colleague on holiday." As the relief assistant flipped through the paperwork Keith had brought he had a quizzical expression on his face. Finally, he put the stack down and said, "Mr. Beedie, I'd venture to say you have a whole lot more experience with commercial buildings than I do. If you say it's all in order, I'm sure it is." While Keith stood there, the temporary clerk got out his stamp and approved all the plans. Within 10 minutes, Keith was on his way out the door with the permits. "The guy even said sorry for the wait," says Keith, with a smile.

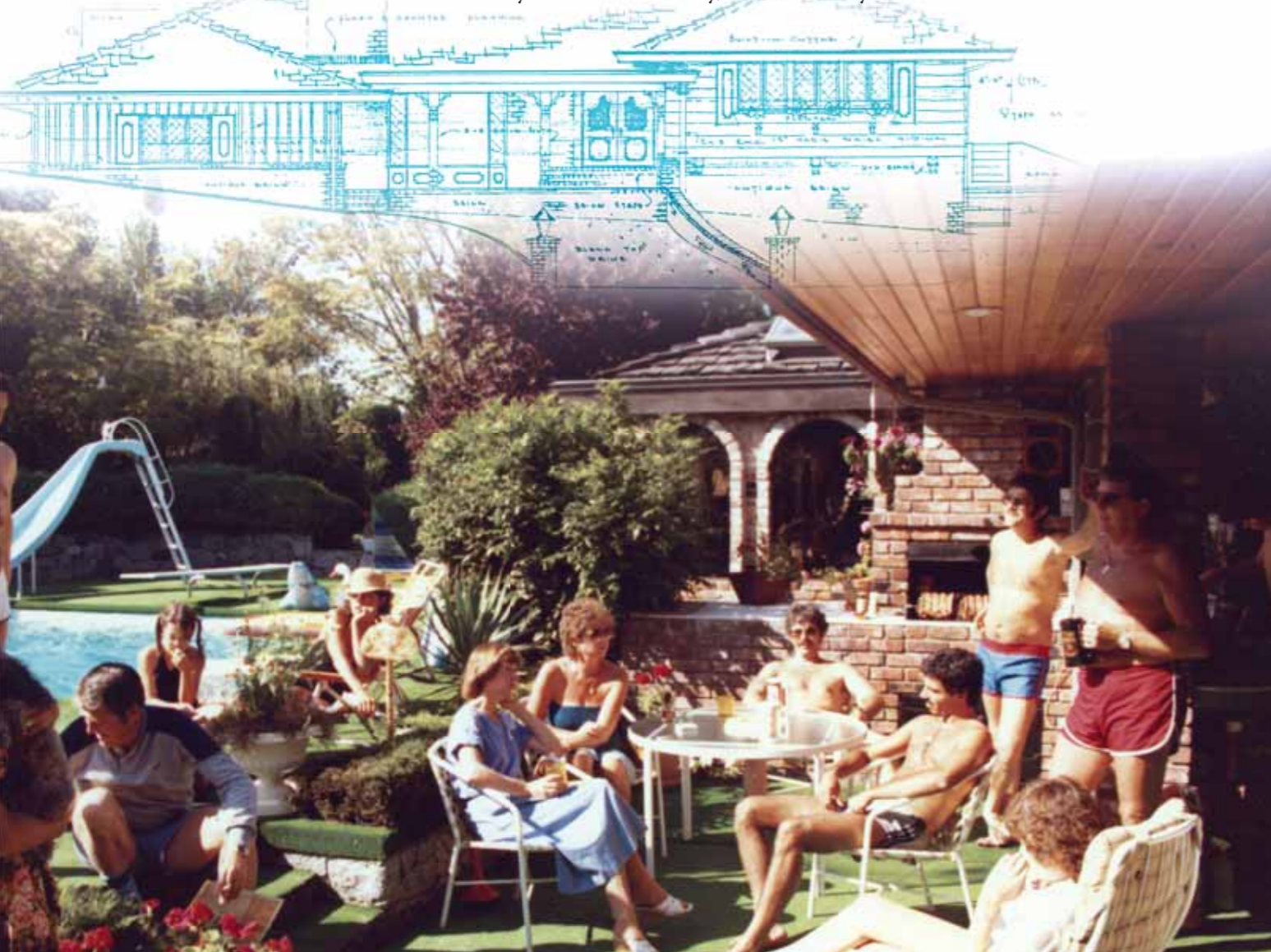


FROM TOP: Keith and new son Ryan, circa 1969. Four-year-old Ryan shares a moment with his dad in front of the Woodglen house, 1972.



FROM TOP: Excavating for the pool at Keith and Betty's Woodglen house in 1969. An architect's elevation of the new home on Woodglen. The Beedie home was often the scene of great company parties, 1982.

With a couple of leased projects under his belt, Keith was convinced that keeping as many buildings as he could finance was good business. Things were going well enough in February and March of 1968 that he felt able to take a vacation with Betty to Hawaii. It was the first of what became annual trips to the islands; a well-deserved break in the hectic work schedule that Keith started looking forward to each year. The first Hawaii trip was memorable for another reason, as Betty got pregnant while they were away. When the couple returned home and discovered that a new Beedie was coming, Keith set out to build another home for the family. He found the perfect lot on Woodglen in Burnaby and got to work. The place was finished just in time for the baby, Ryan, to move into with Keith and Betty in January 1969. "It was a great feeling," says Keith. "Betty had been a big part in my kids' lives and seeing her with our baby was good." After a lifetime of moving every few years, the house on Woodglen had staying power for Keith. He and Betty still live there today, more than 40 years later.



ALOHA TIME

In February 1968, Keith and Betty took their first trip to Hawaii in what would become an unbroken annual tradition. "We had a wonderful time on that first trip, partially evidenced by the fact that Ryan was born on November 13 of the same year," says Keith with a smile. "I have always been a worker and had never taken much time off for vacations. But Hawaii was like a tonic for me and I started to think that getting away on a regular basis might be really good for me, and for Betty."

Keith and Betty always stay at the Hawaiiana Hotel in Honolulu and enjoy the company of old and new friends each time they are there. When Keith was still very much in the make-or-break stages of the company, the longest time off he could afford was two weeks. Today, he and Betty decamp for five weeks every February. And now that Ryan is in a leadership role at Beedie Construction, Keith feels he can step away from the company more often, so they frequently go on vacation more than once a year.



Betty's sister Dorothy and her husband Frank often join Keith and Betty in February. Keith and Frank have made a yearly tradition of visiting Pearl Harbor. While the men tour the war monument, Betty and Dorothy hit the shops. They enjoy happy hour every evening and take driving tours of the island. Keith also watches every televised Canucks' game at the local sports bars. The weeks in Hawaii are also a great time for Keith to catch up on one of his favourite pastimes: reading.

Going to the same place for over four decades, Keith can't help noticing that some changes have taken place. "We used to be the young ones around there," says Keith. "We used to get calls sent up from the reception asking us to keep it quiet. Now, we are the ones calling down there and asking that others keep it down. I guess now we're the old ones." Sadly, the Hawaiiana was placed in receivership in 2009, marking the end of a vacation tradition for the Beedies.

On the beach at Punalu, (l-r) Keith, Betty and Frank and Dorothy Kratzer, 1989.

DOWNTIME

Keith and Betty have always liked to travel and their trips have taken them all over the world. The one destination that has become an annual vacation ritual is Hawaii. Ever since the couple visited the islands in 1968 they have returned each year for a bit of rest and relaxation from Keith's hectic work schedule.

1 Keith on the beach in Hawaii in 1974. 2 Keith at Lake Tahoe, 1963. 3 The cousins line up on a log at Birch Bay, (l-r) David Lorenz, Lisa Lorenz, Chris Johnson, friend Michael, Ryan and Leigh-Ann Poato, 1974. 4 Keith and Betty at Dubrovnik during their 1984 tour of Europe. 5 Keith and Betty in Rotorua, New Zealand, 1988. 6 Betty and Keith in Penticton, 1963. 7 At the Okanagan Beach Resort in 1989. 8 Keith in Tahiti during the Concorde trip, 1990.



CONCORDE REPRISE

One year, Betty had a birthday surprise up her sleeve that she knew Keith would love: a flight on Concorde. The plane was in Vancouver in the summer of 1986 to bring Margaret Thatcher to Expo. People were offered the chance to purchase a round-trip flight to Alaska, just to experience the aircraft. "I was so excited to get on that plane," says Keith. "It flies at such a height that apparently you can see the curvature of the earth, but it was a cloudy day and I wasn't able to see that. It was still a pretty amazing experience."

The flight made enough of an impression that when Keith noticed an ad in the paper in 1990 for a trip to Tahiti on Concorde, he jumped at the chance. The deal included the flight to Tahiti, a week-long layover on the beach and a flight home by regular jet. "I surprised Betty with her own Concorde trip," says Keith. "We got to Hawaii in 2 hours and 20 minutes, refueled and flew to Tahiti in approximately 2 hours. We were flying at Mach 2."

In a funny coincidence, when Keith and Betty boarded the flight they met a woman named Mrs. Lee who was sitting across the aisle. While they were chatting she commented to Keith that he looked particularly happy. "Yes, I'm happy with the trip but I'm also happy because today I just signed a lease agreement to construct a building for the Old Dutch Potato people," said Keith. "Her face went a little bit white when she heard this. It turned out she owned a lot of industrial property in Vancouver and they were one of her major tenants. She didn't know they were leaving. I felt bad being the one to deliver this news to her just when she was taking off on such a nice trip."





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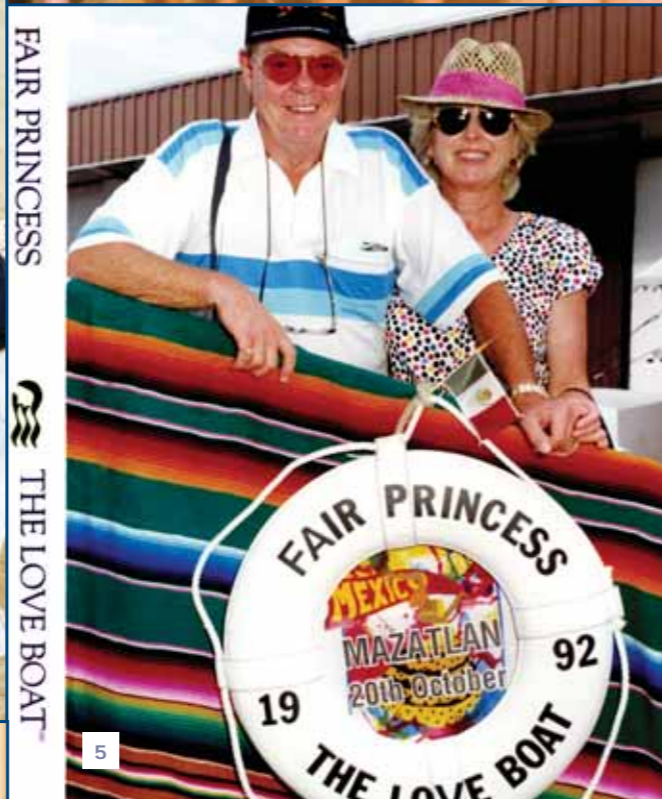
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FAIR PRINCESS

THE LOVE BOAT

5

1 Keith on Waikiki Beach in 1986. 2 Betty on the balcony of the Hawaiiana, the last year they were there. Much to Keith and Betty's dismay, the hotel was closed in 2009 to make way for a new development. 3 Keith and Betty with John Williams and his wife, Lene, at Hanauma Bay near Honolulu, 1979. 4 Relaxing on the beach, 1981. 5 On the 1992 Fair Princess (Love Boat) cruise. 6 Brunch at the Island Grill in the Aloha Tower, (l-r) Frank Kratzer, Keith, Dorothy Kratzer and Betty, 2009. 7 Poolside at the Hawaiiana, 1972. 8 Keith feeling laid back on Waikiki, in front of the Hawaiian Village. 9 Keith and Betty at their favourite beach spot on Waikiki, 1977. 10 The Beedies celebrated their "Returnee Party" at the Hawaiiana Hotel in 1981. 11 Betty and Keith with Lisa, the manager of the Hawaiiana Hotel. Lisa is hugging one of the stuffed bears Betty took her every year, 2008. 12 The entrance to the Hawaiiana Hotel where Keith and Betty used to stay when they were in Hawaii.



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Getting a tilt-up panel ready at a Beedie work site. Keith was always learning as much as he could about new building techniques. When tilt-up construction caught on in the U.S., he went down to find out more. A problem with poor bondbreaker required steam to loosen the panels on this job.



TILT UP

In an effort to broaden his knowledge of commercial and industrial construction, Keith set out to learn as much as he could about building techniques and trends in the industry. In the late 1960s he heard about a new method of construction being used in the United States. It was called “tilt up” and it sounded promising enough to Keith that he took a special trip to California to investigate the process. “We had a grocery store to build for IGA on Prior, near Main Street, and I thought we could try it,” says Keith. It was an eye-opening trip. Keith was surprised to see how footings were being built in the States.

The tilt-up technique involves pouring a large reinforced cement slab to serve as the building floor. Next, forms are constructed to produce panels for the concrete walls, incorporating rebar for reinforcement. The floor is sprayed with a chemical bond breaker to ensure that they can later be removed easily, then filled with poured concrete and left to cure. When ready, the forms are removed and the wall panels are tilted up into place with a crane set on the footings and affixed to the slab floor. The technique immediately appealed to Keith; it was simple, cost-effective and offered lots of architectural variety. “The only big issue was the ground; down there it’s great, in Vancouver it’s a lot different,” says Keith. “I knew we would have to come up with a different kind of footing.” Nevertheless, Keith returned from California eager to attempt tilt-up construction.

The tilt-up idea worked well for the IGA storeowner, who wanted a small warehouse built for his wholesale business that catered to corner stores around the city. “We did it and learned a lot in the process,” says Keith. “We must have done all right on that first one because the company stayed in that building for close to 20 years with no problems.” The experiment was deemed a success and Beedie Construction Ltd. became the second company in the Lower Mainland to use the tilt-up method, behind Dominion Construction. With Dominion’s sale in 2010, no one has been doing it longer than Keith. Aside from a couple of issues with the method, including an expensive and time-intensive mistake involving a mix-up between a barrel of bond breaker and a barrel of floor sealant, tilt-up construction has served the company well.

“As a small business, I felt a huge sense of relief that you never needed to worry about being paid by Beedie. If you did honest work, you always got an honest cheque.”

—AXEL GRINGMUTH, ETS ELECTRIC LTD

Now that Keith was becoming more heavily involved in the industrial/commercial construction business, he was developing a reputation as a dependable small operation. Through a mutual connection, Keith was introduced to Art Evans, one of the most successful industrial real estate agents in Vancouver. Art worked for Macauley Nichols, later to become Colliers, and he and Keith would develop a long and fruitful business relationship. “Art put me into a lot of good deals,” says Keith. “He was an astute salesman, but an odd guy.” One of Art’s oddities was never doing business in his own office. He would meet for lunch at a restaurant or pub downtown to do any face-to-face business. “No matter how large a deal we worked on, the end of the meal was always the same,” says Keith. “He never had money to pay. In fact, if we met at his office before going out, he always made a big show of standing up from his chair and putting his wallet on his desk on the way out. In plain view. I bought lunch. Always.”

Art developed a habit of stopping in at Keith’s Kingsway office around five o’clock for a drink and a chat. The two men would share a drink, relax, compare their days and talk shop. “There was a routine Art always had when it was time for him to go,” says Keith. “He would stand up, walk over to where I kept my bottle, pour himself a full glass of booze, say goodbye to me, get in his car and drive home.” It didn’t take long before Keith suffered a shortage of drinking glasses; most had walked out the door with Art. “This guy was making thousands of dollars in commissions from me, but there he was, lifting my glasses,” says Keith. Norma tactfully mentioned the problem to Art on the telephone one day, suggesting that since Christmas was coming, it might be a nice gesture to buy some glasses for the company. “Would you believe he showed up with a box of most of the mismatched glasses he’d taken?” says Keith. “Most of them were dirty, for heaven’s sake.”

Art made up for his quirky behaviour with a talent for scouting out good deals and quickly became the primary realtor for Beedie Construction. One technique that Art employed to great effect was trolling the City of Vancouver property sales ads. “The City would offer land for purchase at a fixed sale price,” says Keith. “If no one bought, the price they offered it at was good for one calendar year from the offer date.” Art would monitor the expiry dates on interesting properties and advise Keith about anything promising. One day in 1969 he called about a hot deal: four one-acre sites on Lougheed Highway (Broadway). If Keith could come up with the asking price for all four lots, Art had a deal in place for two, leaving the remaining two acres free for Keith. “The only catch was the deal had to be done right away,” says Keith. “Of course, we had to meet for lunch – on me – to get it done.” Keith put down a \$10,000



As Beedie projects became larger and client needs more demanding, tilt-up panel designs became more and more complex. The Beedie Group soon became the leading tilt-up specialist in Vancouver.

deposit and Art put the full-price offer in to the City the next morning, the last day before the offer price expired.

“Both Ryan and Keith have incredible foresight picking up the right land. They always know where they are going next. If you need an industrial building, where are you going to go to get it? Simple. You go to The Beedie Group.”

—STEVE ASHFORTH, GLASTECH CONTRACTING

Just as Keith’s paperwork was being registered, Vancouver City alderman Ben Wosk made an identical offer. To the City’s credit, Mr. Wosk was politely refused, since Keith’s offer had crossed the desk first. “Wosk was mad as hell,” says Keith. “If he wanted it so badly, I don’t know why he waited so long. Maybe he just cut it too close.” For Keith, there was a dab of poetic justice in Wosk’s frustration. It wasn’t the first time Keith had dealt with Ben, who owned a furniture store on Hastings Street. Back when Keith and Fred had their workshop in Marpole, Wosk put in a buy order for end tables at \$7 apiece. “We’d delivered five and we were making more,” says Keith. A slight flaw in the construction of the end tables caused Wosk to damage the five he had and he cancelled the remaining order. Instead of working with the young carpenters, he declined to pay for any of the tables, including the five he had taken. At the time, Keith had vowed revenge. “I guess I got it on Lougheed Highway,” says Keith.

A final “closure” panel is hoisted into place.

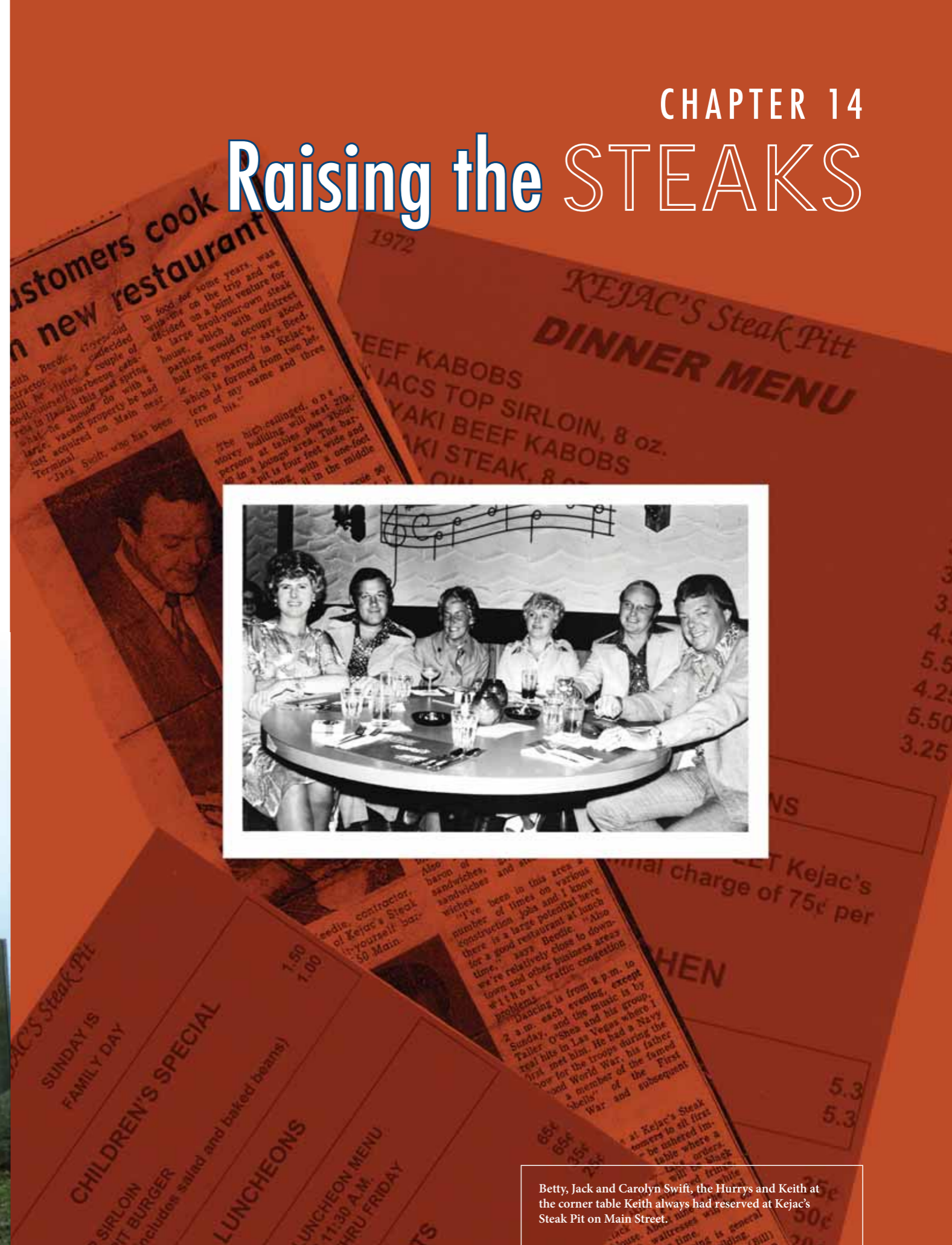


CHAPTER 14

Raising the STEAKS



Betty, Jack and Carolyn Swift, the Hurrys and Keith at the corner table Keith always had reserved at Kejac’s Steak Pit on Main Street.



