



## TV Executive, Barbershopper & Family Man The Curious Case of John Miller



Many barbershoppers will tell you that there was one experience in their life that got them hooked on this grand hobby forever. For **John Miller** there were several pivotal events.

John was raised in Chicago, IL, the son of professional singers. Mom was a coloratura soprano with her own radio and stage shows. Dad was one of her backup singers. Clearly John inherited his pipes from his folks. During the summers the family would go to the **Wilmette Bowl**, an outdoor amphitheatre, and several times John saw the **Mid-States Four** and the **Four Renegades** there. These two quartets greatly influenced his life.

In the fifth grade he formed his first quartet and did an arrangement that his Mom gave him of “*Show Me The Way To Go Home*”. This first attempt solidified his desire to hear those harmonies ring. When he was a sophomore at **New Trier High School**, he formed his next quartet, which auditioned for **The Music Man** in his junior year. They handily won the part and John played **Olin Britt**.



Gray, Calhoun, Hal Purdy and Millers

At the end of his senior year John joined with **Hank Brandt, Jay Giallombardo** and **Geoff Calhoun** and formed **Grandma’s Boys**. Three weeks later they rode a bus to Cincinnati and stayed at the YMCA. They had 2 ½

songs and sang every night at **Purdy’s Corral** any time there was a break in the action. John has always considered Hal Purdy his barbershop Father.

Grandma’s Boys won the District Contest three months later in the fall of ’68 with three of them having joined the Society just a week prior. Then a year and a half later since they were all in college on the east coast they competed out of the Northeast District. They qualified for International and in 1970 came in



11th in Atlantic City. Nine years later with **Don Barnick** as Tenor, they won the gold medal in Minneapolis. John retired in 1980 citing the need to focus on his career as he had turned down several opportunities due to his commitment to his quartet.

John has always been an active member of the Society. Many members do not know much about the work/business side of his life. His career began at **WMAQ** (NBC) in Chicago. In 1976 he moved to **WBBM** (CBS) also in Chicago. A transfer to **CBS network** in Los Angeles in 1980 precipitated the retirement. During this same year John met **Sharon** at a CBS convention in Florida. They married on July 4, 1981 merged her household from Georgia and his from LA and settled in Connecticut. John had been promoted to do advertising and promotion for the CBS news. After moving back to CA she found her responsibilities of house and four sons to take up all of her time



Freddie Prince & The Man

In 1982 he left CBS to follow a mentor to **NBC**, so the family picked up and moved to Los Angeles. Late 1983 John got a call to audition for a new quartet. He told them no. Sharon convinced him that it was a hobby he loved and that with his stressful job the diversion would do him good. His exact quote was “*You have no idea what you are getting into*”. John joined **The New Tradition** and would spend numerous hours rehearsing holding infant **Justin** in his arms. Over time, Justin would spend countless hours watching videotapes of the New Tradition performing. He eventually had all the choreography down pat and everyone was amazed at his near perfect pitch.



Justin make a great Harpo

That summer of 1985 John was named the head of Advertising and Promotion for NBC, Then history was made when John won his 2nd gold medal again in Minneapolis. Minneapolis 2014 is right around the corner! Three-peat anyone?



*The Curious Case of John Miller - continued*



In May of 1986 the current champs, The New Tradition, sang “Come Home to NBC” posing as affiliates at the NBC annual meeting. Many were later surprised to find out that John was NOT lip-syncing. The following year the quartet again sang the '87 NBC theme song.

'87 brought the blessed birth of son #4, **Jon-Michael**. He joined the other brothers in wearing out the records, cassettes and videotapes and going to any and all shows when possible. There admittedly came a time when the quartet sang 42 weekends out of the year when Sharon remembered John’s original statement to her (but never any regrets).



Brandon Tartikoff, Bob Wright and John

Also in '87 John hired **Jay Leno** to be a promotional spokesperson prior to the network hiring him as the host of “**Tonight**”. Much later John would hire **Ryan Seacrest** to host their Saturday night movies.

In 1989 John took on the extra responsibility of program syndication and development. 1990 saw him add Executive Vice President of Marketing over audience and sales.

Later in 1990 John was asked to go to NY to shadow the President of NBC in preparation for taking over the position in 1991. The family moved to Westport, CT while John stayed back in LA to sell the home and get ready for the transition. Once he moved, the powers that be wanted him back on the West Coast. He would work a few weeks in NY, then a week in LA and so on. Within a year the President decided not to retire and John was needed full time back on the West Coast.

Jason and Justin had made excellent transitions in school and did not want to move. The decision was made to keep the family on the East Coast thus began John’s weekly commute to



LA. He would leave every Monday morning and come home on Friday nights.

