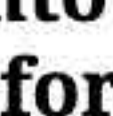


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CATHIE ANDERSON



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Once a Sacramento foster kid, Miles Cooley has brokered deals for A-list entertainers such as Rihanna and 50 Cent

By Cathie Anderson

canderson@sacbee.com

UPDATED JANUARY 15, 2017 8:14 AM



Entertainment lawyer Miles Cooley with his wife, Claudia, and son Enzo, 16 months, photographed near Venice Pier. Cooley spent part of his youth at the Sacramento Children's Home and will speak at its 150th anniversary celebration. NANCY PASTOR *Special to The Bee*

As a freshman at [McClatchy High School](#), [Miles Cooley](#) kept away from the topic of where he lived. He was ashamed to tell classmates from Land Park and Curtis Park that he lived at the [Sacramento Children's Home](#).

Now a successful entertainment attorney in Los Angeles, Cooley's list of clients has included the likes of rapper [Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson](#) and singer-songwriter [Rihanna](#). He will return to Sacramento on Feb. 1 to speak at an event celebrating the 150th anniversary of the foster home he once hid from friends. What will he say?

"I don't want people to see the children's home through the lens of my success," Cooley told me. "This is not some easy Hallmark special. Not all the stories end with a lawyer in a high-rise looking over a golf course in L.A., a successful guy who drives a fancy car and wears nice shoes. That's not the true success of the children's home. Their success is in the grind: the day-in and the day-out of serving those kids, however their paths end up going afterward. What's powerful about the place is that it was there and it was a refuge."

Cooley wants to leave his audience with a better understanding of the 150-year-long legacy handed down from generation to generation at the children's home.

"I want to talk about civic responsibility and the fact that the people that started the children's home ... were prescient and big-hearted," Cooley said. "That ethic, particularly in times like these, needs to be reinvigorated. People have to be not just philanthropic, but they have to be revolutionaries for a cause, in a way."

Cooley said that the value of his story is impressing upon people the meaning of sharing in a legacy: "Who would have known in 1860-something that a kid who was born 100 years later would benefit?"

That kid was born Miles Robinson to unwed, teenage parents in 1969, Cooley said, and as if their ages didn't make it tough enough to be parents, the situation was further complicated because of the difference in their races. His mom was white; his father, black. At the time, he said, such interracial liaisons still raised eyebrows, and the couple's relationship didn't last.

His father, a musician, graduated from McClatchy and pursued a successful career in the music industry. His mother, who attended [Kennedy High School](#), would end up dead by the time Cooley was 5 years old. In fact, it was he who found her body after staying overnight with a friend.

"My mom ... fell in with a rough crowd after I was born. She got into the hippie, free-love, try-drugs kind of thing," Cooley said. "She left when I was 1 for about a year to follow some biker guy up to Spokane, Wash. I was basically passed around in a group of hippies from the time I was 1 to the time I was 5."

When his mother was in town, Cooley said, he would see violence and weirdness that he should have been spared at such a young age. After his mother's death, his maternal grandmother put him up for adoption. He became Miles Allen after being scooped up by a white couple in Davis, Cooley said, but that first adoption didn't take for either the child or the parents.

"They didn't really understand how to raise a kid that was different from them," Cooley said. "For example, my hairbrush was a dog brush that they would go to the pet store to buy. It didn't dawn on me until much later the kind of impact that those kind of messages would have on a kid."

The story got worse before it got better, Cooley said, but where it started to get better for him was when his parents sought guidance from a school psychologist, Leslie Cooley. She ran a battery of tests on Miles, then informed his parents that he was a super bright kid who had been traumatized by life during his early years.

He remained with the Allens for about seven years, he said, but the familial bond never cemented, and after a blow-up when he was in middle school, his parents packed up his bags and announced they were returning him to the county's care. He stayed with Leslie Cooley until a foster home was found, at first in Yolo County and then in February 1983 at the Sacramento Children's Home.

As he bounced around, the one constant in his life was the woman who eventually became his mother, Leslie Cooley. Now retired, Miles said, she lives in Carmel, but at the time, her backyard looked right out onto the back of McClatchy High School.

"The cool thing about the children's home at the time ... was that they allowed Leslie to be what they call a visiting friend," Miles said. "I don't know if they have that program now or what they would call it, but she was sanctioned by the home for me to spend time with her. ... Basically, I got to try the relationship on for size. I lived with her on weekends for three years. She'd take me on vacations with her sometimes."

Leslie Cooley offered to adopt Miles when he was 15, he said, but he told her: "No, because if I blow it with you, I don't have anybody in the world, and I don't have a good track record."