BAD NEWS

Keith put together a couple of deals to make use of the Lougheed Highway site. The planning for the projects involved some creative problem solving.

There was a rule on that portion of Lougheed that each building had to have a 40-foot landscaped setback from the front property line. Since the lots were all on a slope, Keith had decided to use the hill to his advantage, building a parking lot and offices at street level, with a warehouse area underneath that was to be accessed around the back. In order to get more below-ground warehouse space, he proposed starting the warehouse only 10 feet back from the property line, but then landscaping overtop of it and setting the parking lot and offices 40 feet off the street. It was a clever way to get 30 feet more warehouse space out of the lot. Before he could break ground, however, he had to get planning permission.

"I told them that nowhere in the bylaw did it state that the building had to be set back," says Keith. "It only stated that there had to be 40 feet of landscaping in front. My idea worked fine." Technically, he was right. The Board of Variance had to agree and Keith got his extra space. The only vote against Keith's proposal came from a disgruntled Ben Wosk, who served on the Board of Variance.

Just as Beedie Construction Ltd. was starting work on the Lougheed site, Keith received devastating news. Charlie Metcalfe, who had been with him since his first roof in 1947, was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer. As Charlie battled his illness, he and Keith talked about giving Charlie's son, Ted, more responsibility. Ted had been working as a foreman, which meant he worked on specific projects, but Charlie and Keith agreed that he was capable of taking over as superintendent. It was a difficult conversation for Keith. "I didn't believe he was going to die," says Keith. "Even when he was really sick, I asked him to come to the site and sit in his car to keep an eye on things. I remember him saying that he didn't think he'd feel like it. What a stupid thing to suggest. Of course he didn't feel up to it." Ted took over and supervised the construction on the Lougheed site. "He did a good job," says Keith. "I didn't realize how many questions he would have for me, but he learned quickly enough and we got through it. Ted's never let me down."

As Charlie battled his illness, he and Keith talked about giving Charlie's son, Ted, more responsibility.



"Before I got into the management side of the business in 1969, after my father passed away, I hadn't worked that much with Keith. Once I became head superintendent, I was working with him on a daily basis. I found him very easy to work for. He lets you do your job. As long as you do what you're supposed to, he trusts you and leaves you be. When he offered me the superintendent position, I didn't think I wanted to take it. When I said I wasn't interested initially, he told me to try it for a few months and see how I did. It wasn't much of a conversation. I wasn't even on salary for the first year. I was still filling out time sheets every week, because I wasn't sure if I wanted the job. As far as learning how to do my job as superintendent, it was a very natural process. Whenever something came up that was more complicated or demanding than I felt comfortable with, Keith just reassured me by saying it was the same as what we'd always done but bigger. He has a way of making things seem manageable, like you're capable of more than you think you are."

—TED METCALFE, SUPERINTENDENT (RETIRED)

Charlie died on November 2, 1969, at the age of 52. Keith struggled to get through the funeral a couple of days later. He and Charlie had both agreed that they wanted to be cremated when they died, but while sitting in church for the service, Keith started to have doubts about the idea and was feeling extremely emotional. "The thought of being cremated started to turn my stomach," says Keith. He followed the casket out to watch it being put into the hearse, which was parked in a concrete garage attached to the church. "They put Charlie into the hearse and slammed the door," Keith says. "It made this bang sound that sounded so hollow as it echoed in through the garage. I couldn't take it. I got the hell out of there and walked away alone, down the street. I had tears in my eyes. I couldn't help myself. That bang was so final."

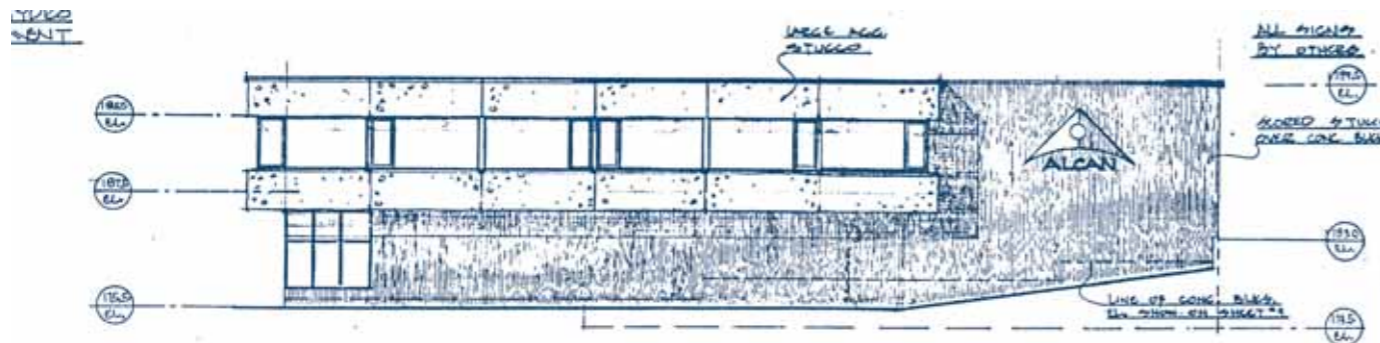
The very same day as the funeral, Keith had a meeting scheduled with representatives from Admiral TV, a company that had agreed to rent a custom building under construction on Lougheed. He went directly to the meeting from the church, still upset over the funeral and the loss of Charlie. "I didn't do a very good job of convincing Admiral to finalize the deal," says Keith. The meeting didn't go well and Admiral backed out.

Shortly after that, Art Evans introduced Keith to Alcan Aluminum Products, who signed a lease for the building on the same site. "When the building was completed, one of the things we had to do was provide a six-foot-tall company logo on their door," says Keith.



Charlie Metcalfe in 1968, one year before he died of cancer. Charlie had been a close friend and colleague of Keith's since they started building houses in 1947.

"I had tears in my eyes. I couldn't help myself."



An elevation drawing and photograph of the Alcan building at 3454 Lougheed Highway, completed in 1970.

“It was this big goddamn thing we had to get across the border from the United States.” The emblem had just arrived on-site and so had a representative from Alcan’s head office back east. “The Alcan guy looked around and then said, ‘I don’t know what you’ve done here, but we aren’t moving in.’” Keith informed him that he had an agreement and it had been custom-finished for them. The Alcan executive told Keith that no one except him had the authority to sign a contract. Apparently, he had been in the hospital for about a year and his right-hand man had issued the contract and signed the lease. Keith lost it. “I

“I wanted to tell him where he could shove that emblem, too, but I didn’t.”

told him that either they were moving in or they had to find another tenant. I wanted to tell him where he could shove that emblem, too, but I didn’t. Instead, I said we were shipping the emblem back to their head office along with a bill for their rent. They backed out of the lease that same day,” says Keith. Alcan did find another tenant to take over the lease and The Beedie Group still owns the building today.

LOUGHEED LEAKS

Through Art Evans, Keith entered into a contract with General Tire to design and construct a building on the two lots they purchased from the company.

Since the company dealt in heavy truck tires, they wanted a completely concrete structure with a parking lot that could support fully loaded trucks. As the parking lot was directly above the warehouse, Keith called in the best engineer he knew to consult on how to make a totally waterproof, heavy-weight-bearing deck. “We did everything he said,” says Keith. “But the thing still leaked like a bloody sieve.” The building was for a client, so Keith wanted to be sure that it worked perfectly.

They devised a plan to run gutters along all the beams in the ceiling of the warehouse, and then have drainpipes at the end wall. “My God, it worked,” says Keith. “General Tire was happy as long as the water wasn’t coming in, so that was a creative solution.”

Next door, Keith built a similar structure but with the warehouse 30 feet under the landscaped area and parking for cars only. He hired a new consultant, who came up with an entirely different system that didn’t require the heavy loading design used on the General Tire building. For a while it appeared that the building had avoided the leak issues of its neighbour, but a few years later a couple of leaks appeared around the same time that Electrohome went out of business and vacated the building. A vegetable processing plant signed a new lease. Since they were primarily washing and rinsing produce, there was water around all the time and the leaks weren’t an issue, but when they moved out and a tobacco company expressed interest in taking over the building, Keith knew that they had to make repairs to the structure to ensure that the new tenant had a dry space.

“Once again, we brought in the experts,” says Keith. They stripped the whole front parking lot of all the tar and gravel to replace some of the concrete. The subcontractors put up a sign warning that the deck could not sustain heavy loads and only cars were permitted in the parking lot. One day, a fully loaded cement truck arrived on-site



The Electrohome building and cars-only parking lot before the cement truck went through the roof of the parkade.



FROM TOP: While some repair work on the parking lot was underway, a cement truck driver ignored the cars-only warning sign and drove his fully loaded vehicle onto the lot. The Electrohome parking lot.

and the driver missed the sign. He proceeded into the middle of the parking area, getting surprisingly far before crashing through the floor into the warehouse below. “It was stuck down there,” says Keith. “The cement was getting harder and harder by the minute, and it wasn’t going to be an easy fix.” Eventually, a crane was brought in to lift out the drum of solid concrete. “Thankfully, it was all covered by insurance but we had a hell of a time cleaning it all up.”

The patch-up job was complete, but Keith had the feeling that the location would be nothing but endless trouble. As soon as the tobacco

company moved in, Keith sold the building. “Six months later I saw that they were pulling up the entire parking lot surface again and the place was empty.” Not all buildings were keepers.

“Keith Beedie is not an overnight success story. Even when things were tight, he didn’t sell buildings unless he had to. It’s his long view on the accumulation of assets that has created his wealth.”

—RON BAGAN, COLLIER INTERNATIONAL

“Keith has an uncanny ability to walk into a site office, ask a couple of questions and suddenly just know exactly what was going on. Within minutes, he understood a whole project. He’d make a couple of critical changes and walk out again, on to the next site.”

—TERRY BRINDLEY, CARPENTER



BLACK ANGUS

Beedie Construction worked tirelessly to put up all the buildings they could on the land they already owned. Art Evans was focused on helping Keith acquire more properties for future development and continued to root out the best deals he could find in the Lower Mainland. After getting one building under his belt in Richmond in 1970, Keith was keen to acquire more land in the Vancouver suburb.

Early in 1971 Art approached Keith about a four-acre parcel of land available in Richmond at the corner of Lansdowne and Number Three Road. It was being offered for sale by the Ford Motor Company of Canada. The property was appealing, but Keith discovered to his disappointment that he didn’t have the capital necessary to put the deal together. Luckily, Art Evans had another trick up his sleeve. He offered one acre on the street corner to a buyer who was willing to purchase a quarter of the land for 50 percent of the original full purchase price. Keith put up the other 50 percent and got himself three acres.

“If there were one word to describe the man, it would be fair. He doesn’t always get fair treatment from others, but he always expects it and he always gives it”

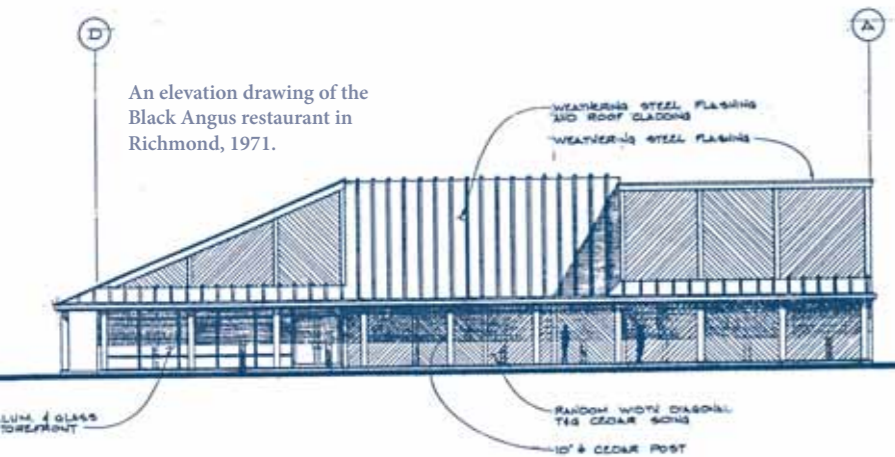
—GEORGE HAYHOE, VP PROPERTY MANAGEMENT (RETIRED)

Keith was in a constant battle with the bureaucracy that was endemic in the development industry, whether it was planning red tape or slow business practices. As Keith was sitting in Art Evan’s office finishing up the closing documents for the Richmond property, a box of paperwork arrived from Ford with the pictures and details for the site. Ford had sent the material along to help Art promote the land, but it had taken them longer to put the package together than it had taken for Art to sell the property. “It was like looking at a menu after you’d already eaten,” says Keith. Keith and Art had a good laugh as they flipped through the aerial photographs and specifications, a signed contract to purchase complete in front of them. “That’s how sharp Art was with knowing things ahead of time. In the amount of time it took Ford to collect the property’s sales material, Art had already completed the deal,” says Keith. Art’s ability to seek out great deals and work quickly was a great match with Keith’s drive.

Art’s ability to seek out great deals and work quickly was a great match with Keith’s drive.

“One of the greatest lessons I learned from my dad was to never say something unless I was 100 percent sure about it. It represents integrity and respect. It is the right way to treat people.”

—RYAN BEEDIE, KEITH’S SON



“They asked for a strange building that no one else would want when they left.”

Keith went on to build a number of buildings for tenants on the three-acre lots, including American Motors, Mark’s Work Wearhouse, Uncle John’s Restaurant and CalVan. The last project constructed on the lot was for Black Angus, a popular restaurant chain out of the United States. The restaurant wanted a particular look for their dining room and the head office was very specific about all aspects of the building – in particular, the finishing work they required from Beedie Construction. One sticking point was the cedar boards they wanted to use to panel the entire seating area. When the cedar arrived on-site, new supervisor Ted Metcalfe immediately called Keith to protest that they had received delivery of a bunch of junk wood. “I rushed down there because we didn’t want to stick inferior-quality wood on our clients’ walls,” says Keith. “He was right, it was terrible stuff. There were only about 10 boards in the whole delivery that weren’t covered in knots.”

“With Beedie, you’re able to build with quality. Within reason, of course, no gold-plated fixtures. But we are allowed to do a good job, to the extent that we knew our buildings were better than the competitors’ buildings.”

—AXEL GRINGMUTH, ETS ELECTRIC LTD

“The wall only contained about half a dozen clear boards,” says Keith. “I was about to order new wood when the Black Angus inspector happened by to see the work. He took one look at the nicer wood and told me to take it all off. Apparently they wanted the knotty stuff as a part of their look. I was dumbstruck because, from my point of view, it was just garbage. But we did it and they were happy.” Shortly after Black Angus signed a 20-year lease with Beedie Construction, they decided that their restaurant’s business model was inconsistent with Richmond’s bylaws. They couldn’t have a bar and dance floor, so gave notice that they were moving back to the U.S. “I was mad,” says Keith. “They asked for a strange building that no one else would want when they left.” Keith requested that they continue to pay rent or buy out the

“There are four core values that Keith Beedie has brought to this company. They define The Beedie Group. The first is hard work, which Keith expects of others and gives himself. The second is value for money, both for us and for our customers. Thirdly, honesty means we do what we say and we say what we mean. Finally, we look for practical solutions for every problem. All those values contribute to our biggest purpose, which is to make sure our customers are happy. Those values come straight from Keith.”

—ERIC JENSEN, GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT

lease. What he got instead was a lengthy legal battle. He eventually won, but after his expenses were accounted for it was a pyrrhic victory.

Many years later, Keith sold the Richmond properties for many times the original purchase price that Art Evans put together, making the bumps on the road with Black Angus and other tenants well worth the effort. Richmond rezoned the area for high-rise construction, sending the land prices skyward. Keith managed to realize a handsome profit when he sold out two acres in 2004, keeping one acre directly on Number 3 Road.

Despite his bad experience with Black Angus, Keith agreed in 1970 to build another restaurant for a client. This time it was an establishment on Kingsway called the Red Barn. It was a franchise operation and the owner had plans to open half a dozen Red Barns throughout the Lower Mainland. Over the course of the construction Keith became friends with the Red Barn owner’s brother, Jack Swift, who joined Keith and Betty in Hawaii that year. Eating out one night while on vacation, Jack and Keith were impressed with the concept of the restaurant they had chosen. It was a do-it-yourself steak house, complete with a huge open-pit barbecue. Customers were invited to cook their own meat, however they chose, on the massive hot grill. “We loved the idea,” says Keith. “Jack had some restaurant experience and we talked a bit about how we could make the same concept work in Vancouver.”

It was a do-it-yourself steak house, complete with a huge open-pit barbecue.

“We loved the idea.”



A STEAK PLACE OF HIS OWN



When Keith got home, he contacted Art Evans about a property the City of Vancouver had available for lease on Terminal Avenue that he had passed on earlier. “I called Art and said I thought I might have a use for that land after all,” says Keith. “We obtained a short lease of 17 years from the city and away we went.” He and Jack decided to call the restaurant Kejac’s, a play on both their names. The build went smoothly with Keith at the helm. He and Jack conferred on details about the dining room layout and design. Like the restaurant in Hawaii, Kejac’s offered patrons the opportunity to cook their own steaks. “There was a beautiful long firepit with a huge fan above it to carry the smoke away from diners,” says Keith.

“Keith is the most interesting man I have ever known in my life, and I’ve known a few.”

—GEORGE HAYHOE, VP PROPERTY MANAGEMENT (RETIRED)



FROM TOP: Betty, John Williams and Keith showing a Kejac’s promotional T-shirt, 1976. Keith and Betty at a costume party held at Kejac’s.

The opening night was a big success, with drink specials and a live band playing. It was a full house of 360 people, packed with friends and new patrons. Keith found that he enjoyed playing host in the new space and he was pleased to be the catalyst for a fresh dining concept in the city. However, after an initial spurt of interest, the number of dinner customers started to decline. Keith was concerned and began asking around. He discovered that while many people enjoyed the novelty of cooking their own steaks, some didn’t want to play chef when out for a special meal. Keith and Jack quickly modified the menu to offer the option of a cooked steak from the kitchen for a dollar extra. “Our problem was not thinking of that from the beginning,” says Keith. “Years later I still had people telling me that they loved Kejac’s but didn’t want to barbecue their own steak all the time. First impressions always stick. The word never got out that we had changed the menu to have full service available.”

For a short time, it looked as though Kejac’s would get a second chance to make a first impression. Business perked up a few months after opening when a local restaurant reviewer penned a highly favourable review in the newspaper. “I sat next to the reviewer the night he ate in the restaurant,” says Keith. “He happened to get the most perfect steak and fell in love with our place. The next night, the line-up went around the block.” The surge didn’t last, however. It didn’t take long for Keith to realize that attendance was once more on the decline. While disappointed that success with the restaurant remained elusive,

Keith enjoyed owning Kejac’s. It was a social business and a pleasant detour some evenings after work. “I went down to Kejac’s a lot. It was nice to pop down for dinner and take a look. I could talk to people. The food was always good.” While the restaurant never took off the way that the partners hoped it might, it did well enough that Keith and Jack opened two more locations over the next couple of years. Jack’s brother’s Red Barn venture failed, so they took over his space on Kingsway and opened a third restaurant in a building that Beedie Construction owned in Richmond.

