

BROTHERS

BY JON SCIESZKA



I grew up with five brothers. No sisters. I'm the second oldest of the Scieszka brothers — Jim, Jon, Tom, Gregg, Brian, Jeff. There were so many of us that even my dad had trouble remembering our names. He would call to one of us, "Jim ... erhh, Tom ... erhh, Jon ... I mean ... hey you."

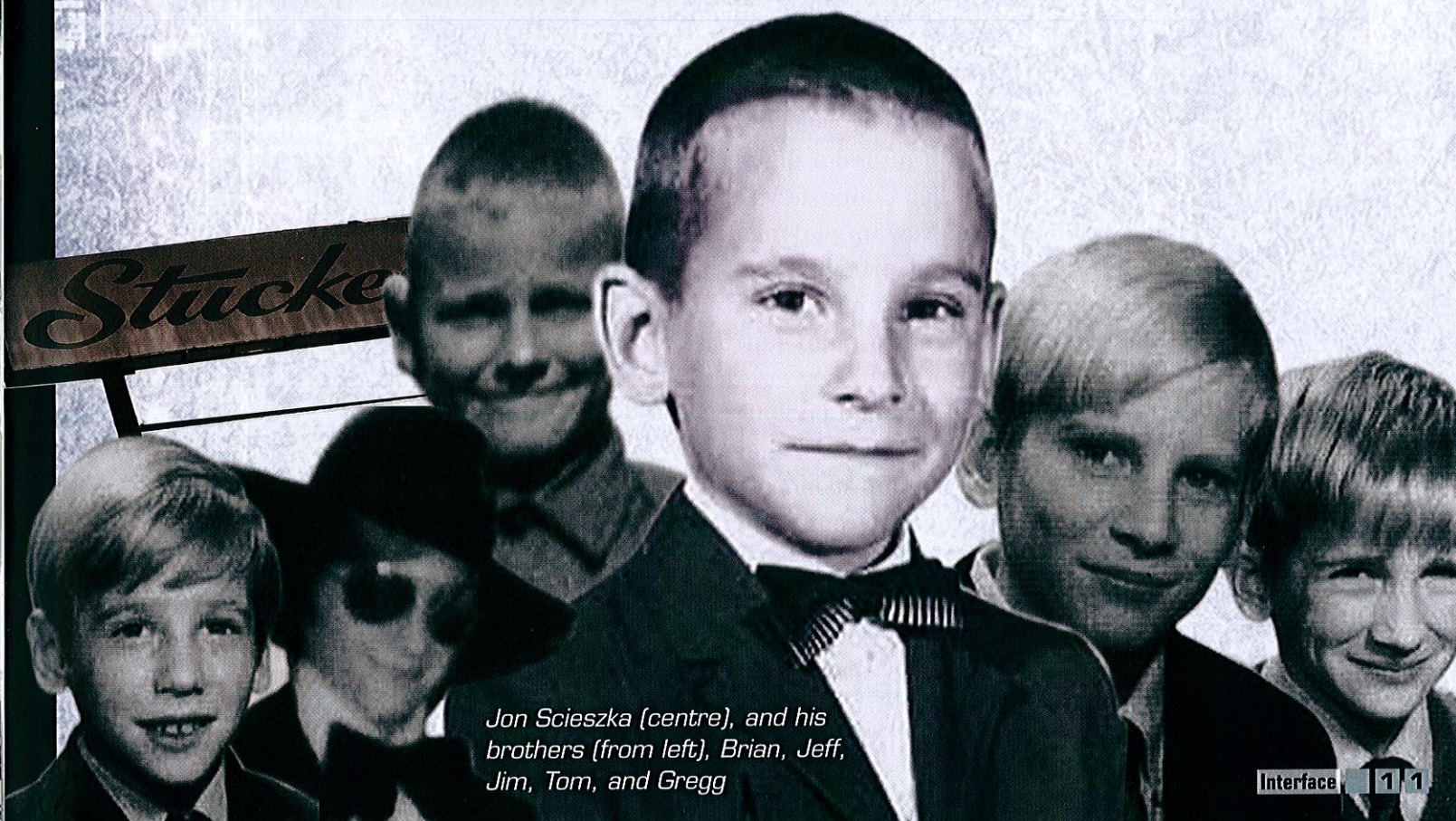
Growing up, we brothers did a lot of "guy" things together. Without knowing anything different, we just figured everyone wrestled in their living room, played Cowboys and Indians with their babysitter (and maybe left her tied up in the closet just a little too long), fought dirt-clod wars in empty lots, built model airplanes (then lit them on fire and blew them up for more realistic crashes), collected every Hardy Boys book, read every Sgt. Rock comic, and watched every TV cartoon possible.



