

1

WIN YOUR WINGS FROM THE GROUND UP The guys behind WestJet

Wayne says the WestJet flight attendants had some great one-liners during his recent trip to Abbotsford, but this one really made him laugh:

“At this time, we’d like to invite all smokers onboard to join us upstairs in the smoking lounge for our inflight movie, *Gone With the Wind.*”

—People column, *The Edmonton Journal*

Frankly, my dears, unlike Rhett Butler he *did* give a damn. Clive Beddoe gave a damn about flying, he gave a damn about fleeing Britain’s bureaucracy, and two decades later he gave a damn about finding a way around the ridiculously high cost of getting from Calgary to Vancouver on a commercial flight.

Beddoe’s first thrilling experiences of flight came while winging at low altitudes in a flimsy glider catapulted across the green playing fields of Epsom College in England. Those teen-years aerial adventures were enough to ignite a lifelong passion that would propel him to earn a licence in the early 1970s to fly airplanes and helicopters—but always as a private pilot who never seriously considered aviation as a career.

Is it any coincidence that in the year Clive was born—1946—British transatlantic airline service began to North America with Lockheed Constellations crossing the pond in nineteen hours, forty-five minutes? Or that Scandinavian Airlines, Alitalia, and Air India were all born in the same year? Or even that the English director David Lean released his prophetically titled film *Great Expectations*? Were these all auguries for the boy born in that fateful year?

Clive grew up in Leatherhead, a small, ancient market town in Surrey south of London. With the River Mole meandering through and greenbelt countryside surrounding it, this is an officially designated Area of Outstanding National Beauty. But as he matured, Clive couldn't wait to flee his British birthplace for greener pastures overseas. Roughly handsome, with a broad nose and the hooded eyes of a pilot who's seen too much sun, he was the second eldest of three sons and a daughter. His father, Ken Beddoe, had settled into the security of the civil service after serving in the war as a navigator with the Royal Air Force. His mother, Kay, was a more creative thinker and more ambitious; together, they bought a large Victorian house and converted it into a rental property. The income allowed Clive to become a day pupil to a nearby boys' school at Epsom, a town twice the size of Leatherhead and famous for its healing salts and derby. Epsom College, founded in 1855 under the patronage of Queen Victoria, ranked second in the A-level league of England's public schools. "And that set me up," he reminisces in his soft, lingering English accent. "I spent a lot of my influential years amongst fairly affluent people—much more affluent than we were, but also they came from perhaps more entrepreneurial backgrounds."

The college had a cadet corps. Swayed by his father's background and his own fascination with airplanes, Clive

chose the air-force section. The cadets could fly the school glider, and his joy aboard the engineless craft led him to a summer glider camp and more flying after school. His father's interest in property management may have influenced his decision following public school to article for a firm of chartered surveyors—land and building assessors—while taking evening courses at the College of Estate Management. Part of London University, the college taught the art and science of property evaluation four hours a night in a four-year program. On graduating, Clive Beddoe became an associate member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the home of a worldwide network of property professionals.

That was the end of his formal education. Book learning is all well and good—it can suggest a flight path and how to follow it—but Beddoe, like the other three founders of WestJet Airlines, never pursued an advanced degree, much less an MBA. They all earned their stripes in the real world, working at a series of jobs, a progression of positions, and eventually, in three cases, building their own entrepreneurial enterprises that predated WestJet. And although the four shared a love of flying, only one had made aviation his profession. Over many decades they had, however, assiduously done the down-to-earth spadework in their varying pursuits that would let them take wing together with an astonishingly successful, against-all-odds airline. It was their combination of talents and—this is the secret—their worldly experience that came neatly together like a finely crafted key slipping into the right lock.

Back in the late 1960s, Clive Beddoe's position in the chartered surveyors' firm that employed him could not have been less entrepreneurial. While he might become a junior partner within a couple of years, he could easily wait a quarter of a century before making senior partner. "I became very

frustrated by the system in England, which is basically that you succeeded by following in dead men's shoes. So your career was managed for you with absolute certainty from that point on. What an awful existence. Certainly there would be financial success, but the challenge was taken away."

Beddoe had always been intrigued by those who created and built their own businesses, Britain's environment was not particularly nurturing to such self-starters. It didn't take long before an entrepreneur reached the 90-per-cent tax bracket. "There was no incentive, nobody cared, you couldn't get people to do things because there was no reward in it. And the union movement was so unbelievably destructive. It was an impulse to leave as much as an impulse to come to Canada."

