



Keith Douglas Ray

May 26, 1949 - May 30, 2020

On Saturday, May 30, 2020, Keith Douglas Ray of Heathrow, Florida, passed away at the age of 71. He is survived by his loving wife, Barbara Verchot; son, Brock (Jennifer) Ray of New Hope, Minnesota; stepdaughter, Rebekah (Joel) Murtinger of Saint Cloud, Florida; grandchildren, Collin Ray and Bonnie Ray; step-grandson, Zachary Johnson; mother, Bonnie Ray; and sister, Karen Ray Carter, both of Greenwood, Arkansas.

Keith was born on May 26, 1949, in Ft. Smith, Arkansas, the first child of Montie and Bonnie Ray. A bright and creative boy, Keith loved horses and cowboys — especially the Lone Ranger. His mother, the seamstress, made costumes for each of his favorite TV characters, and Keith would quickly change between shows. At the age of 9, Keith's little sister Karen was born. When asked if he wanted a baby brother or sister, Keith always replied that he would prefer a horse, so his parents finally got him one of those, too. As Karen got older, however, he never hesitated to play horse with her — he ("Bubby") as the horse and she ("Sissy") as the rider.

As a teenager, Keith earned money for college by mowing lawns. He hated the work so much that he vowed to never mow another lawn again. He went on to attend the University of Arkansas, where he earned a Bachelor's of Architecture — his career of choice since the third grade. His studies here included classes with E. Fay Jones, the noted apprentice of Frank Lloyd

Wright.

After graduating, Keith married Carolyn Williams, also from Ft. Smith, Arkansas, and the couple moved to Washington, D.C., where he began working at Beauchamp & Associates. In 1975, they moved to New York City, where Keith attended Columbia University, earning a Master's degree in Historical Preservation. His thesis won the budding architect and his wife a trip around Europe. Upon their return, Keith began his architecture career in earnest, including editing a volume of essays on Contextual Architecture for the Architectural Review.

In 1978, Keith and Carolyn had their only child, named Brock, the maiden name of Keith's paternal grandmother. In the meantime, Keith had switched careers, becoming a real estate developer and went to work for Oxford Development in Washington, D.C. In this capacity as the architectural "client," he hoped to bring about better design in the built environment.

In 1981, Keith and Carolyn divorced, though they remained on good terms and shared joint custody of Brock. Each Wednesday evening, Keith and Brock would watch the adventures of Zorro (and his trusty stallion, Tornado). On weekends, they explored Washington, D.C. together, one of the greatest cities in the world, and Keith often took Brock to the theater to nourish his son's growing creativity.

In 1984, Keith was transferred to Oxford Development's office in Orlando, Florida. He quickly fell in love with the Sunshine State — especially the beautiful lakes and warm weather. These were also some of Keith's favorite years as a developer. He brought to life a number of well-designed multi-family and senior living projects, including the award-winning Reflections in Orlando.

Keith flew Brock down to Florida to visit him each month. He had purchased a ski boat, and during his son's visits, they spent time out on Florida's lakes and rivers, listening to Jimmy Buffet music and enjoying nature. In 1990, at the age of 11, Brock moved to Florida to live full-time with his father. Raising a teenager full-time brought with it a number of challenges, as one might imagine, but Keith rose to the occasion. In addition to boating and horseback riding, the two enjoyed theater, art, and travel (which almost always included visits to notable architectural landmarks). They also engaged in spirited intellectual debates, as well as Friday night pizzas and movies.

After leaving Oxford Development, Keith and a business partner founded Weatherly Investments. While the pair had some initial success, it was not to last. However, Keith spent the next 15 years working for several of the largest multifamily developers in Florida. In these years, he found the financial success he had long desired. In 1999, Keith fell in love with Barbara Verchot, and the couple married on Thanksgiving Day, 2001.

In 2009, the midst of the Great Recession, with few new development deals available, Keith and Barbara became truly global citizens. They moved abroad and lived for months at a time across the world — in Mexico, France, Spain, India, Thailand, and more. In each new home, they immersed themselves in the local culture. Keith was especially drawn to the unique festivals and celebrations of each society. His favorite spot in their travels was San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, which also included a large expat population.

Keith and Barbara loved living around the world, and he loved telling people all about those experiences. The couple shared a love of architecture, and visiting the cathedrals and basilicas in Europe brought him great joy (Sainte-Chapelle in Paris was his favorite). They also tried to see as many of the Frank Lloyd Wright buildings as they could. Preserving the greatest American

architect's work and honoring that brilliance was very important to Keith.

