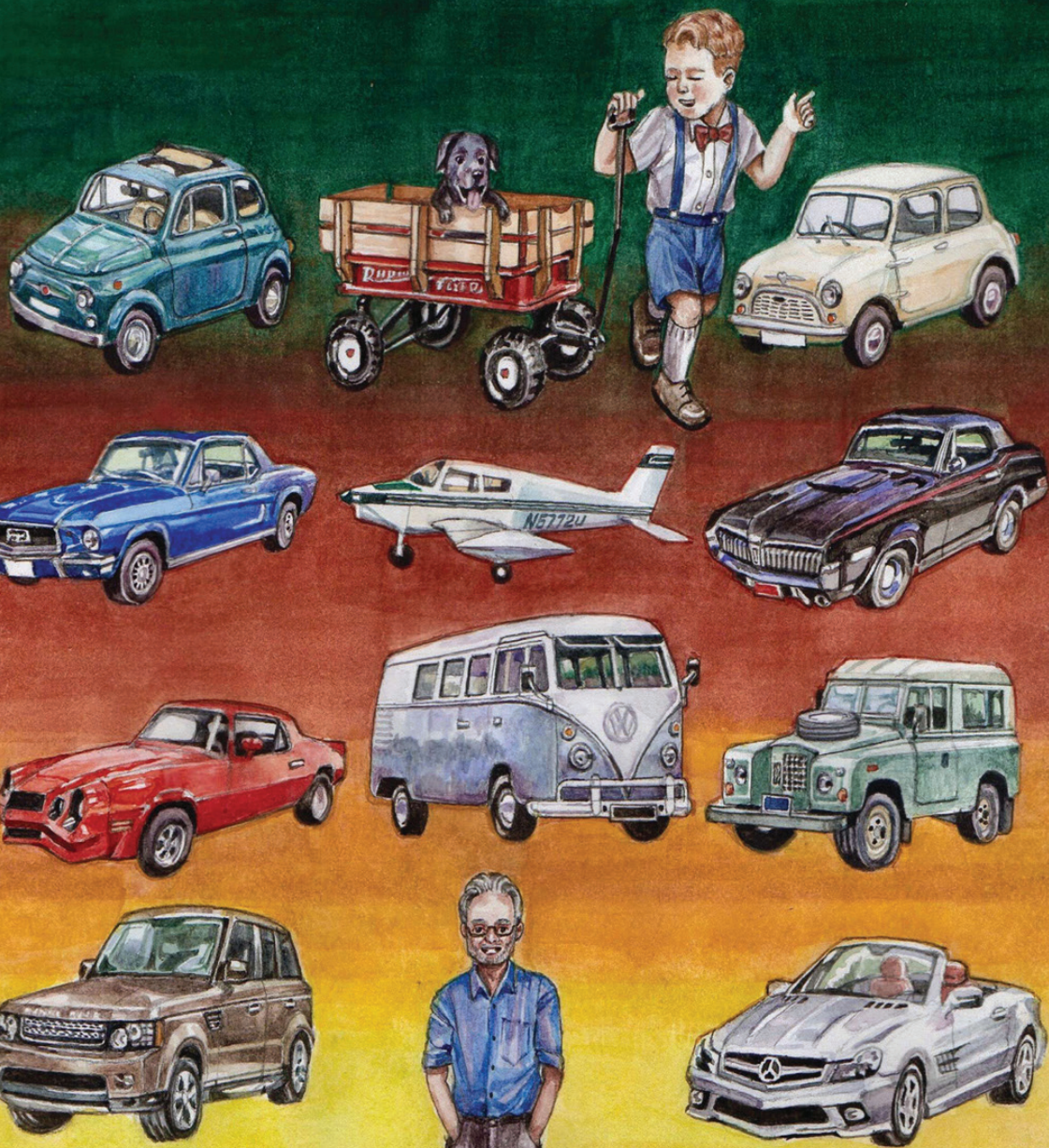


A DRIVE IN TIME

BY KEVIN VINCENT



BEGINNING TO THE END?

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The author takes you on a journey that begins as early as he can remember. Christmas morning under the tree four year old Kevin finds his first 4 wheeler along with his black Labrador puppy called money. Traveling through a long and winding road over the next 60 years through the disco era of the 70's. Then moving on with his 7000 kilometer VW bus trek from one end of Canada to the other. He uses the memories of his cars along with a small plane to guide him through his memories along the way. Be it in the early years at 16 with his first motor driven 4 wheeler Fiat 500, then Mini Cooper then VW bus all great memories and fun even when they had to be pushed to get started. Mustang, Camaro, Cougar great memories during times of fun in experiences successes and failures. Then with the BMW's & Mercedes's all years with Bigger successes and Bigger failures. The Range Rover and the moose, then Wow the Mercedes 550 SL convertible and the Northern Lights.



Kevin was born in St. John's, Newfoundland, the sixth of eight children to an Irish Newfoundland father and a Scottish mother. He spent the last few years of school in a windowless basement classroom with the slow learners. He left school behind after 8th grade to pursue a lifelong education in a world full of windows. He is currently working on his next book "7 Big City Vultures Come to Newfoundland Dressed as Ladies".

www.adriveintime.com

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

TO MY SISTER MAUREEN'S GRANDSON GORDON JOSEPH
MIFFLIN

&

TO MY BROTHER MICHEAL'S GREAT GRANDSON LUKE

&

TO MY BROTHER ALBERT'S GRANDDAUGHTER MOLLY ELIZABETH

THANKS TO FRIENDS PAST PRESENT & FUTURE

ROY, SUSAN, ALLISON & BENJAMIN OSMOND.

DANIEL, ASHLEY, NOAH & JACOB BENNETT.

ROBERT HARTLEY & FAMILY.

BETTY & ROBERT MAKAY.

MARIA MANCINI & BIANCA ECAT.

LINDA COOK, NED YOUNG, JUDY DUFF

ROD NOEL, EDWARD WARD, GARY POLLARD.

JAMES, JULIA, EDITH, DANNY, GAIL,

JOANNE RUBY & RENEE BENOIT.

GRITANON PAODEE (GET), THANAKORN SIRIN (BENZ),
JITRADA JAIJUN (UMIN).

TO ALL TEAM MEMBERS AT DUDEE-INDEED CO.,LTD

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO MELINDA FALGOUST FOR ALL
THE HELP KEEPING MY WORDS IN CHECK YET LEAVING MY
NEWFOUNDLAND ENGLISH IN PLACE.

TO EMIR MEŠIĆ FOR INTERIOR LAYOUT AND DESIGN IN
BETWEEN THE BOOK COVERS.

TO KONTHICHA TECHAPAKAPHONG FOR HER PATIENCE WITH
BLENDING THE THOUGHTS AND VISIONS IN MY HEAD ON TO
VISUAL COVERS.

CHAPTER ONE

**Me, My Red Radio
Flyer Wagon and My
Dog Named Money**

Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring not even a mouse. The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, waiting for Saint Nick to appear . . .

Amazing—my biggest fantasy. All lies of course but the rewards come Christmas morning? Oh, so convincing.

The winter of 1958 found me four years old, and it was nearly as early as I can remember. In the house I grew up, there were two bedrooms besides my parents—a boys' room Freddie, Micheal, Kevin, Albert, and a girls' room Angela, Loretta, Maureen, Yvonne, —evenly occupied by four eager children anticipating the arrival of the jolly old elf. Off to our respective rooms we were sent and told not a word, or Santa Claus would pass our house instead of landing on our roof with his reindeers and bulging bag of gifts. Despite the warning, I could not help peering out the bedroom window, stealing a glance through the curtains out into the starlit sky as the snow gently fell. The rich vanilla scent of baking cookies wafted into my bedroom along with the savory smell of the slow-roasting turkey, the one larger than me! The massive bird intended for the next day would be the centerpiece as the ten of us, my family, gathered round the table for the holiday meal.

I climbed out of my bunk ever so quietly peeping through the curtains. There, streaking through the velvety sky pinpricked with stars, my fevered imagination conjured a brilliant red sleigh piloted by a great round man with a long flowing beard as white as the flurrying snow. And as I squinted, I swore I could just make out the gleaming red nose of the lead reindeer coursing before him. I dashed away, quick as a wink, and clambered up the ladder to get back into my bunk. I definitely did not want him to see me and pass our house.

Before long before I drifted off to sleep and the light of dawn crept through the curtains. Down I climbed from my bunk and scampered off to the Christmas tree in the living room. The towering pine gleamed with bubble lights and glittered with silver tinsel. As dazzling tree as the great tree was, it registered as barely a blink in my four-year-old brain. The gifts that surrounded it were what truly grabbed my attention, one gift in particular. Behind my sisters' stand-up-dolls, ones as tall as me, was the gift I'd been dreaming of all year—a shiny red Radio Flyer wagon.

WOW.

My parents stood in the background, eyeing the excitement. That new wagon was not big enough to carry the big bird still cooking in the kitchen, but it was plenty big enough for my dog Money, a black Labrador.

My father had a curmudgeonly relationship with money, albeit money of another sort. Over the years, with such a big family to support, I can remember his patented response when my older siblings would ask him for some.

“Money, money, money. You think it grows on trees.”

Mind you, however, he always tried to give it.

Just a few years ago, while sitting around a dinner table with a group of friends, an interesting topic of conversation arose. “If you could turn back time, where would you like to be?”

As the question journeyed around the table, answers generally bandied between being twenty to thirty years younger. Yet, I kept thinking I have enjoyed getting to the age I am and would not want to be younger.

But when it came to me, I had a different response.

“I’m happy where I am, but if I had a choice to go back in

time, I would like to go back to that Christmas Eve many years ago when my whole family lived in that little house with no computers, no cell phones, no Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok, and gathered around the table in conversation—laughing in a time of innocence—and then, the next day, wake up back to reality where I am happy no matter the time, with all its pressures, anxieties, challenges and pleasures. After all, what is it they say? Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. But today is a gift. That's why they call it the present."

CHAPTER TWO

Fast Food, Flats and a Fiat

First cars and first loves. You can't help but remember them well. Although, first cars don't tend to get upset when you forget an anniversary! My Radio Flyer introduced me to the world of wheels, but it wasn't until I was sixteen and working at a Dairy Queen that I well and truly fell in love.

Back then, you had to be seventeen to get a driver's license, but I was an enterprising young man, working to be ready for when the time was ripe. Flipping burgers and hot dogs and selling French fries was an easy way of putting a little spare change in my pocket. Occasionally, if a real big spender came along, I might also have to whip up a soft-serve or dilly bar, DQ's signature sweets. But I wasn't interested in chocolate-dipped ice cream. No. I was sweet on something else entirely.

Across the street was Woodford Motors, the local auto dealer. Their front lot gleamed with sleek, four-wheeled beauties—ready to cruise the open road and beyond—right beyond my measly 50-cents-an-hour budget. I had only managed to save a hundred dollars. Still, I remained undaunted.

At the back of the lot, tucked behind the sales office and out of sight of the high rollers, were the “As Is” specials. Now, a Woodford Motors “As Is” wouldn't likely help you get your kicks on Route 66. You'd be lucky to make it off the lot! After looking through what they had on offer for my hundred-dollar budget only one stood out. But there, sitting in a bed of gravel and covered in a blanket of dust, was my first true love.

A 1958 Fiat 500 with a roll-back sunroof.

She wasn't much to look at with two flat tires and no license plate or inspection sticker, but in my eye, it was my ticket to freedom—freedom to roam and freedom to earn some extra

income. I had no intention of selling dilly bars till retirement. Plus, the engine purred to life with the first turn of the key.

Problem was Woodford Motors wanted \$350.00. I only had a \$100.00 in in my pocket.

Convincing them to reduce the price to \$250.00 was easy. Now the hard part begins—like haggling at the Casbah with a produce vendor over dates. And the “date” I wanted was with destiny. I offered \$100.00 and showed the salesman my miscellaneous collection of one and five-dollar notes.

“Quite the handful,” he mused, one eyebrow arched high. “But I can’t approve that. You’ll have to chat with Skipper.”

Skipper? I wanted a car, not a boat. Still, I followed obligingly.

He guided me through the sales floor, a wonderland filled with fancy cars, to the office of the skipper. “Skipper,” as it turned out, was the owner of Woodford Motors, Tom Woodford. Said so right there on the plaque. It was easy to see why they called him Skipper. The wall was filled with a number of photos of him behind the wheel of a sailboat. Golden trophies glittered on shelves his name engraved for posterity.

“He’ll be with you in a minute. Take a seat.”

The salesman gestured to a chair before leaving me alone in the big office. I stared apprehensively at the big empty chair behind the desk, a chair that dwarfed the small seat I occupied. After what seemed like an hour, in walked Skipper crisply dressed in shirt, tie and jacket. He cut an imposing figure against my Dairy Queen uniform of white shirt and pants. All business, which is precisely what he began to conduct.

“You want that fine Fiat for two hundred dollars?” he belled without so much as a how do you do.

“I don’t have that kind of money, sir.” Again, I took the forty-odd pieces of paper money totaling a paltry one hundred dollars. I slapped them on the desk. “This is all I have.”

I could conduct business, too.

He eyeballed me. “How much do you make a week?”

“Fifty dollars.”

He sat back, the large chair squeaking. “You know that this car is as is?”

“Yes,” I replied. “I plan to fix and sell it to make a little profit then buy another.”

He pursed his lips against tented fingers, ruminating. Finally, he leaned forward. His voice boomed across the desk. “Here’s what I will do for you. I will sell the Fiat to you for \$150.00. You give me your \$100.00 now, then \$10.00 a week for 5 weeks. Then you can take the car off the lot. If you do not pay, you lose your money. Agreed?”

“Yes, sir,” I beamed.

Skipper reached out his hand in offer to shake. “It’s a deal! See you next week.”

I firmly shook his hand and went back to work proud as a peacock. I had my first car. A 1958 Fiat 500.

Now, maybe you’re the sort who believes in fate. Or maybe you’re the type who chalks things up to coincidence. Either way, I still get chills when I consider the fact that I got my first set of wheels, that beautiful red Radio Flyer wagon, on a bright Christmas morning in 1958. Here I was, twelve years later, the proud owner of a 1958 Fiat 500.

Four or twelve years gone, I was just as excited.

A week later, I crossed the street to the sales office with my promised ten dollars in hand and gave it to the lady at the re-

ception. I went to the back lot to have another look at my dream. Other than another flat tire, she was still there waiting for me.

On my way back through the sales office to the street the receptionist stopped me.

“Skipper wants to speak with you,” she said.

A look of concern passed over my face. I was back in his office.