He'd entertained four possible destinations. South Africa, despite its wealth, was a statistically dangerous place to live. Australia/New Zealand were warm and welcoming, but a long way away. The United States, which might be difficult to get into, was also a bit intimidating because of its storied cutthroat commercial environment.

"And then there was Canada, and Canada really appealed to me because it was a country with big, wide-open spaces and not a huge population base. Obviously a country of the future, something between the US and Britain—with what I thought would be a business environment with enough of the US influence to be commercialized, but not overly influenced by the British attitude."

Getting there would be a problem because he'd need the offer of a job somewhere, anywhere, in the country to amass enough points to qualify under the immigration system. Then one of three friends living with him in London was hired by a recruiter from Knowlton Realty in Calgary who visited England each year to find chartered surveyors be-

cause they were in short supply in North America. When he was about to finish his final exams at the estate-management college, Beddoe wrote to his friend in Canada to help find him a job there. "I just wanted out," he says now.

In late November 1970, the friend called him. "If you can be in Canada in a month, I've got a job for you."

"Done."

"Don't you want to know what the job is?"

"No."

After the would-be emigrant tendered his resignation at work, the senior-most partner of the firm, a war hero, summoned him into his presence and said: "Beddoe, you're a traitor."

He sold all his belongings and arrived in to Calgary with \$999, which went promptly into a bank account. One of his first financial transactions was an inauspicious introduction to his adopted country. As he was buying a cassette recorder at Eaton's, the sales clerk refused a cheque from this new immigrant, yet signed him up for a department-store credit card. "If I've got a credit card now," Beddoe said, "can't I write a cheque?" He could. The cheque bounced, however, because when his nest egg was wired from England, the bank had put a decimal point in the wrong place and credited his account with only \$99.99. Welcome to Canada, Clive.

His friend had already left Knowlton to work in property management for Marathon Realty, an arm of Canadian Pacific Railway. He asked Clive to help out. "I lasted there three months. It was awful, so absolutely bureaucratic." Shopping around for the most interesting developer in town, Beddoe heard about Alan Graham of the Cascade Group of Companies. Knowing the man was a Scot who might understand the weight of a chartered-surveyor's diploma, he

phoned this very circumspect operator of a privately held conglomerate: “I think you should hire me.”

“Why?”

“Because I think I can make you some money.”
Welcome to Clive, Canada.

Cascade owned real estate, wax museums, and nursing homes in western Canada. In Calgary, Graham ran a construction company and developed apartment buildings. “He had lots of gross revenue, but not much on the bottom line,” Beddoe remembers. Over the next seven years, as the new development manager, Beddoe took Cascade into the more reliable sector of office buildings, among them the Norcen Tower, the Exchange Tower, and the Sun Oil building in downtown Calgary, acquiring the land, negotiating permits, overseeing construction. Beddoe was eventually able to negotiate a financial participation in these developments and his piece of the pie grew big enough for him to branch out on his own. Observing that Cascade was beginning to operate on the edge of his “moral comfort zone,” Beddoe had demanded his money but had to settle for two-thirds of what he was owed, about \$220,000 net. “Ultimately Alan Graham left Canada.”

In the early 1980s, Beddoe started his own commercial-development company with \$100,000. He named it Hanover Management for London’s Hanover Square, where he’d once worked—“it sounded royal and as if it had some money behind it.” His partners in the venture were oilman Harley Hotchkiss and well-placed local lawyer and Liberal Jim Palmer. Hotchkiss owned Sabre Petroleums with the colourful German Baron Carlo von Maffei (who had a 23,000-square-foot house outside Calgary protected by armed patrols) and later became a partner in the National Hockey League’s Calgary Flames. Hanover specialized in

buying older office properties downtown, including the historic Lougheed Building, as a way of holding and controlling land for such developments as the 220,000-square-foot Hanover Building, eventually leased by Petro-Canada.

After the federal government's National Energy Program (NEP) of 1980 led oil companies to downsize or move out of town, Calgary's real-estate market cratered. With continuing cashflow from his properties, but deep in debt to his bank, Beddoe looked around for other opportunities. He borrowed further to buy Career College, a private vocational school in Calgary and Edmonton that was thriving during recessionary times. There were parallels with the kind of company he and his partners would later create in the airline industry. His female president developed what he calls "a nurturing environment" and every student the school graduated beyond a certain break-even point produced almost pure profit—"just like filling another seat on an airplane." Unlike its competitors at the time, his school's strategy was job placement rather than education for its own sake. "To place people in jobs, you had to educate them the way the industry wanted. So you had to understand what they needed in order to modify your syllabus and teach the skills the people wanted to get a job." The challenge, he notes now, is not so different from analyzing and satisfying airline passengers' needs. Expanding to Toronto and Ottawa, he owned Career College for fourteen years, most of them profitable until the government cut back on student loans. (And it was through the school that he met his wife Ruth, who was in charge of finding jobs for the graduates.)