Even at 18-months, Justin already knows all the moves

During the commute years the work responsibilities continued to soar. In 1991, still handling network advertising and promotion, he added daytime and children’s programming. At this time his former mentor was married to *Days of our Lives* star **Deidre Hall**. Her husband was studying abroad at **Oxford** so John would be her escort to



Deidre Hall and her escort

any black tie events. Sharon and Deidre were friends so it was totally fine for any who might wonder. Sharon even wondered how many friends actually read ‘*The Enquirer*’ and would comment on photos of John and Deidre. No one ever did.

There were few Internationals that the family missed. One year John asked his AIC buddies to help him out by individually wishing Sharon a happy anniversary. The first couple of guys really impressed Sharon that they actually remembered. After a few more she caught on that they were coerced into being participants, albeit willing, in making the day special.

Daytime programming was given up in 1993 but John took on prime time specials. The family often went to Las Vegas to attend



Bob Hope, Sharon & John Miller

the tapings of **World’s Greatest Magic**. The family was seen on-air several times and once Jon-Michael was chosen to do a bit with **John Ritter** on stage.

John formed and became the President of the NBC Agency in 1999. They did all the print and on-air advertising in house for the network as well as other NBC owned properties such as CNBC, MSNBC and NBCI.com.

In 2004 NBC merged with Universal and in addition to being President of the NBC Agency he took an additional role of Chief Marketing Officer of the NBC/Universal Television Group. He was one of two leads on the due diligence team that studied the merger, and he was the west coast integration lead.



John interviews Larry King and Mike Wallace

*The Curious Case of John Miller - continued*



John, Dick Ebersol and the International Olympic Committee

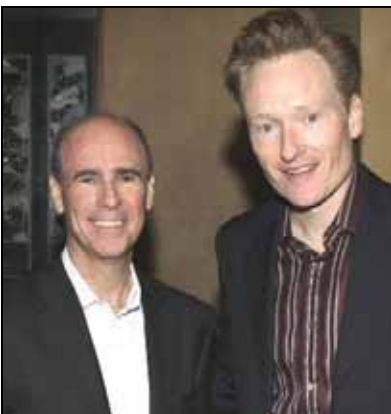
John was instrumentally involved with **Dick Ebersol**, President of NBC sports, in procuring the Olympics for 2010 and 2012. He has been involved in marketing the Olympics to the American public since Seoul 1988.



The slogan “*Must See TV*” was created by John and his team in the mid 90s. It still has the highest awareness of any television slogan in network history. To name a few of the numerous awards John has won for his creative work - he is a two-time Emmy winner, a member of the **Promax** (television promotion and marketing professionals) Hall of Fame, and a three-time Ad Age Marketer of the Year.

During this illustrious and busy career John still found time to coach soccer, baseball and attend basketball games, music concerts, musicals and plays.

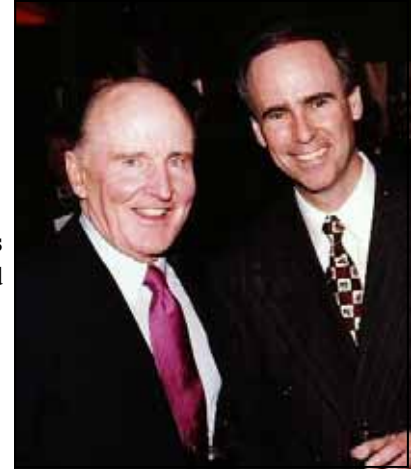
Throughout his career the family has had some fantastic experiences. Eight Olympics, Wimbledon, US Open, and the Super Bowl, not to mention many sports final games and NBA weekends. They attend the Emmy Awards, the Golden Globes and frequent black tie events in LA and NY. The kids grew up being exposed to all kinds of people and culture. It has and continues to be a busy and fulfilling life.



John with Conan O'Brien

Justin and Jon-Michael were both interested in music and acting from an early age. They both had the same music teacher in elementary school that actually had the boys sing barbershop. Both Justin and Jon-Michael began acting in the 4th grade and continued through high school. They both participated in audition-only elite singing groups and always introduced their friends to tagging. They sing tags around the house ALL THE TIME.

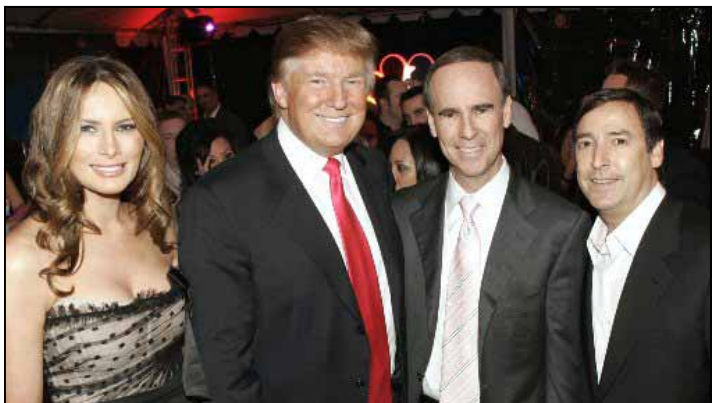
When Justin was a junior he formed an octet, **The TestosterTones**. Sharon produced an ‘*A Cappella Extravaganza*’ to raise money to send the theatre group to Scotland. The **New Tradition** and the **Gas House Gang** were featured quartets. Justin’s group also sang and greatly impressed the audience; barbershop and theatre crowds alike, with **David Wright’s** arrangement of “*Stars and Stripes*”. Justin



GE CEO Jack Welch and John

was foremost in helping the guys learn the tight harmony. Jon-Michael played **Jacey Squires** in ‘**The Music Man**’ and then in high school formed an a cappella group that performed at Senior Centers.

