

Sixty Years of Love in One House!

Pages From The Past

Valerie Green

I first saw this house in the 1960s.

At that time, I was fresh “off the boat from England,” and to me it seemed like everything I had ever envisioned a West Coast home with a Californian touch to be like. It was a wide, rancher-style house painted pink and standing high and proud on a slope overlooking the Shelbourne Valley with little to obscure its view. And, it was on a street called Christmas Avenue which seemed to add a special magic.

The house was built and owned by my older cousin, Ken, and his wife Lynette. They had lived there since the late 1940s. This November 10th, they will be celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary . Fifty-Eight of those years have been spent in that house. A house that was built with blood, sweat and tears so long ago, and has since seen decades of happy occasions with family and friends. A house oozing love and many fond memories.

Their story really begins in 1946 in a line-up at the old Dominion Theatre downtown where Ken, recently back from the War, and Lynette, a stenographer at J.H. Whittome & Co., were introduced by a mutual friend. They started dating, soon fell in love, and began planning their wedding for November of 1947. They also began to think about building a house.

Ken’s brother, Reg, already had property on Christmas Avenue near Mount Tolmie. Below him were four vacant Lots owned by well-known Victorian, Jimmy Little, who ran a drugstore on Quadra Street. Because Ken was a Veteran, Little said he would sell the Lots to him for \$600! Ken’s Dad loaned him the money until his Veteran gratuities came through.

Ken added that what clinched the deal for him was when he looked down from his brother’s property he noticed the remnants of an old fort in an oak tree. His parents had once lived to the south of that area and Ken and his brothers had played as kids on the property and had built that old tree fort. Now, many years later, it seemed like an omen that Ken was meant to buy the property.

The young couple first travelled out on the #10 Mount Tolmie streetcar from town to view their 200 feet wide by 120 feet deep property covered with about 150 scrub oaks.

The first task facing them was to clear out enough space for a foundation to be built! A bulldozer came in and the oaks were pushed into a pile at the foot of the property. Between working on other things, the couple used a two-man cross-cut saw to slowly cut up the oaks for firewood which warmed their future home for many years. Eventually they also purchased two Raleigh bikes and rode out to work on their land at every opportunity.

Ken secured a loan from the Graphic Arts Credit Union for \$4,000 after convincing them that he would be able to build his house for that amount! Today, he admits he was very “green” about all aspects of building and made more than a few mistakes, but fortunately was helped by Lynette’s brother (a carpenter) and a friend, Ross Payne, plus Ken’s brother, Reg (a plumber.)

“After many weeks and miles of bike rides to our lot, the cribbing for the foundation of the house was in place,” said Ken. Working side by side had also built the foundation for their future happy marriage.

After their wedding in November 1947, they lived with Lynette’s parents while continuing to work on their own home. During those post-war years, it was hard to obtain supplies especially cement - this was in the days before “Ready-Mix”- so everything was mixed by hand. Many of Ken’s friends at the Post Office (where he now worked) helped out. Most were also Veterans and were building their own homes. It was a great community effort. Lumber was at a premium for floor and ceiling joists and Ken had to travel by bus to Youbou to order some rough lumber. Nails were also rationed.

Ken then came up with the idea of building the house with concrete blocks. Although a professional mason laid them, Ken himself carried every one of the 2,913 blocks up the slope for the mason. Inside the walls he even placed a time capsule (updated in a later renovation!)

An entire book could be written about all the challenges Ken and Lynette faced as their house slowly began to take shape but eventually in the Winter of 1949 they were able to move in and begin their life together.

The house has changed somewhat through the years. In the mid-1960s two more bedrooms and a darkroom (to accommodate Ken and son, Mark’s, photography hobby) were added upstairs. And in 1989 the kitchen was completely re-modelled. At that time they also sub-divided their property, selling off two lots. In the process their address changed as they were now officially on Stamboul Street. Ironically, their daughter, Terry, moved back to Victoria from Calgary a few years ago and now lives in the house next door which bears the Christmas Avenue address of their original family home.

There have been many happy gatherings at the “pink” house on the hill through the decades - parties, weddings, birthdays and anniversaries. There have also been a plethora of visitors, some who stayed a short while, others who lingered as boarders and “live-ins.” I myself boarded there for one year between 1968/69, during which time we experienced one of the worst snow storms in Victoria’s history!

I should also add that in 1968 I met my future husband for the first time on the porch of that house. It was a blind date that turned out very well - and is still continuing 39 years later! Yes, the 60 year-old pink (now beige) house on the slope of the Shelbourne Valley is definitely a house full of love!

Happy Diamond Anniversary, Ken and Lynette, and may you have many more happy years together in your house of love!

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