During the 1980s, Beddoe was developing the Hanover Group of Companies, which came to include a 50-per-cent investment in Canadian Paper Recycling of Calgary, a money-losing company that he turned around before selling

out. In 1994 he diversified again, acquiring Western Concord Manufacturing, a plastics company with plants in Edmonton and Vancouver. Keeping tabs on the business demanded almost weekly flights to the west coast, usually on Air Canada, at \$700 a round trip. There had to be a cheaper way to fly the triangle of cities. He consulted Tim Morgan, a friend who ran an air charter and flying school and to whom Beddoe had leased his first airplane, a small Cessna 172. With Morgan's help, he bought the larger, more powerful Cessna 421, an eight-seater that Beddoe began flying to Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver, cutting his commuting costs by about two-thirds.

THE FLYING FARMBOY: UNIONS VS. AIRLINES

In the early 1990s Tim Morgan was a pilot for Canadian Regional, a subsidiary of Canadian Airlines International, who operated Morgan Air Services on the side. Then approaching his forties, he had an open country-boy's face and a bull's shoulders, reflecting his childhood on a cattle and grain farm near Strathmore, Alberta (which he and his family still own today). The town, just east of Calgary in the county of Wheatland, was a creation of the Canadian Pacific Railway, a landing pad for nineteenth-century immigrants coming to learn how to farm the rich prairie soil. As a teenager, Tim was less enamoured of agriculture than aviation. He got the flying bug—"I think it was from driving tractors around in circles in a field instead of going in a straight line. Lots of farm boys fly, they're a bit mechanically inclined, kind of like the open skies." His first job off the farm was polishing airplanes at an aircraft sales and marketing company in Calgary.

After high school, he studied aviation at Calgary's Mount Royal College and, with two other pilots (who would later

work at WestJet), bought a Citabria Decathlon, a two-seater aerobatic plane, built a hangar on his farm, and built up his flying hours. Being a pilot was an escape from the land, in more ways than one. “It’s not that I disliked the farm, it’s just a very difficult lifestyle, a lot of hard, hard work.” After he earned his flying instructor’s rating at a Calgary flying school, his first job as a nineteen-year-old was teaching rural people how to fly on small local airstrips. His next one was flying a summer and a half for a game outfitter along the legendary Canol Road in Yukon in a single-engined Piper Super Cup with tundra tires. The idea was to spot big mountain sheep for hunting expeditions: “Then the guide would take the hunters on a big, long tour all over the country and finally get to the place where in fact we knew the sheep were.” He punctuates the story with his easy laugh.

Morgan soon graduated to larger Cessna 401s for a Calgary charter airline that served the oil patch in Alberta and a year later spent a summer seeding thunderclouds on hail-suppression flights in a twin-engined Cessna 320. It sounds dangerous, he admits, but it’s not—“I don’t have that many horror stories to tell you about aviation.” By then, ready to settle down, he became a corporate pilot for a company selling road-construction equipment. “It was one of the better corporate jobs around then,” he says. “The owner respected you; you weren’t just a taxi driver. And I knew the intricacies of the company.” In the early 1980s, the energy crisis and the launch of the NEP shook the Alberta economy. “I was one of the last corporate pilots in Calgary to lose their jobs. I remember when I first started, I couldn’t find a place to park the airplane on the ramp. And then when I finished, I used to shotgun down that ramp and not hit anything.”

Meanwhile, he’d saved enough money to buy his own four-seater Cessna and rent it out. One of his lessees was the

operator of the school where he'd earned his instructor's rating. When the man decided to leave town, Morgan inherited his clientele and set up his own flying school, Morgan Air Services. He hired an instructor from Eastern Canada who helped him build the business, which evolved into a charter operation that today has fifteen aircraft, from light twin-engines to the reliable workhorse King Air. It has been an efficiently run company; "Tim likes the standard operating procedure and everything by the book and written down," says a friend and fellow businessman.

