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54 WEST Life

Meet

Derek and Kristin
from Bexley

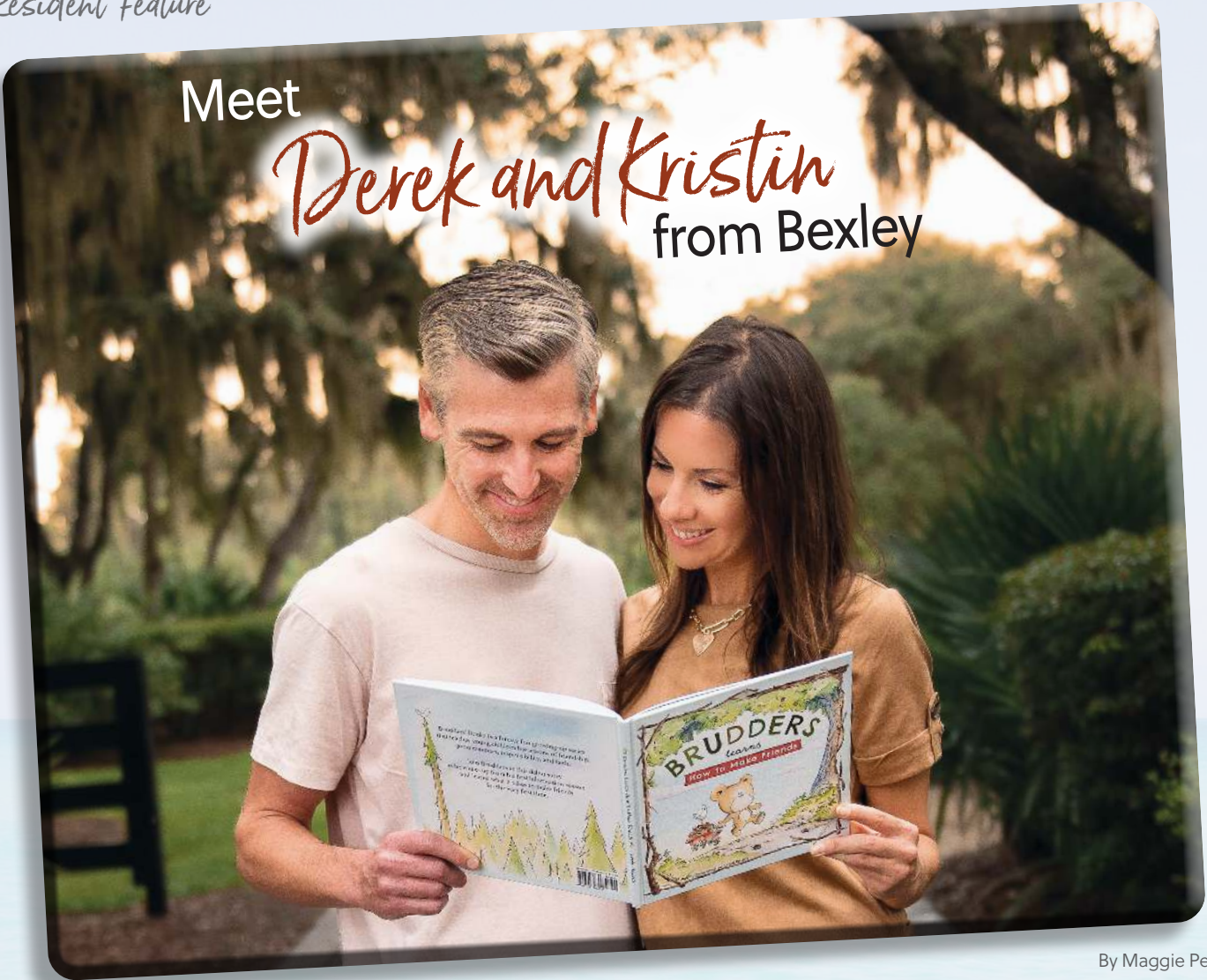


COVER PHOTO BY EDEN LANE PHOTOGRAPHY



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Derek and Kristin from Bexley



By Maggie Perritt

Photo courtesy of
Eden Lane Photography

We would like to thank
Kristy L Thurber,
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this month's
cover story.



