

BOB WELBY MEMORIAL RECOGNITION OF SERVICE AWARD

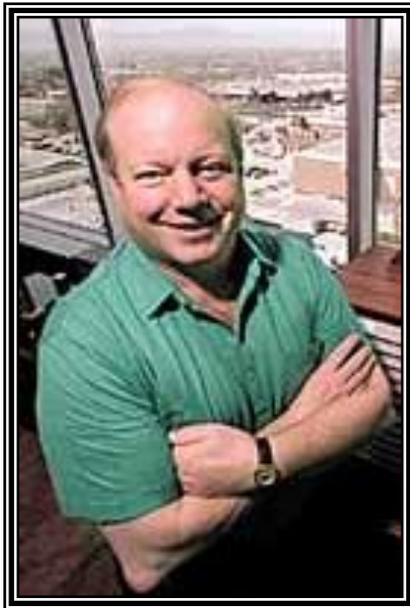
Larry H. Miller - Sponsor - 1992

You know this guy?

By [Doug Robinson](#)

Deseret News senior writer

"After all, you know this guy." — TV commercial for Larry Miller car dealerships.
Do you now?



Did you know that he was once a school-boy marble champion and practiced his craft every day for three years?

Did you know he was a horrible student and that he lasted about a month in college?

Did you know he was brilliant? Or that he once scored so high on a college entrance test that school officials thought he cheated?

Did you know he has something close to a photographic memory and that he could tell you the part number for a '74 Toyota or how many Christmas lights it takes to cover a tree in front of the Delta Center if you asked him right now?

Did you know he consulted his church's president before he bought the Utah Jazz and that he risked everything to buy the team?

Did you know he had a dream that promised prosperity if he would obey one of his church's commandments?

Did you know that he has been in love with the same girl since junior high?

After all, you know this guy, because he appears in corny TV commercials and he owns the Jazz and the Delta Center and about half of State Street, and he's undertaken this unofficial role as Salt Lake's Great Uncle Larry, a cross between the city's great benefactor and one tough businessman.

But did you know he didn't meet his real father until the latter introduced himself at a softball game?

Did you know that while he was working 90-hour weeks that he rarely saw his children when they were growing up and that he beats himself up over it?

Did you know that he has been granted a second chance at raising a child?

Did you know that this intense, driven man collects poems and literary passages and wise sayings, makes notes for speeches in a tiny notebook and can go on and on about paintings and statues that move his soul?

'No wonder we're tired'

All you have to do is look at that right elbow to learn much about Miller. Strangely elongated and pointed, it looks as if a broom handle has been inserted in the joint. It's a cartoon elbow, borrowed from Popeye. If Karl Malone had this elbow, he would be illegal. The elbow is the product of pitching a softball for 27 years.

During most of his teenage years, he pitched for 15 minutes, every day, year-round, working through his repertoire of pitches — risers, drops, curves, knucklers, fastballs. During the winter he either braved the snow and cold outside or pitched in his basement. Sometimes he resorted to throwing darts underhanded at a plywood target. He pitched so much that his elbow became deformed with fluid and calcification. The payoff was a prolific pitching career and a place in the national softball hall of fame.

Miller's work ethic, powered by the narcotic of achievement and success, is both his strength and weakness. It was this work ethic that took him away from home and family. It was this work ethic that drove him to become a self-made millionaire in the great tradition of great American success stories, working his way up from stock boy and counter man to wealthy entrepreneur. At last count he owned 38 car dealerships, the Utah Jazz, the Delta Center, a TV station, Jordan Commons and everything in it (movie theaters, restaurants, offices), an insurance company, a real estate company, an advertising agency and more — all acquired in the last 22 years.

A few years ago, he and his wife, Gail, were driving home from Colorado when they began reflecting on the direction of their lives. Gail suggested they make a list of the things he — *they*, really — had done in his career. When they were finished, they were stunned. The list covered several pages; every few months for 20 years there had been a major business transaction or project. "No wonder we're tired," Gail told her husband.

Miller is the accidental businessman, a prolific entrepreneur-philanthropist whose career sprang from working-class roots and accidents of fate. People ask him now if he had a plan. Hardly. The chain of events that began his entrepreneurial career were sparked by three failures: He dropped out of college, got laid off and got demoted.

