



Jerry and Jane Clayton arrived in New Mexico in the 1960s during the twilight of the Navajo trader. With money saved while working as a gas station manager, Jerry bought a truck and used it to supply trading posts throughout the sparsely-populated reservations that cover much of the state. As the traders retired, he purchased their stations and converted them into convenience stores. He burned customers' old debts as he shifted the businesses from trade and barter into cash-based enterprises. He offered money orders and banking services. He bought an oil refinery to expand control over his supply chain. When he sold his empire – Thriftway – around 2000, he owned 185 stores. In the last decade, under the name Red Mesa Trading, he's built up 35 more. "Did I come in with a master plan?" Jerry says. "Hell no. We got up, worked, and every day an opportunity would come up."

In January of 1986, Brad Kain, Class of 1988, passed up an internship with Ernst & Young – a "Big 8" accounting firm – to work with Jerry, who he connected with through a long-serving staff member at BV who was related. "All I knew going into it was that Jerry had a few convenience stores," says Brad. "I learned more in that 30-day period than any other."



Brad stayed for a month with the Claytons at their ranch in Farmington, N.M. Each day over breakfast, Jerry would tell Brad stories about business, life, and how to effectively navigate both. "Opportunities are around you at all times," Brad recalls Jerry imparting. "The difference is entrepreneurs pick up on that."

Brad went back to Buena Vista's campus and started two businesses, one selling carpet scraps to incoming students and the other distributing care packages. The carpet business, partially funded by \$1,500 in seed money provided by Jerry Clayton, made over \$5,000 on campus move-in days that fall. Brad and co-founders Jean Stangl and Andy Mumma (all Class of 1988) sold the thriving care package business to another student when they graduated.

"These were convenience opportunities, being at the right place at the right time," Brad says. "Jerry taught me a lot about that."

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It's common advice in investments to 'diversify your portfolio.' Brad and Dee Kain, Class of 1988, have diversified their careers, seizing opportunities where they find them. K&R Consulting – which sells and provides support for small business software to 250 clients worldwide – is the third business the couple has owned jointly since graduating: previously, they sold hearing aids and paved the ConAgra campus in downtown Omaha. Brad and Dee have forged a successful career with a professional relationship built on personal chemistry, and an entrepreneurial mindset developed at Buena Vista University.

IN MARRIAGE AND BUSINESS

"I'm not sure what my job is," Dee Kain laughs. "I've never had a business card because I can't come up with an appropriate title. I run the Des Moines office, do technical support, answer the phones, do the company bookwork – everything down to taking out the trash." K&R Consulting (named for 'Kain' and Dee's maiden name, Reichter) is an authorized reseller for Sage Software with offices in Des Moines and Omaha.

Founded in 1994, it currently has nine employees. "I run sales, she runs infrastructure," says Brad. "I can't imagine not working with my spouse. We have common goals. We go to lunch together three or four times a week. I knew this sort of life could be successful because I saw it with Jerry and Jane Clayton. We go home and turn the business off and have fun with the kids, and at the office we have things to accomplish."

As accounting majors at BV in the early days of the Harold Walter Siebens School of Business, Dee and Brad took most of their classes together. As sophomores, they worked together as part of the student orientation staff. They were among the School's first management information systems minors. They married in 1988, the fall after they graduated.

"I remember reading about Jeff Bezos, who founded Amazon.com, and how his professors said they just knew he was going to be a success no matter what he did," Jerry Clayton says. "Brad was that kind of young man – he was nice, clean-cut, and had everything going for him."

Some students feel like they began their educations with blank slates. Brad and Dee Kain, in part, began theirs by working in a very large hole in the ground. "When I got on campus that fall, the Siebens Forum's framing was in and the cement had been poured," Brad recalls. "The crews were tiling and still building some of the walls. My job was to do whatever was needed."

Brad had worked many part-time jobs as a high school student – machinist, plumber, farm hand. In the partially-

constructed Siebens Forum, Brad was a gofer, running from place to place to check on subcontractors and taking deliveries of different materials. In her later years at BV, Dee worked food service there. The Siebens Forum itself, a feat of construction designed as a laboratory for entrepreneurship, was an especially apt prelude to the Kains' first major project after graduation: the brick paving on the ConAgra campus in Omaha.

WORKING DAY AND NIGHT

Brad and Dee earned their CPA certifications and had already secured accounting jobs before graduation: Brad at Touche-Ross, and Dee at a regional firm in southwestern Iowa. During their nights and weekends, however, the couple managed B&B Construction, a paving business Brad invested in with his friend Brian Smith. Brian (the other 'B') was an experienced brickwork contractor. "We started with \$5,000 and an old used van, working on residential patios," says Brad. "I think the thing I learned the most was persistence – you just have to keep going."

