



Picking up where dad left off

For the Miller brothers of Baden — Ethan, 34, and Justin, 29 — the loss of their father more than six years ago is still painful. But as Father's Day approaches, they're eager to reflect on his legacy and how it inspired them

BY NANCY HARPER
PHOTOGRAPHY • TOMASZ ADAMSKI

It's easy to write off Father's Day as just another commercial contrivance devoid of real meaning — until your own father is no longer around and you're left to ponder all those things left unsaid and undone.

As it is for most sons whose fathers are no longer living, it's an especially bittersweet time of year.

What eases Ethan and Justin Miller's grief somewhat is the path they've chosen to share after their father's untimely passing at

the age of 58: to resurrect the local antiques business that was his pride and joy.

J.C. Miller Antiques, once connected to Baden industrialist James Livingston of Castle Kilbride fame, was established by Ethan and Justin's late father James (Jim) Clare Miller in 1977. With Jim's death from cancer in November 2010, the shop on Foundry Road remained closed until June 2016, when the brothers waded into a treasure trove of childhood memories.

Ironically, now that their job is to sell fragments of other people's history, they've been finding out a lot about their dad and

their own history along the way — an unexpected and especially meaningful gift.

As a young man, Jim Miller worked summers at the Foundry Road shop then known as Attics and Things Antiques. At the time, the shop was owned by Harris Veitch, who as the son-in-law of J.P. Livingston — himself the son of James Livingston — lived just a stone's throw away in Castle Kilbride.

Jim Miller bought the building in the 1970s and changed the name to J.C. Miller Antiques, where he established a reputation

Reopening J.C. Miller Antiques last year has allowed Ethan, left, and Justin Miller to feel like their father is still with them.



“One of the reasons I like this business so much is that surrounding yourself with certain things makes it feel like dad is still here.”

BADEN ANTIQUES DEALER JUSTIN MILLER

as a highly respected collector of vintage art, fine antiques and classic cars. In 1988, when Veitch and his wife left Castle Kilbride, Jim acquired many of the furnishings of the grand old home to sell in his shop.

Known as a man with an eye for quality and a passion for history, he passed those characteristics along to his boys — and whenever he hit the road to buy and sell, he’d take them along for the ride.

Growing up in Baden as the younger two of three boys — eldest brother Ryan, 38, also still lives in Baden — Ethan and Justin had the kind of father-son adventures that were defined by the family business.

Even family vacations revolved around the buying and selling of antiques.

“A lot of his business was done on the road,” Justin recalls. “It was all about pulling up to somebody’s house — a collector’s house — with a vanload of stuff he’d just bought or traded for and he’d do business that way. People quickly learned that he had a very keen eye for quality. People would say, ‘It’s Jim Miller quality.’”

“If dad had a client in Florida, we’d go there and make three stops along the way. It was like a treasure hunt. It was about the people, the characters in the game. I remember driving with dad and you’d be on a nine-hour drive and he’d be on the

phone for a solid six hours of that. It would be entertainment listening to him on the phone. You felt like you were really a part of it.

“Sometimes he’d drive for three or four hours without saying anything but at the same time we all knew we were on the same page. There was a connection there, no question about it. The stuff you’d absorb from listening to him on the phone totally shaped the person I am.”

Adds Ethan: “Dad always said, ‘There’s no other business like the antique business.’ I think it’s because every object tells a story — often something very personal.

“I remember in Grade 6, 7 and 8 going to Brimfield (the Massachusetts home of

the biggest antique and collectibles show in the country) in May. My ‘take your kid to work day’ was a week long. We’d load up the Ford Econoline van that he bought for 1,000 bucks and load it to the point where the tires were bulging at the rims. He stacked this thing like a Tetris game. If you took one thing out you’d have to take four out. We would make stops and the challenge was how much could we sell before we got to the Brimfield show.

“I grew into him as I got older. He would always joke that he had to take the kids on the road with him to spend time.

“Some of my best memories of dad were in a business context, crafting a deal. It took years for me to fully appreciate what it was he was doing. If you ask anybody who dealt with him, they’d say he was a risk-taker, a deal-maker. Dad always made it happen. One of his famous sayings was, ‘Let’s do something even if it doesn’t make sense.’


“It was that spirit of ‘Let’s give it a shot.’ It’s amazing he did what he did.”

Now in the unique position of having taken on the business that made their father a household name, Ethan and Justin are relishing every moment.

Like everything else, the antiques business has changed with the advent of the Internet — and it remains just as vulnerable to trends as any fashion — but some things do remain the same, including the presence of real characters in a fascinating business.

“On the day we opened the shop, someone stopped by and said, ‘I remember spending time with your dad in here,’” Ethan says. “It’s amazing how you talk to these people and put together a puzzle that wasn’t fully together when he died.”

Adds Justin: “We always hear stories from people we deal with now. One of the reasons I like this business so much is that surrounding yourself with certain things makes it feel like dad is still here.

“We know a lot of people who dealt with him. There’s always a new story about dad or you meet somebody you didn’t know that knew him. He’s always here. Being in this business is great for that.” 

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