“Sit down,” he said.

Then he reminds me. “The car is “As Is” where is. If you have problem, that’s your problem. Now, get it off my lot.”

He obviously had reconsidered allowing my flat little Fiat to take up prime real estate on his lot. I felt like I was skidding side-ways and I hadn’t even gotten behind the wheel yet!

“But, sir, I still owe you forty dollars.”

“You can come every week and pay me ten dollars as agreed.”

Pump the brake, already!

“But, sir, I have no driver’s license.”

“One of my guys will drive it to your house. What’s your address?”

I breathed a tremendous sigh of relief as he jotted it down. Crisis averted, I skipped off across the street and back to work.

When I got home my car was parked in front of my house with every one of the tires pumped up. Over the next week, I tinkered with it and had it brought to a nearby shop to have the inspection done. I crossed my fingers so hard, I nearly broke them.

The garage man said, “You need a headlight and a taillight.”

“How much?” I asked.

“Nine dollars for the lights and thirteen for the inspection. Twenty-two dollars.”

Three weeks later, I sold it for \$350.00 for a profit of \$165.00. I still owed Skipper ten dollars. With \$350.00 in my pocket, I returned to the back of the lot looking for my next diamond in the rough. From that moment on, I would only deal directly with the Skipper when buying a car off his lot. I think he enjoyed dickering with me. Two men doing business, I'd like to think.

From three Austin Minis to an Austin America, it seemed every month I had a new find in the driveway. Sometimes they stayed parked on the hill nearby, just in case they wouldn't start, and I could simply pop the clutch and use gravity to start them going.

I distinctly remember my mother saying, "Kevin, isn't it time you get something dependable?"

But I think I was moving too fast to hear her.

CHAPTER THREE

The Big Mini and My Trust Fund

When I was around seven years old, I was run over by a big city bus. My legs were crushed, and I had to spend close to a year in an orthopedic hospital. My legs were tightly wrapped with tape and raised ninety degrees, counterbalanced by weights. Very uncomfortable, I should say. Not nearly as uncomfortable as having to continue my studies, though! Every day, I would be wheeled off, bed and all, down a long hallway to studies. Between my legs and my education, I often wonder which was more excruciating.

It was a lonely existence for a while. My brothers and sisters would stop by from time to time but were not permitted on the ward itself. They would remain outside, and the nurses would turn my bed around so we could at least see each other and wave. Time passed and eventually they put me in a big walker and taught me to walk all over again. The whole incident was a major pothole on life's highway, but there was a silver lining. Because of the incident, my father saw to it that a trust fund was set up, funded by money from the bus company—money I could access for important things when I reached twenty-one. I remained ignorant of the fund until I reached nineteen years of age when the age of maturity had been lowered. Well, I didn't need a car to burn rubber all the way to the lawyer's office. Within an hour, I had a cheque in hand for roughly 10,000 dollars.

Not far from the lawyer's office was the bank from which the cheque had been drawn. I strutted right up to the counter and confidently placed my cheque in front of the teller as if I'd done it a thousand times before.

"How would you like your money?" the teller asked.

What a weird question, I thought.

"Cash," I replied. Well, that set off a bit of commotion. I

looked about, the confident bravado of just a few moments before rapidly dissolving. The teller darted from one bank employee to the next, whispering in their ears.

Had I done something wrong?

I started to feel the same crushing sensation as I had all those years ago when the bus hit me. Only now, the crushing sensation was in my chest.

She finally came back to the counter. I gulped.

She smiled. "Would you take part of the amount in cash and accept the remainder as a counter cheque?"

Sweat began to bead on my forehead. "Is there something wrong with the cheque?"

She shook her head. "No, no, no. It's just a lot of cash, and it will take a little while."

My confidence began to return. I shifted the bag on my shoulder. "I can wait."

And I did.

An hour later, bag stuffed with money, I hailed a taxi and headed to Woodford Motors to visit Skipper, and this time, I was shopping from the front of the lot. As soon as the taxi stopped, I saw exactly what I wanted.

A nearly new Austin 1800.

Wow! It was so beautiful—with real leather seats and polished wood-grain dashboard. I left in search of Skipper.

"Moving on up, eh?" he said. "That's a real beauty. Only 7,000 miles. Owned by a nurse. She traded for an automatic. Had trouble with getting used to the manual transmission. Got it priced at \$3300, but for you? Only \$3000."

A smile played about the corners of my lips. I was used to the game of negotiating with Skipper by now, so I offered \$2500.

He stared at me for a minute. “Fine. \$2800, but that’s it.”

“Ok,” I replied and proceeded to count out the money from my satchel.

He pointed to the money bag. “You be careful.”

I nodded and shook his hand over another solid deal.

I slipped behind the wheel and deeply inhaled the smell of leather. Life couldn’t be anything but easy with a ride this smooth. It was amazing. On the way home, I made a pit stop to pick up gifts for my parents and siblings. Well, my parents were not at all happy I had cashed in my trust. Rather than berate me incessantly, they both decided discretion was the better part of valor and chose to find the positive in the situation. Mother was happy I finally had a car that was dependable. My father chose to delight that I no longer possessed a vehicle that would leak oil all over his driveway.

With a reliable car came opportunity. I met up with my buddies, Rod and Gary. I told them I had plans—plans to leave the island for the big city of Toronto.

“Do you want to come?” I asked.

“Yes!” Rod’s reaction was hell of a lot faster than the seventeen seconds it took for the Austin 1800 to hit 60.

It took a bit for Gary to get his foot off the brake, but within an hour he was on board.

“We leave tomorrow,” I said, and we did.

The drive was 1,000 kilometres to the end of the island where we met the overnight ship that would ferry us to Cape Breton on Canada’s mainland. Beyond that, it was a 3,000-kilometre drive to Toronto. Rod and I had taken this journey three years earlier. While it had been memorable, we certainly had not traveled in the comfortable style of the Austin. That trip,

we didn't even have our own transportation. With nothing more than knapsacks, pup tents and sleeping bags strapped to our backs, we hitched a ride all the way across the island—mostly in the back of open-bed pickups and only a few kilometres at a time. Rain snow and sleet pelted us in the roughly five days it took to make it across the island to the ship.

Ahh . . . the ship. We were ever so grateful for that seafaring beast. On board, we were finally able to get a shower and wash some of the weary road away. The next morning, we hopped off the boat. Within one hour, a white Pontiac convertible with red seats stopped.

"Where you headed?" the driver asked.

"Toronto," I replied.

"Jump in! So am I!" He thumbed toward the back seat.

After twenty-two hours of cruising on the open road, we reached the big city—Toronto. My dreams were bigger than my wallet, though, so I had to find a job. I got work at a car wash and it was just like the movie. I probably wasn't going to get rich, but it was better than digging a ditch.

Music blared constantly, and there were lots of amazing characters that kept me amused. Of the twenty-odd staff members working there, I was the only Caucasian, but to me it was nothing but a bunch of people living it up. It was one big disco . . . until the ball stopped turning.

One day, a hearse pulled into the wash. The boss orders me to get in the back and vacuum. With more than a little trepidation, I climbed into the back of the long, black car. My stomach rolled a little as the decaying scent of dying flowers permeated my nose. At least, I hoped what I was smelling was dead flowers.

I imagined dead ghosts.

The hearse moved slowly through the car wash as the outside team worked on the windows. All the while, I'm in the back wanting to get sick. It almost felt like being trapped in a coffin as I waited anxiously for it to get to the outside so I could exit. The good news was it was payday. I took my two-weeks-worth, stuffed it in my back pocket, and high-tailed it, never to return. Too bad superstition had gotten the better of me. I had great fun working with all of them, and some would have put good old Rolls Royce to shame. As for me, all I could think was "I can't wait till it's time to home."

* * * * *

So, that first trip to Toronto had fallen flatter than the wheels of my old Fiat. I had returned home just a few weeks later, back to my island.

This time, the trip was different. The drive was comfortable the entire way. When we got to Toronto, the three of us got a room to share then headed off to hunt for work. Our first stop was to an employment agency that specialized in finding short term jobs. The theory was, that would give us cash to keep us afloat until we found something more permanent. We got hired right away for work in a stone quarry. We had to lift slabs of rock into small rail cars.

It was hell.

After only one week, we grabbed our pay and took off to a small town about fifty miles outside the city call Acton. As we drove into town, we were overcome by crap. No, I mean literally. The distinct odor of feces seeped into our nostrils. I

blamed Rod. Rod blamed Gary. And Gary blamed me. You get the picture. Even rolling the windows down didn't help. In fact, the smell got worse!

We tried to ignore the overpowering stench and found a place to stay. The next morning, we headed for the big factory on the outskirts of town we'd heard was hiring. There were jobs there, all right, but there was also something else—that horrible smell! Turns out, it was a tanning factory where hides got processed with tannins, salts, and other ingredients like fish oil. The cows were lucky they were already dead! The factory immediately offered all three of us jobs, but I decided right then and there I wanted to do something different—something that preferably didn't smell like something I'd stepped in. I hopped back into the Austin, hoping the stench would not stick to the leather seats, and drove away ruminating on the possibilities for employment. About six miles from town, I drove past a car lot on the main drag towards Rockwood called Rockwood Motors.

There, on a raised platform, was a blue 1968 mustang.

Wow.

I decided to turn in and take a look. The owner strolled outside and immediately took a keen interest in my little Austin.

"Can I take it for a spin?" he asked.

"Sure!" I replied. I nodded to the Mustang. "Can I take this one?"

He nodded. "Yes! Let me get the key and back it down for you."

Needless to say, there was a marked difference between my paltry four cylinders to the Ford's powerful eight. I flexed the big motor's muscles and took it for a delicious cruise. When I got back to the lot, the owner was waiting for me.

“For \$3000 and your car, you can have it,” he offered.

I pursed my lips, thinking. “I will get back to you.”

But I had no plans to spend an unnecessary \$3000 as I still needed capital to get my new life going. As much as I loved the Mustang, I had let it go from my mind.

There was a pub in Acton called the Station Lounge. It was a draft house stuck in the nineteenth century. It had separate women’s and men’s entrances—old style for sure. It sat next to the train station and looked more like an old western hotel. Inside, Rod, Gary and I propped up with a jug of draft when in walked the owner of the Mustang.

“You didn’t get back to me,” he said.

“I decided against it. Need my money for something else,” I explained.

He wasn’t that easily dissuaded. “Okay. A thousand dollars and it’s yours. It’s right outside.”

Rod and Gary slipped out to take a look. It didn’t take much to sell them on the idea. Of course, it wasn’t their money either! Plus they had jobs.

“You should get it,” they encouraged. But as much as I wanted to, I needed every red cent to reach my goal. The Mustang owner became a bit agitated. He really wanted to sell me the car. Then, the truth came out.

“I will be honest with you,” he began. “When I took your car for a test drive, I showed it to a customer. She has been calling me every day since. She wants your car. I will call her. If she is prepared to pay me an extra \$1000, will you trade for even?”

It was a no-brainer.

“Yup,” I replied. “No problem.” I leaned back in my seat, locked my hands behind my head and smiled. I had learned

a few lessons from Tom Woodford.

There were no cell phones back then. So, he went to the pay phone on the corner. When he returned, he looked relieved.

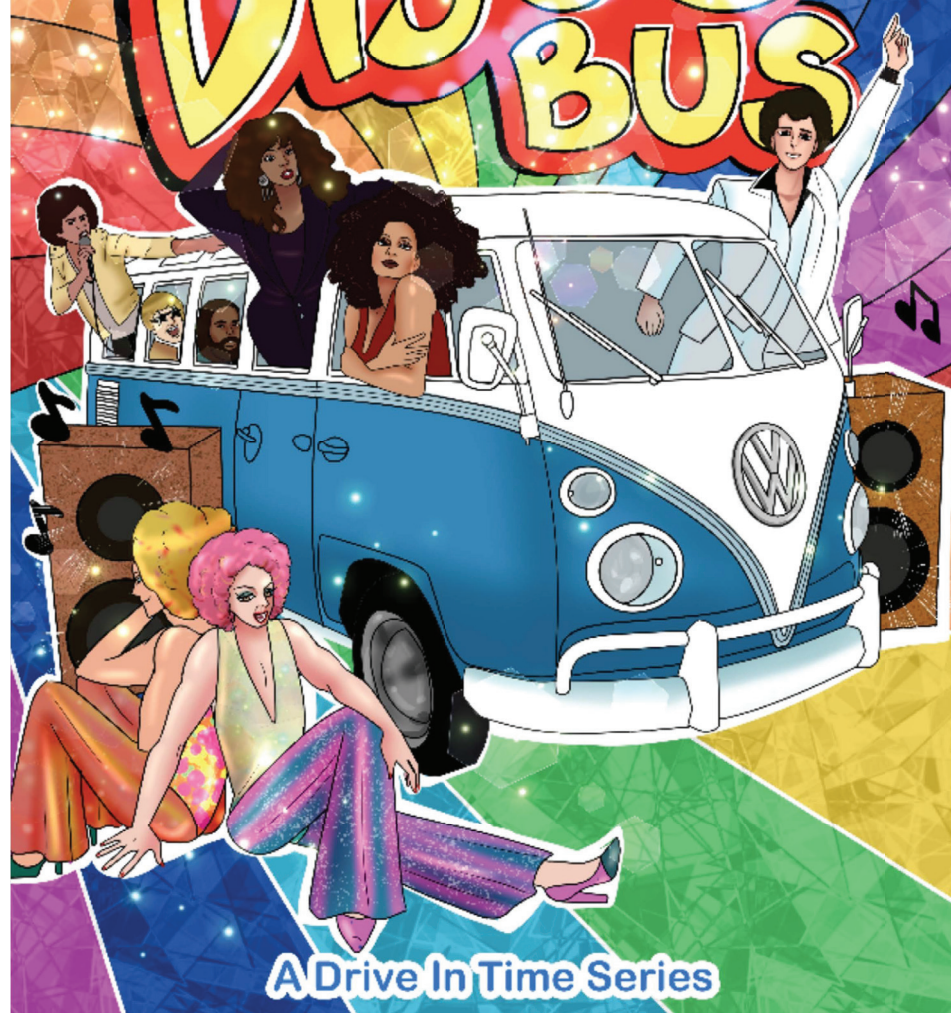
“Can I have your keys and registration? You come by in the morning, and we’ll sign it over.”

I nodded. The very next day, I was driving a mint 1968 blue mustang . . . and it hadn’t cost me a dime.

Try and make THAT good a deal, Skipper.