After a couple more corporate-pilot positions, one of them flying a Gulfstream Commander turboprop, Morgan had an unexpected call from Time Air, which had begun as a small commuter airline in Lethbridge, Alberta, and expanded to cover most of Western Canada. The caller wondered if Morgan would like to take a Fokker F-28 course—the following day—and then come fly the sixty-five-seat jets for the company. "The next thing I knew, I was a co-pilot on this big airliner and I looked out the window and where am I landing? In northern Saskatchewan on a gravel S-curve with a fishing shack—doing the same thing I always did."

Time Air was, in many ways, a model company. "People wanted to do a job, make things happen, they wanted the company to be successful—and they just wouldn't come to work and go home ... There was profit-sharing. It was very fun, very friendly." For the next two and a half years, he worked out of Saskatoon with the former employees of NorcanAir, which Time had taken over. "That was a very tight-knit group, very work-oriented, very—I hate to say this—very Alberta agricultural-type people. I fit right in there."

But Time, and the times, were a-changin'. With the deregulation and consolidation of the domestic airline in-

dustry in the late 1980s, the privatized Pacific Western Airlines bought Time Air and Canadian Pacific Air Lines (CP Air). Time became Canadian Regional, a feeder airline to Canadian Airlines International—the renamed CP Air. In the early 1990s, Tim Morgan wound up back in Calgary with Canadian Regional as a captain on de Havilland Dash 8 turboprops. “And that’s when the airline business started to come apart,” he recalls.

Morgan joined the Canadian Air Line Pilots’ Association (CALPA) and became vice-chair of the council representing the entire regional arm of the airline. “We thought we had a good relationship with the management within Time Air. But we got sucked into the old mother CALPA, which was Air Canada and Canadian at that time. And we were such a small fish in a big pond, we got told what to do. To the point we went on strike.”

Then he met what he considers the true face of unionization in his industry: “We were to sign a contract regarding the merger between one of the companies down east and Canadian Regional. And we went down there saying ‘our pilots don’t want to sign this, we want to re-look at it.’ We walked into the hotel room in Toronto and sat across the table from the CALPA lawyers and this guy—great big cigar, greasy beard, from down east—just what your typical union guy would look like. And he says, ‘You must sign the contract. It really doesn’t matter whether you want to sign it or not, if you don’t sign it, we’ll sign it for you.’ So I said, ‘Oh, okay.’ Picked up my briefcase, walked out of the hotel room, got back in the elevator, out to the airport, on to the airplane, came home, and that’s the last thing I ever had to do with CALPA. It was very much a learning experience for me, because the people asked me to represent them and I couldn’t represent them. This was nothing but a sham. Why

was I involved in the union? Because if someone was gonna run my life, I thought it might as well be me.”

While Morgan survived the layoffs caused by deregulation, he was bounced around from the senior officer’s position on the F-28 to mid-level captain on the Dash 8 and back again. But his schedule afforded him enough free time to keep running Morgan Air Services—where one day in 1994, Clive Beddoe showed up with Mark Hill, one of his employees at the Hanover Group.

THE STRATEGIST: THE LURE OF LOW COST

Mark Hill, a bit of a loner and a contrarian, was raised as a diplomatic brat. Born in Germany, he was the son of a Canadian foreign-service officer based in Ottawa who took his family on overseas postings. Mark was schooled in England and Brazil, but mostly in Canada. He did two years at Carleton University in his hometown and then four more at the University of Victoria, where he double-majored in geography and strategic studies. It was there that WestJet’s future vice-president of strategic planning (“and paranoia,” he adds) got a grounding in areas that would be crucial in planning and developing an airline. As he told his alma mater’s alumni magazine, a military-history course taught him tactics of combat campaigns. One geographer was “a no-nonsense professor who raised the bar on how to digest and process reams of information in an organized fashion.” Another was a rebel in the department, a stance that appealed to Hill—as did the philosophy of a historian specializing in American politics and diplomacy who “encouraged my somewhat off-the-wall, argumentative, unconventional-wisdom thinking.”