There was never an opportunity for the boys to sing with a chorus while in Connecticut. Their activities kept them busy and the nearest chapters were too far away. In 2001 the family moved back to California. In February of 2002 they all went to a Pioneers weekend at **The Grand Tradition**. That weekend Justin met **Mark Hale**, who invited him to visit **Masters of Harmony**. Justin was a freshman at **Marymount College** in Palos Verdes and wasted no time in contacting the chorus. Local members picked him up at school and gave him rides to rehearsal. He hasn’t looked back.



Melania & Donald Trump and John - The Apprentice Launch Party at the Playboy Mansion - NBC Photo: Chris Haston

*The Curious Case of John Miller - continued*

That same year Justin and Jon-Michael were two of the original-founding members of **Westminster Chorus**. In August of 2003 Justin became the presentation coordinator of MOH. He was a Board Member-at-large of Masters of Harmony from 2005 – 2007 at the same time he served as President of Westminster. He was asked to be Director of Westminster in 2008.

John and Justin have three gold medals with MOH along with Jon-Michael's two. Justin and Jon-Michael have won silver and gold with Westminster. Justin has placed fourth three times with two different quartets in the college contest. He was a member of the faculty of Harmony College in 2006.



John and Grant Tinker NBC CEO

At John's surprise 50th birthday party the boys sang 'My Father, My Friend, My Dad' with their older brothers **Bobby and Jason**. To this day it is one of John's favorite and most emotional moments of his life. He was moved that his four sons, two of whom don't sing barbershop,

would come together in this way for him.

Although John changed to communications he was originally a theatre major; Justin and Jon-Michael followed in their father's theatre footprints. They have been in countless plays and musicals. Justin was originally a musical theatre major but changed to music education. His dream is to teach at his high school in CT and be the musical director for the shows. Jon-Michael will continue to pursue acting, singing and dancing. Bobby just turned 39 and got married to **Sarina** on December 27th. Jason is 34. Both boys live and work in Los Angeles.

Justin just graduated with BM (Bachelor of Music) Music Education with Vocal Emphasis and BM Performance with a Conducting Emphasis. He will begin his Masters of Art in Teaching in January - all from **Chapman U.** in Orange. He teaches piano lessons. Jon-Michael is a BFA acting major at **Ithaca College** in upstate NY. He is applying and auditioning for Masters programs to begin next fall.

John Miller has been successful in so many areas; family, career and hobby. One can only imagine the substantial number of people he's influenced and inspired throughout his life. As the kids begin their own journey, we're all simply grateful to be a part and watch as this "curious" story continues.

### From Production Assistant to President

WMAQ in Chicago - Production Assistant/Associate Producer/On-Air Promotion Mgr.

WBBM in Chicago - On-Air Promotion Mgr.

1981 Director of Advertising and Promotion for CBS News NY; Created an ad campaign for Dan Rather and encouraged him to loosen up on air by wearing sweaters.

1982 Director of Affiliate Promotion CBS in Los Angeles

1982 Vice President Affiliate Promotion

1983 Vice President Advertising and Promotion West Coast

1985 Vice President Advertising & Promotion NBC TV Network

1989 Senior Vice President A & P and Program Development

1990 Executive Vice President Marketing New York

1991 Executive VP A & P, Daytime and Children's Programming

1993 Executive VP A & P, Children's Prog. & Primetime Specials

1999 President of The NBC Agency

2004 – present - President of The NBC Agency and Chief Marketing Officer of NBC/Universal Television Group

### A Note from Sharon

Speaking as the wife, mother and non-barbershopper in the family this hobby has been an unbelievable addition to our family. Everyone in our extended family supports the hobby and gets much enjoyment out of watching and listening. Since moving back to California in 2001 we have developed such close friendships with many in our **Far Western** District family. Through the AIC I have friends all over the country. I can truly say that a day doesn't go by that I am not grateful for that little boy that fell in love with this art form and for his parents, who although did not participate, encouraged and supported him in his quest to be the best.

I am grateful that my children embrace and love this pastime. We are confident that the singing will continue on for many generations. My support and encouragement will continue as I accept the honor of serving on the **Harmony Foundation** Board of Trustees. Let's *Keep the Whole World Singing!*

Sharon Worsham Miller - January 7, 2009

*Editor's Note: My sincere thanks to **Sharon Miller** for the information and photos provided in this feature.*