KEVIN VINCENT

Disco BUS



A Drive In Time Series



Before Club 54 in Halifax Atlantic Canada's first Disco opened. Let's Dance "Do The Hustle" To the sounds of Van McCoy Dianna Ross, Donna Summer, Barry White, Elton John, Bonny M, The Bee Gees, K.C. & The Sunshine Band, Gloria Gaynor, ABBA, A.W.B. To name but a few that reigned over the crowd.

Black, White, Gay, Straight, Transgender, No labels on the Dance Floor. All dancing to the same beat. It was the "Me" generation.

It's now 1978, he signs off as DJ,
packs up the bus & chugs along across
City's & Mountains on a 6000 kilometre
journey from the Atlantic to the Pacific.



Kevin the DJ. with friends
circa 1976

CHAPTER FOUR

A Midnight Train to Georgia

Well, it wasn't Georgia, exactly.

Late 1973 found me scraping by in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Life's road had taken me there after a few of those "new ventures" hadn't quite panned out. The first roadblock happened around the time I was fifteen and another when I was seventeen. With creditors in hot pursuit by the time I was nineteen, I figured it might be time to put my little road trip up on blocks—at least temporarily. I hitched a ride to Halifax with a guy who was moving there. I arrived with a 125 lbs. on my frame and just eighteen dollars to my name.

I could not waste time looking for work, and I didn't. I figured selling beer at a bar or waiting tables at a restaurant was my best bet. Tips were supposedly the best part. I wish someone had dropped me a tip about which restaurant was hiring! After dropping into about ten different restaurants, clothing shops, and the like, I finally decided to stop at this bar called the Heidelberg in downtown Halifax on the lower section of Dresden Row.

It was around 6 o'clock in the evening. I first stopped into the restaurant on the main floor. I was approached by a waiter, an older, short, chubby guy. He measured only five-foot-six-and-a-half. Okay. Maybe not that short. I'm only five-foot-seven. But where he rivaled me for height, he certainly had me on years and weight.

"Good evening," he greeted, menu in hand. "Table for one?"

"No, I'm sorry," I replied. "I'm not here to eat."

The insistent rumble from my stomach belied the fact I desperately wanted to, but I did not know how long that \$18.00 in my pocket had to last. His eyes narrowed as he looked at me rather crookedly, then I realized it wasn't his look that was

crooked—something was off about his hair.

I shook my head certain it was just the hunger making me see things. I straightened my shoulders and cleared my throat. “I’m just wondering if your restaurant needs a hard worker?”

“You’ve come at our busiest time,” he clipped, tucking the unnecessary menu under his arm. I guess he took a good hard look at my skinny frame and felt some compassion, because his stern gaze softened. “Come back in the morning. They need a dishwasher.”

“I’ll do anything,” I assured.

He sighed, eager to get on to some paying customers. He directed me to the side door. “Go up and see Robbie. Maybe they need help in the bar.”

I thanked him profusely as he waddled off with three customers, menus in hand. With each shift of his solid bulk, his hairline seemed to shift right along with it. The impossible black mass of hair had a mind of its own. I felt compelled to alert him that something was wrong with his hair, but the copious sweat dripping down his forehead and soaking the pits of his shirt told me he already had enough to contend with. Besides that, he could very well turn out to be my boss. Best not upset the apple cart before I was even hired!

I exited through the side door and jogged up the stairs to the second floor. I skidded to a stop at the threshold of a huge open room with a bar at the very end. The dark room echoed hollowly, empty, without a customer in sight. Not at all like downstairs which was busy as a bee. I counted about a hundred and fifty chairs, grouped in small clusters of two, four and six. The empty seats waited around the edges of a wide-open expanse of floor. I wondered what type of business

went on up here.

That's when I saw it.

Dangling from the center of the ceiling, its brilliant facets soaking in any hint of light that managed to seep into the dark room, was a glittering ball of cut glass.

This was a discotheque!

As my eyes adjusted to the dim light, I made my way to the long bar across the room. A dozen stools stood in regiment, waiting for thirsty customers.

"Good day, young man. What can I get you?" the bartender greeted me enthusiastically.

"I'm looking for work. The man downstairs told me to come up and ask for Robbie."

He put out his hand. "Robert Burns. You can call me Robbie."

Over the years, my Scottish mother frequently mentioned a Robert Burns. The fleeting thought occurred to me this guy might be related.

"Kevin, and I need all the help I can get," I said as I took his hand.

Robbie busied himself polishing a glass. "Now, who sent you up here?"

I tried to describe the man downstairs in the politest terms possible. Robbie smiled broadly and shook his head.

"Did he have a thing on his head?" Robbie asked, obviously not feeling justified calling the ragged mop a toupee.

"Yes, a black thing."

"That's Dobson."

"I wanted to tell him that it was all askew— like it might fall off."

Robbie interrupted me. "Oh, don't do that! He'll bark at ya. Now, what are you going to have?"

My hand fiddled with the measly eighteen dollars in my pocket. I cast a hesitant gaze downward, then looked back at Robbie. "That's ok. Thank you."

"It's on the house."

A smile of relief spread across my face. Maybe my luck was changing. "Thank you. Can I have one of those?"

"Ah. That's German. Heineken. Imported."

In my naïveté, I had assumed they made it on the premises. After all, it was the name of the place. I shared my thoughts with Robbie. He laughed and popped one on the counter with this funny glass he called a stein. As the golden liquid flowed into the stein, so did Robbie's chatter. Then he gave me the disappointing news.

"This is a slower time for the bar. Maybe your best bet is the restaurant downstairs."

"Dobson mentioned they might need a dishwasher."

"That's a hard job," Robbie commented. "They always have trouble keeping them."

He plunked another Heinekin on the bar in front of me.

"How come there's no music?" a sudden, loud voice barked as loud as a Newfoundland.

I wheeled to see a big man stroll into the room.

Robbie shrugged. "Same thing happened last week, man. He didn't show until around ten."

The big man did not look pleased. "He is supposed to be here at eight!"

I stole a quick glance at my watch. It was 8:15.

Robbie introduced me. "Heinz, this is Kevin from New-

foundland. He's looking for work."

And Heinz glowered at me like he was looking for lunch.

"Newfie," he finally barked. "Can you play those turntables up there?"

He jabbed a big, fat finger past the dance floor, about seventy-five feet from the bar. There, in a small, raised booth, you could see two turntables. Faster than you could drop the needle on a 45, I answered.

"No problem."

Heinz nodded.

"Okay, then. If you are the Monday-Tuesday guy, you set up at eight each night not 8:15!" he barked. "Robbie, give him the regular."

Then, quickly as he had blown in, he was gone.

Robbie turned to me one eyebrow raised high. "You done this before? Disc jockey?"

I gulped. The only jockey I knew was the kind that rode a horse. I venture to the little box at the edge of the stage. There were loads of vinyl covers with unfamiliar names. I had no idea who or what they were. As I later discovered, that was a good thing.

First thing, I figured out how to turn on the turntables. That was the easy part. Then I started turning on the light switches and—holy crap—the room lit up like Christmas! The mirror ball started to spin, spreading a glitter of light across the dance floor. Every time I hit another switch, the colours would magically change—red, blue, white, yellow—every colour of the rainbow. My eyes traveled over the vast collection of vinyl. What do I play, I thought? I had no idea what kind of music this was. This? This was disco.

Let's get it on.

* * * * *

I decided to play something while I looked things over. Before I could load the platter on the turntable, a bar maid in a long, dark brown tent dress breezed in.

Robbie pointed in my direction. "Meet the new guy."

She floated over and shook my hand. "Hi, I'm Anna. This place is gonna fill up quickly. You better get ready, and don't let them intimidate ya."

I shook my head. "Intimidate me?"

What did she mean by that?

"Play Gladys Knight's 'Midnight train to Georgia,'" she smiled as she walked back to the bar.

Gladys Knight? Midnight train to Georgia?

I should have known then I was about to be in for a hell of a ride.

I fumbled through the records and found the requested piece. There was a satisfying "shush" as the vinyl slid from the sleeve. The table started spinning and I float the needle over the rotating black disk, gingerly dropping it to the surface without so much as a hint of a skip. A proud smile beams across my face as Gladys starts serenading. A good start. And so, like the record, the night spun on.

Anna made her way back to the booth. She nimbly balanced a tray laden with full glasses of draft. "Turn it up!"

I obliged and within seconds Anna rivaled the dulcet tones of Miss Knight, crooning in perfect sequence with the turn table. It was hard to determine who was doing the actual singing. I remained transfixed as Anna worked her way up and down

the aisle, balancing that tray over her head with what had to be two dozen filled-to-the-brim drafts. She never lost a drop.

From that moment on, sometime after 8 o'clock every night (not 8:15), I made sure that song played a few times each night I worked. I wasn't the only one that fell under her spell as she flowed right along with the music, making the tune her own. No matter who was in attendance, the entire room came alive when she started singing. Her talent wasn't limited a "pip," though, truth be told. She could induce similar effects with Diana Ross, Gloria Gaynor, Donna Summers, and so many others forgotten as life's inconsequential details have forced them from memory.

That first night, however, the spell broke as the tune ended and I scrambled to find some other familiar tune to fill the silence in the room. There were hundreds of records, but I stared at their covers hopelessly as the room started getting busier. And that meant, I was getting busier.

Anne would periodically drop by the booth giving me Heinekens I didn't order and tiny slips of paper for the D.J. Chap. That's me, I thought.

What the hell did Anna expect me to do with these pieces of paper?

She pointed to tables. "They bought you a drink and want that song."

She gestured to the paper in my hand. "Robbie says you like this Heineken's"

She dropped two off on the ledge behind me and off she went. The night had a hell of a learning curve. I scrambled to play every request I was given. Finally, I decided I would draw up a tally as to what songs seemed to be liked. By midnight, I

had gone from a set of five tried-and-trues to around a dozen tunes that kept the dance floor thumping.

The bass made the growing collection of Heineken bottles behind me. There was easily a dozen, and about 1:30 a.m., I realized I was three-quarters in the bag. I had to slow it down. After a set of six or seven tunes, I shifted the music to slower numbers. But you can't please all the people all the time, and it pissed off some patrons who wanted to stay on the floor all night. People on the dance floor didn't buy drinks, though. I had to help Anna and the rest of the wait staff out. My bladder appreciated the brief respites, too. With all the free beer, nature called.

Just next to the DJ booth was the hall to the bathrooms. I only had three mins between a Gladys Knight number to scoot, go about my business, and get back to the next song cued and ready. I never skipped a tune. Last call was at 2 a.m. The music played until 2:30 sharp when the glitter ball died, and the lights came on.

I quickly settled into the routine of the club. The bar staff would be busy shutting down and cleaning up, and I'd get all the vinyl back in the sleeves. It was close to 3 a.m. and I was getting ready to leave when Robbie called out to me.

"Newfie! You're forgetting something."

My mind was a little fuzzy from all the beer, but I quickly ran through a mental checklist. The records were put away. I powered down the turntables. The disco ball wasn't spinning. What had I forgotten?

"Your pay," Robbie clears up the obvious confusion on my face. He passes me fifty dollars. "Heinz said pay you the regular. That's a hundred for Monday and Tuesday. Cash."

Considering at the time the minimum wage in Newfoundland was only \$1.40 an hour before the government took their cut, \$50.00 was a fortune.

“You’ve still got three paid beers here,” Anna piped. “Sit and drink with us.”

Jesus, I thought. I’ve already had over a dozen.

“Where do you live?” Robbie asks.

“That’s complicated,” I sighed. “I sort of don’t live anywhere. The guy I came up with had a camper van parked in a parking lot two blocks up. He said I could stay there for a week since he had moved in an apartment with someone. There wasn’t much propane in the tank, so I tried not to turn up the heat except to use the gas stove top. I’d only heat up a package of tomato soup I got at the supermarket just down the street.”

Tomato soup may not sound like much, but back then, I made it haute cuisine. The supermarket had a special—five packs for a dollar. I bought ten packs, a loaf of bread, and a can of instant chocolate Quik to make cocoa. I boiled the kettle so I could wash with water that wasn’t sub-zero and, come most mornings, I would be out early so the movement would heat me up. It was February and -10 degrees. Needless to say, I was not in a hurry to get back to my chilly huddle in the parking lot, so I joined them that night and many more to follow.

After two weeks of spinning vinyl, Robbie pulled me aside. “Heinz wants to see you in the dining room. Tomorrow at 10 a.m.”

Holy shit! It was already 3 a.m.!

“I’d better head back to my huddle.” Waddle might have been a more appropriate word as I had already had at more than a dozen Heineken thanks to the numerous requests. I stumbled back to the parking lot. I had been warned not to turn on any lights. If they thought anyone was sleeping in in the huddle,

they would force the owner to move off the lot. I honoured his request as it was my only refuge.

My paltry \$18.00 had grown to \$118.00. I had become accustomed to the tomato soup and the hot chocolate, so food didn't put any immense strain on my budget. Besides, I had needed to save enough to get a real room. Everywhere I had inquired wanted a month's rent up front plus a damage deposit. With the funds I'd managed to save, I had planned to continue the hunt that day, but I hesitated. Robbie's announcement gave me pause for thought.

What if Heinz was letting me go?

The thought made me shudder. I might need every cent, so room hunting would have to wait. Seven bleary-eyed hours later, I found my way to the rear entrance of the kitchen— a door clearly marked "Staff Only." The pace on the other side was busy.

"I'm here to see Heinz," I mentioned to the cook who was busy sliding pans of food into the immense oven. Normally, I would have welcomed the wave of heat, but nerves already had me sweating.

"He just went upstairs. He'll be down soon." The cook was a nice guy, chatting away as he continued slinging trays in and out of the four ovens, each big enough to hold a moose.

"So, you're Newfie," he says. "Well, today is corned beef and cabbage day."

"Really?" I responded, trying to keep the obvious excitement in my voice under wraps. Corned beef and cabbage was a Newfoundland tradition. Families usually served it up on a Sunday. Today was Wednesday. I didn't care. A warm feeling come over me.

“Do you do turnip?” I dared.

“Absolutely,” he replied. “Boiled potato, turnip, carrot, cabbage and beef. All in one pot!”

Just like mom, I thought.

The smell of the cooking sort of made me miss the warmth of home, and I waxed melancholy with him how she would often serve a chicken or beef baked with gravy, with a little mashed turnip and sweet mustard pickles. At Christmas she got fancy and serve a turkey.

As my mind slowly slipped back to those warmer moments, Heinz gusted in with a bellow, chilling me to the core.

“Newfie! Over here!” I followed him to his office where he ordered me to sit. He quickly got to business. No small chat.