A lousy student

Larry Horne Miller graduated from West High School with a 1.77 cumulative grade point average. One point seven seven. Teachers suspected his grades didn't reflect his intelligence — at every level of schooling he was given tests in a room alone — but his reputation for misbehavior preceded him. One teacher gave Miller his own curriculum at the outset of the term and said he didn't want to see him until the end of the year.

Miller's grades were so poor that he didn't qualify to take a college admissions test until a family friend intervened and arranged it at the University of Utah. Miller scored in the 99th percentile. The score was so high that university officials were suspicious — the grades and test score didn't match. They thought he had cheated and asked him to retake the test, this time under close supervision. Same results.

He lasted six weeks at the University of Utah. "It verified two things — that I had a short attention span and I had lousy study habits," he says.

He worked odd jobs that "taught me what I didn't want to do." He worked in a book bindery. Framed houses. Carried and mixed mortar. Drove delivery trucks. Picked strawberries. "When we were dating, he wasn't interested in doing anything with himself," says Gail. The best thing that happened to him was getting laid off a construction job when he was 19.

A recreational drag racer in his spare time, he had come to know the owners of a small auto parts store. They were looking for someone with experience to work the counter. He had no experience, but he told them, "I'm a fast learner. If you hire me, you'd feel good about it." He swept floors, stocked shelves, made deliveries, answered the phone, and soon he was working 96 hours a week — every hour the store was open. Within a year he was doing the hiring, firing, scheduling and ordering of parts.

"The reason I stayed with it is because it only took me a few days to realize I liked it," he said. "It was not about cars but the numbers. Remembering the numbers."

Miller's ability to recall numbers is legendary among acquaintances. During nearly six hours of interviews with a reporter, when discussing certain events in his life, he casually mentioned not only the dates of certain events in his life but sometimes the day of the week. He'll tell you he had a meeting about the purchase of the Jazz "on Tuesday, March 12." He moved to Denver when he was "26 1/2 years old — a Monday morning, Nov. 16, 1970." He bought his first dealership on "April 6, 1979," and took possession on "Tuesday, May 1." His first date with his future wife was "Jan. 30, 1959." He can tell you that three decades ago his parts store increased its sales "576 percent the first year, then 202 percent, then 200, then 201."

"Larry has something that borders on a photographic memory," says Dennis Haslam, a lifelong friend who serves as president of Miller's sports entertainment business. "Ask him what the part number is for a generator for a 1974 Toyota, and he could recite the seven numbers."

Only another counter man can fully appreciate this gift of recall for numbers. It makes him fast and efficient. A customer could ask for a part and most of the time Miller would know the seven-digit part number and the price — wholesale and retail — without opening a book.

"How do you do that?" people would ask him.

For five years he served as a counter man at various auto parts stores while playing top-level softball competition as well. Then he was recruited by a softball team in Denver with the

promise of a job as a Toyota parts manager. Miller and his wife made the move, leaving Utah for the first time on that Monday morning, Nov. 16, 1970.

An epiphany

Miller was sitting at his desk on a recent morning — Wednesday, May 14, 2001, 8 a.m. — at the top of the Jordan Commons office building. His chair commands a view of the Salt Lake Valley in three directions. From here, he can survey his kingdom and sphere of influence — car dealerships lining State Street, his theaters and mall, the campus he is building at Salt Lake Community College. He has literally risen above his humble beginnings, whether eating breakfast in his mansion high above the north end of the valley or sitting in his office, high above the south end of the valley.

Miller, dressed in his uniform of sneakers, jeans and a golf shirt with the Jazz logo, is deep in thought, searching for words. At times like this, he tends to close his eyes and place a hand on his forehead, as if palming his head will crystallize his thoughts. He is nothing if not a passionate, introspective man, and given the deep circles under his eyes, he appears to do more thinking than sleeping. He is of course famously emotional. As the conversation moves seamlessly from family to patriotism to art to religion to career, he daubs at his eyes with a handkerchief, which he had placed on his desk. He knew it would come to this. The eyes are great, bottomless wells.

"There were trade-offs," he begins, leaning back in his chair, palming his forehead. "If there is one thing I'd do different — only one — it's to have been there at the Little League games and for the scraped knees and the dance recitals and the back-to-school nights. Would we have been as accomplished? There's no way to know. Ten years ago I would have said no. Today I think I would say I probably could still do it. Instead of working 90-hour weeks and missing all that stuff, I'd work a more balanced schedule, 55 or 60 hours, and the important things would still get done."

