

ONE OF MY INTERESTING CONSTRUCTION SUPERINTENDENTS, DAVID GORDON BRUCE

My career started as a Mixed Farmer and then migrated to Building Construction. I graduated as a Civil Engineer and qualified for Professional Status at a Bleached Kraft Pulp Mill. I then brought my skills to join my two (2) brothers who had incorporated a House-Building Construction Company in Trail, B.C.

My brothers were practical Carpenter Tradesmen, and the decision was to relegate their younger brother to operate the business from a Millwork Plant, located at Bear Creek, that we had purchased. The business included Sash, Door, Millwork, General Contracting, Housing, and small Construction Projects. We incorporated Verigin Industries Limited (ViL) to better identify our operations.

The prospect of advancing the company was when a Promotor suggested that a proposal could be submitted to the new community of Elkford, B.C., for a Town Center that would include a Shopping Center and a full-service Hotel. This was entirely a new field of endeavour as we had never planned to be a Project Developer, but we soon became one.

During the time for proposal approval, the community required a Vehicle Service Center and a Municipal / Fire Hall. Cominco Ltd was conducting Engineering and Development advice to its Coal Mining Division, Fording Coal Limited (FCL). We were known to Cominco and so those projects were tendered and construction underway, when the Engineers for Cominco approached ViL to provide deficiency services for employee housing that was underway at that time.

Just as that list of projects were being completed, approval of the Development Project became a reality and ViL entered a new challenge, Project Financing, both Long Term and Interim. It was then that FCL requested that we develop a thirty (30) unit Apartment Building to house its ever-growing employee base.

This meant that ViL added another service and that was Building Design. The resulting new projects were:

- 22 room full-service Hotel
- 22,000 square foot Shopping Center
- 30 suite Apartment Building

Elkford, in its infancy was still a developing community and all labor, materials and Trade Contractors provided their service from “outside” with the nearest Concrete Redi-mix Plant south of Sparwood some thirty (30) miles travel distance to Elkford.

Obviously, qualified labor was a challenge, especially to the “Open Shop” General Contractor ViL. The FCL Construction Camp in Elkford was available to provide Board and Room for all Workers which was an asset.

It was at this time that a young man walked into the ViL offices in Trail, B.C. He walked up to the large counter and distracted my meditation regarding all those events that were talking place.

“Can I help you?” I asked as I became aware of this teenager with a beard. In 1973, the world was inundated with a new social cause and this individual represented that entity fully.

“I want a job”, was the confident request. Something caused me to disregard the manner and dress which this applicant represented, and I decided to proceed through my standard interview process.

“What are your qualifications and experience”, I inquired. His response was, “I worked at a Truss Manufacturing Plant at Lloydminster”.

“Can I classify you as an Apprentice Carpenter then?” was my next question.

“I don’t know what that means so I don’t think so,” he answered.

“Our projects are in Elkford, B.C. and you would need to stay in a Construction Camp. You would need to travel to the site on your own. Is that acceptable to you?” as I wondered why I had progressed this interview to that point.

“I am okay with all that”, again he responded with no hesitation.

“We need to discuss the pay scale. Our Tradesmen are receiving \$10.00 per hour but I would need to set your rate at a first-year apprentice or \$6.00 will that be satisfactory?” was my offer.

Then I thought I would test him and carried on “there are three (3) projects underway, and all tools are scattered, and I need someone to keep track of their location as well as ensure they are gathered at the end of the day and placed in the Tool Crib. If you can organize that as a rule, I will offer you a \$1.00 per hour upgrade. “What is your name?”

“Yes, I can go for that”, again his confidence was reassuring me.” My name is David Gordon Bruce. Just call me Dave.”

“You can proceed to the Office Trailer at Elkford and check in with the Site Superintendent, Russel Verigin. He will be your contact person now and check you in to the Camp. Russel will be your boss and whatever he instructs is your obligation to complete. Is that understood? I will be visiting the site in a day or so and we will see how you are doing then,” I dismissed the Interview Applicant.

Several days later I arrived at the Site office in Elkford just as everyone was meeting for morning coffee. The discussions were normal for a project that size. Somebody was looking for a shovel and a rake when suddenly I heard this voice blurt out:

“There is a shovel leaning on the third steel post from the North end of the Shopping Center and there are two rakes in the basement of the Hotel leaning against the South foundation.” I walked up to Dave and said, “you got the extra \$1.00 per hour.”

The nearest Liquor Store was Sparwood and so the routine set by ViL was to purchase alcohol for a Thursday evening social at the Camp. Friday morning everyone went home to return to Camp on Sunday night. I was there the next week when I heard someone running down the Camp Hallway screaming. I

asked “who that might be” and one of the Workers said, “that is that new kid you hired”, nonchalantly. I walked out just as Dave was running by me and grabbed him and told him to go to his room and I would talk to him at breakfast.

Breakfast was at 7:00 A.M., and I took my plate over and sat across from Dave who obviously liked to eat on time to be on the job by 8:00 A.M. I was direct, “we are not a Temperance organization and so I need a commitment from you. You cannot drink alcohol along with whatever else you may be ingesting. Is that clear?”