When in new locations — home or abroad — Keith and Barbara often organized their time around a theme. While living in France, they looked for Knights Templar symbols in churches. In Mexico and the American Southwest, they visited the mission churches. In Rome, they sought out Caravaggio paintings.

Keith considered the couple's trip to the Thai/Burmese border land region (organized by Barbara to bring aid to the hill tribes) to be his most adventurous experience. The couple had special visas to get in, and they were the only non-Thai people to be given permission to go into that region. The trip required riding elephants for four hours through the jungle to get to a remote hill tribe village in a restricted area of Thailand surrounded by Myanmar. The ride was entertaining for the first 15 minutes before becoming extremely uncomfortable from shifting back and forth on the very rudimentary hill tribe elephant seats.

In 2012, while living in Chang Mai, Thailand, Keith was diagnosed with throat cancer. The couple moved to Bangkok, where he underwent radiation and chemotherapy treatments. While the cancer was eradicated, Keith was struck seriously ill by an infection. He was bedridden for several months and had to undergo physical therapy. Eventually, Keith recovered and, nearly a year after his initial diagnosis, was healthy enough to travel again.

Despite — or perhaps because of — a career focused on the built environment, Keith loved nature. He never stopped loving horses, and he loved watching horse racing for the beauty of his favorite animals. This love extended even to his reading, and his favorite author, Dick Francis' horse-racing murder mysteries. His love of nature extended beyond horses, too. As a Floridian, Keith spent as much time in nature as he could, especially on the

water, and loved watching the graceful movements of the egrets and ibises on the shoreline.

At the same time, Keith was fascinated by science and technology. He was an early adopter of home computers, accurately predicting how they would impact every facet of our daily lives. He loved to learn about how technological changes would affect the world. In recent years, he had been especially fascinated by new space exploration technologies, and he loved watching rocket launches (and the increasingly accurate landings).

In April 2020, Keith had a heart attack and underwent bypass surgery and spent two weeks in the hospital. As he started to garner strength after surgery and felt he would heal, he wanted to make a bucket list with Barbara of the places the couple would go and the people they would visit.

Unfortunately, his recovery was short-lived. On Wednesday, May 27, one day after his 71st birthday, Keith returned to the hospital. He was diagnosed with aspirated pneumonia — the result of a complication from his cancer eight years earlier. The following day, he was moved to hospice. He passed away in the early evening on Saturday, May 30, with his beloved wife by his side.

Keith was a devoted son, father, husband, and friend. A private memorial will be held on June 27, 2020, at Dayton Church of Christ in Dayton, Arkansas. A separate party for friends — no speakers or program per Keith's wishes — will be held in Florida in early November. In lieu of flowers, please send donations in his name to the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

The family of Keith Ray invites you to leave a message of condolence on the Tribute Wall created in his loving memory.

Tribute Wall



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Barbara Verchot - June 24, 2020 at 04:36 PM



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Barbara Verchot - June 24, 2020 at 04:24 PM



“ *Brock and Jennifer, I am so sorry to read about the loss of your amazing father. I was very impressed with his accomplishments and adventures. And he raised an amazing son. Remember the good times with love and that will help get through the sad times. My thoughts are with you all.*

Su Mackey - June 23, 2020 at 10:08 AM



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Barbara Verchot - June 21, 2020 at 05:27 PM



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Barbara Verchot - June 21, 2020 at 05:26 PM



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Barbara Verchot - June 21, 2020 at 05:24 PM



“ *What a beautiful story of life honoring Keith. Our deep sympathies to the family.
Bruce and Fran Lyon-Dugin, friends of Brock and Jennifer*

Fran Lyon-Dugin - June 20, 2020 at 04:11 PM



“ *Forever my brother. Forever in my heart.*

Karen Carter - June 19, 2020 at 09:49 PM

CA

“ Keith was my " birthday buddy" on May 26th and we exchanged remembrances for many years. He was such a dear man and Nic and I will certainly miss him.

Carol Andreyev - June 19, 2020 at 08:34 PM

SP

“ Barbara and Keith's family, we are reaching out to send our love to you at this very difficult time. Keith was an extraordinary man and was blessed with a wonderful partner in Barbara and a wide circle of close family and friends. May his memory always be for a blessing. Our deepest sympathies, Barbara. Love, Susan and Howard Pelteson

Susan Pelteson - June 19, 2020 at 04:47 PM



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Barbara Verchot - June 19, 2020 at 04:12 PM