He can remember precisely the moment of his life-altering epiphany. It was March 1971, and he had just taken a 21-line Corolla crash parts order over the phone from a body shop. He was checking to see what parts he had in stock when "like a bucket of cold water it hit me. Here I am, soon to be 27, with two children and one on the way, with the responsibility of raising and supporting those children, for food and diapers and college and preparing for our old age and retirement, and I have nothing to fall back on, like a college education, except what I have inside me, my talent and energy. It scared the heck out of me. It hit me so abruptly. That's when I started my 90-hour weeks. I decided I had to be good at something, and the thing I was best at is being a Toyota parts manager."

From that moment on, he began working from 7:30 in the morning until 9, 10 or 11 at night, six days a week, for the next 16 years.

Reasoning that other dealers had the same parts and roughly the same prices to offer, he believed service and hustle were his aces. "A lot of people go through the motions with little sense of urgency; I had an extreme level of urgency," he says. "A body shop would call and want 21 parts; I'd pull, pick and price them in 15 or 20 minutes. If I can find only 19 parts, I'm ticked off. If I'm five minutes late, I'm upset because I created a system that wasn't more responsive."

Miller wasn't just good at delivering service and parts; he was world-class. He wanted parts delivered five minutes ago. He was a quarterback, running the two-minute offense. His store became the highest volume Toyota parts dealer in the nation. Miller eventually became operations manager over five car dealerships. "If you had asked me then what I would be doing in the next five or 10 years, I'd still be working in Denver dealerships," he says. "I had no aspirations to have my own deal. I was perfectly content."

Cussing, softball, tithing

In Miller's mind, any discussion of what happened next and his subsequent meteoric rise in the business world must include his religious faith. Early in his married life he strayed from his Mormon roots. His re-conversion to the church was a seven-year process, culminated by a late-night meeting in which he told his local church leader there were three sticking points: a weakness for swearing, playing softball on Sunday and paying tithing (donating 10 percent of his earnings to the church). He vowed to change. The next day he told Gail, "Starting with the next paycheck, pay 10 percent tithing on my gross earnings, and I don't want you ever to ask me about it again."

Six weeks later, Miller was summoned to a meeting with the owner of the dealership. He wanted to reassign Miller elsewhere in the company so the owner could take over the car dealership operation and work with his eight sons.

This was what he got for paying his tithing?

Miller decided to leave the company. He moved back to Salt Lake City and bought his first car dealership, drawing up the contract on a place mat in a restaurant. That day he came home and told Gail, "I just spent a million dollars." He had spent their entire savings, \$88,000, as a down payment.

"I don't think anything scared me as much as that first dealership," says Gail.

The Millers endured hard times when the economy turned sour in the early '80s. "There were times when Larry would come home and say, 'Sorry, we didn't make any money this month.' We didn't have enough to pay our bills," says Gail.

Miller, whose dealerships sell 60,000 cars a year now, tells the tithing story for a reason, of course. "That was the beginning, absolutely," says Miller. "When I had that meeting (with his boss), it forced me out of a situation where I thought I would be indefinitely. There were forces at work that sent me back to Utah."

A few years later, Miller had a dream that he says was remarkable in its clarity. He was in a high-ceiling room with open skylights, and there was a knock at the door. He took a white package wrapped with white ribbon that lay on a table, and gave it to someone at the door. Moments later, there was another knock. This time there were more white packages on the table. He took them to the person at the door. The scene repeated itself over and over, and each time he gave away a box he discovered it had been replaced by many more boxes on the table until eventually they filled the entire room. "Where are these coming from?" he asked Gail. "The only thing I can figure is they're coming through the skylights."

Finished with this story, Miller lets it settle on his listener before concluding, "I have been so fortunate in my life, not just in material ways. So much so that I wonder why me?"

The thrill of the hunt

How could one man drive himself so hard for so long at the expense of everything else? Think of it: 14-hour days, six days a week, for nearly 20 years. "That's a good question, but I don't know the answer," he says. "I can only offer clues."

