

The Good Neighbour: A Celebration of Ken Taylor

About the Exhibition

In honour of the opening of the [Kenneth D. Taylor fonds](#), Victoria University Library is proud to present *The Good Neighbour: A Celebration of Ken Taylor*. Comprised of newly acquired personal and professional archival material, and supplemented by records held in the [Victoria University Archives](#) and the Office of Alumni Affairs and Advancement, the exhibit highlights the extraordinary life and career of this esteemed Canadian diplomat, businessman and good neighbour.

The **physical exhibition** is available at the [Front Foyer](#) and the [Reading Room](#) of the **E.J. Pratt Library** from **May 14 to September 9, 2019**.

([Download Exhibition Pamphlet](#))

About Kenneth D. Taylor

Ken Taylor was born in Calgary, Alberta on October 5, 1934. He attended Crescent Heights High School in Calgary and came to Victoria College for his undergraduate degree, graduating in 1957. Ken went on to receive a M.B.A. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1959. In 1960, Ken married Patricia Lee, who he met at the University of California at Berkeley. They have one son, Douglas.

Following graduate school, Ken immediately entered the Canadian Foreign Service, serving as a Trade Counsellor in Guatemala, Pakistan and the U.K. In 1974, Ken was appointed to the top job within the Federal Service section of the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce: Director of the Canadian Trade Commission.

In 1977 Ken requested to be posted to Tehran, and as events unfolded there, it became a choice that shaped the rest of his life. The Iranian revolution that followed the overthrow and departure of the Shah of Iran from the country and the belief that the United States supported the Shah, led to a storming of the U.S. embassy by a group of student Islamists on November 4, 1979, who demanded that the U.S. return the Shah to Iran for trial. Six American embassy staff managed to escape in the riots and eventually found their way to the Canadian embassy. Ambassador Ken Taylor and his diplomatic colleague John Sheardown agreed to house the Americans in their private residences at great personal risk.

On January 27, 1980, the six Americans successfully left Tehran carrying Canadian passports obtained by Taylor through the Canadian government. The operation was termed the [Canadian Caper](#) and was later popularized in the film, *Escape from Iran: The Canadian Caper*. A more fictionalized and glamourized account of the events appeared in Ben Affleck's film *Argo*, which underplayed the role the Canadians played in the drama. [Affleck was persuaded](#) to add a postscript to his film to acknowledge the contributions of the Canadians and particularly Ken, to ensuring the safe passage of the Americans.

For his involvement in the Iran hostage crisis, Taylor received numerous awards and honours, including the United States Congressional Gold Medal, the Americas Society Gold Medal, the Harry S. Truman Good Neighbor Award and the Gold Medal of the Canadian Club. He also received honorary degrees from various universities and keys to several cities throughout the United States and Canada. He was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1980.

Following his time in Tehran, Ken served as Consul-General in New York, then retired from diplomatic

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service in 1984. Taylor was Senior Vice-President of corporate government relations at Nabisco Brands and RJR Nabisco, Inc. until 1989. He continued as a director of several firms and served on the boards of various agencies including the Business Council for International Understanding, the School of international Affairs at Columbia University, Vancouver-based company First City, Alberta Northeast Gas, and the Matthews Group in Toronto. He was Chancellor of Victoria College from 1998 until 2004.

Credits

Exhibition by Bailey Chui and Lisa Sherlock and installed by Erin Siegel.

Thanks to Abe Lam, Sarah Gough, Jessica Todd, Agatha Barc, Carmen Socknat and the Office of Alumni Affairs and Advancement for their assistance.

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Related Resources

- See [photograph database](#) for photo descriptions
- See [Digital Collections](#) for digitized materials

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