His answer was calm and reassuring, “I can live with that.” To my knowledge, I never saw a repeat of the previous night’s performance from Dave for the rest of time.

It was several weeks later that an opportunity came about that we travelled together from Elkford to Trail. It was on such an occasion that I suggested to Dave that he consider registering as a Carpentry Apprentice. He asked questions as to how it would benefit him and I explained that once he had an Interprovincial Ticket, he would be able to qualify for a job posting anywhere in Canada and perhaps North America. He suggested that he needed to talk to his father and that he would let me know.



The next week he agreed to pursue my offer and a contract was signed with ViL where two (2) years of practical was recommended by ViL but Dave would need four (4) years of monthly Apprenticeship classes to qualify. In 1973, he became an Apprentice at age sixteen (16). Much to my satisfaction, Dave was able to achieve a 90% and higher ranking, in each of the four (4) terms and within two (2) years received his Interprovincial Carpenter Tradesman Certificate.

Dave qualified as a Tradesman entitled to full pay at ViL from that juncture onward.

ViL would have annual Summer Barb-B-Qs and Christmas Parties for all the Employees, Owners, and partners. The first Christmas Party that Dave attended he asked if he could bring his father, Gordon Drysdale Bruce to the event. It was during this event that Gordon approached me and thanked me for providing a “direction” for his son. My response was “Dave was shown a pathway but he then walked on his own initiative. He is now his own responsible man.”



Eventually, we were introduced to a “special person” in Dave’s life, to a Summer Barb-B-Q, Dave introduced Shirley. She seemed to fit right in and became part of the ViL family of construction people.



Dave excelled as a Tradesman and ViL needed someone to be a Site Superintendent to renovate the Elkford Square Shopping Center in 1983. I discussed this new challenge with Dave, and he accepted the challenge. I was impressed with his ability to organize the Trades and supervise the Project. Here he is at the Opening Ceremonies at the end of Renovation.

The Project was constructed on time and on budget which now became an additional credential for Dave in his career.

In 1984, ViL was offered a partnership with Rempel Bros Concrete Limited (RBCL) to construct projects at Expo '86 with an Open Shop Construction Company. To this end Marbella Pacific Construction Limited (MPCL) became a reality. This was another huge step forward for ViL and it would require major personnel changes should tendering become successful.

Twenty-nine (29) International Pavilions was the first MPCL tender accepted by Expo '86. As a result, a Lower Mainland resident, Bill Fleming was recruited to be General Manager under my supervision. Russel Verigin became Site Superintendent, all under the supervision of Elmer Verigin. This meant that the construction activity of ViL would need to be substantially changed and there was no time to make this transition as the Expo '86 Project needed to be started immediately. ViL was not able to adjust to these changes in the Kootenays and began to slow its operations down.

MCL was successful in being awarded a second Project which was to renovate an existing building into a Supply Kitchen that would service all the Expo '86 Food Outlets. There was a sudden need for a Site Superintendent which resulted in a call to Dave Bruce.

"Are you ready to come to Vancouver to administrate this project?" was my call to Dave.

"I have nothing to do here so why not?" was the immediate answer.

"Load up the ViL pickup with as many tools as you can fit in and head on down," was Elmer's answer.

Elmer was staying with Russel and Tillie in an Apartment on 12th Street and after a few days, a Motel / Apartment unit was found on Frazer Highway so that Dave and Elmer could co-inhabit economically. Dave adapted to construction on the Lower Mainland like a "duck to water" and the challenging renovation project unfolded as it should.

At the completion stage of the "Expo Kitchen", pigeons found access holes in the ceiling of the former Warehouse located on Carrall Street, Vancouver, leaving droppings here and there. The holes were a challenge to discover and so Expo engaged the local Cadet Troupe to shoot the Pigeons one late shift. Well, there was feathers and blood, along with pigeon corpses to clean up which precipitated a "change order" to Expo which resulted in much mirth at MPL and Expo but Expo '86 had to abandon the project as it could not achieve a satisfactory operating Health Permit.

Perhaps it was "destiny", but the Blarney Stone Irish Pub was located just a block further down Carrall toward the water. It became a 'natural watering hole" for the crews and many memories. This is where I heard the lead Singer do a rendition of "Don't Cry For Me Argentina". That became my favourite song, especially when I heard Madonna sing it in a movie about Eva Peron.

Living with Dave went well as Elmer did the cooking and when it was Dave's turn, we went to the Chinese Restaurant across the street. Shirley visited us from time to time and we would enjoy some of the evenings. The picture

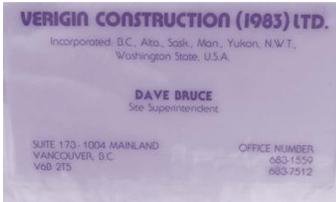




suggests that living with Dave was very interesting as we learned to have fun together.

Shirley visited us from time to time. She had this “secret” envelope that she folded into a bundle. Her theory was that we would “break into it” when our curiosity got the best of us. She would know if we did as the “package” would need to be opened. We never did and she never revealed what the secret was inside.