“Bar sales are up on your nights. I told Robbie you play Wednesday and Thursday as well.”

Two hundred a week, I thought. That’s great!

“I also need a helper in the galley kitchen in the dining room. I run a lean kitchen zero

waste,” he barks. I learned the restaurant was only part of the business. He also catered huge outside events as well.

“I need someone 11 to 7. Do you want it? Have you worked a kitchen before?”

“Yes,” I tell him. “When I was fifteen.”

“Tell me about it,” he said as he picked up the phone and orders coffee for the two of us.

When I was fifteen, I had a take-out. I had quit school in eighth grade and found this takeout next to a four-bay car wash. Shrewd businessman that I was, I made a deal to rent the restaurant for only fifty dollars a month. However, I had to take care of the self-serve car wash as part of the deal. With

the help of some friends, I cleaned the place up and started serving up fish, chips, chicken, chips, burgers, and milk shakes.

“What happened?” Heinz asked in curiosity. “Why did you close? No business?”

I shook my head. “No. Business was good. One night, however, I had precooked two 50-lb. sacks of potatoes for next day. I left the chip trays full and hanging over the fryers over the hot oil. When I arrived the next day, the chip trays were empty. Not a chip in sight. I called my friends who had helped me the previous evening to make sure I had actually cooked them. They assured me I did. I called my father.

“I think I had a break in.” I told him about the fries.

“Anything else missing? Look around.”

I did and told him everything else looked to be in its proper place.

“I’ll come up,” he said. When he arrived, he asked me to help him move the fryers from the wall.

“Yep. You were robbed, all right.”

Rats.

No, really. Rats.

“You’ve got rats. Big rats. Just look.” He pointed. There were several holes. Big holes. These rats had to be bigger than cats!

Turns out, the restaurant backed into a stream, and there was a bar next door with lots of garbage—a rodent’s paradise.

“Kevin,” my dad advised. “Pack up. You can’t deal with this.”

He wasn’t wrong. I’d rather look a polar bear in the eyes than a rat. Shivers radiated from my head to my toes.

“Shutter down,” he said.

I looked Heinz directly in the eye and finished my story. “And I did. Right that minute and never went back.”

Dobson with the funny hair came in with the coffee.

Heinz looked at him. "Dobson, do you still rent rooms at your place?"

"Yes."

"How much do you charge for rent?"

"Fifty dollars per week."

Heinz jabbed a thumb at me. "Newfie here needs a room today."

Well, for the next two weeks I stayed at Dobson's. I worked the 11 to 7 shift in the kitchen, made a quick change and jogged up the stairs to the DJ booth.

After only three short weeks, Robbie had more news. "Kevin, Heinz wants you to play Friday Saturday as well. It seems that Monday to Thursday is showing better bar sales than Friday and Saturday."

I made a mental note to thank Anna for her advice that very first night.

Don't let them intimidate you.

When I'd switch the music from thump-thump to something more mellow I'd still get a few boos, but they would go back to their tables and Anna and her crew could peddle their drinks.

By now I was drinking every night, working sixteen-plus hours every day except Sunday, and realized I needed to get away from this or my own midnight train would be pulling into the station a hell of a lot sooner than I wanted.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Volkswagen Hippie Bus

Rainy days and Mondays. Despite what Karen Carpenter may have crooned that 1971 chart-topper, I wasn't going to let it get me down. That Monday morning, I decided to visit the Employment Office and search for a job that might be a better fit—or at least involve a lot less drinking! I arrived at the office, took my number, and dutifully waited for my spot to come up in the queue.

When my number was finally called, I walked to the desk answered all the questions the lady behind the desk posed to me. After dotting all the proverbial I's and crossing the necessary T's, she asked if I had ever considered taking training courses. She inquired as to my level of education. I informed her I had completed Grade 8 in school but had also passed the Grade 11 equivalency exam. This was in an era before Grade 12 had been developed.

"Courses start next Monday," she began. "But if you make a decision now, I can get you accepted. Your tuition will be paid, and you will receive \$120 every week for the duration of the 10-month course.

Someone was going to pay me to go to school? Really?

She listed my choices. Welding or hairstylist. Neither option particularly appealed to me, but as she offered no other selection, I gave them both considered thought. I ruled out welding. I couldn't stand the concept of wearing a hat all day, especially one with just a tiny window for vision.

"Hairstyling," I stated confidently.

"Wonderful," the lady declared. "Come back on Thursday, and I will have all the forms for you to sign so you will get your cheque allowance two weeks from Monday."

Now came the hard part. I had to tell Heinz I couldn't work

the kitchen position anymore and could only give a week's notice. I'd go ahead and keep the DJ gig—or so I thought. It wouldn't be so bad. I would get home at 3 a.m. if I didn't stay after closing. I could still bring in the big money and be up bright-eyed and bushy-tailed for my new training at 9 a.m. A decent night's sleep came a hell of a lot easier these days since I now had my own one-bedroom apartment. I had moved out of Dobson's single room more than a year earlier.

Well, after just four weeks of juggling the DJ job and my classes, I realized the inherent flaw in my brilliant plan. The drinking hadn't stopped. If it didn't though, I realized, I would. I finally had to quit spinning other people's music and march to the beat of my own drummer. I found a DJ to take over my spot so that Heinz wasn't left high and dry. It was with some sadness I left the music, the booze, and the excitement for a new beginning.

Hairstyling might not have been my obvious choice for employment, but so far, it was proving to be a profitable one. I had only been in school four of the ten months before the owner had me working in one of his many shops. The good thing about that was it afforded me the opportunity to earn tips totaling the same amount of my weekly allowance. Back in 1976, that was music to my ears.

One Friday night, I visited a bar frequented by the staff at the salon. After about ten Heineken's—which, I admit, I continued to indulge in as my budget allowed—one of the girls mentions her Saturday routine, which included a hobby which absolutely fascinated me.

Parachuting.

"Really?" I asked with amazement.

She nodded. “Oh, yes! I go every Saturday. I do four to five jumps depending how many people are there. Usually, there’s three to five brave souls.”

Braves souls, indeed. You had to be, I thought, to jump out of a perfectly good airplane.

Or just emboldened by strong German beer.

“It’s only \$45.00, and they’ll show you everything,” she urged.

I shook my head eagerly. It was set. She would pick me up in the morning.

Morning came much sooner than I expected after and after twelve to thirteen beers and an entire pack of Camels Plain. I didn’t need an airplane to see clouds—my head was in a down-right fog. However, I remained somewhat enthusiastic about what lay before me. Maybe not as much as the night before but still enthused. I threw some water on my face to clear my head and readily embarked on my latest adventure.

We got to the airport and the meeting point where we were instructed to unfold and refold our parachute. I think the instructor sensed my lack of confidence as I handled the thin, slippery fabric that was supposed to be strong enough to keep me from winding up as on oil slick on the tarmac.

“You’ll have two chutes,” he explained. “One that will open automatically when you leave the plane and another as a back-up in case the main does not open.”

Great plan.

“And what happens if that one does not open?”

He mumbled something incoherent as he walked away.

“Jesus,” I muttered as I looked up to the wide expanse of blue sky. “Save me a seat up there, ‘cause here I come.”

Of course, I grinned half-heartedly, if the goddamned thing

didn't open, there was just as much a chance I was going right to the bottom in a blaze of glory.

Four others joined me in the plane, along with the instructor and our pilot. I held on to the contents of my stomach as the plane lifted its wheels from the tarmac—not much there besides the Heinekens—and I waited for my life to start flashing before my eyes. After all, they say that's what happens, right? Hardly a minute had passed—at least that's what it felt like—and the fuselage door opens. Wind howled through the cabin. I can hardly hear the instructor as he orders us from the plane, one by one, with a hearty shoulder slap. My turn arrives. I froze.

"I will give you a push," he suggests.

At that moment, I felt like Linda Blair's stand-in. In a move straight from *The Exorcist*, my head turned round and looked straight at him. I even sounded like a man possessed as the guttural words fell from my lips.

"You push me out this door, you're coming with me."

He did not have a chute. His wide-eyed horror let me know he took me seriously. He let me hitch a ride in the plane back to the base where I knew my more adventurous companion, and my only ride back to the city, would be another three hours. I needed to find something else to fill my time.

Next to the skydiving office there was a big sign.

GET YOUR PILOT'S LICENSE HERE.

The thought intrigued me. It seemed like a fool's errand to jump from a perfectly good airplane, but to pilot one? That sounded like a much more reasonable enterprise.

In less than ten minutes, I was sitting next to the flight in-

structor. He showed me the basics: how to take the sling off the propeller; how to start the engine; and how to radio the tower for takeoff clearance. This time, the nervous quiver in my stomach was a welcome excitement and not an icy dread. Still, I sat on the runway in my small plane, dwarfed by a nearby big jet. At the time, Halifax airport only had one runway.

“We have to wait two minutes after the jet takes off. There will be too much wake.”

I took his advice and soon lifted into a dream. Up, up, and away, the small plane lofted into the sky, making a wide circle before coming in for touch down. I was thrilled—enough to pursue the ten hours required dual flight time, the ten hours classroom instruction, and one hour flight time with license—twenty-one hours total. Thirteen Saturdays later, I was a fully licensed pilot, and I was ready to spread my wings.

After a year of cutting hair, I realized I wanted to continue my trek from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It wasn't going to be in a plane, though. My transport was a little more terrestrial—the old Volkswagen bus which needed the occasional push to get going or a strategic park on a hill to pop the clutch. After a flea market sale to get rid of the excess and pick up some pocket change, my friend Danny and I set off to continue the 7,000-kilometre cross country trek. We traveled through Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, with a five-day layover in Toronto. While in Toronto, I paid a visit to my older brother Freddy whom I had not seen or spoken to for over three years. In our last conversation, he had made a valiant effort to convince me to stay.

“There's lots of work here. You don't need to drive all that way in that tin can. You can stay with me.”

The offer was tempting—steady work, a comfortable bed and a roof over my head—but the siren call of my dream to travel from one end of the country to the other sounded louder, and I had hit the road. Now, however, passing through Toronto, I decided to drop in on him. I'm glad I did.

Cash was getting low, so I decided to invest the little money I had left buying live lobsters from Cape Breton and set up roadside. Back then, food trucks weren't yet a thing, but I have always been a man before my time. I already had the Coleman stove. I just needed a big pot. I ordered twelve dozen of the crustaceans—144 lobsters—with shipping costs of \$2.50 each. I priced the lobsters at \$7.50. The venture wasn't without some risk. The \$350 investment was a gamble since I only had \$500 to my name. But with a little entrepreneurial gusto, I turned that \$350 investment into \$1050, then repeated the process until I had made \$2000 and cleaned the stove and pot of the smell of lobsters. Even though we were done selling the red shellfish, we kept the big pot as a storage container. Who knew? Maybe we could even cook up a big traditional Newfoundland boiled dinner if we could find the salt meat.

Before the journey continued, my younger brother Albert decided he wanted to join us. After some deliberation—the VW was a tight enough squeeze for two of us most nights—but we agreed if he brought his own pup tent and sleeping bag which he would set up each night next to the bus.

Wallet and the VW tank filled, I revved up the engine. Danny and Albert gave me a push. I popped the clutch and off we headed, a merry trio chugging and putting along, music blaring.

* * * * *

Ontario is a big province and took the better part of two weeks to drive through with interesting stops along the way. We continued on to Manitoba, through Saskatchewan, and arrived in Alberta where we arrived with only twenty dollars and no gas. We had to seek work right away.

As luck would have it, Calgary was booming. As much as I did not want to cut hair anymore, I knew it was my best option for the time being. I passed a shop in a prime location downtown. The lobby was packed, all lined up waiting to be clipped. I asked the receptionist if I could speak to the manager.

From the stern set of his jaw as he swaggered over, he likely assumed I wished to make a complaint. It took me less than two seconds to set him straight.

“Give me a chair and a pair of scissors, and I can show you how I can help satisfy your customers quickly and make you more money in the process.”

His eyebrows twitched in consideration for about thirty seconds before he pointed to a chair and said, “Go for it.”

Everything I needed was setup at the station and ready. Ten minutes later, I had a happy customer and a five-dollar tip. For the next four hours, that was the pattern—back to the waiting room for a new customer and in ten minutes another happy face and another tip. By the end of the day, I had enough money from tips so that the three of us could have a good feed. Moreover, the “audition” was a success. The manager told me I was hired.

“You’ll get fifty percent of what you bring in.”

“Sounds good,” I replied. “I’m staying in an RV park about 50 kilometres away. I’ll need to save to get a proper apartment downtown.”

“Start with this,” he replied and handed me a stack of cash. “Here’s \$120—your earnings for the day—and here is a \$300 advance.”

My eyes widened. “You had better be here tomorrow at 9 a.m.”

Cheered by my good fortune, I went back to the RV park to meet up with Danny and Albert. They sat limp on a bench, exhausted. They had found jobs landscaping. The work was enjoyable but exhausting and early. They had to be there the next day, promptly at 8 a.m.

“Well, boys,” I began, eager to share my bounty, “there’s no boxed macaroni and cheese on the menu tonight.”

I continued before their faces registered too much dismay. “We’re having pork chops, fried onions, potatoes, mushy peas and gravy. Break out the Coleman stove!”

I set down my sack of goodies and we cooked it all right there next to the open fire pit while sipping on some refreshing, ice-cold beers. We made plans to search for an apartment next days after work. So, for a while at least, we called Calgary home.

After several months, we decided to move on from Calgary to a small town called Grand Prairie—population seven thousand. Within months of our arrival, Grand Prairie became an oil boom town that more than doubled in population. It was also a hub for smaller towns, some nearly seventy miles away, and the supply town to the many drill rigs close by—over one hundred of them.

Accommodations were not easy to find . . . and expensive. Once again, we needed money. Albert got a job at a car dealership. Danny found employment at a building supply house. As for me? I stuck with a skill that always proved profitable—

cutting hair. Wallets filling, it was time to put a roof over our heads. We settled on a 35-foot RV trailer. The trailer slept six and had a full-sized bathroom and kitchen. We made a deal with a local farmer who charged us \$3.00 per day to park on his property with an additional \$30.00 set up fee. He piled bales of hay around the trailer to act as insulation against the bitter Canadian winter. It was thirty below and as windy as hell.

If personal business required more than a few minutes in the toilet, we had to go to the shower houses that housed separate toilets. The trailer's facilities could handle liquid waste—the tank was insulated and could last a few weeks without any type of service. Proper planning was advisable to avoid those midnight trips to the shower houses. The unfriendly, biting cold gnawed down to your bones if you had to leave the trailer in the early hours in the morning. It was a process to bundle up for the freezing cold, layer upon layer until you looked like a matzo ball with feet—but it was a necessary evil. As soon as you stepped outside, it was like cuddling up to an iceberg floating in the North Atlantic. Brr!

