



**jenny
bramhall**

**becca
bramhall**

ena burrud
**catherine
sanders**

sisteract

There's a special kind of energy to be found at 111 N. College Ave. Maybe it's the sense of family that comes from having every business in the building run by sisters.

The 120-year-old building is home to Clothes Pony and Dandelion Toys, owned by sisters Becca and Jenny Bramhall, and Treetop Studio, owned by sisters Catherine Sanders and Ena Burrud.

Each woman brings distinct backgrounds and experiences to the mix. But all four agree that working side-by-side with a sister makes it less like work and more like fun.

"We just love working together, day in and day out," Becca said. "It is what makes it all worthwhile."

Because of a 6-year difference in age, Becca and Jenny were not real close growing up. Becca was the youngest of four children and was generally a nuisance to her older sister.

"Jenny was always trying to get me to leave her alone," Becca said. "And I was always trying to see what she and her boyfriends were doing. It wasn't until we weren't living in the same house any more that we got to know each other and became very close."

A shared passion for helping others emerged as they each ventured out into the world. Jenny was a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala for three years who went on to create "Trees, Water and People," an organization that helps residents of poor communities improve their lives and environments. Becca worked with homeless teens who were transitioning from foster care into adulthood.

For 20 years, the sisters lived in different cities. They both married and had children - Becca two and Jenny three - and they always talked about how wonderful it would be to live in the same city to raise their children and possibly even work together.

In 2001, Becca and her family moved from Denver to Fort Collins, beginning the chain of events that would see Clothes Pony open in 2003, bringing the dream of the Bramhalls to fruition.

Becca and Jenny laughed as they recalled the days immediately before the store's opening in the Opera Galleria.

The store was filled with boxes and hangers and the sisters knew they had their work cut out for them to get the store ready for the big day. That's when the blizzard hit.

"The snow starts hitting," Jenny explained. "Becca and I are running around getting our kids home to their fathers. Then we plowed back down here with our pajamas and sleeping bags, pulled

into the garage and got into the store. We were snowed in for two days.

"We were dancing around the whole Opera Galleria in our pajamas," Jenny continued. "Nobody was there!"

After a couple of years, Clothes Pony moved to 111 N. College, where it shared a space with the Children's Mercantile. In June 2007, Children's Mercantile went out of business. Becca and Jenny seized the opportunity, buying out the inventory and opening Dandelion Toys.

Not long after, Jenny bought the building itself, which included an upstairs level that had not been used in decades. The sisters began imagining the building as home to a variety of businesses that would be of service to families in the community.

Meanwhile, the lives of Catherine and Ena were beginning to drift toward Fort Collins - and to Becca and Jenny.

It is difficult to believe Catherine and Ena grew up in

Alabama because there is no trace of a southern accent. They claim the accent is just below the surface and comes out when they drink, are tired or mad.

The sisters were incredibly close growing up.

"Some circumstances from our childhood," Catherine said, "made it so we needed to rely on each other heavily, which we did."

Since the age of 10, Ena - the older of the two - dreamed of being an actress. Her dreams led her to Los Angeles, where she had a career as an actress, married a producer and had three children. But there came a point in her career when she became unhappy - until she discovered yoga.

"When I found yoga," Ena said, "I became a very nice person."

"We became friends again," Catherine said, joking. "Yoga does make people nicer."

Ena went on to become a certified yoga instructor.

Catherine, meanwhile, worked as an archaeologist doing fieldwork and research. She eventually moved to Estes Park with her husband. There, she worked as a natural foods cook. After the first of her children arrived, Catherine became a stay-at-home mom. The family eventually moved to Fort Collins, because they felt it had more to offer young families.

Just like Becca and Jenny, Catherine and Ena had talked about working together and hoped to someday live in the same city.

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They dreamed about opening a wellness center that combined yoga with the arts.

Catherine joked that after 10 years of asking, she finally had to use what she referred to as a lot of physiological manipulation to get Ena and her family to move here.

"I had to pretend I didn't care," Catherine said. "I talked to her and told her 'I've made peace with the fact that we're not going to live near each other and I'm OK with that. I don't need you to be right here.'"

"Then..." Catherine snapped her fingers, "guess who's moving to Fort Collins?"

With Ena in Fort Collins, the sisters started looking for places to open their business.

Now, with all the pieces ready, fate and destiny stepped in to finish the puzzle.

Catherine and Ena were frequent customers of Becca and Jenny's and they all got to know each other. This past April, Becca and Jenny approached Ena with the idea of offering a yoga class in the upstairs space that had been used for storage.

"We carved our way through shelves and dust and I came right by the window, made a circus tent and started teaching 'Mommy and Me' classes," Ena said.

Every week she came in to teach, Becca and Jenny would ask her about doing more classes.

So Ena hired a teacher to teach yoga to kids.

Then Becca and Jenny asked if Ena wanted to lease the space.

So Ena thought about that.

Then Becca and Jenny asked her if she just wanted to start her own company and totally transform the top floor.

"Every time they'd bring it up I'd think, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.'" Ena said. "Then I started talking to Catherine and she said, 'This might be it.'"

Catherine and Ena started putting their plan in motion, working through May and June to transform the upper floor from a cold dusty attic to a warm, welcoming area that includes a spacious yoga studio and a creative arts room both overlooking beautiful trees

and College Avenue. Treetop Studio was born.

All three of these businesses offer different products and services, but at the heart of each one is the commitment to family and the community.

Dandelion Toys and Clothes Pony offer unique toys and clothing. Becca and Jenny carefully decide on the products they offer, keeping in mind sustainability and quality.

"We want any family to come in here and find something that works for their budget and that will delight their children," Becca said. "We work really hard to buy things that are affordable to our customers."

The clothing on sale is organic and well-made so that it lasts and can be passed on to other children. The sisters also seek out well-made toys that will last and that promote creativity and imagination.

"There is balance in life between how things are produced and the quality of things," Becca said. "Don't buy a lot of things that are cheap, buy fewer things that are of good quality that provide longer, more open-ended imaginative play for children."

Upstairs from these two stores are Catherine and Ena and Treetop Studio. The two offer a variety of classes for adults and children including yoga, pottery, music, writing and art.

"We want people to express themselves," Ena said. "To find their voices by making a shape with their bodies or through drawing a shape on paper or through singing."

Ena teaches some of the yoga classes, but there are other instructors as well. The teachers at the studio are carefully picked for their expertise and experience.

For Ena, yoga is a simple, yet powerful way to help maintain balance in life.

"Yoga helps us clear dusty thinking, reveal the story in the breath and stir expression in the body," she said. "We realize simple ways to expand each moment and to trust our lives."

All four of these ladies agreed that the most challenging part of their jobs is the financial/business end of things.

But for all four, the best part is working with a sister. ❖



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