Here's one: When Miller was a boy, he played marbles. Not playground marbles, but serious marbles — marble tournaments. To prepare himself for competition, he hiked up Capitol Hill to the police rifle range and gathered up large, brass shell casings. Hundreds of them. He arranged the shells upright in 10 rows the width of his room, the farthest row being some 30 feet away, and shot them with marbles until he had knocked down all of them. It took accuracy and power to knock shells down from that distance, especially since the marble had to go over or through other shells to get to the back rows. Every day for three years he fired marbles at the shells. He won the school marble championship and advanced as far as the finals of the city championship.

It was the same for softball. Those daily practices allowed him to become an adult-level pitcher at 16. He pitched in his first world tournament at 24. He played at the highest levels of softball for 18 years before retiring in 1985. By then he had pitched in 1,081 games and collected 819 victories.

"I can't define why I'm like that," says Miller. "It seems to me some of the characteristics are inherent. I always had them. I guess it's the thrill of success. The thrill of the hunt."

Miller brought the same intensity and work ethic to the business world. He worked all day and most of the night. He could have worked fewer hours, but that wasn't his style: He was obsessive in his hands-on management style, overseeing every detail of the business.

"It was the satisfaction of accomplishments and of doing certain things," he says. "I wasn't afraid to delegate; I took pleasure out of details. Also, I could make sure it gets done right."

The same man who couldn't do homework for school, thrives on doing his homework on the details. He studies every nuance of a project. When the Delta Center was being built, he dived into every aspect of the project. During daily meetings with architects, he requested that certain things be done with the construction of the building, and architects told him they couldn't be done. "Well, if you look at the drawings and reconfigure your plans," Miller would

say, "I think you'll see that it can be done." The next day the architects would show up for another meeting and report, "You know what, you're right."

"That happened several times," says David Allred, a Jazz vice president who sat in on the meetings. "He studies things out. He can tell you those kinds of things about anything he's involved with. He becomes an expert."

Amid all the worries about costs and deadlines and building issues during the construction of the Delta Center, he became an expert in, of all things, trees; specifically, the trees that would be planted in front of the building. He talked to horticulturists at universities. He read books. He drove to sites around town to view certain types of trees in person. In the end, he decided on a flowering pear. Why? Because when they're planted a certain distance apart, they grow together and form a canopy about 35 feet above the ground. The canopy will provide shade in the summer and a beautiful treetop view for people looking out of the fifth floor of the Delta Center, not to mention vivid colors in the spring and fall.

This is the quintessential Miller — a man who revels in details and projects. He is running a business empire that employs 5,000 people, yet he can tell you how many Christmas lights those trees require. ("When we first planted them they took only four to six strands per tree; last year they averaged 76. Some have over 100.")

Through the years, Miller tried to hire people to oversee the day-to-day operations and the details, but it didn't work. He couldn't help himself; too often he stepped in to get his hands on some project. More recently he has tried again, but with more latitude for him to get his hands on a project if he wants.

"My father has an insatiable appetite to correct problems and do deals," says Miller's oldest son, Greg.

It was this insatiable appetite for deals and details and success that drove Miller to work the long hours and miss a home life, a fact that haunts him. "I didn't have to give up what I did," he says. "I could have delegated, and today I do."

Ironically, and painfully, Miller used his great administrative gifts to organize and lead thousands of people in the business world, but he couldn't or didn't do the same for five kids and a wife at home.

'Well, we splurged'

Sitting in her house atop Capitol Hill, Gail Miller, surrounded by the opulence of her new home, is dressed in a gray sweatshirt, blue stretch pants with a small hole in the knee and white socks. She is a handsome, soft-spoken woman with white hair and a serene, wise bearing. "She has the patience of Job," says Greg.

This house is another world for a woman who grew up with nothing. There were times when her family of 11 didn't know when they would get their next meal. "When dad came home with a sack of groceries, the kids would say, 'Yea!' I know how to do with nothing."

Gail's mother tells her, "I never thought this would happen to one of my children." For her part, Gail has become accustomed to it. It's not as if she won the lottery.

"It's all been gradual," she says. "I don't feel puffed up in it. It's just the place I live. I have to stop sometimes and appreciate it."

The Millers raised their family in Sandy, but they always hoped to return to Capitol Hill, the place where they grew up. A few years ago, they decided to build their dream house here. Before a reporter visited his home, Miller prepared him for what he would see.