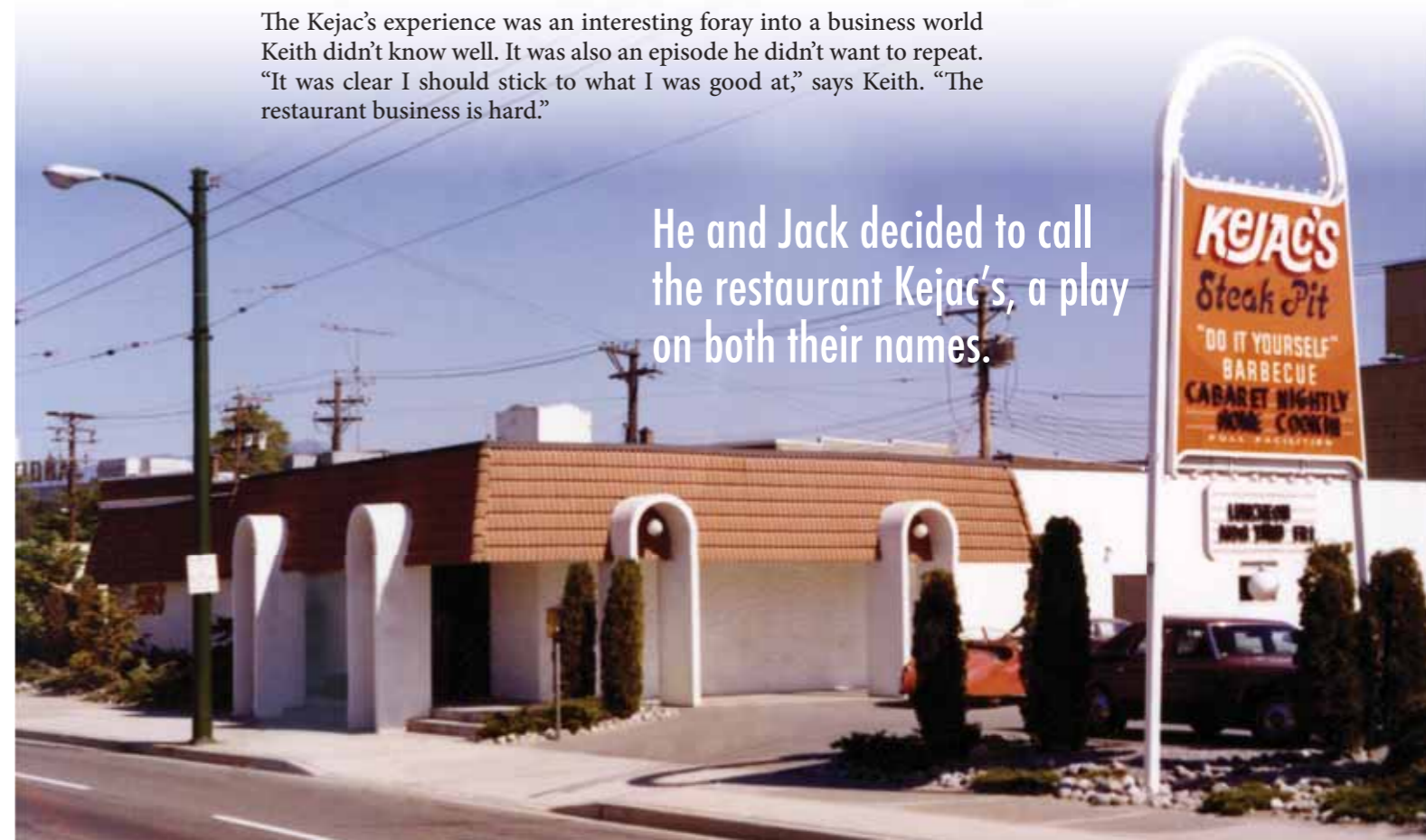
Despite a group of regulars and fairly steady traffic coming through the doors, Keith found the bottom line of the restaurant business more challenging than he had anticipated. He discovered that his partner was not quite as well versed in the ways of the industry as he’d thought. Keith was too busy to give the business the attention it needed and it soon became apparent that money was flowing in the wrong direction – out the door. “We had a lot of losses,” says Keith. “There was some theft of things like liquor and steaks that the managers weren’t up to the task of keeping tabs on the way they needed to. I got sick of feeding the damn thing my time and money, so I told Jack I was done.” Keith owned the buildings on Main Street and Kingsway and in Richmond, which was good since he didn’t have to worry about breaking a lease. The Kingsway location he sold to Arby’s Restaurant. Years later, a fire broke out in the original Kejac’s on Main, resulting in its demolition.

The Kejac’s experience was an interesting foray into a business world Keith didn’t know well. It was also an episode he didn’t want to repeat. “It was clear I should stick to what I was good at,” says Keith. “The restaurant business is hard.”



FROM TOP: A Kejac’s menu. The restaurant gave customers the option to grill their own steaks, or have them done to perfection by the restaurant. Kejac’s Steak Pit on Main.

He and Jack decided to call the restaurant Kejac’s, a play on both their names.



CHAPTER 15

LAND Man

SAT BARBER-ELLIS



In 1973, Keith purchased a five-acre parcel of land in East Vancouver that eventually housed artists' studios and the Barber-Ellis offices.

TILT-UP TRAGEDY

Beedie Construction Ltd. continued to expand into the build-to-lease market as Art Evans kept presenting Keith with attractive real estate options around the Lower Mainland. Art and Keith shared a talent for the art of the deal, using creative financing methods to make the impossible possible. One example was a deal Beedie Construction struck with BC Hydro in 1972. The Crown corporation had three properties for sale, totalling approximately eight acres, at Van Horne Way beside the right-of-way underneath the Oak Street Bridge in Richmond. Keith agreed to the purchase price, but didn't have the money to complete the deal. He and Art managed to make arrangements with BC Hydro to put down a sizable deposit on the land and then take time to put together a few contracts before paying the outstanding balance. Ultimately, BC Hydro carried their portion of the purchase price for years, giving Keith the capital he needed to get to work on the site.



The Schenker warehouse that Beedie Construction built on the Richmond property acquired from BC Hydro.

"Keith's a tough negotiator and I say, good for him. My experience with Keith as a joint partner was very, very good. I admire the guy."

—FRED CAVANAGH, JOINT VENTURE PARTNER AND TENANT

Construction soon started on a number of buildings on the Richmond property, including warehouses for Cavco Carpets, Schenker Warehousing and Trans Pacific Warehouses. Keith continued to use tilt-up construction for his buildings with great success. The company developed a strong reputation in the Vancouver area for being the tilt-up experts, other than Dominion Construction, having more experience than almost any other local builder in employing it. On the Van Horne Way property, Keith eventually put up more than 150,000 square feet of tilt-up warehouse buildings, a new record.

"Keith has come up with a chemistry of trades that work with the Beedie staff in such a way that buildings go up in a unique, quick way. The schedule is accelerated because the trades have worked together enough that we communicate in shorthand. Careful use of standard components allows for volume buying and lets him capitalize on cost savings. Long-term buying relationships also let Beedie enjoy specific manufacturers' lowest-cost pricing. The savings add up."

—STEVE ASHFORTH, GLASTECH CONTRACTING

“It was one of the most terrible things to happen in my life.”

Unfortunately, the Richmond site would mark another first for Beedie Construction. The first and only construction site fatalities for the company occurred there in 1973. “It was one of the most terrible things to happen in my life,” says Keith. The Cavco building under construction was going to have the offices built over the truck loading area and a number of heavy “second”-storey panels were being stacked up to await completion of the first level. They were balanced on their sides with a small space between each one with braces at each end to prevent them from tipping over. In an incredible stroke of bad luck, as two men were working on the last panel, a strong gust of wind blew through the site, knocking the panels down like a line of dominos.

“Ted was fortunate to escape with his life,” says Keith. “He was at the end and saw the panels coming down. He scrambled to get out of the way, tripping on something as he went. He narrowly missed being crushed, crawling out at the last second.” The two men at the end of the stack were not as lucky. Both workers were killed by the impact of the panels. “Betty had only been in my office a handful of times,” says Keith. “By coincidence, when I received the phone call about the accident, she was there for a meeting with our insurance agent. I never swear in front of women, but when I heard the news I jumped from my chair and said a few choice words.” Keith was horrified by the thought of the loss of life wrought by one ill-timed blast of wind. “My first instinct was to get out there right away,” he says, “But I was in no condition to drive, so I had someone take me out to the site. I didn’t go to the actual location of the accident because I knew I would never be able to get the image of what happened out of my head if I did.”

“Safety has always been a very big deal at The Beedie Group.”

—TERRY BRINDLEY, CARPENTER

Keith wasn’t the only one shaken by the accident. “Ted was the super on that job and I don’t think he’s ever gotten over it,” says Keith. “There was no one to blame. It was just one of those unpredictable tragedies. That was one hell of a wind.” One of the men killed was a 50-year old construction veteran and the other was a young apprentice. Keith approached the families of both victims to offer his personal condolences and learn more about the men who had worked for Beedie Construction. He was reassured by both families that the men knew the risks associated with the industry. For the family of the apprentice, he donated money to the young man’s church and paid for a stained glass window to be erected in his memory. “It was an incredibly tough time. About as painful as it can get,” he says. “Something I’ll never forget.”



“The inefficiency drove me crazy,” says Keith. “You could go to a job site and see two or three guys doing work that one man could have done.”

STATE OF THE UNIONS

Once Keith had succumbed to union pressure in 1964, in order to get cranes into operation on a job site, it wasn’t easy to reverse the process. To get around what seemed to be an unending stream of regulations and demands, Keith formed an alternate company. Beemet Construction Ltd. was created to allow for greater flexibility and efficiencies on projects and at job sites. Even with Beemet in play, though, the unions couldn’t be completely avoided. Unions and their rules still played a larger role in Keith’s business than he liked. “The inefficiency drove me crazy,” says Keith. “You could go to a job site and see two or three guys doing work that one man could have done. A speck of rain appeared, the rules said they could take a rain vote to quit for the day with pay. It was frustrating to hear about work delays when I knew how long something should take.”

Increasingly frustrated by the union presence at Beemet Construction, Keith leaped at the opportunity to decertify in 1987, when the government introduced new legislation. The big challenge was to arrive at a successful decertification vote. While the vast majority of employees saw the same limitations presented by the union, the lead-up to the vote created a lot of tension. Beemet Construction workers were pressured by union officials to vote in favour of maintaining the status quo.

The process was closely scrutinized and regulated, and included a rule that prevented Keith from speaking directly to his employees about the issue. “How can you state your case if you can’t talk to anyone?” says Keith. “Luckily, there were lots of people in the company dedicated to getting the truth out there to employees.” When the time came to vote, the overwhelming majority of Beedie employees voted to decertify. The only holdouts were younger workers who had less experience with the company, and who had been fed false promises by union management. “I felt bad for some of the young guys who were ultimately disappointed in the union when the things they were promised didn’t work out. But they had to make their choice,” says Keith. After years of the union, Beemet Construction became one of the first companies to become non-union under the new legislation.

BEEDIE BUILDINGS 1960s and 1970s



Printcraft



Small strip mall in Port Coquitlam.



Coolite on Hastings



Hertz Rent-a-Truck



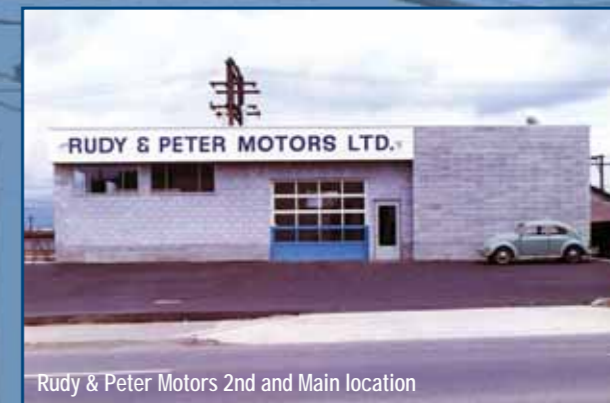
Scott Silk Screening



Midas Muffler Shop



Henry Electric



Rudy & Peter Motors 2nd and Main location



Fairview building that housed Mushroom Recording Studio



Busy Bee Cleaners



Gizellas



Mini Mart

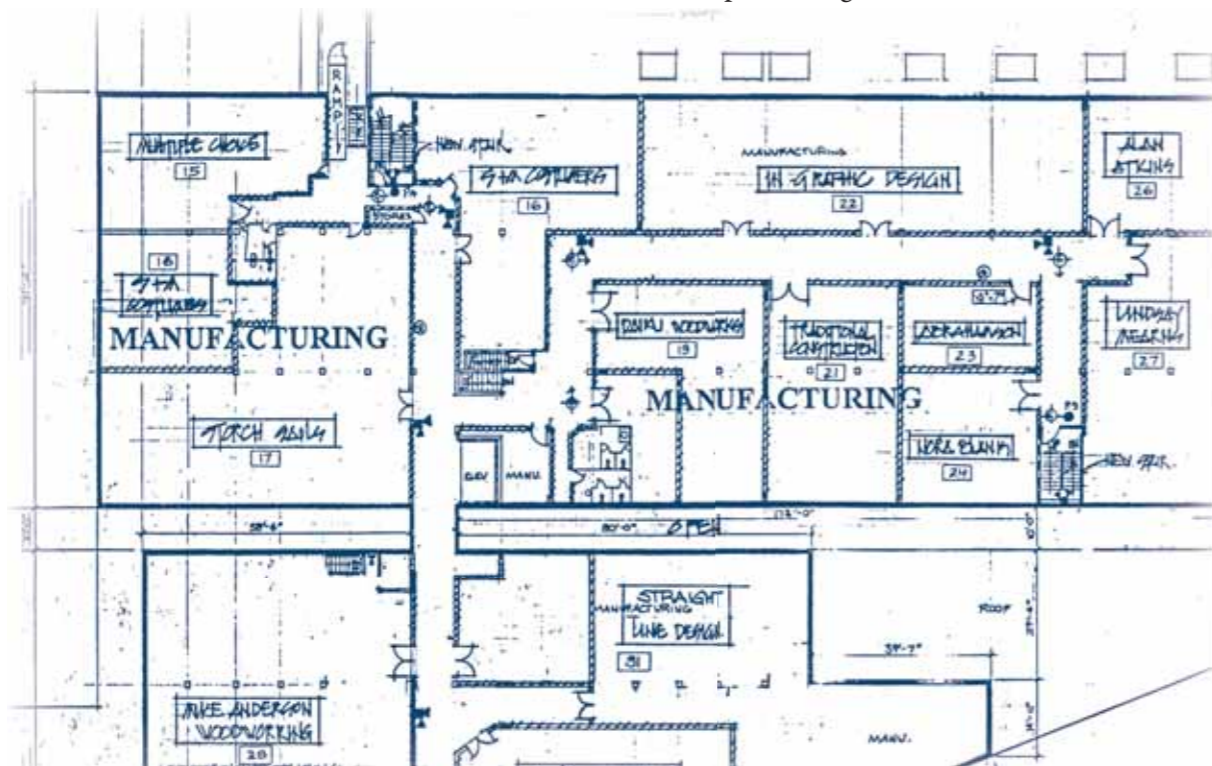
BARBER-ELLIS



FROM TOP: Part of the Parker Street property was converted into artists' studios and Beedie Construction built a new 100,000-square-foot facility that was leased to Barber-Ellis. Main floor plan of the Parker Street building.

Also in 1973, Art Evans ran into yet another Vancouver land deal too good to pass up. This one was between William Street and Parker, on Glen Drive. The property was a five-acre parcel with an old, four-storey wooden building on it. "I was in my office when he phoned and told me it was a good buy," says Keith. "I hadn't seen the place, but he said he liked it and that I had to get a bid in that same day by five o'clock if I was interested." Art had proven his savvy enough times that Keith didn't question the suggestion or see the need to investigate any further. Foregoing negotiations, he put in an offer at the full listing price of \$800,000, with no conditions. He met with Art who then took the signed offer and rushed it to the property's representative, Henry Bell-Irving.

After leaving Art's office, Keith drove down to William Street to take a look at what he'd just bought, affirming Art's judgment on the prospects of the purchase. Meanwhile, Art was sitting down with Bell-Irving to complete the transaction when a phone call came through from Dominion Construction. They wanted to offer full price on the lot, but had to wait for confirmation from their board. Art overheard them say that their offer would be in by seven o'clock, two hours past the deadline set by the owner, Murzo Holdings. "Bell-Irving was a well-known, respectable gentleman," says Keith. "He had the authority for the owners, and he told Dominion that he'd already agreed to sell and the deal was done." Art watched nervously while Dominion upped their offer to \$850,000, then \$900,000. Bell-Irving was a man of his word, however. He stuck with Keith's offer, despite the higher bids.



"There was one deal we were working on putting together for a big build-to-suit project that had Beedie in direct bidding competition with Dominion Construction. It was a complicated paper cutting, printing and distribution plant that needed to be built, with head office representatives out from eastern Canada to make the final decisions. I went with the head office guys to both meetings, first with Beedie then with Dominion. Keith met with the executives in his office in Burnaby, chatted with them for about half an hour and answered a couple of questions. We left there to meet with Dominion, downtown in the Bentall Centre in a huge boardroom where seven or eight guys went over a dozen fancy drawings. We walked out and the head office guys told me they were going with Beedie. They explained that, as nice as all the Dominion bells and whistles were, they didn't want to pay for them. Keith answered every construction question they had asked very simply. They liked that Beedie was a family business and that it was his own money on the line. I saw lots of deals go down like that one."

—RON BAGAN, COLLIERS INTERNATIONAL

Dominion wasn't finished with the William Street property. Once they realized they weren't getting anywhere with Henry Bell-Irving, they contacted Keith. They offered him \$50,000 to let them have it and when he said no, they doubled their price. "I could have made \$100,000 in a single day, without laying out a nickel," says Keith. "But I thought it was a good piece of land and I wanted to keep it."

Once the property was signed over, Keith's first order of business was to decide what to do with the existing structure. He learned it was the old Simmons mattress building, built in 1894. "Four storeys of wood, wood, wood," says Keith. And in a strange coincidence, it was the very same building that Betty's father had worked in years before when it was still a mattress plant. "In fact," says Keith, "he had a funny story about busting a suction pipe that filled the mattresses with feathers back then. When the thing broke, it was feathers all over the place."

The building had a lot of open space, which was being used by the previous owner as a public warehouse. This had only been partially successful, but in an effort to cater to those who needed smaller spaces, Keith converted a portion of the warehouse space into studios. After a couple of years of running through unsuitable building managers, Keith settled on Terry Kaufenberg, who has been Keith's top manager

"I could have made \$100,000 in a single day, without laying out a nickel."



The 1974 building permit for the Barber-Ellis building. Today the same type of permit would consist of dozens of pages and the cost would be \$100,000 or more.



When Keith decided to upgrade the siding on the old Parker Street building, city officials got nervous and issued a Stop Work order. After a meeting with city hall ironed out the problem, the order was rescinded.

for 16 years. Terry liked the idea of renting the unusual spaces out as artists' spaces. The idea was immensely popular and the concept took off, filling up quickly with a wide variety of creative people. Today, 1000 Parker is considered one of Vancouver's most important artist studio facilities.

While they were living through the growing pains of converting the old Parker Street building from public warehousing to individual artist's suites, they tore down the several small structures surrounding the main building. They then proceeded with construction on a 100,000-square-foot building with 70,000 square feet of low-ceiling basement warehousing and parking, all constructed on 50 percent of the five-acre site.

After prolonged negotiations with a local manager, Keith signed an agreement for a 20-year lease with Barber-Ellis to occupy the 100,000 square feet of the building and a portion of the 30,000 square feet of underground parking. The lower-floor basement was then to be subdivided into smaller areas and leased to various clients. The manager handed over a \$2,000 deposit and worked with Keith to draw up plans. While going through the process of getting the plans approved by the City, Keith had the remaining buildings on the site torn down in preparation for excavation.

The designs finally received City approval and Keith gave the order to commence digging. Once the workers broke ground they discovered they were on an old dump site, unearthing a treasure trove of discarded vintage bottles of tremendous value to collectors. One Monday morning workers arrived to start construction only to find that a frenzy of activity had taken place over the weekend. Collectors had dug through the entire site, including an area around the footing of the old Simmons building. Fearful that the whole place could come down on some unsuspecting bottle enthusiast's head, Keith decided to post security to the site. Keith asked his father-in-law to come back to the same place he'd worked so many years before assembling mattresses, but this time as a security guard. "Dave, Betty's father, found it strange to be there again, so many years later," says Keith. "Life can be funny sometimes."

"Every successful business person will have stories told about them about their generosity, both materially and otherwise. Keith is generous to a fault with people he likes and people who are loyal."

—GEORGE HAYHOE, VP PROPERTY MANAGEMENT (RETIRED)

Confident that no weekend glass enthusiasts were going to be crushed on the property, Beedie Construction proceeded with the build. "The land was horrible," says Keith. "False Creek inlet used to come up there, before it was filled in by the City. The water table was still very high." The foundation required a complex system of concrete pilings, beams and joists, making the job a new experience for Keith. Just as the pilings were being driven, a surprise visitor showed up. "He was the son of the president of Barber-Ellis," says Keith. "The fellow stormed onto the site unannounced and asked what the hell we thought we were doing." He proceeded to criticize every element of the project before declaring that the company didn't want the building at all.

"I was furious and asked him what the hell he was talking about since we had a signed agreement," says Keith. "Then I asked him if he knew how much we could sue them for if they walked away." Keith went on to explain that they had customized plans, City approval and considerable work already completed. Undaunted, the president's son declared that the local manager didn't have signing authority on a project of that scale and therefore the contract was invalid. It was an unwelcome development on an already difficult build. Keith started to wonder why he hadn't taken the \$100,000 offer from Dominion Construction.

"I phoned this guy's dad to see what the score was and got in touch with a lawyer," says Keith. A few tense days passed as the project was put on hold as they awaited the arrival of the Barber-Ellis president from Toronto. "I was so bloody angry," says Keith. "If that deal fell apart, my whole company would be in jeopardy." The president arrived and, after only half an hour touring the site with Keith, conceded that he couldn't understand his son's extreme reaction. He and Keith discussed the potential legal consequences of pulling out of the agreement and

The Barber-Ellis offices on Glen Drive, part of the 5-acre property purchase by Keith, circa 1975.



then talked about some small modifications to the design. After a couple of days, some negotiations involving lawyers and a few minor changes to plans, the president overruled his son and supported the existing agreement. The building was completed and Barber-Ellis stayed for all 20 years of their lease before moving out. Today, the building is fully leased to Staples and various other companies. Despite his reservations midway through the build, in the end Keith was pleased that he'd held out against the son.