At UVic the quick-moving, sardonic student with curly brown hair and a penetrating gaze met the woman who

would become his first wife. A field-hockey player for the university, she came from Calgary, where her father ran Western Canada's largest architectural firm, the Cohos Evamy Partners, and the oil boomtown is where the couple headed after Hill graduated in 1985. He soon immersed himself as a worker in Ron Ghitter's unsuccessful campaign against Don Getty for leadership of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party to replace premier Peter Lougheed. Unlikely as it now seems, for the next three years Hill worked in the public sector as assistant to the president of the Alberta Vocational Centre, an adult-education school, who became his mentor. Fred Speckeen, who later became a Presbyterian minister, was a role model by demonstrating in his people skills "how to conduct yourself, personally and professionally. Although I'm not a people person," Hill notes. "That's why I don't have the big staff today, and I know it and everybody knows it. But I understood how he did it and why he did it—and why I could never do it." Speckeen also taught him how to handle a piece of paper only once, which is how his protégé manages to deal with the flood of information that crosses his desk at his home office in Victoria, where he now spends most of his work week.

Calgary was never his favourite city ("I can't stand the horrible winter climate," he says) and when government downsizing threatened his job at the vocational centre, he decided to leave town and earn an MBA at the University of British Columbia. On the first day of classes, he thought, *Oh, boy, have I made a mistake!* "The courses seemed more quantitative and I'm more of a qualitative guy. I dropped to half-time and left at the end of the first semester."

Returning reluctantly to Calgary in 1989, he worked in commercial real estate for Knowlton Realty and did a couple of small deals with Hanover Management. "Clive Beddoe

was a big wheel in real estate and had the reputation of being a really sharp guy. Maybe a little tough, but at the end of the day pretty fair. A lot of guys would shake in their boots about doing a deal with him.” (Hearing of his reputation today, Beddoe says, “I find that extraordinary. I didn’t consider myself a tough negotiator; I thought I wasn’t hard enough. I believe in trying to create a win-win situation. The only way you win in the long run is to show people how they can win also.”)

One day in 1990, Hill—then in his late twenties—phoned Hanover about a possible tenant for a building, only to learn his contact there had left the company. Instead, Beddoe fielded the call. Mostly as a joke, Hill told him, “I’ve heard you’ve lost somebody. I’d better come down and put in my application.”

“Why don’t you do that?” Hanover needed somebody immediately to handle minor leasing matters; Hill still isn’t sure today if Beddoe even knew who he was.

“I came in as asset manager, which was re-leasing a bunch of downtown real estate we had. Clive had a reputation then for being really moody. In hindsight, he had just gone through a divorce—and having gone through two myself, I know exactly why some days he could snap at people. So I was a bit nervous about that. But he gave me a lot of leeway. Clive is a master motivational guy. He understands what people’s hot buttons are and how to set up a remuneration package that pushes those buttons.”

Beddoe soon discovered one of Hill’s buttons. Often at week’s end they had a beer at The Chowder House, a restaurant owned by Clive’s brother Steve, who had followed him to Calgary. Clive was pursuing his passion for flying as he earned his multi-engine, helicopter, and night ratings. One Friday afternoon in the fall of 1990, as they were discussing

his flying, Hill—who'd never piloted any aircraft—said, "I've always wanted to do that."

"If you fill the Lougheed Building 97 per cent," Beddoe replied, "I'll buy you a private pilot's licence." The Lougheed was an eighty-year-old Class C office building at a time when similar properties had 40-per-cent vacancies. Today, he recalls Hill as "young, somewhat idealistic, and a very hard driver." Within six weeks his inspired employee had the building nearly full and by December was taking his first flying lessons—at Tim Morgan's school—and was soloing the following summer. Overseeing his mountain-flying course was Tara Linke, a young instructor who later became one of WestJet's women pilots.

Over the next few years, Beddoe gave Hill more opportunities to shine and increase his income annually. In one deal, the young go-getter wrote a business plan to acquire a warehouse building in Arizona that involved a Fanny Mae (a mortgage from the Federal National Mortgage Association in the United States) and several foreclosures that let Hanover buy at the bottom of the market and sell out with a nice profit.

Hill kept flying and became increasingly intrigued with the economics of the airline industry. One of his first public observations on the subject was that his boss's eight-seater Cessna was often flying half-empty on his trips to Vancouver. "Mark, who is unbelievably cheap and hates waste of any kind, thought it would be a good idea to sell seats on board the airplane," Clive Beddoe says. "And because we operated through Time Air and his commercial licences, we could do this. Mark proposed that we offer seats at half the cost of an Air Canada ticket."

And then on a rainy day in June 1994, Mark Hill wandered into Tim Morgan's office in the oldest hangar at the

Calgary airport. Unable to fly, waiting for the weather to clear, he began chatting about the airline business. He'd read about the great success story of this American low-cost carrier, Southwest Airlines, and told Morgan what he knew about it. Finally, he asked, "Why wouldn't it work here?"

