



*believe
in me*

Harold Keith was a writer of books, but he always thought his stories for young people would make good movies. Finally someone in Hollywood agreed.

BY MOLLY LEVITE GRIFFIS

by Newbery Award Winning Author

HAROLD KEITH

Brief Garland

The True Story of COACH JIM KEITH

Harold Keith never stopped believing that one of his books would be made into a movie, but he would have been quite surprised to learn which of his 16 titles finally made that giant leap from page to picture. After all, *Rifles for Watie*, his Civil War epoch for young adults, won the prestigious Newbery medal, the crown jewel of children's literature. *Susy's Scoundrel* and *The Obstant Land* both received coveted Spur awards from the Western Writers of America. *Will Rogers, a Boy's Life* was sold in the theatre lobby when "The Will Rogers Follies" opened on Broadway.

Komantcia was a New York Times Best Book and its sequel, *The Sound of Strings*, garnered such glowing reviews that they were both optioned for movies six times. Keith's *Brief Garland* won the Oklahoma Book Award given by the Center for the Book, but that did not happen until 2000, two years after the death of the long-time University of Oklahoma sports information director—and the award was given for a reprint of the original.

But it was *Brief Garland*, the saga of a scrappy bunch of girls and a most reluctant male basketball coach (who had been hired

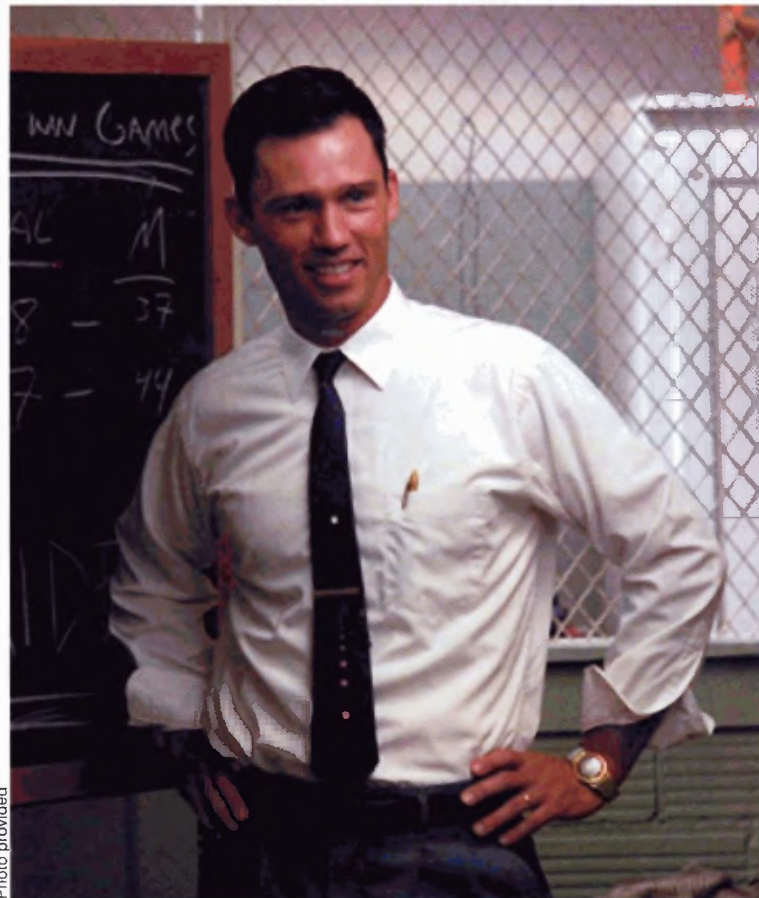


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ABOVE: Jeffrey Donovan plays basketball coach Jim Keith in "Believe in Me," the screen adaptation of Harold Keith's *Brief Garland*, which won the Oklahoma Book Award in 2000.



Lynette Lobban

LEFT: "Believe in Me" director Robert Collector, seated, and the real Jim Keith, who served as a consultant on the set, look over a list of theaters that plan to feature the film in coming months.

originally to coach the boys team) which captured the imagination of Hollywood director Robert Collector. This past March, Collector brought Keith's characters to life in a movie titled "Believe in Me." Based on the real life story of Harold Keith's nephew, Jim Keith, '51 ed, "Believe in Me" is set in Oklahoma's short grass country in 1964, long before women's sports, basketball in particular, had come of age. When the book was published in 1971, the situation had not improved appreciably since in most schools girls were still playing six-on-six and a married girl was automatically excluded from extra-curricular activities.

"The decency of the people in Harold Keith's book and the civil rights aspect for women really appealed to me," Collector says. "In a day and time when I think money has ruined sports, the fact that I could make a movie about people who wanted to play purely for the love of the game really inspired me."

Ironically filmed in New Mexico, where Collector points to more economical production costs, "Believe in Me" stars Jeffrey Donovan, Samantha Mathis and Bruce Dern. Seeking as much

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Young actors on the set of “Believe in Me” jelled as a team under the watchful eye of Jim Keith, the Oklahoma basketball coach on whom the film is based. “Coach Keith” taught the girls the fundamentals of the six-on-six basketball, popular in the 1960s and ‘70s.



Photo provided

The cast of “Believe in Me,” including Anne Judson-Yager, above as Ginger, learned the fundamentals of half-court women’s basketball for the film from OU alumnus Jim Keith.

authenticity as possible, Collector secured Jim Keith as a consultant; Jim and his wife, Jorene, traveled to New Mexico to spend several weeks with the cast on the set. “Coach Keith,” as the actors soon began to call him, taught the actors the fundamentals of basketball, a task that came easy for the one-time president of the Oklahoma Girls Basketball Association.

Collector also cast former Connecticut and WNBA basketball great Diana Taurasi in the role of an opposing coach. Nine members of what Jim Keith calls “The Originals,” because they played for him on the Sayre team portrayed in the movie, also had cameo roles.

In 1951 Harold Keith had a hard time believing that he had won the Helms Foundation Award as the outstanding sports publicity director in the nation. He had a hard time believing that the Oklahoma Memorial Stadium press box he designed was voted best in the nation and an even harder time believing that years later the new press box would be named for him. The most self-effacing of men, Harold Keith had a hard time believing that he deserved any of the accolades that came his way, but he would have found most unbelievable of all the fact in March 2007 “Believe in Me” premiered at the National Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame in Knoxville, Tennessee.

“That’s hard to believe,” Harold Keith no doubt would have said.

But the rest of the Sooner family had no trouble believing it at all.

Editor’s Note: “Believe in Me,” which was shown on all American Airlines domestic flights in the month of August 2007, is scheduled for September 3 release on DVD. Brief Garland, Harold Keith’s book that was the basis for the movie, is available from Eakin Press 1-800-880-8642.

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