START UP

With a partner, share a happy childhood memory involving you and a member of your family. Do your memories and your partner's memories have anything in common?

Jon Scieszka was born in Flint, Michigan, in 1954. Like many children of their generation, Scieszka and his brothers were interested in the American Wild West.



Jon Scieszka (centre), and his brothers (from left), Brian, Jeff, Jim, Tom, and Gregg

We also built forts, explored sewers, tracked rabbits in the snow, accidentally lit that dead tree in the park on fire, and shot a lot of things we probably shouldn't have shot with our BB guns. I learned to cook by cooking like my mom — in massive amounts. A pot of oatmeal still doesn't look quite right to me unless it's industrial size. And I still have a hard time roasting just one chicken. It looks so lonely.

We tied Tom into bed when we were babysitting. We broke Gregg's collarbone at least three times playing football. We laughed at baby Brian playing in the toilet. We encouraged baby Jeff to eat plant dirt and cigarette

butts for the entertainment of our friends. Well, didn't everyone do that with their brothers?

Why does the author include these details?

BROTHERS ARE THE GUYS YOU STICK WITH AND STICK UP FOR.

Brothers are a bit of a puzzle. They are the guys you would put in a headlock and try to ram through the bathroom door. But they are the same guys you wouldn't let anyone touch in a schoolyard recess rumble. Brothers are the guys you would tease without mercy. But they are also the same guys you wouldn't let anyone else in school badmouth.

Brothers are the guys you stick with and stick up for.

The Scieszka brothers are scattered all over the country now, but we still get together once a year to play a family golf tournament. We named it after our dad, Lou, and his favourite car — his old Cadillac Coupe de Ville. It is the Coupe de Lou Classic. We all grew up playing golf, because Dad Lou, an elementary school principal, taught Junior Golf and gave us lessons during summers off. And I'm sure my brothers would want me to point out the amazing fact that I am the winner of both the very first Coupe de Lou 1983 and the latest Coupe de Lou 2004.

But of all the Scieszka brother memories, I believe it was a family car trip that gave us our finest moment of brotherhood. We were driving cross-country from Michigan to Florida, all of us, including the family cat (a guy cat, naturally), in the family station wagon. Somewhere mid-trip we stopped at one of those Stuckey's rest-stop restaurants to eat and load up on Stuckey's candy.



Five of the Scieszka brothers pose for a family photo.

