

(INTERVIEW BY LAURA OHATA
PORTRAIT BY MATTHEW RAINWATERS)

John Paul DeJoria

CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF JOHN PAUL MITCHELL SYSTEMS, ENTREPRENEUR AND PHILANTHROPIST

Growing up between Echo Park and East L.A., there weren't a lot of trees. When I was 6 or 7 years old, our whole gang would hang out around the only nice tree in the neighborhood. I grew up in a tougher area but never went without food. During the school year, maybe I had two changes of clothes. We just made the best out of what we had. I had a good childhood.

My mother was very generous, even when we had nothing. She wanted to give us something nice, so once a month she would buy a little filet mignon steak, and she and my brother and I would split it three ways so we could all taste what it was like.

When I was homeless in my 20s, it was very difficult. I had my 2½-year-old son with me. **After you experience returning Coke bottles so you can buy food, no matter what happens after that, it's not that bad.**

My friend Lee Meyer found us and said we could move in with him until we got on our feet again. He also gave me a car because mine wasn't working very well. Of course, when I made it, I bought him a new car and gave him a great job. He's a Hell's Angels-type guy, a biker. **I never joined the Hell's Angels, but I rode with many. They were OK guys.** They were probably pretty bad guys, pretty tough, but they had heart.

I worked at Redken for four and a half years. Then I went to work for a company called Fermodyl for one year, training management in sales and sales motivation. They grew 50 percent. Then I went to work for Tricology Products, and I tripled their sales the first year. Then I started a consulting company. **When you put that work experience together, you have all the knowledge you need to start a company.** Shortly after that, I decided to go into business for myself with my friend Paul Mitchell.

We had a backer with \$500,000 who was supposed to invest in the company. Then he decided not to invest and he never gave me a dime. With everything set up, I said, "Let's just go for it!" **I borrowed a few bucks from my mom and it was tough, but we made it happen.** The blessing was that we owned the whole company.

Paul Mitchell was the hairdresser. I did all the marketing and sales promotion and helped put together the product formulation. We

never argued about anything. **I didn't tell him how to cut hair and he didn't tell me how to do business.**

Mr. Mitchell was my friend for about nine years before we started the company. Then we were in business for about nine years together. He died of pancreatic cancer in 1989. **Paul was, at that time, the world's greatest hairstylist, in my opinion.** He would give shows in the United States and throughout the world.

We moved to Austin when my son, John Anthony, was about 4 years old. We thought Austin would be the best place to raise him with good family values. The school system was great. Austin is a city that really thinks about the ecology of our planet now as well as in the years to come. It's also an extremely fun place. **There are so many activities going on in Austin, and the majority of those activities are family oriented.**

Austin is centrally located and because I travel so much, I can get anywhere in the nation within three hours. When I go to Europe, if I don't take my own jet, it's only a half-hour flight to Houston to switch planes.

I've learned that the difference between successful people and unsuccessful people is that successful people do all the things that unsuccessful people don't want to do. When doors are slammed in your face 10 times, you go to door No. 11 with just as much enthusiasm as door No. 1.

You want your product or service to be the very best so that people continue to buy it. **You want to be in the re-order business, not the order business.**

I've learned that success unshared is failure. I give to a lot of charities, but in Austin, the three that are the most important to me are the Austin Children's Shelter, 100 Club and Help Clifford Help Kids.

I have four biological children and two stepchildren. When I was in my 20s and a father the first time, boy, did it teach me responsibility. As I got older and the kids kept coming, it taught me patience. **As a father, I've learned to listen to my children. Sometimes they make more sense than you do.** You may be older, but you are not necessarily smarter. ●



John Paul DeJoria at his home on Lake Austin, 5:30 p.m., Aug. 28, 2008.