“Things were different back in the day. There were no cell phones or pagers. You started the week with \$5 worth of dimes for the pay phones. I'd go into the bank to get them myself on Monday. You ran from job to job, stopping at phone booths along the way. It was crazy. Because you didn't have a phone with you, at the end of the day you headed back to the office to complete all your calls. I'd get back after five o'clock with 20 to 30 phone calls to make. You thought nothing of talking to someone about pricing issues at 7:45 at night. Now with cell phones, we do that kind of business throughout the day from the job sites. It is so much easier today.”

—TED METCALFE, SUPERINTENDENT (RETIRED)

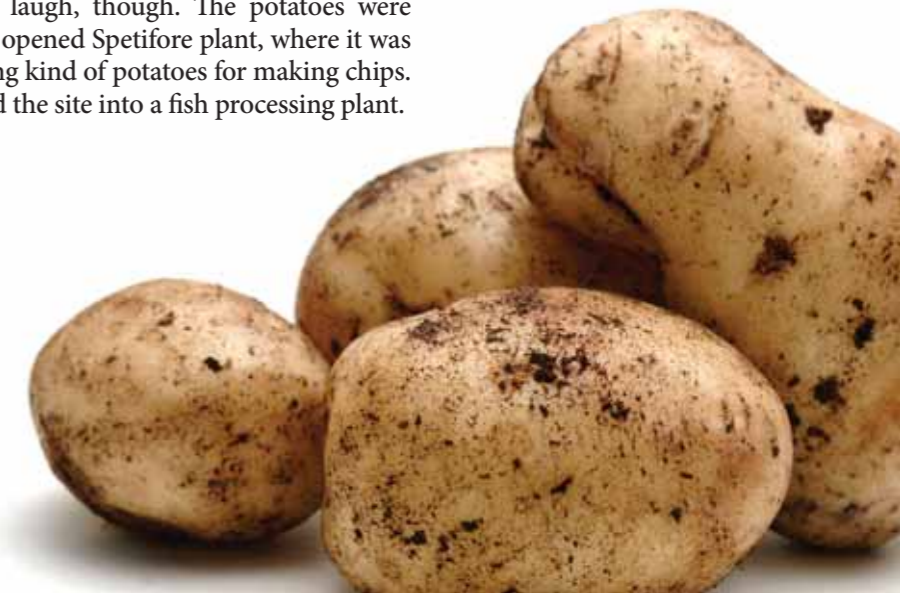
LET'S GET GOING, THE POTATOES ARE GROWING

Just as Keith was finishing up the Barber-Ellis project, he was offered the opportunity to construct an even more complex structure. “It was at that time the most difficult build of my career,” says Keith. A farmer in North Delta named George Spetifore needed a huge frozen foods processing plant and warehouse, complete with a 20,000-square-foot freezer, blast tunnels and complex wiring system to accommodate the plant machinery. Under optimal circumstances it would be a difficult project, but Spetifore had an unusual constraint that pushed the entire project into overdrive. The plant was intended to process potatoes into potato chips. The problem was that the potatoes he wanted to process were already planted. The whole project had to be completed in time for the harvest of the tubers, about six months away. In other words, in the same amount of time it takes to grow a potato, Keith was expected to design and construct an entire warehouse and processing plant. The race was on: Keith Beedie versus Mother Nature. Keith had no time to lose.

The acquisition of the permits necessary for such a large undertaking was arguably the most arduous component of the project, or at least the part most out of Keith's control. Luckily, he had a trick up his sleeve. The mayor of Delta was Tom Goode, a friend of Keith's from years back. He was able to personally issue the permits based on little more than a simple site plan, an artist's rendering and Keith's promise to keep the planning department updated as construction progressed. “I had an engineer, a designer and three draftsmen working two shifts just to keep up with the construction crew,” says Keith. The building went up at such a quick rate that Delta Municipal Hall couldn't keep up their inspections, asking Keith to get his own engineers to conduct them instead. Thanks to Tom Goode and his trust in Keith, Beedie Construction beat the potatoes. They completed the huge project in the same amount of time as permits alone would usually take to process.

Mother Nature still had the last laugh, though. The potatoes were harvested and taken to the freshly opened Spetifore plant, where it was discovered that they were the wrong kind of potatoes for making chips. The owners immediately converted the site into a fish processing plant.

**Mother Nature
still had the
last laugh ...**



THE AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE

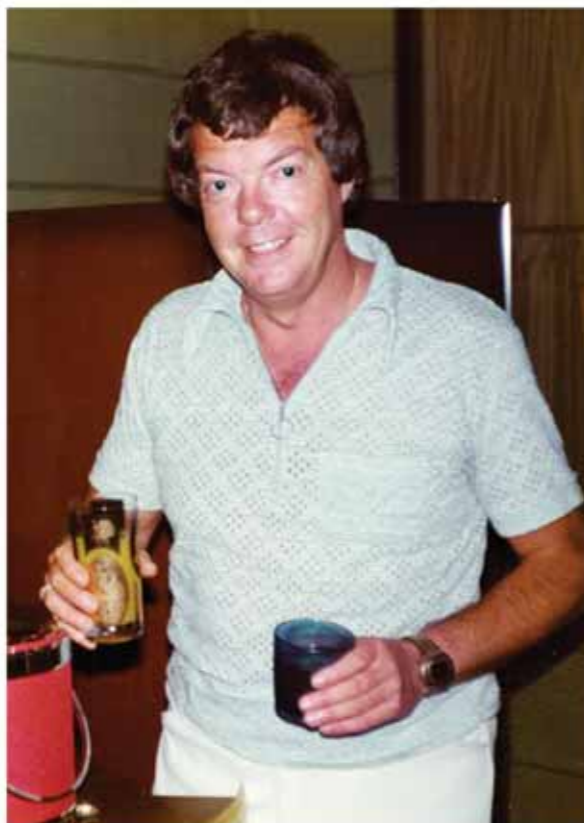
The ALR was implemented by the B.C. government in 1972. It was designed as a “freeze” on the development of all designated agricultural land of over two acres in size. The Land Commission was formed to administer and manage the province's ALR zones. More than 4.7 million hectares of land was designated ALR.

In 1976, when Keith bought the site in Richmond that became designated ALR, he didn't expect it would take him 12 years to get it out of the ALR. Once he finally did, a journalist quoted Keith in a newspaper article, insinuating that he had some sort of inside connection with premier Bill Vander Zalm. The misunderstanding arose from Keith's description to the reporter of how he planned to speak with his neighbours about the rezoning process. He mentioned Vander Zalm's name because his property, Fantasy Gardens, was across the road from Keith's land. To Keith's dismay, the journalist used the statement to imply that Keith would be using his influence with the premier to expedite the rezoning process in his favour. “The interview got off on the wrong foot when the first question the reporter asked me was, ‘So, how does it feel to be a millionaire now that your land is out of the ALR?’ I informed the journalist that I was already a millionaire.”

Upset by the tone and implication of the article, Keith wrote letters to the newspaper's editor, Richmond Council and Bill Vander Zalm and tried to clarify what he had said. It proved to be a difficult task and no retraction was printed. Keith jokes that trying to get to the truth of the article was almost as tough as getting the land out of the ALR.

CHAPTER 16

UP, Down, UP



Keith in the early 1980s.

THE FRESH MILLIONAIRE

Beedie Construction Ltd. continued to expand. Each new project brought fresh challenges, pushing the company to grow and advance. Keith was learning with every job, getting better at putting together the right deals at the right time. His natural instincts for negotiation and managing sub-trades were honed as the deals got bigger and the stakes got higher.

Years earlier, Keith had sat in the moonlit bathroom of his Halley Street home, dreaming of a day when his personal worth exceeded a million dollars. In those days, this goal seemed distant and unlikely. While Keith knew that the business had come a long way over the years, he was still surprised when his accountant informed him one day in 1977 that he was a millionaire. "I knew we'd been doing all right," says Keith. "But when I heard the word 'millionaire' I thought, 'I've done it.' Nevertheless, I didn't sit down with a drink to celebrate or anything. It just felt like another fact of life."

He re-examined his business aspirations and aimed higher. "I had always wanted to build a housing subdivision where I could control the quality and type of building. This seemed like a good challenge, so I decided to shoot for it." He had come a long way from the young guy who had built his first cement block workshop in Marpole.

In 1977-78, Keith started helping out a friend who was having trouble keeping up with the financing payments in a joint venture project he'd become involved in. The deal was for a large piece of land in Port Coquitlam, situated on a picturesque bend in the Coquitlam River. The property was massive, zoned for a 400-lot mobile home park. There was nothing there except a home occupied by Bill and Evelyn McAdam, who became site security. The place had been used by the movie stars Errol Flynn and Kim Novak as retreats from their fast-paced life in Hollywood. As Keith, his friend and the other interested party in the original joint venture got started on the planning, it became clear to everyone involved that it would be better if Keith took over the whole deal by himself. Keith instantly saw it as a stellar opportunity to realize one of his new dreams.

"Keith Beedie isn't afraid of anything. He isn't scared of losing, but it seldom happens. There have been times that every sign has pointed towards scaling back, but to make sure there was enough work for everyone, Mr. Beedie has taken on projects to keep guys on the payroll. I'd give Keith Beedie 110 percent any day of my life. He doesn't even have to ask."

—RON PHILLIPS, FOREMAN



FROM TOP: Lana Beedie working at the Kingsway offices in the 1980s. Ryan, Betty, Irene and Keith celebrate Keith and Betty's 13th wedding anniversary, 1979.

"I didn't sit down with a drink to celebrate or anything. It just felt like another fact of life."

The lots were small and the roads were small, so trying to bring in the homes in one piece was a disaster.

The initial idea was to create a mobile home park, tentatively named Oxbow Lake Estates after the bend in the river where it was situated. From the start, it was an uphill battle. It took a full year to obtain approval for the development of the first 50 lots, during which time it became clear that mobile homes weren't going to work. "It was terrible," says Keith. "The lots were small and the roads were small, so trying to bring in the homes in one piece was a disaster. When they said we couldn't build on the individual sites because it was a trailer-zoned lot, we built houses on a different site in the subdivision, with no trouble from the City even though we were manufacturing on a trailer-park-zoned site. There is no understanding some of the Planning Department's decisions! We then put them on trailers when they were partially built and plunked them down. We did 50 homes that way, but lost money on it." After battling with the City of Port Coquitlam and trying his best to obey the bylaws, Keith decided that he was through building his dream in half measures. He wanted to build homes, not just truck in mobile units. He decided to attempt something that had never been done in British Columbia before: a 13-phase, small-lot strata subdivision.

"I love the story of Keith working around Port Coquitlam's mobile home zoning. He is a born non-conformer, and there was red tape wrapped all around that job. When he couldn't change the zoning, he got creative. He manufactured the homes on a site not yet zoned, then moved them in on a flat-bed trailer to the lot. That's typical of Keith."

—AXEL GRINGMUTH, ETS ELECTRIC LTD

A bare-land strata works similarly to a regular housing strata, except that the shared assets include services normally provided by the local municipality. The strata owns and maintains everything in the community, such as the roads, sidewalks and local parks. "We had to go through Victoria to get approval," says Keith. "No one knew what the rules were because it had never been done before." It was a long and frustrating process, since the rules and regulations were precedent-setting. No sooner would Keith obtain approval on one phase than he would face the whole process again for the next phase. "I tried to explain to the woman in Victoria that the applications were identical; the only element that changed was the number of lots for development in each phase." Each time he complained, Keith was told that each application was considered separately and had to wait its turn. At one point, all four applications he had pending were being held up. Keith's annoyance was increasing. We had purchasers but we couldn't sell until we had approval from Victoria.

**BARE LAND STRATA PLAN OF PART OF
LOT 14 OF SECTIONS 12 AND 13,
TOWNSHIP 39, PLAN 53172
NEW WESTMINSTER DISTRICT
MUNICIPALITY OF COQUITLAM
PHASE 7**

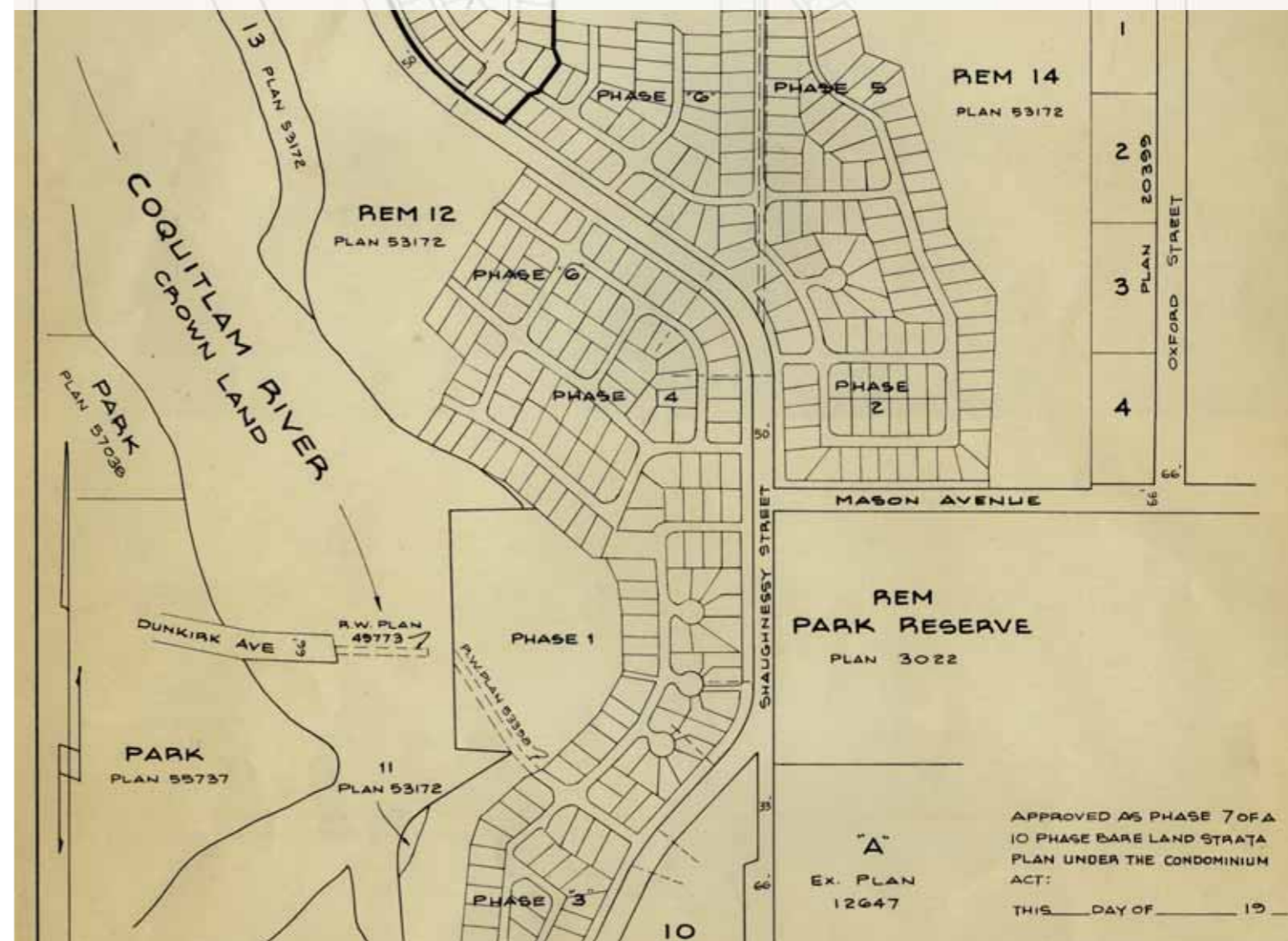
FIRST SHEET SHEET 1 OF 6 SHEETS
STRATA PLAN N.W. 939
PHASE 7
DEPOSITED AND REGISTERED IN THE LAND
TITLE OFFICE AT NEW WESTMINSTER, B.C.
THIS _____ DAY OF _____ 19____
ASSISTANT-DEPUTY REGISTRAR
REFERENCE #

Keith finally caught a break when the woman he was dealing with in Victoria went on vacation. Her right-hand man, who had observed all the back-and-forth negotiations, took a different view from his boss. He seized on her absence and passed all the pending applications in one go. "She came back and was furious," says Keith. "I don't know what happened in the end, because once that worked out, the rest of the applications went a lot smoother." As they were approved, Keith sold the developable lots to Dieter and Gerry Gulps, experienced builders of low-cost homes. They renamed the subdivision River Springs.

"Keith has never been one to cut corners or make anything other than the best building he can make. I worked for The Beedie Group for over 30 years and I saw a lot of buildings go up. There isn't one of them I'd feel anything other than proud of. Each and every one of them is a solid work of craftsmanship."

—GEORGE HAYHOE, VP PROPERTY MANAGEMENT (RETIRED)

A survey map of a portion of Keith's bare-land strata project at River Springs, circa 1978. The project was originally called Oxbow Lake Estates until Keith renamed it.



“Eventually he told me that I couldn’t put rocks in there as long as he was around to stop it. I wanted to throw him in the damn river.”

Even though Keith now had an easier time dealing with Victoria, the project wasn’t hassle-free. When it came time to develop the phase of the project that was closest to the bend in the river, he had to tour

the property with representatives from the appropriate government ministries to get approval to construct rip-rap to prevent slope erosion. Because he was dealing with a river, both provincial and federal fisheries regulations had to be met. As he stood with the ministry representatives and looked at the area, Keith explained to the visitors how rocks had to be placed to shore up the soil. The fellow from the province spotted tiny fish swimming in a water eddy, prompting a lecture about the importance of the biomatter coming off the trees on the water’s edge and the fragile nature of the baby fish. “Even though I pointed out how things had to work, the guy wouldn’t listen,” says Keith. “Eventually he told me that I couldn’t put rocks in there as long as he was around to stop it. I wanted to throw him in the damn river.” With no choice but to listen, Keith

took notes about where he would have to put the rip-rap, much farther back than he would have liked.

Next stop on the tour was the other side of the river bend. This time the trees caused problems. Keith wanted a number removed. He had to listen to the provincial representative wax poetic about trees as he walked around and red-taped the trunks of timber he insisted had to be saved. Keith’s irritation grew as he saw the problems he would have to deal with, working around a huge amount of literal red tape. At three o’clock, the provincial fellow announced he had to leave briefly for a dental appointment, but that he would be back to finish up documenting his directives.

With the provincial representative gone, Keith turned to the federal fisheries representative, who had been quiet throughout Keith’s ordeal. “I asked him what the feds’ opinion on the same issues would be,” says Keith. “He told me I was doing just fine the way I’d been working and then asked me if I remembered him.” Keith didn’t, so the man introduced himself. His name was McFarlane, he told Keith, and he was going to buy a house from Beedie Construction Ltd. years earlier in the Garden Village development. He went on to explain that he had put down a \$25 deposit on the house to be built with a few minor changes. A short time later, however, he was transferred to Ottawa. He had gone to Keith to apologize that he wouldn’t be able to take the house after all, upon which Keith returned his deposit in full. “He told me he’d never forgotten my gesture,” says Keith. “I had told him that it



FROM TOP: An aerial shot of a neighbourhood in River Springs in the 1980s. A sales model of the River Springs project.

wasn’t his fault he couldn’t complete the transaction. He said that he and his wife still talked about it.”

With the federal fisheries man’s blessing, Keith moved the red flags around as he saw fit. “The changes saved me from screwing up a full acre of land,” Keith says. When the fellow from the province returned from his appointment, he had no idea anything had been adjusted. He marched around the lot and took pictures of all the red flags in their new positions, confident that he was preserving his own choices. “He told our site representative that he now had proof of what trees were to be left,” said Keith. It was a small but significant victory.

Victories were hard to come by in the River Springs project. Since there were so many building lots, work on the property was spread out over a number of years. The economy can change a lot in a few years, a lesson Keith learned the hard way in Coquitlam. In the early 1980s interest rates skyrocketed. Numbers that had added up when interest rates were in the low teens started to look very menacing when the rates climbed past 20 percent. “I had some sleepless nights,” says Keith. “All I could do to cope with the stress was to enjoy a couple of drinks after work, spend time with the family and try not to dwell on it.” He was selling lots to Dieter, but carrying the huge project was taking a toll. Keith had to try to make back whatever money he could manage.

In the end, River Springs had 13 building phases. In the middle of phase seven, Keith was contacted by the municipality to construct the community centre as per the strata agreement. He was happy to oblige, putting up a nice facility complete with tennis courts, a swimming pool and a large tract of land for a boat and recreation vehicle storage area. The residents of River Springs were delighted and the community centre was a draw to buy in the subdivision. Looking at the fine print of the contract, though, Keith detected a small loophole. “The deal said I had to build it, but it didn’t say I had to give it away,” says Keith. “I was able to send the strata corporation a bill for \$450,000. They did not protest, since nowhere in the contract did it say anything other than I had to make a community centre. At least I got something out of that.” Times were hard enough and Keith had to tap the money stream wherever he could.

Keith’s son Colin was first introduced to the company when he cleaned lumber at 3444 Lougheed Highway during school summer holidays in 1969. Since then, he has done numerous jobs for Beedie Construction. His help was instrumental in the River Springs project, where he built his home and constructed the community centre. “Shortly after

“All I could do to cope with the stress was to enjoy a couple of drinks after work, spend time with the family and try not to dwell on it.”