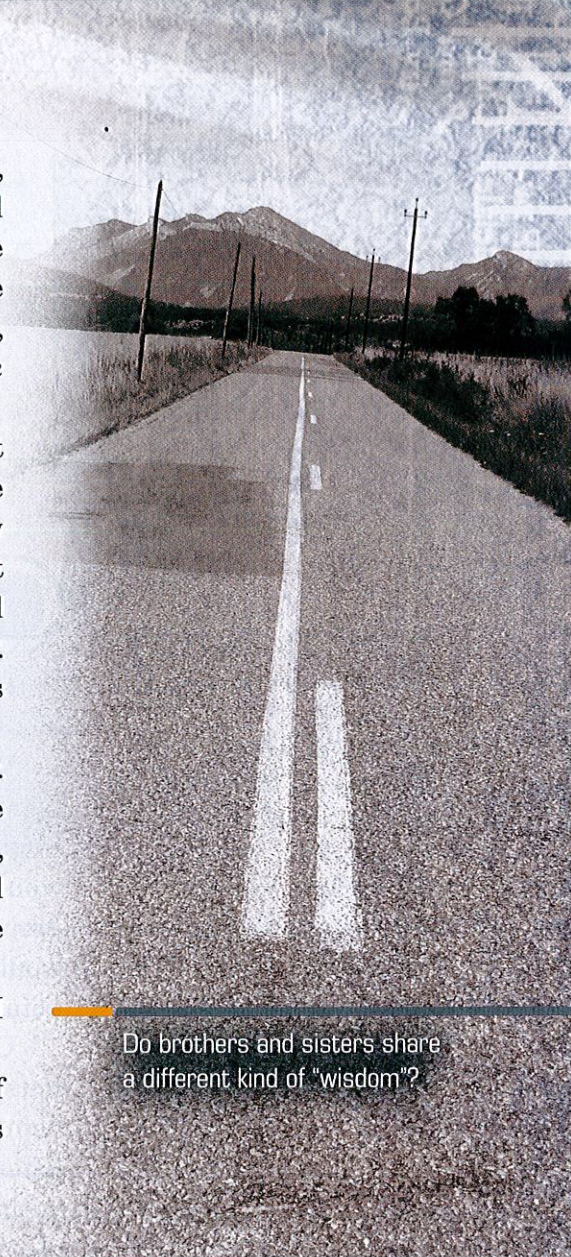
We ate lunch, ran around like maniacs in the warm sun, then packed back into the station wagon — Mom and Dad upfront, Jim, Jon, Tom, Gregg, Brian, Jeff, and the cat in the back. Somebody dropped his Stuckey's Pecan Log Roll on the floor. The cat found it and must have scarfed every bit of it, because two minutes later we heard that awful *ack ack ack* sound of a cat getting ready to barf.

The cat puked up the pecan nut log. Jeff, the youngest and smallest (and closest to the floor), was the first to go. He got one look and whiff of the pecan nut cat yack and blew his own sticky lunch all over the cat. The puke-covered cat jumped on Brian. Brian barfed on Gregg. Gregg upchucked on Tom. Tom burped a bit of Stuckey lunch back on Gregg. Jim and I rolled down the windows and hung out as far as we could, yelling in group puke horror.

Dad Lou didn't know what had hit the back of the car. No time to ask questions. He just pulled off to the side of the road. All of the brothers — Jim, Jon, Tom, Gregg, Brian, and Jeff — spilled out of the puke wagon and fell in the grass, gagging and yelling and laughing until we couldn't laugh anymore.

What does it all mean? What essential guy wisdom did I learn from this?

Stick with your brothers. Stick up for your brothers. And if you ever drop a pecan nut log in a car with your five brothers and your cat ... you will probably stick to your brothers. 🌈



Do brothers and sisters share a different kind of "wisdom"?

🔍 ZOOM IN

- With a partner, write a review of, or response to, this piece. In your work, discuss why you think the author wrote this piece and why you think he chose to write it in a humorous way. Refer to specific excerpts and quotations from the memoir in your review or response.

OR

Create a cartoon strip of one or more of the incidents described in this memoir.

- The cartoon strip should reflect the camaraderie among the brothers.
- The author says, "Brothers are the guys you stick with and stick up for." Based on what the author says in this memoir, write three other conclusions that you can draw about sibling relationships. Use the same structure: "Brothers (Sisters) are ... and ..."
 - Share your statements in a small group.

🔎 ZOOM OUT

- From your experiences as a family member, develop a set of guidelines on how to survive and thrive as a member of a family. You may write specifically about your family or discuss families in general.
- Write a personal essay in the style of this memoir where you describe an anecdote from your family life that has had a lasting impact on you. The anecdote may be serious or humorous.
 - Exchange your essay with a partner and revise it based on your partner's feedback.