"I don't see why it wouldn't work here." Morgan offered some of his thoughts on the subject and concluded: "Should we look at it?"

"If you give me some information, I'll build a model to say what this thing would cost." Hill began researching the subject at night and on weekends. "And then," he says, "Tim brought Don Bell in."

THE COMPUTER GUY: CARING FOR CUSTOMERS

Don Bell, a third-generation Calgarian, was the son of an electrical engineer who worked for TransAlta, a power-generation company. Don's first after-school jobs set the tone for his career. As a twelve-year-old delivering *The Calgary Albertan*, he was so service-oriented that he got a letter from one woman customer rhapsodizing about "the best service I have ever had from any *Albertan* boy, and that is covering the last 17 years, older than what you are." (His mother, whom he credits with teaching him how to treat people, has kept the testimonial.) Interested in anything with a motor, he became especially smitten with the aircraft business during his high-school years. His father chartered helicopters for power-line patrol from a flying service; the owner's widow became the wife of Gerry Stauffer, a local aviation legend known as the Chief, who had a company that overhauled airplane engines. Through the family connection, Don began there as a part-time mechanic's helper in 1972, aged sixteen. After high school, he moved to Medicine Hat to work with Stauffer's brother and nephew

and got his pilot's licence at twenty and his commercial rating a year later.

Not wanting to be a professional flyer, and influenced by his dad, he took engineering at the University of Calgary, where he found his first career. After two years of courses, he shifted his interest to the more exciting new world of microprocessors. He answered a call from the university hospital's ambulatory-care centre, which needed help in developing a test programming project using microcomputers, predecessors to the personal computer—something he, like most other people, knew little about. This was the Stone Age. It was just a year after Ed Roberts, founder of the now-defunct New Mexican company MITS (Micro Instrumentation Telemetry Systems), designed the first desktop PC—the Altair, named for a *Star Trek* episode—and the very year Bill Gates and Paul Allen licensed their BASIC language to Roberts.

Inspired, Bell quit university and launched a software business with five friends as backers and about the same number of employees. His MITS Computer Systems, a private integrated computer systems supplier, assembled hardware from kits and began the hard slog of peddling machines with a mere 16 kilobytes of memory and a bulky 10-megabyte hard disk the size of a long filing cabinet. “They were completely unreliable, failed all the time, and the software was very buggy,” he says. More promising was software development for accounting and the hotel, dental, and medical fields, and the resale of restaurant and labour-management programs. The company grew to several branches across Western Canada, an office in Toronto, and a hotel-software business in San Francisco, which he later sold. Two of the products were so successful that employees spun them off into separate companies, which are still flourishing. Clinicare serves North American medical group practices and Genie

Computer Systems develops and markets clinical and practice management software in Canada.

“Don is an interesting character—very unassuming,” says Mark Mackenzie, who worked in service and sales at MITS for eighteen years, helping open offices from Vancouver to Toronto. “When he was selling, he did none of the textbook things, but he was very successful. We had a pretty heavy customer focus—a twenty-four-hour service operation. It was a typical small company, boom or bust, but most of us were team players and were required to wear multiple hats. Everybody had to be self-sufficient. Since leaving MITS, I’ve begun to realize how much of a role Don played in my life and my aspirations.”

By the late 1980s, Bell was flush enough to buy out his original investors. As president and chief salesman, managing up to forty employees, he says, “I learned how to run a business, how to treat people—and customer service. It was all about knowing your product, treating your people right, treating the customers right, taking care of them.” (He treated his employees well enough that several of them would eventually join him at WestJet, including networks manager Steve Stretch, who’d been a customer-service technician with MITS.) “It was really tough to make a living at it. But we survived and we were moderately successful. And I was able to afford to buy a couple of airplanes that we used in the business.”

He had a Piper Comanche, a Cessna 310 and then a sleek Cessna 340, which he flew across the west every week for work and pleasure. With his airline transport rating, he even took time off from his business occasionally to fill in as a pilot on corporate jets and turboprops.

One of the people he could talk aviation with was Tim Morgan. His folks and the parents of Morgan’s wife were

friends. Bell sometimes called him for advice and they saw one another from time to time, usually at the airport. At one get-together in 1994, Bell showed him an article in *Fortune* magazine about Herb Kelleher, the head of Southwest Airlines. “You ever hear of this guy? You might be interested in this.”

Oh, yes. “Come to a meeting we’re having next Saturday,” Morgan told Bell.