I welcomed the sun every morning, mostly for any hint of warmth it offered. I trudged through the ice and snow to the hair salon where I worked. A real estate office sat next door. Haircutting was reliable and it paid the bills but, always on the lookout for new opportunities, I decided to drop in to learn what it took to be a real estate agent. The broker explained how I needed to study and sit for a licensing exam.

"I'd be happy to assist you, if you'd like," he said.

"I'd appreciate that," I replied.

I studied hard and absorbed everything the broker taught me. Finally, I was ready to fly to Edmonton to take the exam.

One very-chewed pencil eraser later, I completed the exam. I could have gnawed through a dozen yellow Ticonderogas waiting for the results. A full week later, the envelope arrived. With sweaty hands, I opened it and a smile broke across my face. I passed.

I had no intention of giving up my job at the salon. I was making \$500 per week plus \$150 in tips. Back in 1978, that was good money, but I had two days off each week. Those days, I would devote to my newly minted real estate license. My intention was to maintain a desk at the office next door, but the broker, who had been so helpful in helping me prepare for the exam, wanted me to work there full-time—with no salary guarantee. I gulp. Those weren't terms I was willing to accept. I began to second-guess my decision to expand my horizons. Luckily, the thing about horizons? You could always find a rising sun.

My “sun” was named Kate. Kate was the owner of the salon where I worked. Kate informed me she was moving to a place called 100 Mile House. She was selling her salon.

“If you’re interested in taking over, I think we can work out a deal,” she offered.

I considered it. The offer was sound. It was a busy shop and saw a regular, steady profit. Still, I hesitated. My plans did not include staying in the salon business—owner, or no. Pressed for honesty, I would have to admit I constantly fell back into it simply because it was the easiest and most expedient way to get much needed funds to survive and live just a little.

“Thank you, Kate, but I don’t think owning a salon is in the cards just now.”

Instead, I decided to follow Kate’s lead and headed on to

100 Mile House, a small town in the B.C. Caribou. Real estate was where the real money was at, and there was a big real estate development complete with golf courses, stables, and other rich opportunities. The move allowed me to get closer to the Pacific and complete what I set out to do—to travel from one end of the country to the other. The Volkswagen had given up the ghost in Calgary. It still held some value, and I sold it for parts—enough to invest in a Pinto wagon and keep moving.

We put the Pinto in gear and got on the road. Unlike the VW, Kate wasn't quite ready to give up the ghost.

"Find a place to set up a salon, and I will go in with you for half."

Her revised offer was a little more palatable. Owning a salon entirely on my own would have held me down—preventing me from completing my quest. I raised an interested eyebrow. Having a partner to shoulder the responsibility? That meant someone would be there to take over if that siren song continued to call me to the road.

"Done," I agreed.

The storefront I found sat on the main drag next to a church that looked more like an office building—the Church of Scientology. Representatives kept foisting books on me and pressed me to join. As a "recovering Catholic," it felt suspiciously like an invitation for another brain washing. Politely, I kept making excuses and declined. Good fences make good neighbors, and all.

When I wasn't busy fending off the neighbors, I was expanding. I didn't stop at one salon location. Not only had Kate and I set up the 100 Mile shop, but we had also ventured to establish a second one in Williams Lake, sixty miles away in a

busy shopping center. I joined the hair styling elite by traveling to England and received training from Vidal Sassoon. Now, I could charge \$25.00 or more. Appointments were booked every fifteen minutes, and on a Saturday, I would make \$1000 on my own. I worked non-stop from opening to close. My wallet grew bigger while the call of the open road grew smaller. Still, on nights when I managed to find a still moment to kick back with a beer in hand, I could still hear its faint voice drifting on the wind, reminding me that ribbon of highway still waited.

CHAPTER SIX

The Goat and the Red Camaro

When a French-Canadian fur trader dropped his axe into a remote Cariboo lake while ice fishing, he likely never suspected that he was making history. After his misfortune, locals dubbed the serene body of glassy water, now an idyllic vacation spot along British Columbia's Highway 97, Lac La Hache. "The Lake of the Axe" has remained the colorful moniker of this beautiful lakeshore destination since.

Quaint shops extended for thirty miles in either direction along a rough gravel road extensively traveled by logging trucks—in retrospect, probably not the best surface for a mint condition, cherry red 1978 Camaro. As the loose rocks crunched under my radials, I could almost imagine the caravans of wagons carrying fortune-seekers traveling along the Cariboo Wagon Road. As one of the rocks pinged the pristine paint job, I could also imagine the damage being caused. I cringed.

The Camaro held the distinct honor of being my very first right-out-of-the-showroom car. I luxuriated in the warm smell of leather, the cycling roar and purr of the 302 V8 engine, and the pulse-pounding beats of the stereo you could feel thrumming in your gut. I savored my time tooling along long ribbons of highway in my flashy chariot—until an 18-wheeler piled high with fresh cut logs en route to the mills would pass and leave me blinded in billowing clouds of snow.

Time for a pit stop.

I thought I'd set up shop in the area for a while. I wanted someplace warm and cozy to live while I went about cutting hair for my day job. I found a log cabin that fit the bill. It sat just feet from a lake. Lots of glass let in beams of natural light. The high cathedral ceilings with wooden rafters soared above

the stone floor. You could see the winter snow seeping in between the stacked logs that formed the walls, but with the firewood stacked high next to the open pit fireplace, it was a cozy refuge from Canadian winter and the bitter winds that blew in off the lake.

A lodge rested at the end of the lake. It rented motorboats and canoes and kayaks, though in the chill of winter, they weren't really in high demand. Instead, when the weather turned frigid, they rented huts scattered around the lake surface no bigger than outhouses for ice fishing. Inside each of them, you could find a tiny gas stove with a kettle and all the makings for coffee, tea, or chocolate. Of course, it wouldn't be fishing without fishing lines, bait—and ice!

The cold had a way of seeping into your very bones. But you almost forgot about the cold when you had a three-pound lake trout on your hook. The thrill of the catch sent a surge of excitement through you, cold hands be damned. For me, the enterprise was more for sport than anything else. More often than not, I'd send my catch back into the hole with a splash and sit back to warm my cold hands on a steaming tin cup of tea.

There was more to do on the ice than fish, however. The main event was the World Championship Outhouse Races. Teams would come together to construct moveable outhouses, often of plywood or metal, and race them across the frozen water. A close examination of the rules revealed that toilet paper and reading material must be included. First Prize \$10,000. What a gas—no pun intended. At the end of the outhouse event, they had a stock car race right on the 10-mile stretch of ice. As the sun dipped below the horizon and temperatures dipped even further, it was nice to sit by the windows of our

cabin with the fire roaring.

But outhouse races and ice fishing weren't going to pay the bills. Scissors in hand, I quickly got to work and gathered a roster of regular customers. One returning patron struck me as particularly interesting. She would come by, like clockwork, every four to five weeks. Tall and attractive, with short white buzzed hair, she would swan in with a full-length white fur coat. She kept it wrapped casually around her, and it flowed along with her graceful movements. It almost seemed a part of her. Whenever she would come by, I would slot an hour or more to spend with her, but I enjoyed the time and attention almost as much as her. She always laid a twenty-dollar tip on my counter before she left but, to be honest, I would have been happy to provide the service for free. Listening to her riveting stories were payment enough.

Her husband was a fur trapper who died young leaving her to support herself and her kids. Unusually, she maintained his license and continued trapping. The family maintained a camp for the purpose. On one of her visits to the salon, I noticed she did not seem to be her attractive, pleasant self. Then, she told me why.

Her older son had come up to the camp with a few friends to spend a weekend. The camp was rustic, to put it mildly, and did not have indoor plumbing. Instead, it had an outhouse like many of the camps in the area. Tacked to the exterior back wall of the outhouse was a dart target—concentric rings and a center bulls-eye—they would sometimes use for shooting practice. On this particular weekend, my client's son heard the call of nature and employed the outhouse for its traditional purpose. Then came the shocker—his friends chose that particular moment

to hone their shooting skills not knowing he was inside taking care of business. There was no danger of constipation that day!

I was in the middle of cutting when my body began to quake with laughter. I could not control myself. Tears streamed down my cheeks before my breath caught in my throat. I looked up in horror, trying to apologize for my callousness, but she is laughing right along with me. The apologies still flowed, but so did the laughter.

“Kevin, thank you. Up until now, I have not even been able to smile let alone laugh. I have to thank you. I knew coming here today was the right thing to do.”

Many haircuts and delightful conversations later, I had dollars in the bank and monthly payments up to date. I decided to buy a little real estate. On a country lane there was a beautiful ten-acre meadow directly across from a pristine lake. The property had about 800 feet frontage with opportunities to cut it into four large lots. It had a nice grade which the adjoining parcel did not. That parcel was less enticing—a valley filled with a swampy bog. Cows grazed in the muck right up to their udders.

I called the agent for the meadowland. He met me right away—an older chap who wrote up the offer right then and there.

“Ten thousand total with only two thousand down and it’s yours.”

And seven days later, when all the paperwork was signed, it was.

Out in the country, you didn’t need a permit if what you put on the property wasn’t permanent. So, three weeks later there was a 60-foot trailer with all windows facing the lake and an

artesian well being drilled. I felt proud to be a landowner and gazed over my homestead. My moment of pride was shattered by a disgruntled, angry shout.

“Get off my land!” An angry farmer stomped toward me. I half-expected him to skewer me with a pitchfork. I pulled out my paperwork and showed him the deed and survey.

“That’s not for this property,” he says. “Yours is next door.” He pointed to the swamp where the cows grazed in the bog.

Perplexed, I shook my head. “But the salesman walked this lot with me.”

The farmer’s mouth twitched. “What was this salesman’s name?”

As soon as I told him, he scoffed. “You’ve been had, boy. You’ve got twenty days to get this trailer off my property and stop drilling.”

That Camaro had never driven faster as I flew into town where I grabbed a phone book and looked through the yellow pages under lawyers. There, in bold letters was the name Crook.

Perfect, I thought. *A Crook to handle a crook.* I got an appointment the same day.

Sitting in his office, I watched him review all my paperwork.

“Can I ask where you got my name?” he asked, eyes roving over the details of the contract.

“Yellow pages. Your name stood out. I’m dealing with a crook so figured I needed a crook to help me deal with him.”

After looking at my photos and all the paperwork, he called the agent right there. He gave him 48 hours to reimburse me all I spent plus 10% and his fee delivered to his office, or he was going to file to have his license suspended for fraud. It did not even take 48 hours. The next day, I received a call that all had

been dealt with. The entire episode was a learning experience. Before I purchased any more real estate, I'd make sure I wasn't getting "bogged" down.

The next day, I set off to tell my friend Kate the good news. There was a rough gravel rock lane to her house, so I decided to leave my shiny red Camaro parked at the bottom of the lane. After a beer or two and some shared laughter over the whole fiasco, I headed back down the lane toward my pride and joy. I blinked incredulously and shook my head. *I'd only had two beers.*

I wasn't seeing things. Standing as proud as a peacock on the front bonnet of my beautiful, pristine Camaro was a goat. A bloody goat, looking straight at me!

"Meh! Meh!" it bleated.

It may as well have been an elephant in heels jumping up and down on my bonnet—the damage couldn't have been worse. I grabbed an old tree branch and gave it a smack. All the action did was encourage the hooved animal to come after me.

"Meh! Meh!"

At that moment, I just wished I still owned that bog. I'd drown the goat.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round

The road so far had been interesting—tripping the light fantastic as a DJ in a Halifax disco, getting a pilot's license, partnering in multiple businesses—but interesting wasn't satisfying. I was twenty-six, stuck in a profession I didn't want, and with experiences like my disastrous swampy, boggy udders real estate deal, I made the decision to move on. I traded in the red Camaro for a new GMC panel van. It was the perfect chariot for my next venture—driving from the Pacific to the Atlantic—coast to coast over seven thousand kilometres.

The plan was to drive straight through to Prince Edward Island—the only province I had not been—and to set up shop for the busy summer season. After that, the intent was to continue to Cape Breton then, ultimately, Newfoundland.

I sold my interest in the shops, the trailer and all its contents. With Danny on board as navigator, we headed east, the van filled to the brim with tools for my newest business plan: The Olde Tyme Photo Parlour. The venture called for us to set up in shopping centres across Atlantic Canada. People could dress up in vintage-looking costumes to be characters from bygone eras. We would use a period box camera and within minutes, we could revive such historic luminaries as Billy the Kid, Abraham Lincoln, or Pocahontas.

“Don't see history,” we planned to hawk. “Be history!”

After a seven-day drive across the country we arrived in Prince Edward Island and set up shop. It became readily apparent we had misjudged folks' interest in purchasing a piece of instant history. After the first ten days, business was bleak. We were strapped for cash. Maybe my bright idea wasn't so bright after all. But, as the man says, it all boils down to one thing . . . location, location, location.

We packed it in and headed to Cape Breton. We duplicated our Prince Edward Island setup, but this time in the new large shopping center, and held our breath.

Say cheese!

Customers queued up before we had even opened the door! For the next week, we made history . . . and a generous amount of money. Fourscore and three hundred and fifty-seven dollars later, the tide had turned.

The following week we rode that tide (and a ship) all the way to Newfoundland. After a few days of welcome rest and socializing, it was back to work. We opened our photo booth in an even larger shopping center and again, customers lined up giving us a steady stream of income for three weeks straight.

Business was great, but we still needed some sort of residence. While in Prince Edward Island, I had noticed a 72-passenger Bluebird school bus for sale. It had been converted to a camper—two huge bedrooms, a living room, a bathroom, and a kitchen with a stove, oven, and fridge. A veritable apartment on wheels! It would suit our travel plans to a “T,” I thought. We could pull up right next to the shopping center in each province we intended to visit without missing a beat.

Danny stayed behind in Newfoundland to operate the photo parlour, while I flew to Prince Edward Island to make a deal on the bus. Seeing it again, I knew it was kismet—it was just as unique and individual as me. The fare box was still mounted inside the door. I stuck the key into the ignition and gave it a smart turn. It started on the first click. I thanked the previous owner and an hour later, I was headed to the ferry from Prince Edward back to Newfoundland.

