



Picture: Adam Armstrong



A young Richard Miller pictured with his father Hughie.

"We all stayed in show business, too. My sister has gone off the road now but my two brothers are still travelling the show circuit."

In turn, Richard's three children are also in the business as show food caterers and amusement operators.

Miller's 12 grandchildren, aged three to 21, incredibly, are the sixth generation of show business Millers and all travel the show circuit. Those who are school age attend a travelling show school. Those old enough already have their own stalls and amusements – even his three-year-old granddaughter is part of the action.

"The three-year-old does the illusions in my tent with me," Miller says.

"They are all involved. I'll cut one's head off or put them in the goldfish bowl. They do things with me all the time. But none of them will sit in the electric chair because they know I'll give them a bit of a shock.

"We're really proud of our kids. We travel all states and most of the time we travel together. When we go to a show, I can walk around and run into four or five of my family working their own amusements.

"We are the oldest family in Australia in the business. There are no other names that were around in the 1800s.

And the Miller show business line will continue."

Officially, Richard and Janet's home is a "beautiful little 10-acre farm" at the quantity named Howlong on the Murray River near Albury in NSW.

But in reality, the couple are only "home" for about three weeks of the year.

The rest is spent in their motor home, which travels the show circuit from one corner of the country to the other. After the Ekka, the couple will head home to Howlong for a couple of days, then straight back in the motor home bound for Adelaide, Perth and back to Mt Gambier in South Australia before hitting the Victorian show circuit.

Life on the show road rarely stops. "We spend all our time in the caravan," Miller says. "But I wouldn't change our lifestyle for anything. I love it. I love getting to the next town.

"I can't wait to get in the trucks and get 'em going to Perth. Four days on the road, pull up and have a barbecue of a night, chase camels. I have a motor scooter I take off and go for a ride. I'll have some fun out there. "I know somebody in every town. It doesn't matter what town I'm in from Brisbane to Perth, if I break down I know I can get help. I pull up at garages and people will shake my hand and they know me from somewhere.

"There's not too many places that we go that we can't back up our trucks. "That's what show business is all about."

Richard and Janet plan to set up a museum one day at their Howlong property but don't even think about mentioning the 'R' word.

"Nup, I won't retire," Miller says quickly.

"Showmen don't retire, they don't get sick. They just die. I've never heard of any showman ever retiring. "I was born doing this and I'll probably die doing it."

lighting and what-have-you, but there aren't many people who walk into one of my old illusion tents and don't walk out laughing or wondering, 'How the hell did he do that?'

"You never give up your secrets, of course."

As well as running amusements, Miller's parents operated a factory at Coorparoo that manufactured most of the plaster-of-Paris prizes given away in sideshow alleys around Australia.

Miller started work in the factory when he was about seven years old.

"I used to have to get out of bed early of a morning and we'd be up working at 6am and work till 8, 9, 10 at night," he says.

"We'd make horseshoes, cockatoos, cocker spaniels, all sorts of figures. They were the main prizes that all the showmen used all over Australia. Nearly every prize in sideshow alley was made at the Hughie Miller factory.

"We'd usually leave home on a Thursday night to go to a show in maybe Gympie or Maryborough, work the shows Friday, Saturday, then come back and work all day in the factory for the next three or four days and make enough prizes up to take to the next show.

"We'd go to Lismore, Casino, Maitland, Tamworth, New England, the Sydney Royal Show, north Queensland, Goodwindi, all over.

"But we'd always be back in the factory working. I think Dad used to give us three hobs a week.

"I never had a chance to go to school but when I was about 14 years old I went to Norman Park State School, then Coorparoo State School. Even then, school was then just a couple of days here and there.

"We all worked until we got our own businesses and then worked the shows on our own.

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