

ON THE HOMEFRONT



# The Romantic

As Alice Cunningham discovered, if you follow your heart and instincts, good things can happen in life

It's amazing — and terrifying — how much our lives depend on luck. It can change in an instant. Two of the biggest milestones for me were the day I met my husband, Blair, and the moment we agreed to become business partners and launch a hot tub store.

It was June 2, 1975, and I was attending a conference of the World Future Society in Washington, D.C. — an international association of futurists whose membership meets every four years. There were thinkers, innovators, scientists and policy makers on the agenda, and I especially wanted to hear a speaker named Hazel Henderson talk about the future of women in the work force.

After Hazel's lecture, I introduced myself. As we talked, a tall man approached and gave her a warm embrace. Then, the next thing I knew, Hazel left to do a television interview and invited the two of us to talk. Talk we did. The man's name was Blair Osborn, and we spent the next 10 hours learning about each other as we walked the streets of our nation's capital.

## **ALICE CUNNINGHAM**

Co-Owner  
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Seattle



PHOTOS BY TARA GIMMER

By midnight, we knew we were going to spend the rest of our lives together. In fact, we knew that we wanted to leave our respective bureaucracies and launch a professional partnership. The only question was deciding what the venture should be. This was 1975, the middle of the feminist movement, and people were asking whether or not men and women could work together as equals. This was an important issue for us.

When I met Blair, I was at the start of a bright career in civil service. I was an administrator of job-training programs for 88,000 people and allocated \$60 million in federal grants for programs across four states and a few U.S. territories. Blair was a tenured professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Washington in Seattle.

People thought we were crazy to consider giving up so much security and prestige. My father cried the day I told him

I was leaving my high-paying government job to move to Seattle and open — of all things — a hot tub store. Still, my gut and heart told me it was the right decision.

Here we are, 30 years later, and we've

never looked back. The risk we took paid off because we were willing to take a chance.

One of my favorite books is *The Luck Factor* (Miramax Books, 2003) by Richard Wiseman, Ph.D., a psychologist and professor at the University of Hertfordshire, U.K. He conducted an eight-year study of the psychological features exhibited by

people who considered themselves lucky vs. those who think they were born under a bad sign.

The experiment revealed that subjects who thought they were lucky managed to

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create their own good fortune. They stayed positive and were open to new opportunities. The study also showed how misfortune and missed opportunities seemed to follow the cynical, pessimistic personalities.

Lucky people, according to Wiseman, live by four guiding principles. For the most part, such folks:

- Maximize chance opportunities.
- Listen to lucky hunches.
- Expect good fortune.
- Turn bad luck into good.

Even though Wiseman wrote his book some years after Blair and I met and launched our business, I've embraced those four guiding luck principles all along. I consider them the foundation for our shared success in business and life.

After all, it was a chance meeting with a stranger that changed the course of our lives forever. Blair and I listened to our hearts, followed our guts and turned a business many people thought was folly into a thriving enterprise that has lasted the test of time.

Wiseman got it right. The luck factor plays a significant part in one's success. ■

— as told to Joshua Keim



### Lessons Learned



■ Go with your gut. Trust your instincts.

■ Don't be afraid of risk. You have to gamble big to win big.

■ Keep an open mind and always be optimistic.