"When we were dating in high school, we would drive around and see homes we wanted," he said. "Our dream houses. We'd see houses and we'd say, 'That's an obscene display of wealth.' Well, we splurged. I told Gail when we built this house, you know people will say, 'That's an obscene display of wealth.' When you come down the street (below it), you can't miss it; it is pretty lavish."

Let's put it this way: When the architect showed up the first day, he plunked down a book in front of Gail and said, "See if there's anything in there you like." The title of the book: "The Palaces of Marseille."

It's granite and glass on the outside with a pool and a playground and a home movie theater and a view of the entire valley as far south as the smog will allow. Bronze statues greet visitors as they approach the front door. Inside, there are marble and wood floors and 24-foot ceilings and large paintings on the walls and another large sculpture in the entryway.

The house took three years to build.

Spending money doesn't come easy for the Millers, the house notwithstanding. They tend to buy things on sale, and they certainly don't splurge on clothing. Miller likes to tell people he still wears the same \$22 wedding ring and \$150 watch. For years, the biggest thing he bought himself was a \$64 softball mitt.

During the early years of his career, when his salary soared with the Toyota boom, he saved. Instead of buying a boat or taking lavish vacations, he saved the \$88,000 he eventually used as the down payment on his first car dealership.

"You want frugal stories?" says Greg. "One time we drove downtown to get something to eat and pulled up to a parking meter right in front of the restaurant. Larry slowed down and then speeded up. I said, 'Where are you going?' He said, 'There wasn't any time left on the meter.' We drove a half block up the road so we could save 25 cents."

When the subject of Larry's frugality is raised, Gail is skeptical. "I don't know about that now," she says. "He has 11 Cobras. Want to see some of them?" She leads her guest to one of the garages on the property and points to three shiny red convertible sports cars.

The cars notwithstanding, she says, "Larry understands the value of money. About the only thing you can find fault with him is it's hard for him to enjoy it."

Gail has known Miller since they were 12. It began when he asked a friend if he knew of any cute girls he could meet; the meeting was arranged at Gail's locker. They introduced themselves. Nothing much happened, but when Miller appeared as a model for Gail's art class in ninth grade, the romance began in earnest. They married when she was 21 and he 20.

When the kids came along and Miller began working incessantly, Gail picked up the slack at home. "My mother is a saint," says Greg. Gail mowed the lawn, cleaned the garage, painted the house, fixed broken bikes, helped with homework and coped alone with the trials of her children.

"That's all Larry learned at home when he was growing up," says Gail. "He didn't learn emotional attachments and the warmth of a father. He thought he was doing what a father should do, and that was provide."

Miller's parents married before World War II and then divorced after the war ended. Miller was 1 1/2 at the time. His mother remarried a couple of years later. Miller's stepfather was Frank Miller, who worked at the Phillips petroleum plant. "You could set your watch by his electric shaver that went on every morning," says Larry. "He was a salt-of-the-earth kind of guy. Reliable. Honest. Hard-working."

Miller's natural father, who had agreed during the divorce settlement not to contact his children, sent him a letter wishing him well when Miller and Gail married. The son didn't respond. When Miller was 35, he was warming up for a softball game in St. George when a man approached him and said, "Hi, I'm your dad." They saw each other a few times over the next few years, but Miller says, "He wanted it to be more of a relationship than I was comfortable with."

Miller himself was a distant father. He was gone six days and nights each week, and on the seventh day he played softball. "He didn't go to his kids' games, they went to his," says Gail. Miller's five children suffered from his absences. Most of them were rebellious and angry; they ran with the wrong crowd, got into trouble. Greg got kicked out of Alta High School. Roger divorced. The Millers' only daughter, Karen, had a baby at the age of 15, and for years was in and out of the house.

Even when he was home, Miller was preoccupied. Greg says he learned that when the door to his home office was shut, you didn't open it, and if it was ajar you entered at your own peril. To keep the peace, Gail tended to keep the children's troubles to herself until matters

got so serious she had to tell him. By the time a problem reached Miller, it had already spiraled out of control, and Miller raged.