Meanwhile, at the children's home, he was figuring out how to work within a bureaucracy to get the things that were important to him, he said. He also found advocates in counselors such as Edianne Duedall and Seton Bunker. Miles said he is certain that he tried their patience but they recognized and nurtured his ego strength.

"The ladies that ran the clothing program, I convinced them to let me buy fewer clothes, so I could buy nicer clothes at Macy's," he said. "They worked with me. ... There were times, though, when it was particularly bleak, like when the only person giving you presents is the Air Force or whatever."

The environment wasn't the best place to develop good study habits, Cooley said, because it could be difficult to find a quiet place to study when other children were having meltdowns.

Finally, by the time Miles was 16, he said, he was ready for a permanent home with Leslie. He moved in with her and took her last name. He was a solid C- student when he arrived at her home, and that didn't change immediately since he was more interested in savoring the good life as a Land Park kid rather than in buckling down and studying.

But then a funny thing happened. His friends and classmates began to talk about the four-year colleges where they had been accepted, and Miles looked ahead of him and saw a dead-end road. Ever since he was age 6, he said, he had envisioned himself as one day being a politician, and he knew that many lawyers became politicians.

He wanted to get into an esteemed law school but had little hope of even getting into a good four-year college, he said. That was when he was finally ready to be steered by Leslie and focus on his study habits and academic strategy. He went to Sacramento City College where he blossomed and earned virtually all A's. With that two-year track record, he landed a spot at UC Berkeley.

While he was studying there, his birth father reached out through social workers and asked to be connected with him. Miles agreed. He had never had negative feelings for his father, he said.

"There's a lot of forgiveness around him being so young - 15 when I was conceived, 16 when I was born, 21 when my mom died," Miles said. "I have sympathy for the guy. I've always felt he was the closing of a circle or the filling of a hole. It felt good to have a dad. I wanted to embrace that and look at all the positives and not look at a lot of the negatives with resentment or any of that. There's just a lot of love and forgiveness."

After graduating from Berkeley, Miles signed up for the Peace Corps in Ecuador. He learned Spanish and teamed up with an activist to develop successful social programs for women and children there. Following that service, he applied to law school and was accepted at a number of them. He chose [Boalt Hall at UC Berkeley](#).

His father, [Miles Robinson](#), had connections in the music industry after touring for years as a drummer with the [5th Dimension](#), and Miles had an interest in entertainment law. A partner with [Kelley Drye & Warren](#), Miles became a father in August 2015.

At the Sacramento Children's Home, [CEO Roy Alexander](#) told me that Miles represents the legacy of the nonprofit organization's founders. The agency no longer has the visiting friends program because the goal now is getting the child into a permanent home within six months.

"Back in Miles' day, they could have grown up here," Alexander said. "They could have easily been there three or four years. The state has instituted a new program, effective the first of the year, that the goal length of stay is six months."

The children's home, however, had begun working in this direction years ago, Alexander said, and the average length of stay there has been about a year. They also reduced the number of residential beds there to 30 from 68. Instead, the staff and volunteers now emphasize supporting families in crisis to prevent breaking them up.

The agency runs two crisis nurseries where parents can drop off children if they need a break or if a lack of child care could result in the loss of work. The children's home also runs several family resource centers where they offer parenting classes, mental health programs and more.

"We served nearly 7,000 children last year," Alexander said. "The cost of serving those 7,000 is almost equal to serving about 100 kids residentially, so it really shows the possible cost savings of prevention and early intervention."

For generations, Miles Cooley said, the institution has been making a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable people in Sacramento. He hopes his speech will allow people to see how crucial this work has been for him and so many others: "I want to have people put themselves mentally and emotionally in the shoes of a young person who has to be in the children's home and what their life has to be like for them to end up there and then how the children's home was a solution and a platform and a refuge."

Cathie Anderson: [916-321-1193](tel:916-321-1193), [@CathieA_SacBee](https://twitter.com/CathieA_SacBee)

150th Anniversary Business Lunch

WHAT: The event, which will feature entertainment attorney Miles Cooley and Mayor Darrell Steinberg, celebrates the 150th anniversary of the Sacramento Children's Home, which was originally an orphanage. The nonprofit organization still has 30 residential beds, but its emphasis has shifted to preventing the breakup of families in crisis. To that end, it has created crisis nurseries that house at-risk children for no more than 30 days, and it has family resource centers that offer parenting classes, mental health programs and other much-needed services.

WHEN: 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Feb. 1

WHERE: Golden 1 Center, 500 David J Stern Walk, Sacramento

COST: \$1,500 for a table, \$150 for an individual ticket

INFORMATION: kidshome.org/150, [916-290-8203](tel:916-290-8203)

This story was originally published January 15, 2017 4:00 AM.

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