

Some 40 years ago we were preparing to shoot *Empire, Inc.*, the CBC mini series which I wrote, but were struggling to find the perfect actor to play the lead, the fictional tycoon James Munroe. The whole story revolved around this character and without a compelling Munroe we simply didn't have a series.

One day the producer Mark Blandford, director Denys Arcand and I were looking at screen tests, when Kenneth Welsh appeared. Ken was not exactly unknown then, but, in terms of television roles, not nearly as well known as he later became, and none of us was very familiar with him. And frankly I wasn't all that impressed. At first.

As I recall, Ken was wearing some sort of neckerchief and looked like, well, an actor - certainly not a business mogul. But as he started reading scenes he transformed himself, and the mood in the screening room changed dramatically.

The second the test ended Denys said "Well, boys, we've found our Munroe." And he was right. We cast Martha Henry as Munroe's wife and the alchemy conjured up by those two acting masters created television gold. They each went on to win richly deserved ACTRA Awards for their performances. I won one as well but give much of the credit to Ken and Martha. They made any writer look good. It's disheartening that we've lost both of these Canadian legends within the space of a few months.

A few years after *Empire* I called Ken to try to entice him into playing a leading role in my play *The Noble Pursuit*, premiering at the Thousand Islands Playhouse. I caught him in the midst of preparing dinner but we had a convivial conversation. Trying not to sound too shamelessly self-promoting, I kept slipping in plugs for my play - it was a great part for him, etc., etc. I knew his presence would elevate the whole enterprise and I was really hoping he'd say yes.

But in the end he declined. Letting me down gently, he said he'd lost his taste for stage acting. "I think I've lost my stage chops." He excused himself to get some potatoes into the oven. And I reluctantly said goodbye.

But his comment about losing his chops was nonsense, of course. He went on to play many, many more parts over many, many more years, on stage and off. And play them exceedingly well.

Lose your chops?! Never, Ken. Never.