Keith at the Kingsway office in the 1980s.

that,” says Keith, “I heard from our resident security couple, Bill and Evelyn McAdam, that Colin wanted to come in and work in the office. I brought him in and he was very good at providing detailed work. With Ryan and his MBA and Colin with so much experience, I felt that when I retired the company would be in great hands moving forward.” After a few years of work in the office, Colin suffered from medical problems that required his retirement from the business. “I was extremely sorry and disappointed that Colin wasn’t able to carry on with the company,” says Keith.

Eventually, the project worked out well, but not before Keith had lost a lot of sleep worrying about the bottom line and whether Beedie Construction could survive River Springs. Today the area is a pleasant subdivision that has held up well over the years. And bare-land strata has since become a common practice, thanks in part to Keith’s persistence, patience and savvy in setting a successful precedent in River Springs.

“The best advice he’s given me is about being able to support the ebb and flow of your business. Everyone has rough times and success is getting through them.”

—TOM GREENOUGH, TOMTAR ROOFING

BEEDIE
GROUP
**CASE
STUDY:**

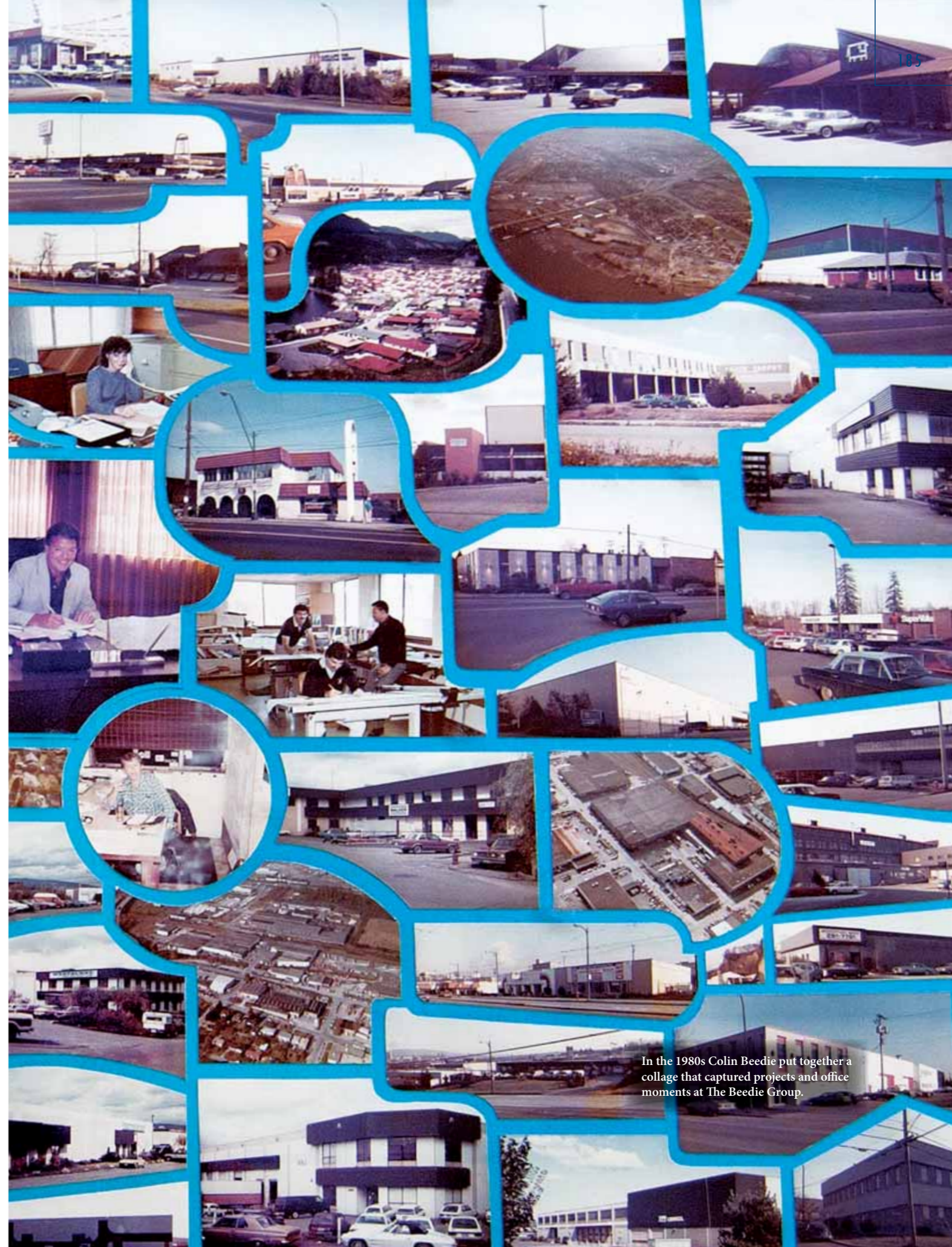
SAVE
TIME
AND
MONEY

The Bogardus Wilson building under construction in 1989. It is typical of a two-storey building style.



Before Beedie Construction started work on the Meridian Industrial Park in the late 1980s, cost and time efficiencies for projects were not an exact science.

Buildings were usually site specific and had a variety of custom features that had to be worked out with clients, adding to costs and lengthening project time frames. At Meridian the Beedie team found a way to offer money saving, pre-designed options and to plan the construction of a series of same-site projects. With all the details worked out beforehand and buildings clustered in one location, building crews literally started working at one end of the industrial park and roled through the site until the first phase was finished. By the time they had completed phase 1, phase 2 was sold out and ready go.



In the 1980s Colin Beedie put together a collage that captured projects and office moments at The Beedie Group.

LAKE WHATCOM



FROM TOP: A view up Lake Whatcom from the Beedie home. Keith and Betty on the second floor balcony of the lakeside retreat. Keith on the patio.

In 1980, with times in the real estate market at their most difficult stage in all the years since Keith had been involved in the industry, Dieter Gulps and his brother ran into another project that was on the ropes. A small, 18-unit strata being developed on Lake Whatcom, in Bellingham, Washington State, was going bankrupt. The mortgage company had foreclosed and Dieter approached Keith to go in on buying the 14 unsold and unfinished units from the mortgage company. Money was extremely tight at the time, but the waterfront homes proved irresistible. Both Dieter and Keith felt there was a profit to be made in finishing and selling the homes off one by one. Keith wanted one of the homes and picked one of the lake units.

Keith started using the house on the lake on weekends as a retreat from his hectic pace of life in the city. Betty looked forward to the time they had with Keith away from work. It was a welcome change to have a place to relax and unwind, far from the stress and pressure of life in the construction business.

"It bothers Keith if we don't get down there every two or three weeks or so. There's a nice little corner on our patio where he likes to sit."

—BETTY BEEDIE, KEITH'S WIFE

Time with Betty, whether at the lake, on vacation or on a cruise, took Keith away from the stress of running the company. Throughout the course of his career, whenever things were hard it was Betty he turned to for support. "She's a great gal," says Keith. "A good listener, too."

When the company was more successful, particularly in later years, Keith was able to take more time away from the business and Betty was his best companion. "I'm a lucky guy," he says.

"Central to Keith's success is his fantastic, loving relationship with Betty. It is clear that they have a marvellous marriage that many would envy. There's no doubt there have been hard times in their time together that have tested them as a couple, but they've pulled together and made it through. She has worked so hard to raise their family. She's a fabulous woman, and he was smart enough to pick her."

—ANNE KOBER, LAWYER

My mom and dad have always been great together. They have a balance worked out between them. In some situations my dad has the power and in others, it's my mom. He recognizes that he needs her. Without her companionship and support, he'd be lost. And he'd be the first to agree."

—RYAN BEEDIE, KEITH'S SON

Eventually, Dieter ran into some financial problems, forcing the sale of his own house on Lake Whatcom. For Keith, however, his time at the lake still serves its original purpose of escape from the regular routine of the office, providing some balance to his otherwise busy schedule.

Keith and Betty regularly escape city life to seek relaxation by the lake.

Rising on the Lake

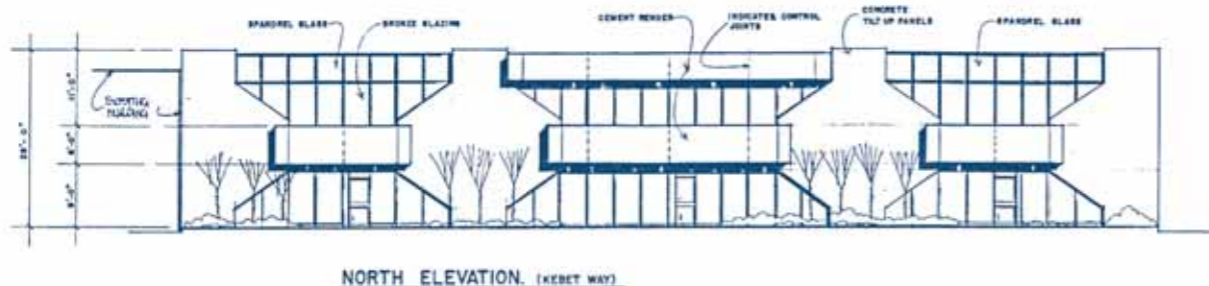
Keith's ritual of baking bread on weekends at Lake Whatcom is a highly anticipated event. Taking advantage of his downtime there, Keith fires up the bread machine in the morning and bakes all day. What started as a bit of an experiment has turned into a fine science. Keith's bread is in big demand back in town, and he usually gifts three or four loaves to friends and staff each time he bakes. Had he not gone into construction, Keith may have had a future as a baker, though he wouldn't have enjoyed the early mornings.

**Beedie Bread** (to be baked in a bread machine)

- 1¼ cups milk at room temp.
- 3 cups white bread flour
- 2 tbsp sugar or Splenda
- 1 tbsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp salt (optional)
- ¾ cup raisins
- A shake of chopped walnuts (about 2 heaping tablespoons) to be added with the raisins, 35 minutes into the mixing process
- 1½ tsp yeast or 1 packet

Word of Keith's bread has spread and friends look forward to receiving a tantalizing loaf.

SURVIVAL IN TOUGH TIMES



FROM TOP: An elevation drawing of one of Octavio Fernandez's buildings at 1594 Kebet Way, Meridian Industrial Park, 1988. Judy Stopa working at the Beedie offices on Kingsway in the 1990s. Judy has been Keith's secretary for 35 years. Keith presents Gil Hagglund with a cake on his 66th birthday. Gil was a friend and a flooring contractor who frequently worked on Beedie Group projects.

In the early 1980s the real estate world was in turmoil. High interest rates and plunging property values were putting an end to many developers. Despite the burden of borrowing costs and property taxes that made it difficult to carry projects, Keith understood that the secret to survival was finding ways to work through the downturn, keeping the company busy. He also felt intense responsibility to his employees, realizing that, as hard as things were for him in business, they were more frightening for people trying to hold onto their homes. Keith knew that the survival of the company was essential, not just for him, but for everyone he employed. Keith was determined to make it for all the people in the Beedie Construction family.

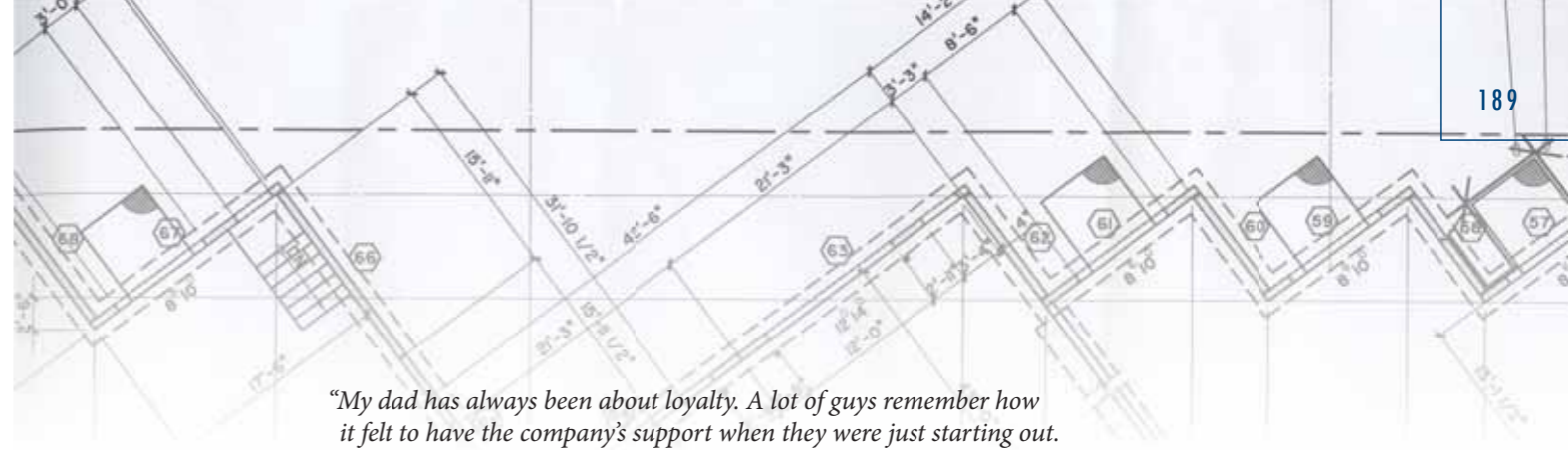
"When the company was smaller than today, everyone felt like Keith Beedie was a father figure and we were all his kids. We were under his wing. His major concern has always been having enough work for people in his crew. He felt protective of his employees, because many of them had worked for him for decades."

—JUDY STOPA, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

As many development and construction companies in the Lower Mainland failed, Beedie Construction soldiered on, building and selling projects at the same time as they continued to add to their leasing portfolio. While not certified as an architect in Canada, Octavio Fernandez specialized in designing industrial buildings and came on board as the company designer. It was the start of a lengthy and profitable relationship, as his fresh perspective on industrial design led to the company being sought out by those who valued innovative and distinctive buildings. In a tough economy, Keith knew that whatever edge he could find to set him apart from the crowd was vital to the company's survival.

"Keith is a good man to do business with simply because he is honest and reliable."

—RON WATERS, JOINT VENTURE PARTNER AND TENANT



"My dad has always been about loyalty. A lot of guys remember how it felt to have the company's support when they were just starting out. Now, they feel loyal in return. The inner circle is a good place to be."

—RYAN BEEDIE, KEITH'S SON

Having made it through hard times before, Keith put his experience to the test, steering the company through the turbulent economy. The number, scale and scope of new projects were all put under review. Existing work was examined and re-evaluated. The loyalty Keith had shown to all his employees and trades came up aces, as the people he worked with were motivated to stay the course with Beedie Construction. They had confidence in Keith, knowing that he had weathered storms before and that he was a good bet to stick with over the long term. Keith saw what a lot of goodwill he had accumulated, both in his own company and in the industry itself.

"The one thing The Beedie Group demands is loyalty, but it doesn't go one way. Keith has a soft spot for trades that have supported him."

—STEVE ASHFORTH, GLASTECH CONTRACTING

Beedie Construction emerged on the other side of the financial crisis stronger and with an even more loyal employee and client base. Those who had stuck by him got confirmation that they were backing a winner. His strong relationship with the Royal Bank of Canada, based on a lengthy history of integrity and skilled business decisions, also provided a strong source of support for Keith. He had weathered enough storms in the past to know when to take risks and when to circle the wagons. Keith walked a fine line in the tough years of the early 1960s and the 1980s, finding a balance that eluded other builders in the Vancouver area. As others around the industry fell, Beedie Construction Ltd. stayed solvent. "If it didn't kill us," says Keith, "it would only make us stronger."

One of the projects that Keith took on to keep people in the company working was the construction of a 50,000-square-foot concrete tilt-panel building on the Langley Bypass in the City of Langley. Keith drew the plans and got the permit. No sooner had work started when the union from the Fraser Valley hall approached the job site and said that we needed to hire through them instead of using our crew from the Vancouver hall. Keith explained that he needed people with tilt-up experience, as without it, the work was too dangerous. "The union still insisted that they have their guys on, so I had to hire them," says Keith. "I didn't let them anywhere near the actual tilt-up portion of the build. I gave them a few days off just then." It was one more reason for Keith to be unhappy with the unions.

BUILDING IN LEAN TIMES: BEEDIE PROJECTS IN THE 1980s



- 540 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver
- Coast Meridian Stores
- Burbridge Omega Distributors
- Langley Production Supply
- 576 S.W. Marine Drive and Heather Street, Vancouver
- 7470 Buller Avenue, Burnaby
- European Health Spa
- B.C. Tel
- B.C. Stevens
- E.B. Peerless
- Cola Industries
- Inglis Limited office modifications
- Sheard renovations
- Langley Bypass property
- Pedersen
- B.C. Tel expansion
- Budget Car Rentals
- Cambie Laundry
- 975 W. Kent Avenue
- B.C. Tel renovations
- Weldwood
- High Tech I
- Alpine Drywall
- High Tech II
- Pacific Western Brewing
- Plexar
- Coquitlam spec building
- Hartford Truck
- Surrey Hyundai
- Trans-Can Greetings
- Carmichael Trucking
- National Aluminum Products
- Truck stop and restaurant
- Trend Tex Fabrics
- Transwest Trailers



Bogardus Wilson building at Meridian Industrial Park.



B.C. Telephone neighbourhood office, 1980s.



Mohawk Oil.

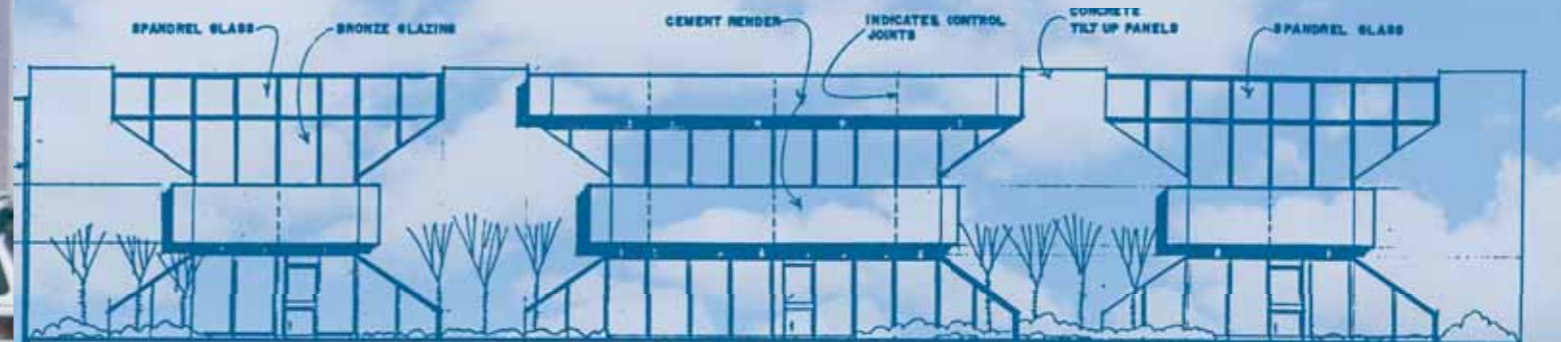


Truck stop complex at Meridian, 1987.

- S.W. Drug addition
- Mobile Handicap Equipment
- Don Pearson – Sibco
- H. Pedersen
- Raeside Equipment
- Electrohome
- Fraser Valley Custom Furniture
- Top Chic Rattan & Bamboo Imports
- Consumers Glass
- Coastal Lumber
- Mohawk Oil
- Eng Washing Machine Rental
- Tri-City News
- Bogardus Wilson addition
- Laidlaw
- Met-Tec
- Macs II – No. 2
- B.C.T.A.
- BFI Med. Waste
- Wismer and Rawlings Electric Ltd.



Aldergrove shopping centre, 1980s.



1594 Kebet Way, Meridian Industrial Park, 1988.

MERIDIAN INDUSTRIAL PARK

The River Springs development had satisfied one of Keith's dreams – to complete an entire subdivision. It was also a reminder of why he had moved from residential to industrial construction in the first place. His second goal of developing an industrial park sparked to life with an opportunity in 1987 to purchase 60 acres of land just off the Mary Hill Bypass in Port Coquitlam. It started as a partnership with another individual, but a difference in the ultimate vision for the project resulted in a breakdown between Keith and his partner. Keith bought out the other fellow just as construction began.



Meridian Industrial Park
in Port Coquitlam.

“It was a good decision,” says Keith. There was little other industry in the area and the municipality recognized the benefit that a Beedie Construction project would bring. Port Coquitlam was more than cooperative in providing the necessary permits and assistance in a timely fashion. For the City fathers, the economic stimulation that a large industrial park could produce, urging others to come to the same neighbourhood, was irresistible. The taxes the municipality stood to collect was another considerable motivation.

“Meridian Industrial Park was our first big park and there were a number of difficult decisions that had to be made. I remember Mr. Beedie saying, ‘We have to do what’s right for everyone here.’ He is always concerned that he is being fair. He doesn’t want to be taken advantage of, and he certainly expects people to treat him the same way he treats others. He’s fair.”

—CECELIA McGUIRE, MANAGER TAX AND TREASURY

“When I finished with the project I was able to reach another goal that I had set,” says Keith, with a smile. “Years earlier I’d promised my son Colin a sandbox. I was so busy back then that I never got the chance.

Colin's sandbox: when Meridian got underway Colin took a golf club up to the top of a mound of sand to practice his swing.



Meridian gave me the opportunity to make it up to him by putting him in charge of the project.” Colin’s “sandbox” was actually 290,000 cubic yards of sand that was pumped onto the site from the bottom of Pitt River. The sand was needed to bring the site to flood plain level and also preloaded it in preparation for construction. “Pretty damn huge sandbox, so I think it was worth the wait,” says Keith.