The ConAgra Campus, to be styled after the Old Market area of downtown Omaha, was a sizable contract – \$1.5 million – and offered formidable challenges for the young entrepreneurs. The first was getting a bank loan ("and really, in retrospect, why would the banks have just given some 20-year olds 50 grand to run a company?" Brad notes). To help, Brad and Dee's parents provided part of the initial collateral. B&B further split the bid so that it would be responsible for \$900,000 for labor and the \$600,000 in materials would be

supplied by the general contractor. After securing financing, the practical challenges began. Due to torrential rains, the project started eight weeks late. The crew's generators were stolen one night, and reliable employees were tough to come by. To make up for lost time, construction continued 24/7. Dee gave up her job to manage the company, while Brad worked days at Touche-Ross and covered the 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. shift at the construction site. There, he not only supervised, but learned to pave. "If you lead a crew, you have to be willing to lead by example," says Brad. "By the time we got done with the project, I was the second -fastest bricklayer on site." Through hard work, Brad, Dee and Brian completed the project on time and on budget. "You do what you have to do," says Brad. "It's a source of pride to see something that is probably going to be here 150 years from now."

AN EXTENSIVE FAMILY

Dee – a native of Hardy, Iowa – selected BV in part because of close family ties. While she was a student, her cousin Scott Stevenson, Class of 1975, worked in the Alumni and Development office, while her aunt, Bev Keen, was student services office manager. Bev's son Paul graduated in 1985, and her daughter, Jennifer Thompson, is currently assistant athletic director.

Even as their business was rising in the 1990s, the Kains embarked on what they consider to be their greatest challenge: raising triplets, Austin, Justin and Travis, born in 1997.

"That was much harder than doing anything else," Dee says. "We started the K&R office in Des Moines in October of 1998. We physically moved there in March of 1999, and I started working part-time in April. We actually conducted some interviews while I was in the hospital at Omaha after having the boys. I know you look back and think, what were we thinking? The children were two years old and we were moving and expanding our business. But that's how opportunities happen."

Full Speed Ahead



In 1990, Brad sold his half of B&B to Brian, and the Kains looked for another project in which to invest the profits. With the help of a business broker, they looked at car washes, laundromats, and convenience stores before happening upon a hearing aid center in Norfolk, Neb. "We saw opportunities, says Dee. "The audiologist who built the business had an established client base and the demographics were getting older. I had a grandma who had lost her hearing; I never knew her not having hearing problems. It was great to work with the people and give them the ability to hear again."

For their second business together, Dee took the lead: she managed the office, handled the company's bookwork, and became a licensed hearing aid specialist to work directly with clients. "I didn't just manage, I actually did hearing tests and fitted hearing aids," she says. "The previous owner taught me as much in the transition as he could, and you just have to learn this process. We inherited the staff. They all stayed."

Meanwhile, Brad was working in another office, selling AS400 mainframe computers to medium-size businesses, an experience that led the Kains to see an opportunity in branching out to the business that became K&R Consulting.

"When we started in 1994 in Norfolk selling DOS accounting systems, not everyone had a computer," says Brad. "These were new opportunities, and we basically grew with them. In our business if you're not learning the new technology, you're going to die. If I don't learn something new every day, I'm not doing my job."

Through K&R Consulting, Brad and Dee are utilizing skills that build on every business they have owned since "Beaver Carpet Sales." "The common element is solving problems," Brad says. "In the B & B paving, it was providing streets and sidewalks to spur a city's development. At Norfolk, it was helping people to hear. With K & R, it's helping put systems in place for business."

In seeking problems to solve, Brad and Dee uncover opportunities. Through the software they sell and service, they help others to seek and solve new challenges. Today, they find their opportunities in technology, as the Claytons saw them in the deserts of the American Southwest.



Remembering Professor Higley

One of the reasons Brad Kain chose to attend BV was the reputation of its accounting department. Among his favorite professors was the late Dr. Wayne Higley who, along with Dr. Margaret Redenbaugh, taught accounting majors who passed the CPA exam at the highest rate in Iowa from 1986 to 2001: 58%. The statewide average for the same period was 19%.

"Wayne Higley fit the mold of a typical accountant in many ways," says Brad. "He was a very technical, professional-type individual. The man really knew his stuff, and he could communicate it so you could really understand it. After putting new accounting systems in place for 20 years, the basics of accounting are second nature to me now. I attribute a lot of the basics to him."

Higley, who taught from 1986 to 2001 and continued to teach as professor emeritus until spring 2008, died in February 2010.