

Pinky's Store

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Kevin: Hello again, how are 'ya? What a beautiful morning. Good to see you. Pinky, my goodness. Good to see you. How are you?

Pinky: Good, and you?

Kevin: Very good. So good to be with you. This is Jamie, Chris, Kourtney. This is Sydney and Erin. I had to show them the store. I'm like, you can't come to Pine Ridge without coming to Pinky's store.

Pinky: Well, we're actually getting ready to repaint and do some things.

Kevin: Well it looks great.

Pinky: Do you want some water or anything?

Kevin: I brought more books for you as well.

Pinky: Oh good, because this week we have the National Low Income Housing Coalition CEO coming here.

Kevin: Here? Wow. From Washington? Yeah. I'm so happy to see you.

Pinky: It's been a long time. Kind of a rough year.

Kevin: I'm so sorry. Who, was it your sister that passed? Recently, right?

Pinky: Did you see Danny?

Kevin: We did. And then we went to the store yesterday, which looked great. So impressed with what you've all done at the store there, what he's done. Yeah. He's really brought the store to life. Just like you've done here, embrace the neighborhood, and knows everybody. It's just so fun to see over there.

Pinky: So how long are you here?

Kevin: We're here until Saturday. And then we're going up into the Black Hills for some hiking, and going to Devil's Tower, and ending up in Denver.

Pinky: Anybody want to sit at the table?

Kevin: This is where everything is. Yeah, this is one of my favorite images at Pine Ridge, is the chair with her name on the back. So Pinky's my first friend from Pine Ridge. That year when I read that, the year Pine Ridge was on the cover of National Geographic. I read that article and was like, I'm going there. And so started emailing. And the first person that emailed me back was Pinky. And we both were taking a risk. I was coming and taking a risk.

Pinky: I didn't pay attention to it. I thought, well, it's one of those, because he said, "I think I can help you." And you get them all the time in the non-profit world where you read it, and you get down to the bottom and sit ay, "Pay a thousand dollars and then we'll give you our mailing list or something." So I went back and looked at it again, and I emailed him and said, "Can you call me?" And so he called me, and we talked, and I said, "Well, then can you come out?" So he came out and that's how we met.

Kevin: The first time I came out, I didn't even have car. Pinky met me at the airport, Pinky and Danny her son, met me at the airport and we went to lunch. And then we drove down. I think, remember the badger we saw? That badger was the biggest badger you've ever see. And Pinky just took me under her arm the whole trap, like set me up at the Trading Post and stayed there. She introduced me to people and that's where it started. It all really started with Pinky right here at this table.

I tell people, you've got so much to learn about life at Pinky's table in the back of the store., And a trip for mew would not be complete, like, I wouldn't actually feel like I went to Pine Ridge without seeing Pinky and without sitting here at this table.

Pinky: So how is your tie with Kevin?

Kourtney: So I work for Kevin at the lumber yard.

Pinky: What department are you in?

Kourtney: Marketing. So I actually came at an art background. I went to school for graphic design, so I switched art for computer art, and that turned into advertising and marketing. And so I joined the team about eight years ago, and it's been Erin and Kevin and I working together.

Pinky: And you work in that marketing?

Erin: I do. Yeah. So I oversee marketing and communications for the whole company, alongside Kevin and Kourtney. We're a tight knit team, and have been there for 12 and a half years, which is mind-boggling. But I love every minute of it. When he comes back from Pine Ridge, he'd some of his journaling or photos. And we're like, that's amazing, tell us more or share more. And you just are engaged with the story from the beginning. I saw how powerful it was for him personally and in the business.

Pinky: And you actually, you have to come here and see, you know. I mean, if you come here expecting to see one thing, you're not going to. You're going to see many things, many facets of life. And one of the most, we take it for granted, we're so busy going from point A to point B, because distance plays such a big part here. We forget about the beauty that we have here, how lucky we are to be in this pretty place. How blessed we are. And you just go up on the hillside and you see it all. And right now it's nice and green. But you have to come in the winter, too, when you see the extremes, when it's bitter cold.

And right now people are euphoric. It's the first of the month. There's money in the community. People can pay bills, and they can get up, but they're not struggling to make a propane payment so they can keep the house warm and keeping the whole family warm. Now everybody's outside and enjoying themselves, and it's a nice feeling. It's almost like people when they hibernate, you come out. That's the way it feels right now.

Erin: We have a little bit of that in Maine. We do the extreme there. Yeah, exactly.

Pinky: You do a good job of marketing with your garments, your apparel. LL Bean, are they one of your biggest employers?

Kevin: Yeah. Yeah. So I met Erin, I coached her in middle school basketball. So I've only did this once, I did this for 20 years, and I only did this once. I was so impressed with her. I didn't tell her this, or maybe did I tell you this in middle school? I said when she graduates college, I'm going to hire her. I was so impressed with her. She did so well. She actually went to Amherst College, one of the best schools in America. Could have gone and done anything. So I was the only lumber company guy recruiting her for sure out of college.

And then Kourtney laid out the whole book. She is the one that set that whole book in terms of the format and pictures and things like that

Pinky: Good morning, Joel. Where are you off to today?

10:10 **Kevin:** Can you tell them a story of opening the store? How you decided to do that? And what about it? I think it's such a great story.

Pinky: Well, I was born here, but I wasn't raised here. My parents moved, and it was at a time when they had to go because jobs were scarce. So I grew up in Oklahoma. My mom and dad worked for the government. They moved a lot, they would transfer. And then I went to art school, too. So I was a theater major, of all things, you would not think that. And so I went to school at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. It's a very prestigious school, but when I went there it was very new.