The site plan of Meridian's first phase, 1987.

“I have always admired Keith's ability to get things done. I started with just one building in Meridian and ended up with three because he runs a good business. He's a straight shooter. His legacy is his balance sheet.”

—JOHN PURDY, JOINT VENTURE PARTNER AND TENANT

Sticking with a tried and true formula, Keith made a point of owning and leasing approximately half of the space in the park, resulting in the company keeping and leasing 20 of the 53 buildings. The success of the project as a whole was demonstrated by Keith's eagerness to add 30 additional adjoining acres when they became available in 1991.

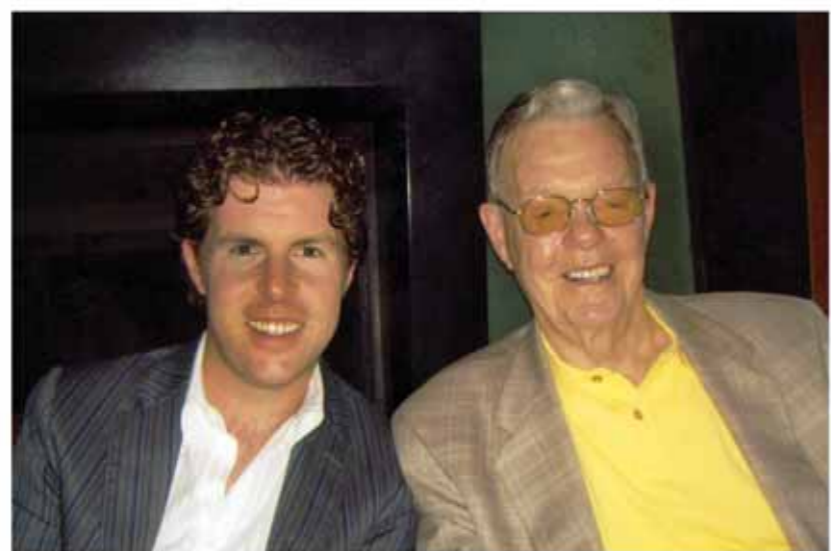
“Keith avoided the temptation to expand too quickly. Even when he could have gone crazy, he held back. Greed is what puts lots of strong developers into the red.”

—KELLY McKNIGHT, RBC ROYAL BANK

The municipality recognized the benefit that a Beedie Construction project would bring.

CHAPTER 17

An EYE on the Horizon



PASSING THE TORCH

For a long time, Keith had suspected that the natural aptitudes Ryan had demonstrated as a boy would lead to his involvement in the family business. From a young age, he showed an interest in the inner workings of his dad's company. He was no stranger around the office, since he had worked for the company as a young man, but he had wanted to pursue his education before embarking on a career. He completed an undergraduate degree at Simon Fraser University and an MBA at UBC, and worked for the accounting firm of Ernst & Young before deciding to return to the family company to work as his father's right-hand man. "His education has been a big help for him in the job he has done and is still doing for the Beedie companies," says Keith.



"I recognized right from the start how amazing an opportunity I had with the company. I never felt pressure, just excitement. I love it. There is something magical about working on deals and signing contracts, then all of a sudden there is a building because of what you have done. You can look on a map and see something you made. It is an incredible feeling."

—RYAN BEEDIE, KEITH'S SON

FROM LEFT: By the time he was four years old, Ryan was a big fan of pool. Here he gets an assist from mom. Ryan had a knack early on for seeing how things play out.

Keith was exceedingly proud when Ryan joined Beedie Construction Ltd. in 1992, at the tail end of the construction on the Meridian Industrial Park. "I always knew that Ryan had what it took to be here," says Keith. "He had to do his own thing first." When Ryan did decide that he wanted to be a part of the company, he jumped in with both feet, taking the helm for the next big industrial park project for Beedie Construction, Riverway Business Park in Delta.



"I remember very well Keith telling me a story about Ryan opening his first bank account when he was a child. When asked to sign the signature card, he scrawled his name on the bottom. The teller asked him to write his name properly, but he protested that he was doing it that way because that's how his dad signed his name. It was a cute story, but what struck me was the pride Keith expressed in the telling of it. He was so proud that Ryan was emulating him at 9 or 10 years old. I think he could feel Ryan coming up to stand beside him in the company."

—ANNE KOBER, LAWYER



Just prior to Ryan's joining, the company hired a new chartered accountant, Len McIntosh. Beedie Construction was growing quickly, with projects being added to the books in rapid succession. Keith was buying big tracts of land and the prospect of filling acres and acres of raw land with industrial buildings ensured that there was no shortage of work.

"They get the best land. They have the best trades to build the building. They get the best clients. It's potent."

—STEVE ASHFORTH, GLASTECH CONTRACTING

"The Beedie name is synonymous in Vancouver with longevity. It represents expertise and undisputed leadership in the light industrial warehouse game. They offer one-stop shopping to a business coming in the door looking for a warehouse. Beedie can take you through the whole gamut, providing the full spectrum of service."

—KELLY McKNIGHT, RBC ROYAL BANK

Len McIntosh was the right-hand man in the office and a great friend after hours.

FROM TOP: Betty, Ryan and Keith at Ryan's SFU graduation in 1991. Keith, Len McIntosh and George Hayhoe at the Woodglen house, toasting Keith's nomination for Entrepreneur of the Year Award for 2001.

As soon as one project was done, it was straight onto the next. Len McIntosh was such a strong fit with the culture of the company that he was later promoted to chief financial officer. His hard work and business acumen, combined with the friendship he offered Keith, were instrumental in the boom the company experienced in the 1990s. Keith valued Len as much for his personality as for his professional skills and, when he suddenly died of a heart attack in 2005, Keith took it hard. Not since Charlie Metcalfe passed away had Keith felt such a hole, both in the office and in his life. "Losing Len was a very big blow," says Keith. "I still miss him and feel for his wife, Shirley."



"Len McIntosh was with the company for 16 years. He was the right-hand man in the office and a great friend after hours. He treated Keith like his dad. Since Len was the controller, I also worked very closely with him and cared very much for him. I was on holiday when he died suddenly, and Keith took the time to call me himself and let me know what had happened. I appreciated so much that he thought to call me. I came back right away and Keith and I sat and talked and talked about Len. I had known they were close, but I had no idea how close until we spent nearly a solid week reminiscing about Len. It was a very soft side of Keith that I had never seen. It showed how much he cares for the people who work for him. When Len died, his heart broke."

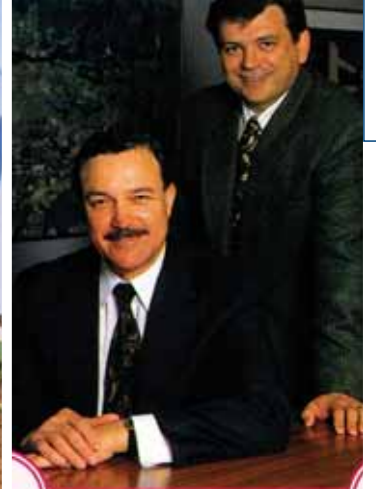
—CECELIA MCGUIRE, MANAGER TAX AND TREASURY

The early 1990s were dedicated to industrial and business parks. "Ryan was learning about construction as he went along, but he was incredible in business," says Keith. "So he wanted to do things a bit differently." One source of debate between father and son had to do with the amount of leverage the company should employ. Keith had learned the hard way through the 1960s and the 1980s that he didn't want to be in over his head to the bank. Ryan, on the other hand, was eager to get into opportunities that required considerable capital. The two had many conversations about balance and worked through their philosophical differences. Ryan managed to convince Keith to forge ahead on several projects he may not have entered into on his own, all of them a success. Conversely, Keith pulled back on the reins slightly and put a halt to one or two deals that made him uncomfortable.

Good land deals continued to come to the Beedies. Keith and Ryan stuck with Keith's successful formula of earmarking roughly half of each build-to-suit prospect to be leases managed by The Beedie Group rather than straight sales. While larger and longer-term projects meant additional risks and stresses, Keith also discovered a benefit. He cultivated a sizable number of sub-trades that were loyal to his company.

"Beedie isn't like some other developers out there who would take you for 10 cents if they could. They like giving the little guy a break. They don't want to take your money, they want to help you grow your business."

—STEVE ASHFORTH, GLASTECH CONTRACTING



FROM LEFT: When Ryan joined the firm in 1992, he took on the development of Riverway Business Park in Delta. George Hayhoe (left) with Len McIntosh. Len was with The Beedie Group for 16 years.

Ryan was learning about construction as he went along, but he was incredible in business.

“When Keith is dealing with brokers, vendors, sub-trades, they know that when they see the Beedie name, they will get what’s promised. People don’t go around ‘kicking the tires’ with Keith. There is tremendous trust there. It gives him an enormous edge in doing business.”

—ANNE KOBER, LAWYER

Beedie Construction had a reputation for working ethically, never cutting corners or skimping on materials. Keith was well trusted as a developer by his network of sub-trades, allowing him to be consistent in whom he used, which in turn brought his own costs down. The sub-trades learned that Keith had no tolerance for fly-by-night operations. They knew that if they wanted to get onto the company’s construction site, they had to bring their best project bids and workmanship. The end result: Beedie buildings were top quality, which clients and tenants came to value and expect when doing business with Keith.

“I had 20 acres of land that I brought to Keith because I knew he was the man to develop it. It became the 401 Business Park. At the time, he had done very little speculative work, relying almost completely on build-to-suit projects. I remember telling him that there was a real market for a good-quality multi-tenant-style building suited for medium-sized distribution firms. He took me at my word, but more importantly, he was in a down time at that point and he didn’t want to lay anyone off. He took a gamble, doing something he hadn’t done before because he wanted to keep his people working. It said a lot about his character that he took the risk for that specific reason.”

—RON BAGAN, COLLIER INTERNATIONAL

“We had tenants occupying two units, designed and constructed for them in a brand-new building on River Way. They were a specialized engineering company that made items for fighter jets in the United States. When 9/11 happened, every out-of-country contract got pulled back into America and suddenly this company had zero work. They were invested to the tune of several million dollars, but they didn’t have a single contract left. They phoned to tell us they were in trouble. I thanked them for letting us know and told them I would see what we could do. I approached Mr. Beedie and explained the situation, after which he suspended their rent for six months and amortized it out over the term of the lease. We made every effort we could for them. Today, that company is in top form once more, increasing the size of their building. In The Beedie Group, when it comes to a good tenant being upset, we’ll do anything we can to fix the problem. I have learned more in the 6 years I have worked here than in the 25 years before. Mr. Beedie is a really, really smart guy.”

—VICTORIA ROBINSON, DIRECTOR OF PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

When 9/11 happened, every out-of-country contract got pulled back into America and suddenly this company had zero work.

THE ART OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Keith is renowned for his strong belief in the importance of relationships in business. Trust, integrity and excellence are all Beedie hallmarks, but it’s his approach to fostering long-term relationships that stands out in an industry famous for its one-time-only approach to clients. As a result, he keeps an impressive roster of repeat clients who insist on coming back to Beedie Construction when they are in the market for a new space.

A great example is Art In Motion, a company that started with Keith in 1990 when they rented a modest 12,000-square-foot space in a Beedie building in Burnaby. The upstart company expanded and soon purchased the building they rented from Keith. Ready to grow again in 1996, they traded up, contracting Beedie Construction to construct a much larger – 42,960-square-foot – building in the Pacific Reach Business Park in Coquitlam. By 2000 they were ready to add another 84,235-square-foot building and came to Keith and Ryan, who was now looking after the Art in Motion contracts. . In 2002, they proposed an additional 76,000 square feet to be built across the street. From humble beginnings in 1990, Art In Motion operates out of 203,195 square feet in the Coquitlam industrial park. The expanding needs of Art In Motion were met at each step by Beedie Construction. As Keith and Ryan were able to provide the service and assistance the company needed through its growth, a loyalty and trust developed between the two businesses. It is a testament to both companies that their parallel successes were used to benefit one another, thanks in large part to a mutually beneficial relationship with Beedie Construction.

Art in Motion building.



ACCELERATING GROWTH BEEDIE PROJECTS IN THE 1990s



- Purolator Courier Ltd.
- Wesgar Industries
- Old Dutch Foods
- Federal-Mogul
- Basic Foods Ltd.
- Goodyear Service Centre
- D&R Brew King Inc.
- Simson Maxwell
- Dakin (Canada) Ltd.
- Safe-Pak Supply Canada Ltd.
- Glastech Contracting Ltd.
- Ledalite Architectural Products
- Eland Distributors Ltd.
- Iotron Industries Canada Inc.
- Candraft Detailing Inc.

- Prestige Glass
- Edoko Food Importers
- Albrite Lighting
- N.A.P. Commercial (Aluminart) Ltd.
- Trend-Text Fabrics Inc.
- Williams Moving & Storage
- Link Technologies Ltd.
- Contac Travel
- Cortina Foods Ltd.
- Linex Industries Ltd./Altech
- Gasglo Industries Ltd.
- Frontier Equipment Ltd.
- Rap-id Paper Vancouver Ltd.
- Apex Express Inc.
- AMJ Campbell Van Lines Ltd.

- Craftsman Panel Cutters Ltd.
- Jentash Marketing Ltd.
- Northern Feather Ltd.
- Novapak Paper Products
- Bartle & Gibson
- Shaftebury Brewing Ltd.
- P.N.G. Products
- Northwest Drug
- Norco Products Ltd.
- Akzo Coatings
- North American Tea & Coffee
- Regency Industries
- Art In Motion
- TwinPak Inc.
- Wexxar Packaging

- West Coast Drilling
- Flint Ink
- Kubota Canada
- Prime Play System Inc.
- Wajax Industries Limited
- Hitachi Canada Ltd.
- Comox Valley Distributors
- Aaaaah So Easy Mini Storage
- Crossroads C&I Distributors
- North American Tea & Coffee #2
- Concord Transportation Inc.
- Bronco Industries Inc.

- Dolomite Ventures Ltd.
- Whitewater West Industries
- Fairey & Company Limited
- BBC Sales/Gold Cup
- White Paper Co.
- Ryder Integrated Logistics
- Kendor Textiles Limited
- Briggs & Stratton
- Finning Ltd.
- Canadian Wheel
- Images Furniture Manufacturing Ltd.
- Engineered Pump Systems Ltd.
- Kavanagh Foods Ltd.
- Euro-Rite Cabinets
- AJM Int'l Sports Promotions Ltd.

- Space Fuel Gas Products Ltd.
- Canadian Springs Water Company
- GPM Distributing Ltd.
- Westbond Industries
- All Trade Distributors Inc.
- Sun Processing/Star Produce Ltd.
- Mail-O-Matic Services Ltd.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Old Dutch Foods,
Artex and Northern
Feather.



FROM TOP: Brenco Industries and Trend-Text Fabrics.
BACKGROUND: Prime Play



CANADIAN CAR AND FOUNDRY (CANCAR)



FROM TOP: Keith and his secretary, Judy Stopa, at the party marking her 35th year with the company in 2008. In 1996, The Beedie Group was recognized as Builder of the Year by the Tri-City Chamber of Commerce for its work on the phase two extension of Meridian Industrial Park: (l-r) Colin Beedie, Port Coquitlam Mayor Len Traboulay, Ryan Beedie and Keith.

In 1994, the opportunity came up for Keith to purchase a 30-acre piece of land that was home to the Canadian Car and Foundry in Surrey. Of immense interest to the plane lover in Keith, it was owned by the famed British airplane manufacturer, Hawker Siddeley. Hawker Siddeley had produced planes that were critical to the Allied victory in World War II, an era that still interested Keith. They had made the famous Hawker Hurricane and the Supermarine Spitfire, both of which were used in the Battle of Britain. The building was immense, over 271,000 square feet on 20 acres of a 30-acre site. It was filled with heavy machinery used to make railcars, train trucks and wheels. The property was offered for a good price, but most of all, “I was totally impressed with the place,” says Keith. “‘Jeez,’ I thought, ‘look at the beams and how it was built.’ There was unbelievable strength there.” It wasn’t the first time that Keith had laid eyes on the property. In 1975, Keith got involved with a company called Multiply.

The main shareholder was an inventor Keith knew who had developed a machine that manufactured wafer board, which has taken the place of plywood in nearly every house built today. When Keith was looking into buying some shares in the company, he went to have a look at the prototype machine, which was housed in the Cancar building. “I was awestruck when I saw Cancar,” says Keith. “Everything was great, the design, the construction, all of it. Little did I know that years later our company would purchase the building and the 30 acres it sat on.”

“I remember one heated negotiation we were involved in for a new building. There was a room full of real estate agents, consultants and lawyers and we weren’t getting anywhere. At one point, Keith turned to the president of the company the building was for and said, ‘We need to go for a walk.’ They walked out of the office together and we all stood around. Fifteen minutes later, they re-entered and informed us that the deal was done. That’s Keith. It was settled with a handshake, which was more powerful than all the smart people left behind in that room.”

—RON BAGAN, COLLIER INTERNATIONAL

Beedie Construction Ltd. bought the Cancar site and made plans to remodel the extensive building into spaces to lease to multiple tenants, as well as putting up new build-to-suit structures on the undeveloped 10 acres of vacant land.

“Working with Keith, you know you’re going to get paid and you’re going to get paid quickly.”

—TOM GREENOUGH, TOMTAR ROOFING



THE STORY OF MULTIPLY

Keith was so impressed by the prototype Multiply machine he happened to see at Cancar that he immediately invested with the company and their wafer-board manufacturing process. The design was patented and sales were good. Due to the sale of a company that used the Multiply technology, forestry company MacMillan Bloedel gained access to the wafer-board technology. MacMillan Bloedel, however, didn’t pay any royalty fees to Multiply for the use of their design.

Frustrated by the lumber company’s intransigence, Multiply and Keith eventually sued MacMillan Bloedel. Over more than three years, the case made its way through every court in Canada. “It was like a basketball best-of-seven series,” says Keith. “We won one level, they would win the next. Finally, we won the Supreme Court battle.” With a victory secured, all that the judge on the case had to do was determine the royalty amount to be paid by MacMillan Bloedel. “Of course, they settled on a number that was identical to the amount we had paid out to our patent lawyer over the years, a little over \$1 million. It just figured.”

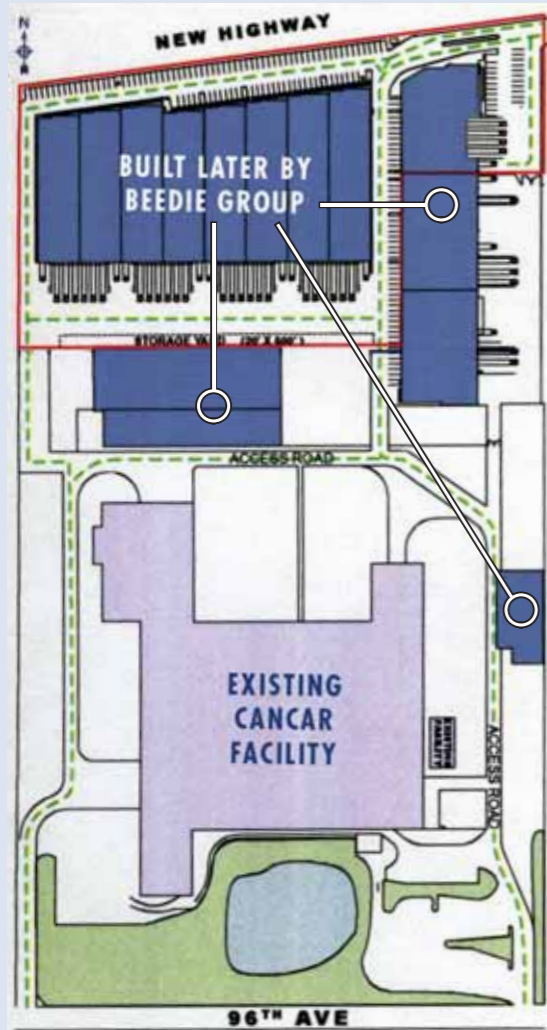
But it wasn’t the amount that mattered. As had happened in other court cases throughout Keith’s career, recovered money spent was not the point. Keith was a fighter when it came to integrity and he never liked backing away from a challenge. “It just rubs me the wrong way when I see people in business behaving that way,” he says. “When I get angry about an injustice, even if it’s a small one that some people would write off, I’ll go hell-bent to do whatever it takes to win.”

SAVING A SPITFIRE

The Spitfire was a favourite plane of Keith’s while he was growing up, during the war years. While attending the funeral of his close friend Bill Vincent, an ex-Air Vice Marshall, on Vancouver Island, Keith happened to meet a group of retired RCAF pilots. When he learned that the men in Comox were trying to restore an old Spitfire, he knew he wanted to help. In honour of his friend who had just died, Keith sent \$25,000 to the group.

With his cheque, he sent a Google Map image of the street he had named Spitfire Place in Port Coquitlam. “What I didn’t know at the time was that the restoration effort had run out of funds,” says Keith. “The money I sent was a complete surprise and, I learned later, an absolute godsend. They were so pleased to be able to continue. I was happy to help.”





A map of the 30-acre Canadian Car and Foundry property in Surrey that Keith bought in 1994. The Beedie Group later added four buildings to the site.