Kristy L. Thurber
YOUR RESIDENT REALTOR

This month we get to know the power couple behind Brudders' Books - Derek Roberts and Kristin Leigh.

Theirs is a crazy story because they are from opposite coasts of the country! Derek had spent his entire life in California, and Kristin lived right here in Florida. They met in California back when Kristin was visiting a good friend who happened to be engaged to Derek's best friend. Neither Derek nor Kristin were expecting to meet someone that weekend because, at the time, they were focused on their own individual careers and were just looking to hang out with friends. But the stars were aligned and Kristin thought Derek seemed like such a nice guy, so they exchanged phone numbers and ended up talking every single day for months!

It became very clear that they both shared the same morals and values, and had similar upbringings, even if separated by almost 3,000

miles. Recognizing how special their connection was, they were not going to let long-distance get in between the relationship they created. They dated long-distance for almost four years!

Fast forward to 2022, and Derek and Kristin are now engaged and living together right here in Bexley, with a wedding date set for this coming February. Oh, and remember those friends from California? Well they moved here and now live right down the street in Starkey Ranch.

During their long-distance relationship, Derek and Kristin created Brudders' Books which is both amazing and extraordinary.

Derek's career started in graphic design, but at the ripe age of 34, he decided to go back to school for Animation. He graduated from Laguna College of Art & Design with a bachelor's degree in Animation and went to work for various animation studios doing background design,

layouts, and illustrations for children’s content. While the studio work taught him a lot, his lifelong dream was to illustrate books for kids, but he didn’t have any sort of connection with writers or the book publishing industry, so he took it upon himself to start creating his own book and created a sketch bear, named Brudders.

Kristin’s education and career started as a financial auditor. She graduated from the University of South Florida with a Master’s in Accounting and the University of Central Florida with her Bachelor’s in Accounting. She went to work for the Big 4 and a variety of global corporations. As Kristin puts it, the problem was that on Day 1 of her career, she knew being an auditor was not what she was put on this earth for. She knew that she was a very visionary and entrepreneurial person and the white collar career path was not the right fit. She was constantly thinking up ideas on how to make life better for people, and yet was in this career where she couldn’t use any of her innate talents. It paid the bills, but it didn’t bring joy like so many can relate to. So, she began writing at night as an outlet, and through that writing process realized she actually had a voice that many people could relate to. She also had a huge heart for kids and knew deep down that God wanted her to do something life-changing for them, but at that time, she just didn’t know what that was yet.

But the day that Derek first sketched the bear called “Brudders” was the day that it would unexpectedly become clear to Kristin. She took one look at the bear sketch that Derek texted her and experienced what she describes as a divine calling.



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Resident Feature

“There is absolutely no other way to describe it. The bear transformed right before my eyes into this vision of a young, innocent child who was stumbling around in life. He looked lonely, but curiously positive, and I so badly wanted him to know that no matter what he goes through, he will always have a forever friend watching over him.” ~ Kristin

As fast as the vision appeared to her, the story poured into her heart in the moments right after. She told Derek something was happening, and that night she wrote the children’s book, “Brudders Learns How To Make Friends.”