"Two things happened," says Miller. "As I achieved success in my career and ultimately in my own business, I felt safe in that environment. I knew what I was doing. As a husband and father, I viewed myself much more as a breadwinner than as an emotional leader. As long as I provided for my family, I fulfilled my role. I didn't realize until my late 40s that my kids and wife had an emotional need for me. I grew up in a family where we didn't talk about emotions; we talked about work, achieving and accomplishing.

"It got worse as I got older. It was moving to higher planes as the world sees it and those things demanding more time and allowing myself to cater to those demands."

"My father loved us, and he was concerned for us," says Greg, "but he wasn't there for us. I don't think he knew what he was missing."

The bridge builder

Miller, who turns 57 this week, has cut his work hours to 45-50 per week in the past year. Over the years, his motivation for work beyond the car business is rooted in religion, philanthropy and his interest in art, history and community.

He spotted an old turn-of-the century fire station while out for a drive one day and embarked on a project to rebuild it at This Is the Place Heritage Park. He supervised the construction of Franklin Covey Field. He funded the building of BYU's new baseball field and loved every minute of it. "The BYU thing is way cool," he says. He is funding and overseeing the construction of three buildings for Salt Lake Community College that will comprise the Larry H. Miller Entrepreneurship Center. He is working with artists on painting and sculpting projects. He donated funds to expand Rice-Eccles Stadium. He provides college scholarships to the children of employees who graduate from high school with at least a C average. He teaches a three-hour entrepreneurial course one night a week at BYU.

Then there is Larry H. Miller Charities, which has received as many as 30,000 requests in a single year for financial help for individuals and organizations. Miller is often besieged with personal requests. He went to a dinner event recently and afterward was approached by more than 30 people who wanted something — money, a car, tickets, advice, funding for an invention. ("It's hard to know where to draw the line," Miller says. "You can't be all things to all people. . . . I think of myself as a bridge builder. You have someone on this side and someone on the other side. Our job is to build that bridge and hope once we get them there they will establish themselves.")

"There are a lot of other things done that people don't know about, and neither do I," says Allred, who is president of Larry H. Miller Charities. "People tell me things that he did that I didn't know. What we see is the tip of the iceberg. He doesn't like to talk about it. He has a fundamental belief that if that stuff gets public, then he's doing it for the wrong reason. . . . People probably don't believe this, but he has a strong philanthropic side to him. I really believe he does what he does and takes the risks he does less for the financial upside than because he believes it will be good for the community."

There really was no other reason why Miller would, for instance, step in at the 11th hour and buy the Jazz just to keep them from moving to Miami. "We need to buy this team," he told Gail one night. "If we don't, who will? If we lose this team, this community will never see major league sports again."

Miller consulted LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley and industrialist Jon Huntsman about the idea, but his purchase of the Jazz was still an act of sheer financial insanity by a guy who merely was a casual basketball fan and borrowed \$8 million to buy a franchise that had lost \$17 million in its 11-year history, including \$1 million in its best year, "and we had no definable plan as to how we would turn it around and break even." Oh, yes, and Miller's net worth at the time was just \$2 million.

He had no equity in the deal; he wanted to borrow 100 percent of the money. Perhaps most remarkably, he convinced a consortium of conservative bankers to take the risk with him. He literally crashed a board of directors meeting at a Salt Lake hotel to make his plea to one bank. In another meeting with the Zions Bank board of directors, chairman Roy Simmons asked Miller why they should lend him the money, then smiled afterward and told Miller, "Before you came in here, I had told these gentlemen that I could not think of any answer you could give that would change my mind. You changed my mind."

Bottom line: In nine days, he raised \$8 million for a sick business. Today it is worth an estimated \$211 million.

Given his golden touch, Miller has been urged at times to seek political office. "Look, I'm not puffed in this, but I have unique, if not rare, elements about me," he says. "I can organize human and financial resources to make things happen. If I were in government, it would taint something about what I do and how I work. I now have broad access to people in government. I can talk to Democrats and Republicans, city people, county people, state people. Many doors are open to me now. It's the way that I can accomplish certain things that others can't."

Others in Miller's position might be tempted by political office to soothe their egos. Not Miller. The philanthropy, frugality, work ethic and even his wardrobe and hands-on attention to details are at least partially driven by a long-held fear that money would somehow change him. "I don't mind getting big," he likes to say, "I just don't want to act like it."