The ship to my island was a four-hour drive away. Once

I got to the ship, I had an overnight ship voyage followed by a ten-hour cross-island drive. As the wheels on the bus went round and round, putting mileage on the road, I started coughing. Clouds of smoke started to roll through the bus. I couldn't stop hacking, so I pulled over to fill up with gas and check things out. The bus sucked down almost as much oil as gas that went into the tank.

"That's your problem," the attendant said. "You're blowing oil. Somewhere you've got a leak and it's dropping oil on the hot engine. That's the cause of the smoke."

Great. Boggy udders came to mind.

"Better open all the windows," he suggested. I looked down the length of the bus. I counted fifteen on either side. "And leave the door open."

I had been so excited with my apartment on wheels, I hadn't bothered checking under the hood. I hadn't needed to—it started on the first click, and the clutch and the brakes worked. What else did I need?

Apparently, a lot. The bus was 25 years old with over 350,000 miles on the meter. In hindsight, I think the "apartment on wheels" was better suited to stay put. *Put out to a boggy pasture with those cows.*

It was clear she did not have many travel days left. Sure enough, I made it back home just before all hell broke loose. The smoke got worse. My eyes watered. The muffler fell off. Fortunately, my brother-in-law Joe was able to put a new one on. He followed me to a garage specializing in buses to get a proper inspection for plates. All I had was a 10-day transit sticker—long enough to get it home.

We traveled to the garage, Joe bringing up the rear, when all of a sudden, he lays on his horn and flashes his lights fran-

tically. What he didn't know was I was just as frantic inside the bus. The brakes had gone out! I pumped like crazy. I only had about 500 feet left of level road before the hill where the moving bus would pick up speed and certainly plunge me to a disastrous and twisted end!

I prepared to steer it into the ditch when, as abruptly as the brakes had failed, forward motion came to halt. Joe scrambled from his car.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

I nodded as I stepped from the bus, heart thudding against the inside of my chest. "I think so."

After I caught my breath, we rocked the wheels so it would not move. We called a tow. At the garage, the mechanic surveyed the damage and whistled long and low.

"You drove that from where?" he mumbled.

"Prince Edward Island."

"You came down Kelly's Mountain in Cape Breton with that?" he exclaimed.

"Well, yeah," I shrugged. "It's the only way to get to the ship home."

He took off his red cap and scratched his balding head. "Son, you must have nine lives."

After my older brother, Michael, sold the old clunker for me and got all my money back, I had to agree. I did seem to live a charmed life, which brings me back to the wildly successful photo parlour business.

Danny and I lined up appearances with this "happening and now" shopping center group. They wanted us to set up shop fronts in all their malls in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. We took the deal.

It was 1981, and the big news was the wedding between a kindergarten teacher and a crown prince—Lady Diana and Prince Charles. Of course, we capitalized on it. The company we sourced our costumes from was located in Santa Barbara California called Professor Bloodgood's: The Original Central Casting Costumes. They were taking orders for Lady Diana look-alike dresses, complete with hoop and head wear along with the prince's jacket complete with medals and sword. The price was steep, but my answer was a firm and resolute "yes." The nicest thing about their products was the ease of transition—the backless costumes slid over customers' street clothes quickly. That meant we could service more customers in a shorter amount of time, and that meant more money in our pockets.

We informed the shopping center the special costumes were en route, and their marketing department ran with it. They blasted it over the airwaves in every province. Driving to Halifax, you could hear a radio spot every ten minutes. You'd have thought we had the real thing. We looked at each other incredulously. Were we ready for this?

Hell, yeah.

When we arrived at Halifax Shopping Center, the parcel awaited us. The work was quite impressive. We were confident the costumes' debut would go off like gangbusters. We weren't wrong.

Forget storefronts. The next day we started setting up right in the center of the mall. Before noon, thirty odd souls had lined up for their chance to be a royal. Most customers we saw that day asked for the Diana wedding dress and the prince's jacket and sword. It wasn't all Earl Grey and scones. Some

Tennessee whiskey might have been more appropriate for the saloon girl and the gunslinger. We even had one man who opted to be a man of the cloth. That night, as we raised glasses to our sound business decision and our good fortune, a thought occurred to me.

I should have offered a glass of wine to the priest.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Hang Down Your Head, Tom Dooley

In the immortal words of The Kingston Trio, my life's theme seemed to be "keep a movin', a movin' on," and that's exactly what I did.

In what seemed like a blur, I moved from one career to another—hairstylist, to real estate, to photographer, and back again. But I finally got to retire my scissors and balanced my time between the photography business and what would turn out to be my life's calling. Real estate.

Educated from experiences with the bog and learned from my studies for the real estate exam, this time I tried a different tack. I became more of a hybrid, acting both as an agent and as a real estate developer. I parlayed my financial success from the photography business into the purchase of old cottages on the lake not far from the city. I would then flip them into comfortable, full-time retreats. With the advent of current television hots like *Flip It Like Disick* and *Flip or Flop*, it turns out I was truly a man ahead of my time.

My first such project was a small cottage—literally on the other side of the tracks. The lulling click-clack of the Newfoundland T'railway locomotive ran like clockwork over the train truss shadowing the small gully in front of the property. The gully fed into a large pond, Topsail Pond. Topsail Pond was the playground of rich, city folks who kept the country properties as an oasis away from the hustle and bustle of city life—a downsized Newfoundland answer to the Hamptons.

Though not situated on one of the prime posh spots around Topsail Pond, my investment had fabulous potential. I just needed to highlight the convenient connection from the gully to the pond . . . and maybe add a new kitchen, roof, bathroom, windows, spruce up the exterior, and throw a few ducks in the

water.

Now, I know why they call that show *Flip or Flop*! That's exactly what my stomach was doing!

"Just put one foot in front of the other, Kevin," I coached myself, and I did—one webbed foot. We started with 2 ducks. It seemed like the easiest task in front of me. Two ducks turned into a raft of eight, which quickly swelled to fifty pairs of paddling feet in the gully edging the property. Their chorus of quacks filled the air. I shook my head.

Sure hope I'm not a quack for trying this.

The ducks may have been able to paddle down the gully to the pond, but humans were going to need other transportation to ease the process—at least if I had any hope of selling this place. I needed a boat. A red speedboat rested on the shore next to a house on the opposite side of the tracks. A fortuitous FOR SALE sign had been tacked to its windscreen. I grinned widely.

Just one foot in front of the other.

I ventured across the way and gave a confident knock on the door. An older woman stepped out, eyeing me curiously.

"Yes?" she asked, a tone of intrusion tinging the edges of her voice.

I stood straight and polite—the vestiges of my Catholic upbringing not yet worn away by the rough road. "I'm here about the boat you have for sale, ma'am."

"Do you live on the pond?" she pressed, one thin eyebrow arching suspiciously over her piercing stare. "I haven't seen you before."

I beamed and pointed proudly to my treasure—a treasure indeed when you considered I only had to come up with \$7,000 of its \$10,000 purchase price. I had secured a free government

grant for first-time home buyers worth \$3000. My neighbor's suspicion only deepened. In her eyes, it would seem my "treasure" was nothing more than a run-down dump.

"Oh," she says. "You're from the other side of the tracks."

It took a moment to grab the gist of her comment, but right about then, the noon train thundered past my property, obliterating it from view. The train horn pealed like a klaxon. My heart sank.

Might as well be a death knell.

I swallowed my reservations and straightened my shoulders. Of all the dilapidated properties scattered on my side of the trestle, turns out mine was the only property connected to the pond by the gully. That gave me a competitive edge—and edge I meant to exploit to the full.

Emboldened by curiosity at my confidence, the woman had taken a step out onto her porch. She crossed her arms over her chest. "What are you planning to do with that boat?"

Mirroring her stance, I crossed my own arms. "I plan to tie it up in front of my property build a little wharf."

She scoffed. "That will never fit under the train truss"

She leaned back and sized me up, thought deep in the lines on her face. "What's your name, son?"

"Kevin. Kevin Nolan," I answered.

She uncrossed her arms and held out a hand in greeting. "I'm Mrs. Ashley. We have summered here for over forty years. I've got to admit that property has been nothing but an eyesore for most of those years."

I could see her calculating the rise in her own property value if someone were able to spruce the old cottage up. "An idyllic view of a quaint country retreat" certainly sounded bet-

ter than “in line with dilapidated fixer-upper.”

“The boat doesn’t have a motor.”

It didn’t matter to me. Truly, I just wanted the boat for window-dressing—to visually suggest the property’s possibilities to potential buyers. Worst case scenario, the windshield folded down. If I laid back, I could reach up and pull myself along by the truss girders and voilà! I’m on the best waterskiing pond near the city—a driveway to the summer fun highway.

“Ok,” she said, giving a quick head bob. “I’m asking \$700.00. What do you think of that?”

“Honestly,” I began, memories of my early negotiations with Skipper. “That’s a little more than what I have.”

I shoved my hands in my pocket and pulled out \$420.00 which I counted in front of her.

She appeared lost in thought for a moment, then snatched the money from my hand. “Okay, we have a deal, but you must move it today.”

She looked at the bills in her hand, peeled off a weathered \$20.00 and handed it back to me. “What kind of person would I be if took your last dollar young man?”

I smiled appreciatively and accepted the proffered bill.

“Besides,” she laughed and gestured. “You’re going to need every cent to get that dump looking presentable.”

I cast a wary look back at my latest venture and sighed. She wasn’t wrong, but I was determined I was up for the challenge. Many times over the course of the renovations, Mrs. Ashley would cross the tracks to feed the ducks We had put in the gully. It could have been out of sheer civic-mindedness, “love thy neighbor” and all that, but I suspect she had more mercenary intentions—like checking on my progress. After all, she had

just as much interest in my success with this little caper as I did. My endeavors often took her by welcome surprise.

“I can’t believe that boat fits boat fits under the trestle!” she exclaimed on one such visit.

One foot in front of the other.

It became my mantra over the next several months. When my labors were complete, the sign was planted on the lawn. Almost immediately, the gamble paid off. With a bit of negotiation, the very first viewing paid full price, a tidy \$70,000—seven times the original purchase price—not to mention a tidy little profit after expenses. I threw in the boat and the ducks gratis.

Not such a quack after all.

* * * * *

Back in the real estate business, confident with my recent success, I crossed the tracks where my sister Maureen owned a large parcel of land. I secured some friendly financing and made the bold foray into my first new development.

I parlayed the sale of an elegant, glass-front chalet that commanded stunning views of all the properties nestled along the pond’s edge into a succession of profitable sales—a dozen properties located mostly on the water along with an island on Three Island Pond. I may have bitten off a little more than I could chew with that last, but I was twenty-seven, fired up with my newfound success in the real-estate game, and I was hungry for more.

I should have brought a bigger fork.

CHAPTER NINE

The Land Rover, the Resort, and the Bankruptcy

They say in real estate you should never fall in love with a property—an adage well worth heeding I discovered as what I expected to be a long-term relationship became more of a one-night stand.

Around five miles from the city, on a serene semi-private pond surrounded by stately, shady trees, sat an old resort. In its heyday, before Newfoundland had joined Canada, it enjoyed a thriving business. Now, however, all that remained of the waterfront getaway were fourteen dilapidated cottages and a centrally located lodge that may have been considered grand back in the day, but now sat a bit saggy and forlorn. Still, it boasted floor to ceiling windows overlooking the pond and high ceilings inside, all finished in warm wood. The majestic stone fireplace begged for a pile of thick, crackling logs. I envisioned guests, chilled after a long day of winter sport on the pond, ensconced in comfortable chairs, warming themselves by the roaring fire as they shared stories of their adventures. I couldn't find a telephone fast enough.

I couldn't take on a project like this alone, so I cut a deal with the estate of Cassie Brown, the famous Newfoundland journalist and author who'd penned such delights as *Death on the Ice* and *The Wreck of the Forizel*. The estate agreed to assist with the financing. The much-needed restoration and expansion funding with the help from ACOA allowed for the restoration of all fourteen cottages, the construction of five additional cottages, all with wood burning fireplaces, two banquet rooms, an amusement park with waterslides, go-cart tracks, a jungle safari ride, and even a replica Gilligan's Island—not quite a three-hour tour, but accessible by pontoon boat—and ducks. . . lots of ducks. Things were moving along swimmingly

until they started getting fishy. Literally.

My province was dependent on the cod fishery industry. It was a long-standing enterprise, existing since 1497 when John Cabot claimed the surrounding waters for the King of England. He made the bold declaration when he dropped a simple bucket—no hook, no bait—over the side of his ship, *The Matthew*, and the cod practically jumped into it. Over the centuries, as people inhabited the island, an industry was formed—salting fish for England. I couldn't wait for my bank account to be as rich as the area's historical past.

Well, the resort took up so much of my time and funding, I spent little on more practical and proven real estate—a decision from which I would learn a hard lesson. Instead, I dumped everything I had into the resort and pared down expenses wherever I could. That included functional transportation.

I had this old Land Rover. I mean *really* old—older than Job. The drive leading into the resort and accessing the cottages was a good two thousand feet long. Whenever a big winter storm blew through—more often than not—the local guy with the big plow would come and clear the road. Sometimes, however, he wouldn't make it to the resort until late in the evening. That meant any long-term, off-season guests, who I depended on to keep the lights on until the summer season, could not get their cars out of the massive drifts. No problem, I thought. I'll fit a plow blade to the Land Rover. The theory was sound. The Land Rover engine . . . not so much. I considered myself lucky if it started even half the time.

I would climb aboard after a snowstorm, fingers crossed, and if the engine turned over, I thanked my lucky stars and rammed through the snow. Now, these were my drinking days.

Frequent hangovers coupled with the smell of gas fumes and an ill-advised three-pack-a-day Camel's Plain habit did not mix well with the repetitive reversing, dropping the plow, and ramming the snow to the end of the lane. It wasn't easy on the Land Rover, either.

When I started with the rig, she was old, but she was good. A few days later, a particularly vicious storm with high winds dumped mountains of the white stuff on the grounds. You could hardly see but a few feet outside the frosted windowpane.

"A landowner's work is never done," I grumbled, slaking the ache in my head with a few cups of strong, hot coffee before I ventured out into the bitter cold. I donned my hooded coat and one glove, reserving the other hand for my cigarette, grateful for the barest hint of heat it offered. I lumbered outside, looking like a short Sasquatch, hoping the Land Rover would choose to cooperate today. I closed my eyes, gritted my teeth, and turned the key while pumping the gas.

CHUG, CHUG, VAROOM!

The old girl started! I resisted the urge to cheer. I let her warm up for a few minutes before I pushed in the choke, lowered the plow, and readied to clear the snow. I tipped a freshly lit Camel between my lips, popped the clutch, dropped the plow blade, and away we went. After a couple of cuts through, I noticed I was getting little resistance.