During the course of the negotiation to purchase, Keith met Fred Koehler, the site manager who had been at the property for as long as the building itself. Keith was pleased that, when he asked him if he was willing to remain in his current position as all the staff had moved to a new location, Fred answered an enthusiastic yes. Confident that the property was in good hands, Keith and Betty departed on a trip to Europe two days after signing the paperwork to buy Cancar. “That’s where the strange coincidence comes in,” says Keith. “We were in Munich, standing in the middle of a crowded underground, 10 track train station trying to figure out how to get to Dachau. The guy standing next to us had overheard our problem and offered to help.” It turned out the helpful bystander wasn’t a local. He told Keith that he was from Langley, B.C., adding that the Beedies were unlikely to have heard of the place. “I told him that not only did I know it, I had just bought a property there.” The conversation continued as the friendly bystander revealed that his best friend worked for a company that had just sold his place of employment in Surrey and that the new owner had promised to keep him on, but that they hadn’t even talked salary yet because they had gone away on holiday. “I told him he was talking to that new owner. The coincidence is so amazing, I still get shivers when

I think of it.” In the middle of a crowded foreign train station, Keith had managed to bump into Fred Koehler’s best friend.

“I remember the days when I used to have to type out all 35 pages of a lease on my electric typewriter. Now, we have templates on the computer and it takes 10 minutes. It sure was a different job when all the documents were done manually.”

—JUDY STOPA, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

The Cancar project proved to be a big success for Beedie Construction. The inside of the original building was renovated numerous times to adjust to codes and regulations, which was expensive. However, with new buildings, the property now has 521,471 square feet and has at least tripled in value since it was purchased, which more than compensates for any hassles in dealing with renovations.



TIME TO GIVE BACK

In 1995, Keith realized that he had reached a level of success in business that he had never dreamed he could achieve. The property holdings of the company, the buildings under his own property management and the size of the projects he was undertaking on behalf of clients were all of a scope he hadn’t thought possible. While he had donated to worthy causes when he was able, Keith recognized that he was now secure enough financially to start thinking of a significant way that he could give back.

“Mr. Beedie is very generous with me. He knows I give him the best I can. One year, when my son completed his Master’s degree in the United States, Mr. Beedie gave me the airfare to fly down to his graduation. It was a great surprise.”

—JUDY STOPA, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

“In all the years I have known Keith Beedie, despite all the things he has achieved, he hasn’t changed one bit. He is still the same kid I knew in school. He’s always up for fun, quick to laugh and he loves a good joke. He has been the same great friend, through everything. He’s an extraordinary guy and I’ve been lucky to know him.”

—HUGH McCARDELL, FRIEND

“We had already been providing bursaries and endowments to Simon Fraser University since 1990, then a few years later decided that we would like to establish something more permanent, that would be able to help more organizations.” After discussion with Betty about her wishes, Keith set about establishing an official channel through which they could make a difference. He set up the Keith and Betty Beedie Foundation, which would focus on support in the fields of health, sports, education and crime prevention. “It feels good to be able to give help,” says Keith.

“My dad has created a great legacy of giving back to the community. It is a legacy I intend to continue and build upon.”

—RYAN BEEDIE, KEITH’S SON



FROM TOP: Keith and Betty, with Burnaby Hospital management, celebrate the MRI project’s success, 2008. Keith and Betty visiting Burnaby Hospital’s new MRI facility.



"I'm very happy that we are able to donate to hospitals the way we are. I'm happy about our scholarships and our Foundation, which was my idea, thank you very much! Also, I don't believe in charities that spend a lot on administration. As we have no overhead, every dollar in the foundation is going towards specific causes. I am very proud of that."

—BETTY BEEDIE, KEITH'S WIFE

Since 2000, the Foundation has contributed over \$3.5 million to worthy causes. These include the creation of scholarships at SFU under Keith's and Betty's names and donations to numerous Lower Mainland hospitals. Recipients of the Foundation health services support include Burnaby Hospital, St. Paul's Hospital and Vancouver General Hospital.

In 2006, the Foundation became aware of a government program that promised to contribute \$2 million toward the building of \$5 million MRI facility at Burnaby Hospital. The hospital had to raise approximately \$3 million on its own to purchase the machine; the government, through the Fraser Health Authority, would construct the magnetic proof room, transport and install the unit, and train operators for the machine. The Keith & Betty Beedie Foundation donated 50 percent of the cost of the unit's purchase. Today, the MRI serves the Burnaby and Vancouver East communities.

Young athletes in Burnaby have been helped through the Beedie Foundation's support and their establishment of Kidsport Burnaby. This kind of assistance has given some the chance to go further in their sport than they could ever imagine. One great example is Melanie Matthews, an SFU student and member of the university's women's softball team who received a Beedie scholarship. She went on to compete as a member of Canada's Women's Softball Team at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

"We were really happy to help someone as talented as Melanie," says Keith. "Later, Betty and I were invited to a lunch at SFU and enjoyed ourselves immensely with Melanie and her coach, Mike Renny. We became very friendly with Mike and even ran into him when he was at a baseball game in Hawaii. While we were talking, Mike happened to mention that the softball field at SFU was really only good for practicing. Lots of times they couldn't even do that because of the drainage. It really wasn't much of a field. One thing led to another and I got the Foundation to find out what it would cost to build a new field." Once the details were worked out, the Foundation pledged a million dollars, partially through a matching funds program, to help



FROM TOP: Betty and Keith's work on Foundation projects has given both of them great satisfaction. The SFU women's softball team. The fundraising brochure used to help raise awareness about the SFU baseball diamond project.

construct a new day-and-night NCAA-compliant baseball diamond on the SFU campus. The state-of-the-art playing field opened in the fall of 2010.

Another of the Foundation's achievements has been the construction of a family health clinic in Moratuwa, a town in Sri Lanka devastated by the 2004 tsunami. "We heard about how the tidal wave had wiped out many hospitals in small towns in the region, and that people were without even basic medical care. So we provided the funds for a clinic, working through Builders Without Borders."

"Mr. Beedie can be incredibly generous, but the little things still matter. Back in the 1980s, he couldn't figure out why we used so many boxes of paper clips. He insisted that since we had staplers, the paper clips were just a waste of money at 99 cents per box of 150. He assigned me the task of doing paper clip inventory, counting how many boxes we had and how many we had used since the last order. I would be in the middle of writing a \$1.5 million loan interest schedule, but have to stop to do the paper clip inventory. When he found out that we were sending our deposit slips to the bank with paper clips, he asked the bank to collect them and send them back. More than once, I went to the banks and was sent back to the office with a box of collected paper clips."

—CECELIA MCGUIRE, MANAGER TAX AND TREASURY

Over the years, the Foundation has provided funding to many civic organizations and projects; bicycles were purchased for the Vancouver Police Department and the Burnaby RCMP, and a grant of \$25,000 was made available for the restoration of a historic World War II RAF fighter plane (the much loved Spitfire of Keith's youth). "I became aware that the Spitfire was being reconditioned, not as just a static display but as an air-worthy aircraft. I was quite taken by the fact that volunteers would spend the money and time to bring this wreck back into flying condition."

"Since we started, the work of the Foundation has given Betty and me a lot of happiness," says Keith. "It's good to know that the success I have experienced can, in part, go back into the community that we live in, and that it can make a difference in people's lives." As the company continues to grow, the Keith & Betty Beedie Foundation's influence will also expand, a fact which gratifies Keith immensely.



FROM TOP: The new clinic in Moratuwa, Sri Lanka. Keith receiving his Business Person of the Year Award from Brianne Harper of BC Business magazine, 2008.



THE BEAT GOES ON

Between 1996 and early 2001, The Beedie Group completed a total of 63 buildings in various industrial and business parks located throughout the Lower Mainland, including the 40-acre development of the Riverpointe Business Park in Delta. Ryan started taking over more and more decision making for the company, with Keith's guidance and approval on acquisitions and agreements. With Keith staying true to his personal commitment to hold onto about half of the finished projects, 36 of the buildings were kept by the company and leased out. "It amounted to about one building completed per month in that period," says Keith. "That included the biggest building we'd done to date: a 414,000-square-foot warehouse for XL Logistics." Ryan was often spotted poking his head into Keith's door with a question, suggestion or request. "As he got more confidence, he needed less from me," says Keith. "I realized pretty quickly that he knew what he was doing. It didn't take long before others in the company, our sub-trades and the industry at large realized the same thing. He doesn't need any help from me, really."

"Keith has made the company, but Ryan's not afraid to build on it. Ryan has a large machine to work with and some very good people around him. But he also has his own plan going forward, strategically placing the company in a place where they could ultimately control the industrial market."

—RON BAGAN, COLLIER INTERNATIONAL



The Beedie Group logo in the reception area of the new offices on Gilmore Diversion.

Because of the success of the company's leasing program, there was more money pumping through the gears of the business, allowing Ryan and Keith to contemplate bigger and more ambitious prospects. Ryan brought with him a fresh perspective, venturing into new markets and enterprises. Keith was interested in expansion, but cautious by nature and from experience. "Ryan brought a lot of new ideas," says Keith. "I took some convincing." Ryan's growing confidence and success rate were helpful motivators to bring Keith on board.

"Ryan is doing a phenomenal job. Often, when the second generation takes over, the company loses all its oomph and drive. Ryan has drive."

—ROB FIORVENTO, DIRECTOR

Another profitable arrangement that Keith and Beedie Construction Ltd. began to employ was to take on more joint venture projects. Working with a partner was a good way to step outside of a normal comfort zone, and in this way the company bought Kingsgate Mall in Vancouver, the AirCare buildings around Metro Vancouver and 50 percent of Station Square in Metrotown Shopping Centre in Burnaby and the Pacific Palisades Hotel on Robson Street in Vancouver.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF OCTAVIO

Octavio Fernandez joined Beedie Construction in 1980 as chief designer. He was innovative and prolific, designing over 200 buildings in more than 20 years with the company. His distinctive style earned him a strong reputation and his work was crucial to the company's success.

In 2002 Octavio went on a two-week vacation to Mexico and never returned. When Keith hadn't heard from Octavio at the end of the two-week break, he started to suspect that his architect was gone for good. "In hindsight, looking at the mistakes that had been made on Octavio's last couple of projects, I realized that his heart wasn't in his job, or in Canada any longer," says Keith.

Octavio's extended break was the talk of the office. People started making bets on when, or if, he would return. Eventually, Keith heard indirectly that Octavio hadn't met with any harm but that he wouldn't be returning to Canada or Beedie Construction. Octavio's abrupt departure was a shock to Keith, who felt that he knew the man well. "I was bitterly disappointed to have lost a valued part of my team, and was personally hurt that Octavio hadn't seen fit to confide in me about his future," says Keith. "I have never heard from him since then. Not once. I heard that he ended up doing well, running a solar water heating business. Good for him." Luckily, Octavio had wrapped up most of his work before leaving. No client contracts were negatively affected or compromised, just delayed.

Although the mystery around Octavio's disappearance rankled, it ultimately led to a new opportunity. Looking back on it now, Keith can see that the chance to obtain a fresh design perspective was exactly what the company needed. In 2003 Beedie Construction engaged a new designer, Darcy Forcier, whose work immediately impressed Keith with its beauty and functionality. Since that time, Darcy has produced 88 designs. "These things happen and sometimes you can only wonder at the coincidence," says Keith. "What started out as a blow to the company turned into a big opportunity."



Octavio Fernandez (left), Colin Beedie and George Hayhoe at the Kingsway offices in the 1980s.

"Keith isn't a flashy guy. He doesn't love the limelight or the lap of luxury. He is a very real, low-key man. When we bought the AirCares, I wanted Keith to come out and take a look at the properties before we handed over the cheque. He and Ryan joined me on a tour of the sites and Ryan pre-warned me that his dad wouldn't want to stop anywhere fancy for lunch, that it just isn't his style. I thought I was being pretty smart stopping at a very modest Subway restaurant in Surrey to eat. Imagine my surprise when Keith decided not to come in, insisting that Betty had made his lunch and he'd rather eat that. I looked out from the restaurant to see him with his food spread out all over the dashboard. I just got the biggest kick out of that."

—ROB FIORVENTO, DIRECTOR

With Ryan taking on increasingly larger tasks and greater responsibility in the company, Keith started to step back slightly, allowing him to take on more for himself. Nevertheless, Keith's daily presence was a vital source of direction and expertise for Ryan and the rest of the company.

TOP SPOT BEEDIE PROJECTS IN THE 2000s



- Bronco Industries
- Algo Communications
- Richards Engineering
- Stylus Furniture Ltd.
- Artex Fabricators Ltd.
- Art In Motion expansion
- Old Dutch Foods Ltd.
- Canasia Toys & Gifts Inc.
- Carr's Machining Ltd.
- Delta Building Products Ltd.
- Craftsman Panel Cutters
- Unifiller Systems Inc.
- PBB Global Logistics
- David Lane Office Furniture Ltd.
- BMS Communications Services Ltd.
- Evergro
- Richmond Machine Works
- Seaside Paper Products
- Canada Post Corporation
- Coast Labelling & Services
- Northern Gold Foods (Weetabix Holdings)
- Exel Logistics – Phase 1 (E.V. Logistics)
- Exel Logistics – Phase 2 (E.V. Logistics)
- Rhema Industries Ltd.
- Euroline Windows Inc.
- Forum Productions Inc.
- PRTI Transport Inc.
- Northern Feather
- The Western Group

- Eighteen Karat
- White Powder Coating
- Art in Motion #3
- Novapak Paper Products Inc.
- Regency Fireplace #2
- T-Brothers Food & Trading Co.
- Manna International Trading Limited
- Diamond SeaGlaze addition
- Form-It Plastics
- Montigo Gas Products (Canadian Heating)
- Task Tools
- Delta Dynamics Inc.
- HiWay Refrigeration Ltd.
- Weyerhaeuser
- Stanley Doors
- Oakmont/Cameron Ashley
- Coniston Products Ltd.
- GHM Consulting Ltd.
- Skeans Engineering & Machinery Ltd.
- Applied Plastics
- Rocky Mountain Recycling
- Stoney Creek Cabinet Company
- Western Logistics
- Sandy's Furniture
- Torre & Tagus Designs Ltd.
- Diamond SeaGlaze 3
- Stylus #2



- Masteel America Corporation
- Intertek Testing Service
- Sandy's Furniture expansion
- Pacific Reach spec (space left)
- Canadian Stone Industries
- Prepac Manufacturing Ltd.
- Classic Packaging
- No. 32 Great Projects Ltd. (Regency #3)
- 401 spec – Building D
- Log Bundling Supplies – CPO Holdings Ltd.
- Scan Designs Limited
- Fuji Photo Film Canada Inc.
- Michelin North America Inc.
- Stuffed Animal House
- Canada Pipeline Accessories (1986) Corp.
- Manufax Holdings (Johnson Ind)
- Amico Canada Inc.
- Urban Barn
- Ashley Warehouse (Sandy's Furniture #3)

Flynn Canada.



- Harlow Burrows
- Flynn Canada Ltd.
- Delta Building Products addition II
- Stylus #3
- Toyo Tires (part of multi-tenant)
- Save-On-Sports (Infinity Sports Group)
- Seaside Paper Products expansion
- Avalon Dairy Ltd.
- Westcoast Weld Tech
- Sialco Materials Ltd.
- Canadian Sales Agency
- Watson Gloves
- Aerostream Cargo Services
- Contac Distribution Services Ltd.
- Canadian Dry Storage
- Publico Properties (Coastal Web Press)
- J & R Home (Riverbend spec)
- Associated Veterinary Purchasing
- North American Tea & Coffee
- Westcliff Holdings Inc. (Western Warehouse)
- Pioneer Envelopes
- Maddies Holdings Ltd.
- North Fraser Landing
- Abbey Blinds
- Trydor Industries (Canada) Ltd.
- Tippit-Richardson Ltd. (Korben Properties)
- Mitchell Press
- Aguiform Dist. Ltd.
- Oldcastle Glass
- Clearwater Doors
- Jeld-Wen of Canada Ltd.
- Campbell Heights spec 1

- Campbell Heights spec 2
- McCartney spec (Lot 5)
- Fraser Business Centre
- Tree of Life
- Bakerview Business Centre 1 (Gloucester Strata 1)
- McCartney spec – Building 2 (west)
- Oakmont 2
- Mayne Coatings (50 Avenue spec)
- Campbell Heights, lot 20
- Brewers' Distributors Ltd.
- Overwaita (EV Logistics 2)
- 18 Karat International Products
- OK Tire Stores Inc.
- Refridgerative Supply
- North Fraser Corp Centre (NFCC)
- Bakerview Business Centre 2 (Gloucester Strata 2)
- Quality Chain ULC
- Home Depot of Canada
- Belron Canada Inc.
- Old Dutch Foods expansion
- Tire Country
- Brenco Industries
- Columbia Packaging
- Belkin Paper
- Vertex Logical Solutions
- Highland Park spec 1
- Tilbury West Corp Centre – Strata 1
- Northeast Lot – 520 Kent
- Canadian Alliance Terminals
- Ryder Logistics

ABOVE CLOCKWISE: Torre & Tagus Designs. Home Depot. Refrigerative Supply. Jeld-Wen of Canada. Overwaita Food Group. Skeans Pneumatic and Automation Systems.

FRASER MILLS

Despite his incredibly varied business interests and successes, one area that Keith had always dreamed of but hadn't yet conquered was a large-scale community development that combined residential, industrial and business-zoned projects. In 2004 The Beedie Group purchased 84 acres of land in Coquitlam with just such a development in mind. Keith and Ryan envisioned Fraser Mills, a community with a small-town feel, where people could live in high-rise residential towers with businesses, restaurants, shopping, recreational facilities, parks and industry all within walking distance. Three years in the planning stages, the development finally got approval in late 2008. Once it is completed, it will be the crowning achievement of Keith's career. "Fraser Mills is for the next generation," says Keith. "It's the fulfillment of another of my life wishes."

"I am very excited about the Village at Fraser Mills. It's going to be wonderful."

—BETTY BEEDIE, KEITH'S WIFE



A model of the proposed Fraser Mills development, in The Beedie Group offices.

With Keith's history of feeling healthy and sharp, it came as a shock when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Since the disease was quite advanced, he was told to go in for radiation right away. Keith submitted to the treatments, which resulted in 35 rounds of radiation, but continued to work his regular schedule. In typical Keith fashion, he was pleased by the level of treatment he was receiving, but was frustrated by the inefficiencies he identified in how the treatment was being administered. After his first two rounds of radiation, he had his own system. "I didn't want to change into hospital gowns every time, so I asked them if as I walked into the radiation room, I could kick off my shoes, take off my shirt, deposit them on a chair and lay down on the bed with my pants down to receive the treatment" says Keith. "They said 'yes.' Eventually I had it down to a science. I'd park my car three minutes before my appointment and arrive just before they needed me. I'm punctual, so it got to where they were waiting for me at the end of the hall. My treatments were quick." Keith had found the best and most time-efficient way to get his cancer treatments and had made it work.

Ultimately, despite radiation treatment and annoying side effects, Keith was none the worse for wear after his bout with prostate cancer. He is now cancer-free and grateful to Dr. Warner for his assistance. "It turned out well," says Keith. "The only nuisance is having to run to the bathroom so often."

"You can count on two things: Christmas and a cheque from Beedie. You just don't want to let the man down."

—STEVE ASHFORTH, GLASTECH CONTRACTING



An artist's vision of a vibrant community waterfront at Fraser Mills.

A DREAM FOR THE FUTURE

One of Keith's biggest dreams was the creation of an entire mixed-use community. The Fraser Mills development in Coquitlam will fulfill that ambition. "I've always loved a big challenge and the prospect of building a complete community was something I've thought about over the years," says Keith. "It's not just the scale of the thing, it's sort of a legacy. A way to create something that will go well into the future."

"Ryan and I envision the Village at Fraser Mills as a model, mixed-use community that integrates industrial and employment uses with residential, commercial and recreational opportunities. Our primary goal is to create a people place that reunites the residents of Coquitlam with their riverfront and their history – making it one of the most highly valued amenities in the entire city. As a complete village, key amenities will draw people of all ages from the city to splash in the river, stroll along the pier, play in the recreational fields, experience festivals at the multi-purpose community centre, shop in a unique village centre and enjoy one of the restaurants."

The website created for the development, www.villageatfrasermills.com, is testament to the scope of Keith's and Ryan's vision.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Keith now had only one outstanding goal to achieve and that was the passing of the company torch to Ryan, whom Keith appointed President, while Keith was CEO. After years of mentoring, Keith was beginning to realize that the student was becoming a teacher. With a different perspective on business and the vigour and energy of youth, Ryan continued to make his presence felt around the offices. He brought fresh ideas and an expanded vision to the company. While it wasn't always easy to convince Keith to try new endeavours, Ryan persisted in pushing The Beedie Group in new directions. "Ryan is a smart kid," says Keith. "He isn't always right, that's for sure. But he does have some great ideas."

"There is an element of competitiveness between Keith and Ryan. I think it works in their favour."

—ROB FIORVENTO, DIRECTOR

One example of Ryan's new thinking was his encouragement of the purchase of 267 acres of undeveloped land in Airdrie, Alberta. The Beedie Group had never bought land outside of the Lower Mainland, but Ryan saw opportunity in the rapid expansion of the Alberta market. It was an idea that Keith has come to appreciate. "I think it was probably a good move," says Keith – one of many from Ryan.