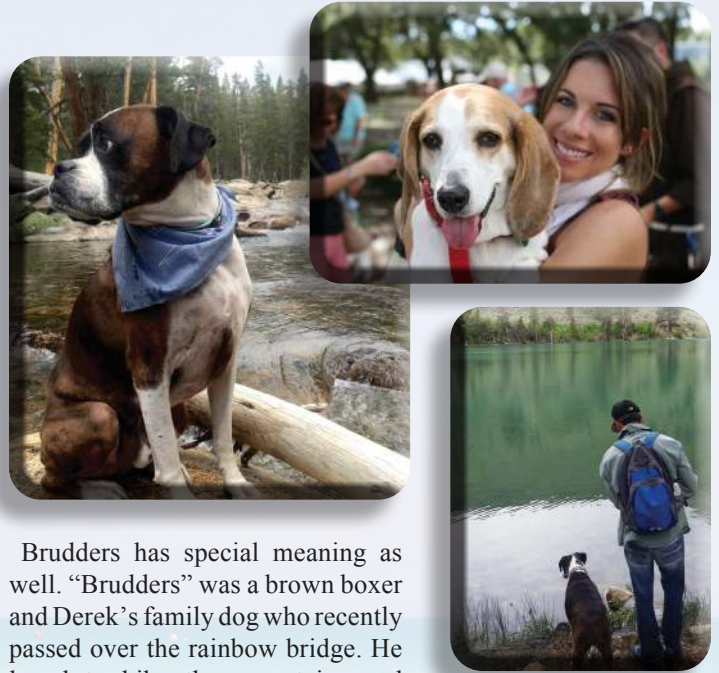
Derek and Kristin had a serious choice to make, spend a year trying to pitch agents to publish the book, or instead spend the year making a difference in kids’ lives right here, right now in the community. I think it’s clear to see which decision they made.

Since they made that decision in 2020, they have donated hundreds of their Brudders® books to community not-for-profit organizations that support children who are in need of a safe and trusted forever friend. Celebrate Birthdays, Pasco Kids First, Fostering Change Foster Closet, the HeartDance Foundation, Heels to Heals, St Joseph’s Children’s Hospital, A Door of Hope, and all the way out to an orphanage in Uganda are just a few of the organizations they have donated to. Connecting directly to these children to give them a special friend means the world to Derek and Kristin because it’s the foundation of what Brudders’ Books was built on.



They also visit schools and have seen firsthand the impact their Brudders® books have had on kids in the classroom. When children get to spend an entire period talking to an author and illustrator about their much-anticipated book questions, there is a light and hope that just radiates out of these kids that brings a warmth to their hearts.

When not working, Derek and Kristin enjoy spending time with family, taking bike rides around Bexley, swimming and hanging out at the clubhouse, enjoying live music at Starkey Market, or heading down to the beach for an early morning walk.



Brudders has special meaning as well. “Brudders” was a brown boxer and Derek’s family dog who recently passed over the rainbow bridge. He loved to hike the mountains and catch fish out of streams (and swallow them whole!). When Brudders passed on to Heaven, Derek wanted his name and friendly adventures in the woods to live on for children all over the world to enjoy! In addition to Brudders, Kristin’s cherished dog “Jellybean”, an adorable beagle-basset hound mix who lived to almost 15 years also recently passed over the rainbow bridge. Jellybean had a personality much like Snoopy, and a face that was all-business, until you whipped out the treats.

Derek and Kristin moved into Bexley in April of 2021 and have loved every single day of it. They love the nature trails, all of the incredible bird species, and the kind and supportive families in the community. Prior to settling in Bexley, the couple lived in a condo in Tampa which had its perks for that part of their lives, but now that they are getting married they wanted a location with more nature, less traffic congestion and more space. “Plus, growing a book business out of an apartment-sized space had become quite difficult,” Derek jokes.

By now it’s clear that Derek and Kristin love promoting literacy and art amongst in the community and inspiring children. They teach monthly kids painting classes on the weekends and even fun Friday evening paint classes for teens and adults. So, if your community has a clubhouse with the space, they’d love to bring their paint classes to you!

Do you know a Resident or Family who should become known by our community? Make your nominations for upcoming magazine features about residents by emailing your ideas to Maggie Perritt at MPerritt@BestVersionMedia.com.