Wow, she is driving so smooth.

I squinted past the flurries. Looking ahead, all I could see were tire tracks—no plow marks.

What the hell?

I got out and walked—more like slid—on the glazed snow to the front of the Land Rover to examine the plow . . . except

it wasn't there. Someone had stolen the plow blade! I should have taken that as a sign, a bad omen, and reeled it in then and there, but I didn't want to remember this as "the one that got away." Little did I realize I was the one on the hook.

Just as my rejuvenated resort started enjoying some success—the line snapped. The fishery collapsed and the economy along with it. Of course, I scoffed.

"That's not going to bother me," I thought. "The only fishing going on at the resort was by the ducks and they're not paying customers."

All too soon, however, a decided stink wafted on the air, and it wasn't the dying fish business. It was failure. As over ten percent of the island's residents packed up and left, so did the support of the banks. With no paying guests, I floundered like cod on the deck. I did everything in my power to turn things around, but I was taking on water. Ninety percent of all hotels went into bankruptcy. I tried to follow suit, but met with no success, and was left with no choice but to abandon ship.

CHAPTER TEN

The Range Rover, the High Seas, and the Moose

Talk about déjà vu.

Here I was again it seemed. No car. No house. No job. No money. But you can't keep a good man down. Almost immediately I set my sights on the next venture.

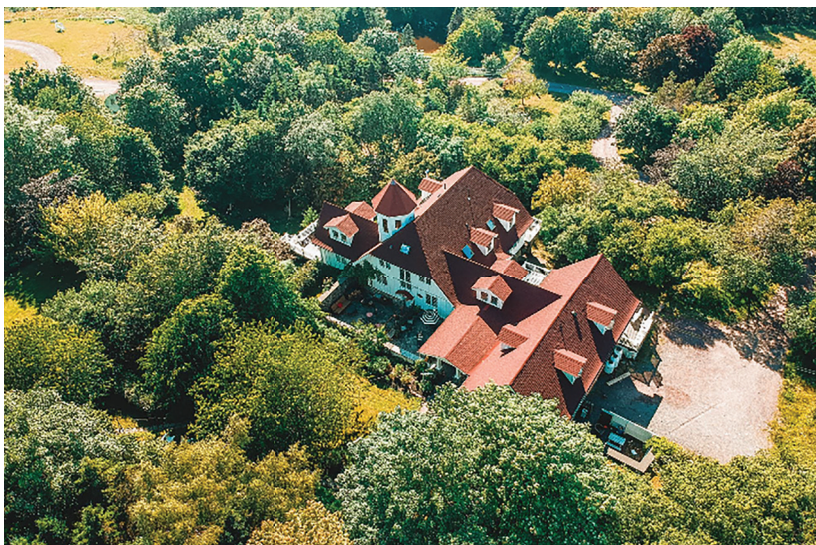
Still, I would be fibbing if I didn't admit that some small part of me longed for that chilly December night in 1958 when the hardest challenge in my life was figuring out how to tug Money around in that brilliantly red Radio Flyer wagon. Instead of waxing melancholy, I picked myself up and endeavored to solve my present "money" issue.

Along with my sister Maureen, we tried to start a business selling franchises from coast to coast. We formed an alliance with a company out of Manchester, England. In total, we spent a week across the pond, learning the company principles and procedures. Once we had the basics committed to memory, we put our future and a 40 foot container packed to the gills with patterned concrete moulds, colours and compounds on a cargo vessel bound for Newfoundland. Good thing I didn't place much stock in mythical seafaring monsters like the Kraken or the Leviathan.

I should have worn a life vest.

Turns out, the leviathan we would face was entirely land locked. As we began to initiate marketing efforts to attract local and national interest, we soon learned that getting the word out came with a monster of a price tag.

In those days, social media was not the advertising behemoth it is today. There was no Facebook. No Instagram. No influencers to take our message wide. And the only "tweets" came from the squawking seagulls circling overhead. I just hoped they weren't a feathered prediction of this venture round the drain.



Aerial View - Fields of Athenry

Back then, the only method to advertise was through local and national newspapers—and they didn't come cheap! What had started out as an easy task had suddenly turned into a complicated one that required pockets far deeper than ours. The decision was made to sell the products and distribution rights to a larger group and recover costs.

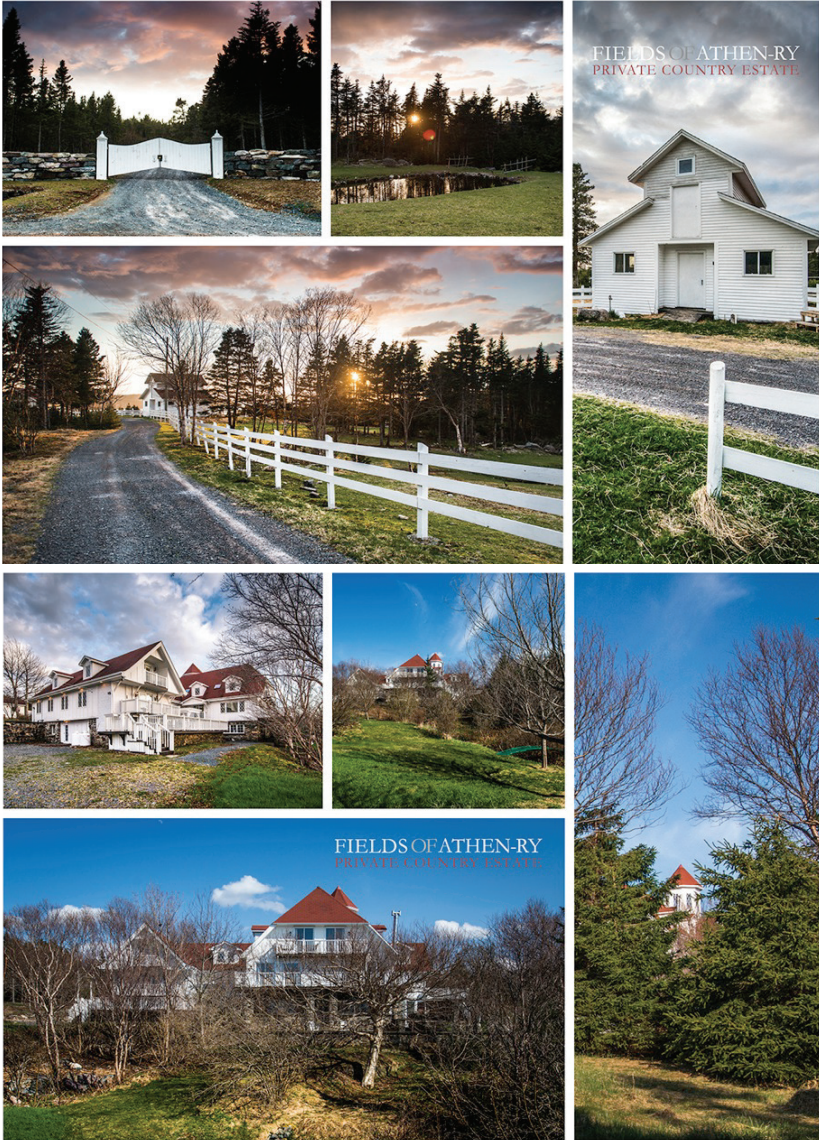
The thing about life is, it's filled with inevitable twists and turns. It's one great big road trip, and sometimes, yes, there's a few detours. But the detours can make the trip interesting—like a large turret manor house built by an Irish doctor for his Irish bride.

A few more years had passed and I put a few more miles on the old odometer. I decided to dip my toe into the real estate market again, this time partnering with my friend Robert. An interesting, but little touted property came to our attention—a

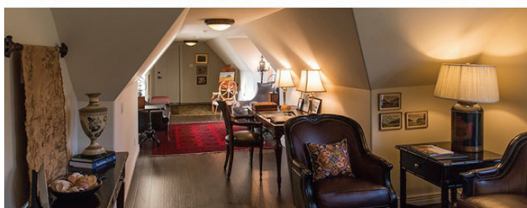
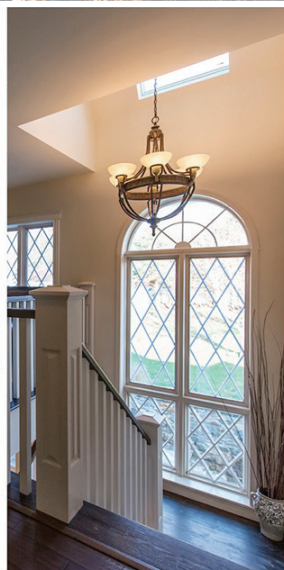
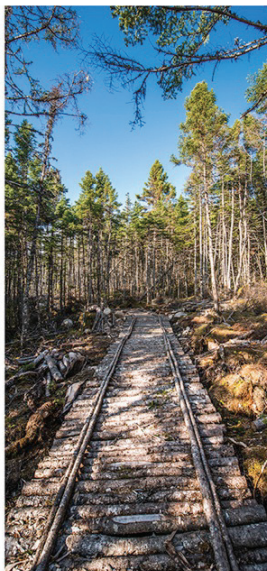
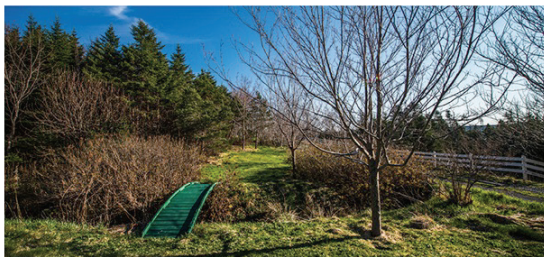
spacious ocean front manor house surrounded by over 100
acres of cultivated English gardens and rolling golden meadows.
Perfect.

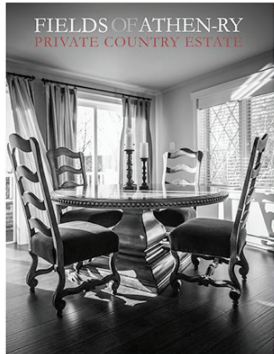
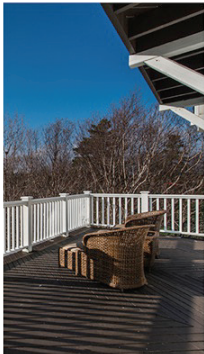
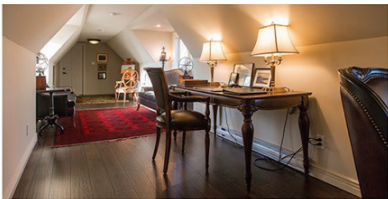


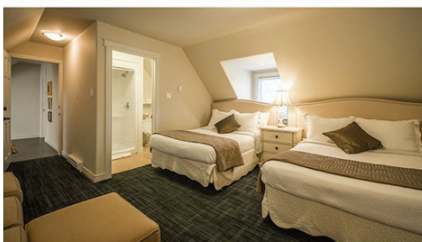
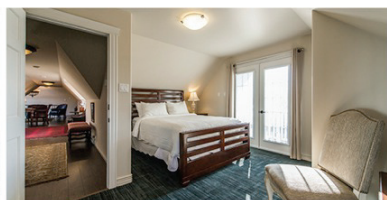
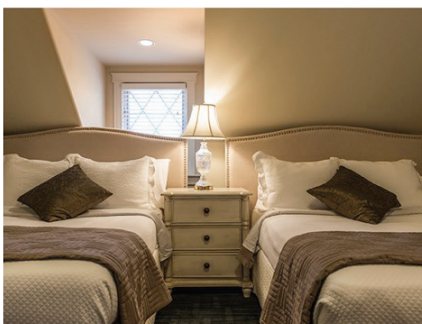
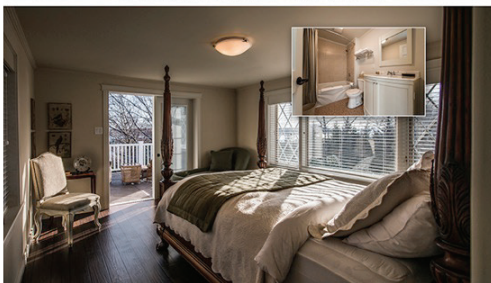
A DRIVE IN TIME



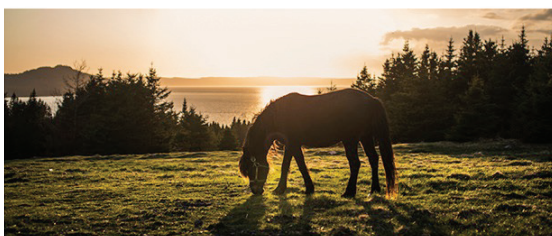
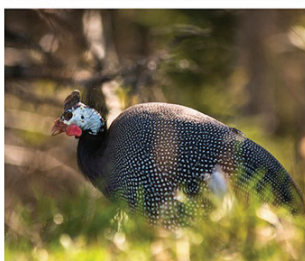
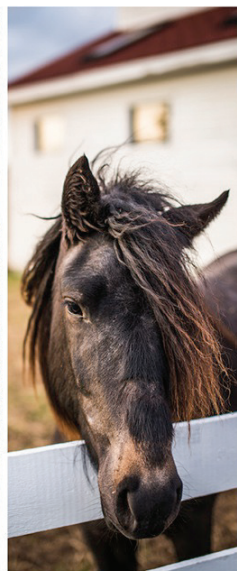
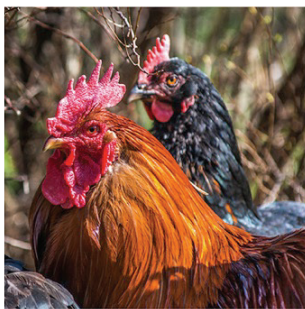












For years, the doctor lived there with his bonnie bride, but as they approached their eighties, the couple decided it was time to downsize. They had expressed interest in some of our holdings and invited us out to their cottage to discuss the finer points.

The “cottage” lay at the summit of a tree-lined 2,000-foot driveway, red roof rising majestically toward the sky.

“Well, what do you think?” they asked. I fumbled for the right words. Only one felt appropriate.

WOW.

They had built this spectacular private estate, second-to-none, and no one knew about it.

And it could be ours! The checkered flag was so close I see it waving. It was time to put the pedal to the metal.

As it turned out, Robert and I had another property downtown, The Hawthornes—an old castle we had turned into palatial townhomes complete with 30-foot ceilings, private elevators, and amazing views. The center unit was called the tower. The 8000-square-foot unit housed a 5,000-bottle wine cellar within its one-meter-thick stone walls.