ViL partners, RBCL, were receiving complaints from their General Contracting customers, that MPCL was



competing against them and that was “unfair” to them. To this end another construction company was formed as Verigin Construction (1983) Ltd. This company would tender projects not on the Expo ’86 site. It was also suggested that projects outside of the Lower Mainland be preferable to RBCL.

A 49,000 square foot First Nations School at Nelson House, Manitoba, 50 miles West of Thompson, was successfully tendered and required a site Superintendent. Dave was offered the opportunity which he accepted and moved his young family into an apartment at Thompson. A construction camp was not permitted at Nelson House and so all the Workers needed to be housed at Thompson as well.



This was probably the most challenging project for Dave as part of the crew were thirteen (13) First Nations Workers from the community. Although they were apprentices in the opinion of the Nelson House administration, they lacked experience in a construction setting. This along with the challenges of a remote project and a building site in semi-permafrost conditions added to the fact that the Electrical / Mechanical Trade developed financial difficulties, rendering the project very challenging. To no fault of Dave’s, he persevered to complete the project. VC(1983)L became involved in a very difficult claim with Public Works Canada which partially compensated for the financial shortfall.

Not all was hard work and the workers from the Kootenays assembled at Dave and Shirley’s apartment to celebrate Grey Cup. This involved preparing Borsch by the Drywall Crew and of course, consumption of alcohol. They called from the apartment to Elmer’s house at Tsawwassen, B.C., to suggest that I was missing a “great party”. I followed up with my house guest calling back and posing as an RCMP Officer responding to an alleged neighbour’s noise complaint. Dave took this seriously and went to a few neighbours apologizing for the “noisy party”. After the second surprised apartment neighbour, Dave realized he was “had” by his boss and called back to “report.”

Upon return from the Nelson House Project in 1987, Dave was placed on the St. Mary’s Hospital at



Sechelt, B.C. to complete that renovation that had already been initiated by others. Dave brought his growing family from Thompson MB and moved them into a house at Sechelt, B.C. From left to right:



Dawn Marie, Kimberly Margaret, Gordon Donald and standing, Shirley and Dave.

MPWL and VCL (1983) went through an ownership change with RBCL deciding that they did not want to be part of a construction business and soon after sold RBCL to Ocean Cement. ViL had restructured the



Lower Mainland operations to Marbella Pacific Construction West Ltd (MPCWL) and was successful in being awarded the Surrey Ice Arena. This became the first Ice Rink that Dave was to add to his expertise.

This was a unique project that used Parallam, a new

laminated wood product Manufactured by MacMillian Bloedel as a construction member in the full span trusses over the entire building.



This was a new challenge for Dave, and he was able to complete this on time and on budget.

This project was followed by an Ice Arena in Quesnel, B.C.

The next project was the Renovation of the District of North Vancouver Municipal Hall.



At this time Elmer developed his own challenges after reorganizing MPCWL with a new CEO and stepping down as President to concentrate on Estimating only. I had graduated in Civil Engineering with a thesis on Construction Estimating so I wanted to complete my construction career doing what I enjoyed best.

Policies of the MPCWL had changed regarding contractor's associations and employee relations. The policy as to deciding on profit margins for estimates were also being challenged by the new management structure. This was totally in contrast to my experience and expertise. Disagreements were taking place. I predicted that the new policy would result in operations failure.

I also was advised by my doctor that my hypertension challenges were now exceeding the medication limits that he could prescribe. All these factors were considered by Elmer and the decision was to resign from the MPCWL and Elmer sold his shares.

Dave continued with MPCWL until it ceased operations and then became a candidate for other construction companies seeking his reputed expertise.

I received this information from his life partner Shirley Bruce:

"..... the date on the plaque was the date he died. Northern Rockies Recreation Center was the last project that Dave completed. They wanted to add a swimming pool but didn't have the funding. We left Fort Nelson for a short period to start the Hay River Health Center. When Fort Nelson got the



funding, we went back. While we were in Hay River Dave started having difficulty breathing. They recommend a scan. We went to Fort St John for a Scan. That scan was not good news. Dave didn't have a chance to start the pool....."

She was referring to a plaque that was placed by the community on his last project.

I called Dave late in November 2013 and had a chance to talk to him during his medical challenge. We were about as close as an Employer could be to an Employee. We respected each other well.

As an "epilogue" to this story I should include my reasons for choosing Dave as the first employee that I would write a story about. The dated adage is "You Cannot Tell a Book by Its Cover" and in the instance of my first meeting with Dave, I found the truth to this. Dave proved to exceed his "Cover". I am glad that I can write about this experience. I hope I can write more stories about the amazing people that I worked with in my 28 years of general contracting.

Written by Elmer Verigin in cooperation with Shirley Bruce who supplied many of the photographs.

Dated December 14, 2022

EWV text to Shirley Bruce dated December 14, 2022 "What is your reaction to the final draft?"

Shirley Bruce text to EWV December 15, 2022 "They love it. Go for it Elmer".