And then I worked for the National Park Service while I was in college, I was a ranger, an interpreter. I loved it, I loved that work. I was getting paid to walk around and enjoy viewing and talking to people. And then I married and divorced a couple of times and get moving closer back up here from New Mexico. So when I was in Denver, I would come back and visit my mom. And she had moved back here by then, and I just thought I'd like to go back there and live. I want to get to know my family, I don't know my relatives, I've been gone.

So I left the government in good standing. I moved back here, left my job. A good job! I must have been crazy, but I wanted to come back. I really wanted to come back. So when I did, I didn't have anywhere to live. I had to live with my mom, she took me in. And I didn't have a job, but the government, the people in Denver said, "You're going to come back. You're not going to be able to make it. You'll be back." I said, "No, I'm not." And then I got to the point, I went back to school at our college. I hope you've seen our campus. You need to stop there at the bookstore.

And then I decided this community had no store. We had to drive a long ways. Early in my high school years, I got a job with a man who owned a trading post, a full-time trading post up at Standing Rock, where they have the pipeline protest. My parents were working there. So I worked in this Trading Post, and it was there where I really credit him and the boarding school with teaching me how to work, a strong work ethic. And I just thought, well, if I had the experience working in that little, tiny store, I should be able to run my own. With the little bit I know. I started in a real tiny trailer, actually. I could sit in a chair and wait on people, grabbed things off the shelf. I borrowed \$35,000, and I thought that was a huge amount of money.

And then it started falling apart. So I thought, well, I have to build something, or what am I going to do? So I borrowed a \$100,000 to build this 30 some years ago. And that was a huge amount of money. Again, I must've been crazy, but my mother was my partner. She was the one that put the collateral. I couldn't, I didn't have any collateral. I had a car, some savings, and that was it. I didn't even know what collateral meant. I didn't even know. I had no schooling. I just thought, I'm going to sell things and people are going to come to my store and they're going to be so happy. I'm going to have a tea pot on, and I'm going to study while I'm waiting on people. And I didn't know that it was going to be that challenging, that hard.

But here I am since 1983, I'm probably the oldest Indian owned minority owner in business. Oh, it's simple. You know, it's humble. But we do a lot.

Erin: Those are the best stores.

Pinky: We do a lot of social ministry here. Like somebody brought these snacks for children, healthy snacks. You see a lot in the community, and you have an opportunity to share. In our culture, generosity is part of it to be able to be grateful. Since that time, you know, that's how many years later, I'm still here.

Erin: That's so cool. I bet there are so many people that this is so important to them, too. Because one of my fondest memories growing up is we had a tiny, little store in our town, and I knew the owner. Kathy would always go on a candy walk around for everyone there. And I have such fond memories of that.

Pinky: You know, a lot of people don't have transportation, so we're the only place. I was just talking this morning. I have a veterinarian staying with me. Some of them are up where you are.

Kevin: We've met a couple of them yesterday.

Pinky: They don't have vehicles so they can't travel far. But the thing that's really lacking, the biggest challenge that we have, is developing a solid workforce where they know that they have to get up, roll out of bed, or get ready the night before and get used to the regimen of it. I was telling one of the veterinarians this morning, I think I'm going to turn my store into a nonprofit where we would train people to work. You know, we're I'd lease the building to the nonprofits where they could have a cadre of people and bring them through with the classes, this is what you do, you have to be honest, you have to be straightforward, you have to have customer service. And we use it only as a launching pad for them to grow further. Somebody needs to do it. And there's a lot of labor programs that come and go. Because we can train somebody, but we don't really track or follow them, what good does it do.

You have to be able to then say, create a job, look at the opportunity. We struggle with lunches for the veterinarians. What are we going to feed them today? Who's catering, who can make something? Who can make gifts? Recycled, get creative, because you have to think about that. There's many, many opportunities here. We just have to work on them.

17:25 **Kevin:** And then we build a house together, didn't we?

Pinky: We did. It's still there. You came and we had a foundation, and I was taking him through the neighborhood and showing him what we had there. Then all of a sudden came his idea. So he sent the house out and, you know about this, don't you?

Kevin: Yeah, we loaded it in Windham, all the materials. Then drove cross-country. I flew out to meet the trailer, because it had to be unloaded piece by piece. Pinky had volunteer groups, church-based, faith-based groups coming in.

Pinky: We had no budget. Zero dollars.

Kevin: Volunteer labor, donated materials. And you had to go round up like your nephew, his buddies. We unloaded that trailer by hand, it took us six hours to unload it. And I remember I was laughing till the very end, because your nephew and his buddies thought I was the truck driver. And at one point I said I flew here, and they got all confused.

Pinky: He's used to sitting. For 10 years, I served on our housing authority board, I've had him for six. He was a rescue dog, and I would go to the board meetings and at the board table, he got to go into the board meetings, and he had a chair there right at the table. And so one day I had him in here and he was acting up, I couldn't figure out why. He was jumping on the table, on me. So I went and got a chair and brought it in, put my coat on it, he was fine. He wanted to sit at the table.

19:45 **Kevin:** How many peer volunteers would you estimate you help organize a year here? Groups that come. It's a lot.

Pinky: We might do 20, maybe sometimes 20 to 25. That depends. Like this year only one big group did come. So we're really missing out them not being here. Because they would paint.

Kevin: So we're headed down to see at Re-Member .

Pinky: He's a partner. He's a partner. Re-Member actually started at this table, too. And I was on their board for short time. But the concept I think was really started here. Without volunteers, there's not a

whole lot that can be done, because you have to work very quickly in the summer. Any building, anything that you're going to do.

Kevin: Oh, gotcha. Okay. Yeah. See, this is what happens. People line up to Pinky at this table. Are we going to see you at your office later this morning? Are you going to be down there?

Pinky: Yeah. I'll be there at one.

Kevin: At one. Okay. All right. We'll see you there.