It had attracted lots of attention from the likes of Diana Krall, the famed jazz contralto to a billionaire fishery magnate, who eventually bought it.

The magnate asked if we would take a small trip with him to help in furnishing it—Toronto, Montreal, New York. Talk about your road trips!

We would start in Toronto. Robert was intimately familiar with all the best shops there. Toronto plane tickets were expensing on short notice, but I needn’t have worried. The fishing magnate made arrangements for his private Challenger jet to

ferry us to our destination—three days, all-expenses paid, at the Toronto Four Seasons and shopping to fill 8,000 square feet.

Long story short, on our return trip, the magnate queried whether we had a lead on any ocean front property near the airport. Immediately, I thought of the doctor's manor house. I grinned at Robert.

Come on, checkered flag!

"I might know a spot," I answered. "It's not on the market just yet, but I think something can be arranged. I can call as soon as we land."

"Why wait?" The magnate handed me a phone.

My grin widened. Why wait, indeed. I dialed the doctor's number and within minutes a meeting was set for the next day.

After the viewing the following day, we had \$1.6 million dollar offer, a signed, blank purchase agreement in hand along with a promise of a \$50,000 good faith deposit. The thought of the \$90,000 commission didn't hurt either.

Then came the yellow flag.

The exterior of the property was phenomenal. No one could contest that. Inside, however, was a different story. The interior wasn't much more than a shell. It needed work. And there were some issues with securing clear title, a stipulation the buyer had demanded. Closing was extended over and over until the buyer decided he was no longer interested in the property and requested the return of his deposit. With great disappointment, we obliged.

A few months later, the doctor advised us the title was now in order. Once again, he invited us out to the property. Sound thinking suggested I politely decline, but like I said, sometimes it's the detours that take you to the most interesting destinations.



The Castle

I stood at the top of that tree-lined driveway and, again, was taken aback at the sheer beauty of the property. Two hours later, I was driving back down that drive with a purchase agreement signed—we were the buyers.

Yeah. I blew through that checkered flag.

We may not have pocketed a fat commission check, but we were more than satisfied with our sound investment in the future. Work began immediately turning the property into a resort and spa. Plans were laid out to construct sixty-four Irish roof styled cottages. We planned to call it The Fields on Athenry. It was one of over 200 property ventures. Venture which went from one to well over 200 properties, many brilliantly successful and others invaluable lessons on the road of life.

As the work on Athenry continued, many trips were made

back and forth. Like me, my Land Rover put in some good miles and not without a few dings and dents. The road to Athenry was peppered with moose crossings.

On one particular trip, I was moving along at a pretty good clip—around 100 kilometre's per hour. Suddenly, a full-grown bull moose loomed in the front windscreen. I slammed on the brakes. The scent of burning rubber wafted through the air, but not enough to stop the edge of the Land Rover from kissing the moose.

In that terrifying moment, life had one more lesson for me. After the Rover came skidding to a stop, the moose, despite his introduction to the bumper of my vehicle, shook his great antlers then simply moseyed on his way.

Sometimes, you just need to make a pit stop then get yourself back on the road.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The 550SL Convertible and the Northern Lights

The thing about road trips and, after all, isn't that what life is, is you'll invariably spy some roadkill by the way-side. I didn't quite expect that I would be said roadkill—well, my company, anyway. And like most roadkill, you can be sure to find some carnivorous vultures circling high overhead.

My situation was no different, but that's a story for another time. For now, suffice it to say some legal entanglements forced my company and every single project I had going to grind to a dead halt. But life is a highway, and I fully intended on moving. In this case, it was literal.

I wound up moving to Nova Scotia. My then partner expressed a desire to move there to be near his aging parents. So, the decision made sense on several fronts. We set up in a Halifax condo, but it didn't take long for the wanderlust, or at least the desire to do something, started niggling at my brain and I began to search for a new project.

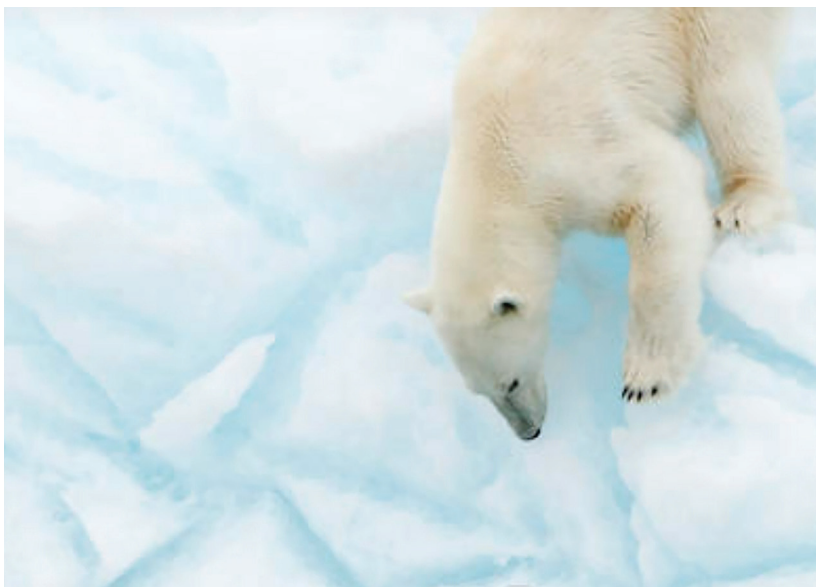
It didn't take very long. As it happened, I was on a random road trip when I spotted a real estate sign in front of a dilapidated, but promising hotel property. The hotel had fifty guest room with a separate dining room. But the main selling point was the view.

Spectacular.

The property nestled at the base of Kelly's Mountain. Already, I could picture guests strolling arm in arm, soaking in the sprawling vista.

The catch? The motel had been deserted two years earlier. The labor of frozen pipes and a deplorable dearth of imagination and money had left it in an impossible shamble. But I had tackled impossible before.

I secured a loan equal to ninety percent of the purchase



price and bought the hotel. The renovation began. Some might argue it was like putting lipstick on a pig, but when your hog takes first prize at the county fair, who cares what color the lipstick is. After some fresh paint, new bedding, and some dedicated elbow grease, my little “porky” project sold.

I was back in business.

While I busied myself with the hotel project, I was also making trips back and forth to Sydney, 30 miles away. I had a friend who asked me to check in on a relative she had there—an elderly aunt in an assisted living facility. Joanie, the poor dear, had suffered a stroke and, consequently, lost her memory. It seemed most of her days were spent lost in a blank, far-off stare. I was only too happy to oblige.

My friend had told me her aunt had always liked teddy bears. I made certain I always visited with one in hand. After

a few visits, the blank stare changed to wide eyes with just the hint of a smile. It was the last time I would see Joanie.

As I backed away to leave that day, I watched her sitting in her chair, a bear in each arm. Her eyes stayed transfixed on me and I swear her smile got a little wider. She passed away just three months later. My friend contacted me to see if I would attend the funeral.

“With the frozen ground, it will have to be postponed till June,” she said.

“Of course, I’ll be there,” I replied in earnest.

At the time of Joanie’s passing, my friend was travelling herself to the other side of the world. Whether it was by way of thanks for making Joanie’s last moments pleasant, or purely out of the goodness of her heart, or maybe a bit of both, she invited me along.

“Join me. I’ll extend my plans a few weeks, and we’ll travel Newfoundland to all the places you haven’t been.”

I thought of Joanie, confined to a chair by her illness and age. Why not, I thought. Life is too short. And though I had travelled the world more than once, I had never really seen my home province.

“Count me in.” Arrangements were made, and plans for Joanie’s funeral were set in motion.

The funeral was held that June at the grave site in a small fishing village called Louisbourg. It was a beautiful sunny day—almost like Joanie was smiling down on us.

After the services, we discovered this amazing lobster restaurant that was right on the ocean. My engine began to rev when I noticed it was also for sale with owner finance. As we drove out of Louisbourg en route to our Newfoundland

trek, I was already primed to put things in gear for my next venture—restauranteur. But I had to put the idea on the back burner. I had a boat to catch.

It was a nice day sailing across the Atlantic to Newfoundland. The ship was sizeable, complete with overnight cabins. Next morning, after the ship docked, we got back to the car with plans to drive 150 miles and stay overnight.

I say car. My friend cheekily dubbed the vehicle the “Silver Bullet.” A sleek, shiny 550SL convertible. I was tempted to caress the shapely frame.

If this was the bullet, I thought, I’d almost be happy to be a dead man. Behind the wheel it brought memories of previous years Mustang, Cougar, Camaro all V8’s rumbling beneath me.

It was still mid-June and temperatures hovered around 55 degrees. But it was a *convertible*. Hood down and heated seats, my friend and I shot up the northern highway toward St. Anthony. My companion’s Jackie O’s sunglasses and ten-foot scarf whipped from her neck like a flag heralding our arrival in fishing villages for a few photo snaps of the breaching whales and picturesque icebergs. After about six hours we reached our destination, but to our dismay, all the hotels were fully booked with iceberg tourists.

A momentary panic set in. If we turned back, we would have to drive over two hundred miles to the nearest hotel. Fortunately, the last hotel took pity and found us a bed and breakfast with two rooms left. It was near the Viking village. The owners had this amazing restaurant right on a harbour brimming with icebergs—massive ones. After all, we were in Iceberg Alley. Still, the view was humbling.

Enjoying the evening meal and the amazing sights, I no-



ticed a helicopter circling the icebergs.

“Are they giving tours or something?” I asked the server.

“No, no, no. They are keeping an eye on polar bears that came with the ice. Can you believe they had to remove two that were found wandering on land near the school?”

B is for bear? My eyes widened.

The bed and breakfast was off the beaten track. Nice digs but lacked Wi-Fi—and polar bears. The polar bears I could do without, but I needed the Wi-Fi. I decided to drive back towards town which was about twenty miles away. I started to get into the car when I was suddenly held spellbound. The sky above me was dancing!

Beautiful lights waved in a palette of gorgeous colors—the famous Northern Lights. I sat for a moment, enthralled by the

nature's awesome light show, but I really did have business to attend to.

With the hood down and the seats on heat again, I drove the bullet onwards in search of a signal. The phone came to life about five miles out. Finally! The road was deserted as I conducted my business. As a gust of wind rifled through my hair, I assumed it was because all the sane people were tucked cozily into their beds.

Suddenly, I realized I wasn't alone.

I smelled them before I saw them. A small herd of ten moose had stopped in the road and simply stared at me. My heartbeat quickened. Did moose pose a similar threat as polar bears? Sure, they may not have claws, but the idea of the damage those massive antlers could do to the Silver Bullet's paint job gave me pause.

I remembered my brother Michael telling me once to turn off the lights. I did. I turned off the car, too, for good measure. The moose lingered for what seemed like ages. In reality, it was probably closer to ten minutes as the seats were still slightly warm.

The night sky was alive with colour. The air was crisp. The scent of moose wafted on the breeze. It was a moment of pure harmony with nature—even if it was a little bit musky. Later, back at the B&B, I took one last look out the window before falling asleep to dreams of icebergs and polar bears.

The next morning, after breakfast and a humorous retelling of the previous evening's encounter, we motored off to explore the Viking settlement a couple miles away. Then we continued our trek to the Glenmill Inn in Corner Brook before trekking off towards St. John's and home.



Halfway down the northern highway, we had an encounter with something quite extraordinary. There, standing on the side of the road, looking straight at us was a white moose. Now, they say the chances of seeing a white moose are pretty astronomical—something close to one in a million. And here was one right smack in front of us.

“Get a picture! Get a picture!” I urged my friend as I floundered to pull the car to a stop. An eternity passed and she still hadn’t snapped the shot.

“What are you waiting for? For him to smile?” I pressed jovially.

She took the picture and off he went.

Seeing the elusive white moose got me thinking again—about accomplishing the impossible. Sure, I’d hit some potholes

along the road and, like as not, there would be more along the way. But if you stuck to it and just kept on moving, the impossible would come to you eventually. Just like that white moose. After all, what is impossible when you break it down, really?

I'm possible.

So, after our little jaunt around Newfoundland, I made my way back to Louisbourg and that little seasonal lobster house right on the ocean and bought it with owner finance. Opened just three months out of the year, I thought. Perfect. Sort of like semi-retirement. Not to mention, I welcomed the opportunity to get back to my roots. And during that first busy season, we saw tourists from all over. We enjoyed a very successful 2019 season.



I had plans to winter in Thailand afterward. Then a little thing called Covid happened. Lock down. There was no 2020, 2021, or even 2022 season. Even the seasons from 2023 forward hand in the balance as the nearby endangered blue whale is under threat from lobster fishing equipment.

So, not sure exactly where life's road is going to take me from here, or what car I'll be in this time, but I'm certain there will be a white moose along the way. After all...

I'm possible.

A DRIVE IN TIME

Kevin Vincent

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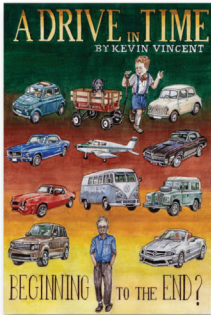
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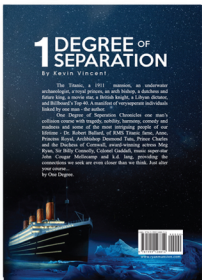
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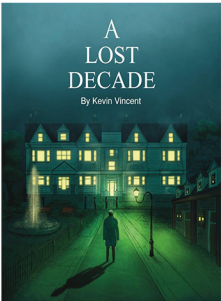
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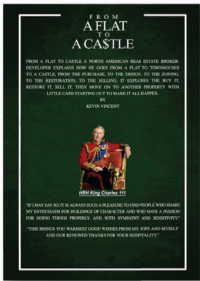
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A DRIVE IN TIME

BY KEVIN VINCENT



A long and winding Road

The author takes you on a journey that begins as early as he can remember. Christmas morning under the tree four year old Kevin finds his first 4 wheeler along with his black Labrador puppy called money. Traveling through a long and winding road over the next 60 years through the disco era of the 70's. Then moving on with his 7000 kilometer VW bus trek from one end of Canada to the other. He uses the memories of his cars along with a small plane to guide him through his memories along the way. Be it in the early years at 16 with his first motor driven 4 wheeler Fiat 500, then Mini Cooper then VW bus all great memories and fun even when they had to be pushed to get started. Mustang, Camaro, Cougar great memories during times of fun in experiences successes and failures. Then with the BMW's, & Mercedes's all years with Bigger successes and Bigger failures. The Range Rover and the moose, then Wow the Mercedes 550 SL convertible and the Northern Lights.

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