In his spare time, Miller teaches a Sunday school class and a weekly three-hour entrepreneurial class at BYU. (Ironically, the former high-school flunky now has four honorary college degrees.) On the last day of class he hands students a collection of poems and favorite quotes and stories that inspire, teach and motivate. Miller carries a pocket-size notebook in which he jots topics for dissertations, which later he expands into an essay in another notebook he carries in his briefcase. He plans to write a book as a legacy to his family. Maybe he is a hard-driving businessman, but Miller is a soft touch. He cries as he describes books he has read and art work he has seen and children he has missed.

Miller has tried to heal the wounds of his family. All five children — and 16 grandchildren — live in the valley. They meet one Sunday each month to hold a Family Home Evening and to celebrate the birthdays for that month. The entire extended family takes vacations together annually.

Acknowledging his mistakes, Miller says, "That's why I feel so fortunate. I have a good relationship with all five children. It could have been permanent (damage). Things are better than ever. We work hard on this. The kids feel like they can speak up and express their feelings now. They probably are angry. We've worked on communication so I don't think it's something constant gnawing in them."

The son as a father

Down the street from Miller's office, Greg sits in his office at Larry H. Miller Toyota. He is tall and slender with a full head of brown hair swept back and vivid blue eyes. He grew up resenting his father, but he has followed in his footsteps. Same bad grades. Same misbehavior. Same native intelligence and gift for articulation and introspection. Same mannerisms. Like his father, too, he started in the parts department, sweeping floors when he was 13. He struck out on his own for a while to prove to himself that he could succeed on his own, then returned to work for his father. He is now general manager of the store.

He can remember an angry moment in his youth, standing at the top of the stairs in the family house and shouting at his father, "I hate the car business!. I'll do anything but the car business!" because it had robbed him of a father. But here he is.

There is one big difference. "I spend time with my kids," says Greg, the father of six. "I am their father figure. I make a great effort to see to that. It's the benefit of hindsight. I can recognize the void in my life. I don't want to perpetuate those mistakes. I attend the dance recitals and coach the junior Jazz teams."

He says his wife, Heidi, saved "my sanity." He had a horrible temper in his youth, and to prove it he'll show you a deformed knuckle. "It's from going through so many walls and doors." When he and his future wife were dating, she delivered an ultimatum: Lose the anger or lose her. He lost the anger. He is happily married.

At the end of the day, Greg admires and respects his father and he believes he owes him a great debt of gratitude for at least one thing: "He worked 20 years of 80-hour weeks to build a resource or a platform to work from so we don't have to pay the same price. I don't have to work 80-hour weeks to have a nice lifestyle. I can be with my kids. He did that. Otherwise, if I didn't look at it like that, it would be easy to be bitter. I'm not bitter. There are so many positives in my life. I have a great life."

A postscript

There is one postscript, one bittersweet irony: Of all the strange twists and turns of fate

that life dealt Miller, this is the most ironic — late in his middle age, he is raising a grandchild as a son. Zane Miller, now 12, calls Larry and Gail Dad and Mom. It's almost as if fate decided that because Miller didn't spend time at home when he was needed, it gave him another son and said, "Try again."

Miller initially resented this intrusion on what should have been his footloose, post-children years, fully expecting his daughter to reclaim Zane when she matured, but then something happened. "Somewhere along the line he started growing on me," says Miller. "By the time he was 4, two things happened: One, I was sure we'd crossed a point for (his mom) to take him and raise him, and, two, I didn't want to see him go." As Miller notes, "Here was a second chance life doesn't always give you."

"When we took Zane, it showed Larry what he missed," says Gail. "Otherwise, I'm not sure he ever would have felt that (regret)."

In some ways, Zane is like a first child for Miller. When Zane was a baby, Miller would rush to Gail and say, "Did you see what the baby just did? How come our kids didn't do that?" Her response: "They did. You missed it."

So now here is a second chance to go to the Little League games and back-to-school nights.

"Larry's married to his work and always will be," says Gail, "but he's better able to tear himself away to go to events."

So Miller will try again to mix fatherhood and his great passion for work. He will try to see the Little League games he can never have back with his own children, and always he will build buildings and sell cars and undertake projects. As Allred says, "He will go to his grave making a deal. That's what he does. He's never more excited than when he's risked everything to do something."

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