"I am so proud of Ryan and how he's turned out. I see what he's doing, what he's capable of, and I think he was born to do it."

—BETTY BEEDIE,
KEITH'S WIFE



MOVING UP, OUT AND ON

However, one proposal from Ryan that met far greater resistance than distant land ownership was the construction of brand-new offices for the now renamed Beedie Group. It wasn't an easy decision for Keith to make, despite the fact that the company had outgrown its old office space. Ryan pointed out that they no longer had room to accommodate the expansion of the accounting department. Keith had been in the office on Kingsway for well over 50 years, having made his way from a small two-bit operation to a successful multi-million-dollar success story. It was difficult for him to admit that it was time to expand. "I had the idea that we could put the accountants in their own office, down the street," says Keith. "Ryan didn't like it. He said it was an old building and it was time to move on. When I argued that we'd just remodelled, he pointed out that the last renovation was 20 years earlier. It felt like it was just yesterday."

"Keith has instilled in his children the same values that have been so critical in his success. In terms of a long-term legacy, that's as good as it gets, isn't it?"

—ANNE KOBER, LAWYER

Years earlier, The Beedie Group had purchased a building on Gilmore Diversion, which had been leased to an engineering firm and an electronic company. When the leases came up for renewal, the company decided to move in themselves and started work renovating it to suit their purpose. The existing second floor was gutted and Ryan took over the planning, construction and refinishing of the new office. In the meantime, the old location was vacated and sold. In an irony not lost on Keith, the Kingsway building was sold to the New Democratic Party to act as their new headquarters. "That was a funny thing," says Keith, who doesn't remotely agree with their politics. "They even wanted to put a picture of me as the builder in the front hall of the old building. I told them, 'no thanks.'"



FROM TOP: The old Beedie Group offices on Kingsway. The new offices on Gilmore Diversion where The Beedie Group has leased out the lower level to Verathon Medical (Canada), a manufacturer of medical equipment that is owned by Dr. J. Pacey, who operated on Keith's popliteal artery aneurysm in 2007.





The reception area at the new Beedie Group offices.

“Although Dad was resistant to moving into a bigger office, the one thing we never disagreed on was the new location. We both knew it was an ideal property. Even once we’d started work on the renovation, though, Dad was still having second thoughts. Once we moved in, however, he came around. He emailed me saying that we should have made the move years before. It was good to know he liked it.”

—RYAN BEEDIE, KEITH’S SON

Keith missed the final move into the new location in March 2007 as he was in Hawaii at the time. “Probably a good thing,” says Keith. “I think it would have been hard. We were in the Kingsway building for 52 years.” In the end, he had to acknowledge that Ryan had done a good job with the office, which was a big improvement over their previous space. “I saw in the end that it was quite nice,” he says. “I am glad we moved, but I sure didn’t want to ... We now have 47 parking spots.”

“Renovations at the Beedie Group offices are always done when Keith’s not there. Otherwise, he’s in there asking why they need a new door when there’s nothing wrong with the old door.”

—AXEL GRINGMUTH, ETS ELECTRIC LTD.

SANCTUARY

In 2007, Keith was approached to finance a TV show called *Sanctuary*. The star was Amanda Tapping, who had a leading role for 10 years in *Stargate SG1*. Keith was an ardent fan of that program, and thought he would give the financing a whirl. Due to some miscommunications, the investors experienced a loss for the first year. So, in an effort to recoup their investment, for the 2008 season Keith and the other stakeholders agreed to a different format. Encouraged by the interest in *Sanctuary* expressed by the Sci-Fi Channel in the United States, they decided to proceed with a 13-episode season. The new season was a big success with the viewing audience, so the group produced another 13-episode season for 2009. With positive audience growth, Sci-Fi then requested a 20-episode season for 2010.

“Meeting Amanda, who by the way is a very personable and neat person, has been a pleasure for Betty and me,” says Keith. “I must say, being a producer of a television series such as *Sanctuary* is a real eye opener. While the experience has not been all positive, we are hopeful that this investment will turn out to be a profitable one.”

Amanda Tapping (second from right) with cast members of the popular TV series *Sanctuary*, (l-r) Agam Darshi, Robin Dunne, Ryan Robbins. Photo courtesy of Sanctuary 2 Production.



MOVING FORWARD

Despite the transition to having Ryan as president of The Beedie Group, Keith as CEO is still involved in the decision making and policy setting of the company. Keith and Ryan occupy adjacent offices in the new building, each with his own area of expertise and control. Ryan sits with the knowledge that his father had the wisdom, tenacity and drive to take the company to where it is today.



Ryan and Keith, 2009.

“It is important for the company to have the constructive criticism that flows between me and my dad. If I am going in the wrong direction, I have him there to challenge me. And vice versa. It’s a good system.”

—RYAN BEEDIE, KEITH’S SON

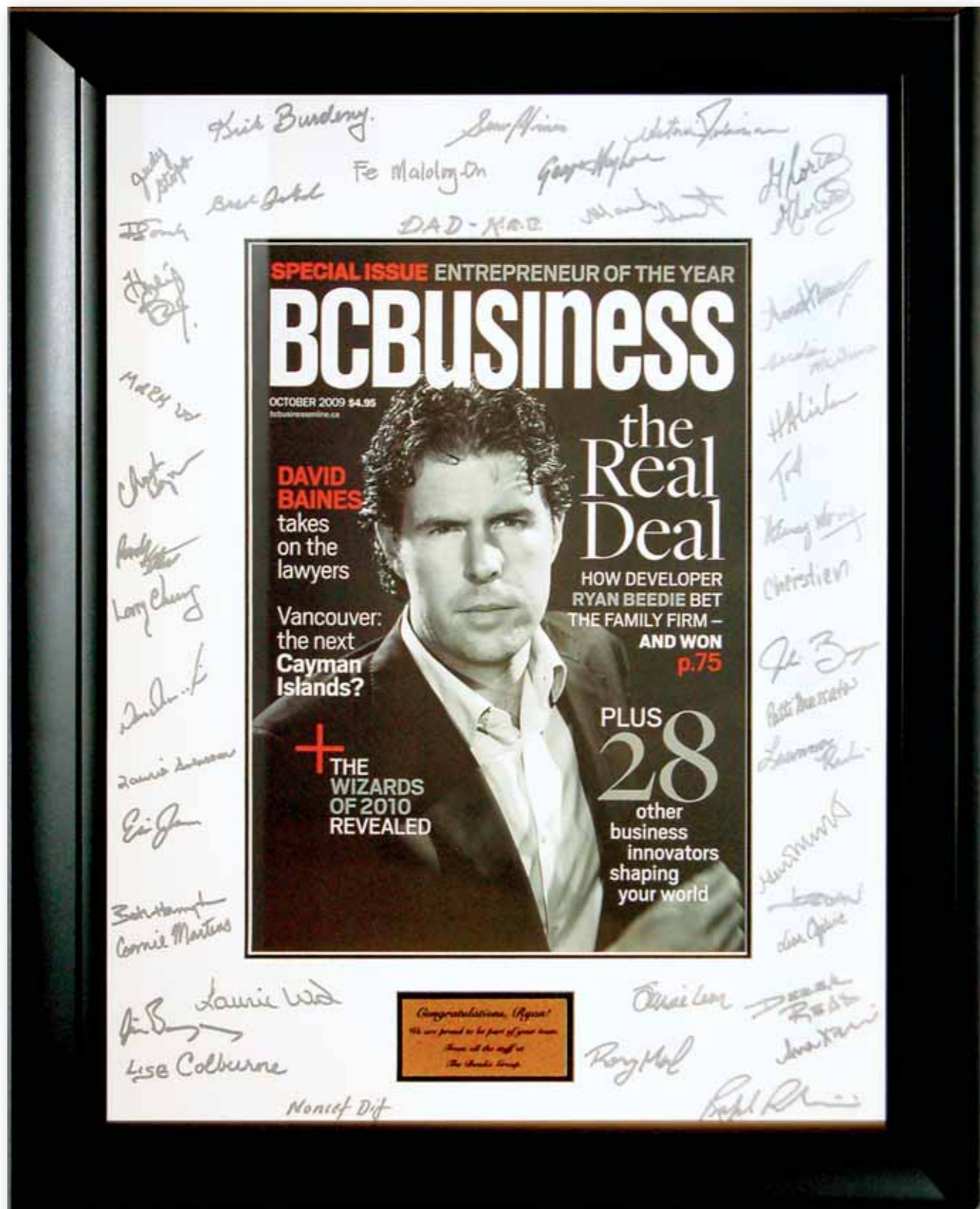
“Keith is fascinating. In a nutshell, he has an amazing capacity to assess information and find solutions. He is the most effective chairman I have reported to in the course of my career. His knowledge, not just what he’s gained through experience, but what he is able to rapidly understand, is incredible. Contrary to other patriarchs at the head of family businesses, Keith is able to trust and delegate. You don’t have to have the last name Beedie to be successful here. Working here, you are part of the family.”

—JIM BOGUSZ, CFO

Though Keith was named Business Person of the Year by the Burnaby Board of Trade in 2008, he knows that Ryan is the man who will steer The Beedie Group into the future. At the time of writing, The Beedie Group is working on Project #892, a long way from Project #1, the concrete block workshop on Selkirk Street. Another feather in the next generation’s cap was Ryan’s being named the 2009 Pacific Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year. Fred Withers, the director of the award, says, “It’s important we recognize these exemplary entrepreneurs like Ryan Beedie who are driving our economy forward. Ryan has built his family’s thriving business into a modern leader in real estate development.” The award indicates that both the company and Ryan are headed in the right direction.

“For me, Keith Beedie is not a business. He is a human being, an absolutely top-notch human being.”

—VICTORIA ROBINSON, DIRECTOR OF PROPERTY MANAGEMENT



"I found it easy to talk to Keith about life. I could discuss more personal issues with Keith than I could with my own father. Keith took an interest in my personal life, asking after my mother, my wife, my kids. I was never just an employee, I was a person. I never worked for anyone else and I don't regret it for one moment."

—TED METCALFE, SUPERINTENDENT (RETIRED)

Every morning, Keith walks into the Beedie Group building and makes his way to his corner office. In 2010, at 84 years old, he is still the heart and soul of the company. While he occasionally takes time to go away on vacation or spend time at the lake with Betty, or to enjoy his grandchildren, the office is where he can be found every workday. Ryan pops his head round with a question, the phone rings constantly, paperwork stacks up in the in-tray on his desk and his computer chimes with incoming email. At five o'clock there is the sound of the fridge opening and a drink being poured. While he is never the first one in the office in the morning, he is often one of the last to leave in the evening.

The business Keith built from scratch has provided security and comfort for his family and employment for countless people whom he also considers family since he first hired Charlie Metcalfe decades ago. The next generation of the Beedies is growing, and Keith's grandchildren are now beginning to show an interest in the company. He has given Ryan, his grandchildren and all the future generations something tremendous to build on.

"There is a big part of me that wants to grow The Beedie Group as much as I can, but there is also a huge part of me that recognizes what has been entrusted to me. I am taking care of my dad's baby, and even though he's handed it over, no matter what happens, it is our collective effort."

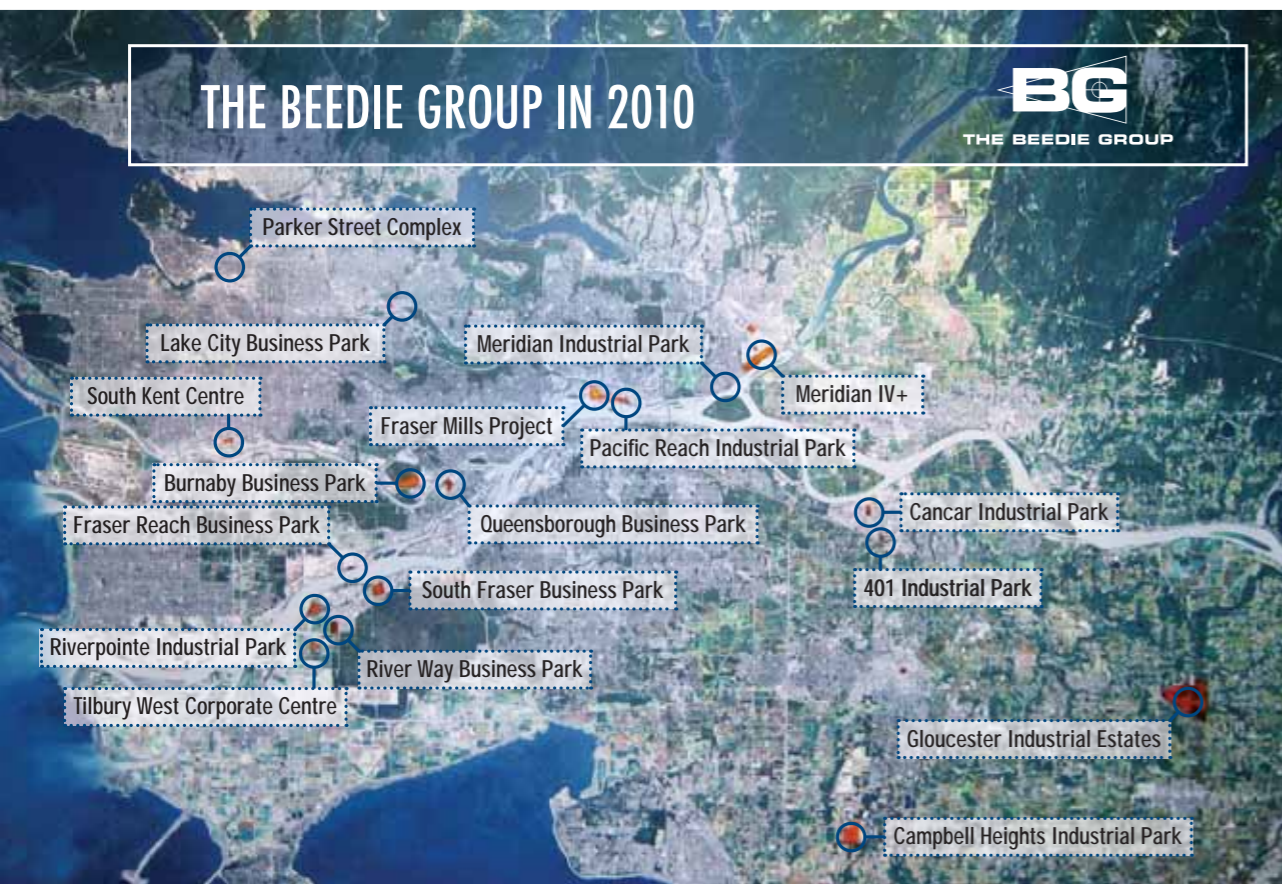
—RYAN BEEDIE, KEITH'S SON

"I sometimes bug Keith about taking more holidays or retiring. He always answers, 'What would I do? This is what I love.' It isn't his job. It's his life."

—ROB FIORVENTO, DIRECTOR

Every morning, Keith walks into the Beedie Group building and makes his way to his corner office. In 2010, at 84 years old, he is still the heart and soul of the company.

OPPOSITE: When Ryan was featured in a 2009 BC Business magazine cover story, "The Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year," Beedie Group staff presented him with a framed copy of the cover that had everyone's signatures. It hangs in the office's reception area.



Beedie projects are located in key industrial and business parks throughout the Lower Mainland and in Alberta.

In 1945, Fred Banbury walked into a service station at 4th Avenue and Alma Street and asked Keith if pumping gas was all he wanted from his life. In the 65 years since that day, Keith has demonstrated that he was capable of much, much more than filling tanks and tinkering with motors.

Today Keith and Ryan are responsible for more than 1,000 buildings across the Lower Mainland (including houses). Over 350 industrial buildings have the Beedie plaque on them. The company owns buildings that Keith has never even seen – a far cry from the days when he hammered every nail himself. Through booms and busts, Keith kept going. He didn't know any other way. "I hate to think there is anything I can't do. That's always been my motivation. When I got into business, I had no idea what I would face," says Keith. "But once I was started, I'll be damned if I was going to quit."



"I sometimes bug Keith about taking more holidays or retiring. He always answers, 'What would I do? This is what I love.' It isn't his job. It's his life."

ROB FIORVENTO

Keith with Vern Keller (left) and Ted Metcalf at Vern's retirement. Vern had been with The Beedie Group for 47 years. Ted worked for Keith for 45.



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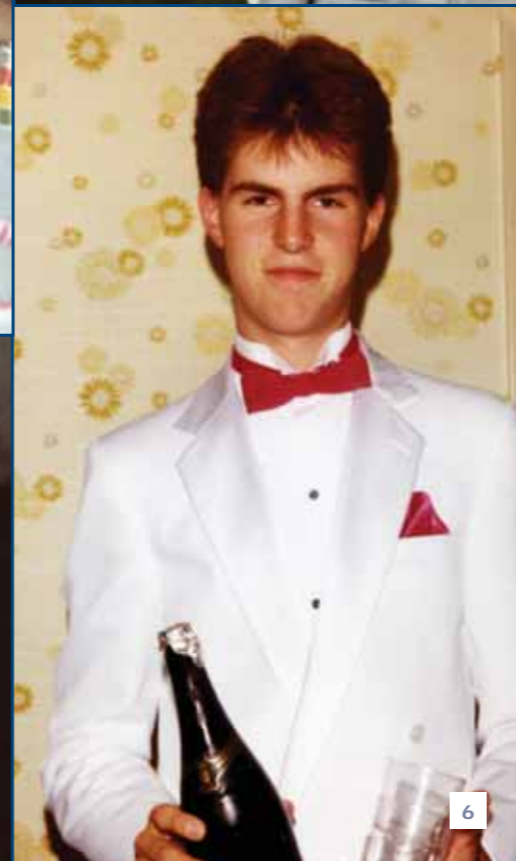
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FAMILY ALBUM

1 Ryan playing hockey, circa 1979.
2 Colin's 12th birthday party, 1968. Colin is at the head of the table. 3 Keith and Ryan with Micha, Christmas, 1979. 4 Ryan and his mom, at Christmas, 1973. 5 Betty and Keith with Keith's favourite Aunt Vi (right) and Uncle Don (left), circa 1983. 6 Ryan is set for his high school grad night, 1986. 7 Keith and Betty in Adelaide, Australia, 1979. 8 Betty and Keith having dinner during the five-day Lurline cruise they took from Los Angeles to Hawaii in 1968. 9 Betty and Ryan in the new home on Woodglen, circa 1969.



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1 Family gathering for Irene's 83rd birthday: (l-r, back) Carol, Dorothy, Chris, Ryan, Leighann, Sandra, Betty, Beverly; (front) Kristin, Stephen, Stephanie, Irene, Jarrett, Darren, Robert, Lisa, 1989. 2 Keith and Betty on Christmas day, 1980. 3 Colin and Keith on deck for Keith's 60th birthday, 1986. 4 Betty and Keith on the road to Hana in 1993. 5 (From top) Darren Lorenz, Keith, David Lorenz and Ryan, 1983. 6 Christmas 2003 with Ryan's kids, (l-r) Betty, Trevor, Paige, Keith and Grace. 7 Lisa Lorenz with Betty's grandkids in the Woodglen pool, 1980. 8 Ryan and his grandmother Evelyn, on her 86th birthday, 1989. 9 Dinner with friends and family (clockwise from bottom), Caroline, Betty, Keith, Dan, Ryan, Trevor, Cindy, Grace and Paige. 10 Ryan (right) shares an inner tube with cousin David Lorenz in the Woodglen pool, 1980.



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1 At Cindy's 40th birthday party, (back) Keith, Trevor and Betty; (front) Grace and Paige. 2 Keith and Betty, 1996. 3 Keith, Shannon Stout (Brindley), Lana and Betty, 1992. 4 Betty with Paige and Grace at Whistler, 2008. 5 Ryan, Betty, Keith and Colin before Ryan's Wedding, May 9, 1992. 6 Paige, Ryan, Cindy, Grace and Trevor, circa 2009.



1 The cousins' kids line up at the Woodglen home: (l-r) Trevor and Nicholas, Fox and Hannah, Matteo, Ella, Grace and Olivia, Paige and Chiara, Bowen and Quinn, 2009. 2 At Punaluv in 2000, (l-r back) Ronnie, John, Frank, (front) Betty's sisters Dorothy, Carol and Beverly with Betty and Keith. 3 Christmas 2007 with grandkids Paige, Trevor and Grace. 4 Keith's nephew Steven and Lynn. 5 Christmas Eve at Woodglen with Santa: (l-r) Betty, Carrie Bobiak, Santa, Keith, Sammy Fernandez, Barbara Fernandez and Carol Lorenz, 1987. 6 Keith's niece Sandra and Tom. 7 Christmas dinner, 1991. 8 The cousins line up a little later in life at the Woodglen home: (l-r) Darren, Ryan, Leigh-Ann, David, Lisa, Chris, Lance and Sandra, 2009. 9 The Beedie clan 1998: (l-r) back row Ryan, Ralph Rubini, Tanis Rubini, Andy Rubini, Lana Brindley, Dale Brindley, Shannon Stout (Brindley), Rich Stout; (front row) Paige Beedie, Cindy Beedie, Trevor Beedie, Betty, Keith, Janelle Beedie with Jayden and Colin; (seated on ground) Christina Rubini and Lianna Rubini.





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THE BEEDIE GROUP

**“When I got into business,
I had no idea what I would face,
but once I was started, I’ll be
damned if I was going to quit.”**

— KEITH BEEDIE



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