

From the Gridiron to the Met

By Dennis Knight

Keith Miller was my nephew until we were estranged by virtue of my divorce from his aunt in 1989. I offer this disclaimer to acknowledge I don't have the status to celebrate Keith's career, but I will tell you about him anyway.

Keith grew up in the little town of Ovid, Colorado in the northeast corner of the state. He played six-man football at Revere High School, winning championships and personal awards along the way, and eventually was named the Colorado player of the year in the six-man classification.

He had opportunities for scholarships from many small colleges in the region, but was determined to play for the University of Colorado where he enrolled without a scholarship and made the team as a walk-on player. By his sophomore year, he was on scholarship and the starting fullback for the team that won a national championship.

His academic career at CU took a turn when he had a date with a student in the music department and took her to Denver to see Phantom of the Opera. It was his first experience with the magnificent music and he was hooked. He would go to the campus library in his letter jacket and check out recordings of the great singers from Caruso to Pavarotti. He was inspired to sing along and taught himself to read music, eventually transferring to the music department while he continued to start for the football team until his graduation in 1997.

It's hard to say whether he graduated with a degree in football and a minor in singing, or vice versa, because he continued in life with a passion for both. Over the next few years he played professional football and made it to the practice squads of a couple of NFL teams including his beloved Broncos but mostly he played European football and in the Arena league in the United States. Concurrently with his football career he sang opera wherever and whenever he could.

Still an aspiring athlete, he was working as a television and radio sports reporter in North Dakota when a singing performance in Minnesota landed him

an offer to attend the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia. AVA is one of the most prestigious academies of its type in the world. It's a four year program in which all the students are on scholarship and the total student body is about thirty with a faculty about the same size.

In his third year studying in Philadelphia he won an audition with the Metropolitan Opera of New York City, but was told by the Met that he first needed to perfect his ability to sing without an accent in the classic languages of the Opera, including Italian, French and Spanish, so during breaks in the AVA regime he studied and sang in Europe to immerse himself in the languages.

Upon graduating in 2006 Keith made his professional debut at the Metropolitan Opera, singing the part of the Imperial Commissioner in Madame Butterfly. He since has appeared in such operas as Rigoletto, Carmen, Tosca, Faust and others.

You can follow his career, see photographs and hear samplings of his voice on the Internet if you search for "Keith Miller Metropolitan Opera". Even better, attend some of the Met's live High Definition performances at a local theaters. I enjoyed seeing and hearing Keith's bass baritone at an HD performance recently where he sang the role of the Wells Fargo agent in Puccini's "La Fanciulla del West".

Getting back to my original disclaimer, I can only report the public record of Keith's interesting career from six man football to the big time in one of the world's most prestigious opera houses, and, while I have no standing to offer predictions about his future, I know I will continue to follow it and brag about him privately, whether I have standing or not.