

On Brotherhood, Inside Jokes and Built-In Best Friends For Life

Michael: *What comes before anything? What have we always said is the most important thing?*

George Michael: *Breakfast.*

Michael: *Family.*

George Michael: *Family, right. I thought you meant of the things you eat.*

Last Saturday night, as the clock struck 11:00 PM in Chicago, meaning it was midnight in South Carolina, I posted seemingly random lyrics of a 1990s Blackhawk song called "Postmarked Birmingham" to my brother Jeremy's Facebook wall. The following morning, I texted him different lyrics from the same song. He was not confused by any of this, because it is sort of a tradition between us. The reason it wasn't random is that the song, which is about a man who gets a letter from a woman who left him and he has no idea why she's writing from Alabama, mentions the date April 22. So every year on that date, we share a childhood memory, a song we bonded over. And also of the CD that I desecrated by listening to before giving it to him as a Christmas gift. Which he will never let me live down.

I love inside jokes. I realize they are annoying if you're on the outside so I try to keep them to a minimum in public. And while I share them with all sorts of people in my life, there is no doubt that the deepest versions I have are the ones that I share with those who were there every step of the way from

the time I was old enough to have memories until the day I departed for college in Nashville: my four siblings.

Quite often when my brothers Jeremy, Ashley and I are texting, if two of us disagree about something, the third one will reply, "I'm with you fellas". Because we have laughed together at *O Brother Where Art Thou?* several times together. (Sometimes there doesn't have to be a disagreement and it just gets worked in the conversation anyway.) Similar are the phrases "Seven Bushes" and "No more questions" from *My Cousin Vinny*. And I'm pretty sure when each of us turned 33 years old, one of the other two was there to text, "Today...he is...33 years old!" from *Three Amigos*.

It's not all TV and movies either. When we were very young, I once chased Jeremy through the house, angry at him. When we got to our bedroom he fell down so hard the whole house shook. He was completely still for a few seconds and I was terrified he was seriously hurt. Then he finally peeked at me and piped up, "I shook the whole house!" And I can still text him those words today and we laugh about it. On another occasion, Ashley and I were playing basketball with some friends and an older guy we knew, who was clearly out of shape, stepped on the court and said, "Let's see if I can still get rim." He clearly couldn't and probably never could, which made the scene quite unintentionally funny. And so this quote has come up during basketball many times. And then there was the time in the 80s we were eating at our family's favorite seafood buffet and another group got seated just after us. And one of the men boisterously and half-jokingly complained to the hostess, "We're six miles from the buffet!" Except he said "buffet" the way it looks phonetically. That comes up every time we eat seafood even now.

My brother Tracy is ten years older than me and was in college by the time I was in third grade but we still share these moments. Over 20 years ago at the beach were staying in an oceanfront house. And an older lady was out sunbathing just in

front, really close to us. As we stood there on the second-floor porch, Tracy dared me \$5 to hit her with a tennis ball. I obviously declined. But later when the ball really did fall from the porch and I had to go down to get it, I threw it back up to Tracy and it hit the ledge of the porch, ricocheted back towards the ground and hit the woman, who for some reason got really mad about it. Tracy gave me the \$5 and we still laugh about it in 2018.

My sister, Kim, is the only sister but we still have our inside jokes, too. Once, not long after she got married I was hanging out at her house. She needed some meat from her freezer, which was in a separate storage room off of the house. I went out to get it and there were wasps. Being terrified of them I reported back with no meat. Kim, who is also terrified of them, decided the situation called for desperate measures. We put on raincoats and hats and gloves—basically, we covered every part of our bodies—and armed ourselves with brooms and mops. And we successfully procured the meat. And Kim loves telling that story to this day.

Another time we were sharing a room at the National Free Will Baptist Convention with her husband Mark and their daughter Camille. Kim bought three 24-count bags of sugar donuts for the week. At the end of the week, they were all gone. Camille claimed to have eaten zero. Mark said he had about six. So that meant between Kim and I, we ate approximately 66 sugar donuts in four days. We agreed to assume we both ate 33 so no one had to take the blame for eating the most. And to this day, we can't talk about sugar donuts without laughing.

All inside jokes are not funny, though. Some are extremely meaningful in a more serious way. A few years ago when I was home for Christmas, Jeremy introduced me to a song that was a "[Stopped Me In My Tracks](#)" song for him, as Phill wrote about for REO. He had me listen to it. And after hearing it, he and I made a vow that any time one of us hears "Colder Weather" by

the Zac Brown Band, we will pray for the other one. We text each other that title every now and then to remind each other of our vow. Jeremy even eventually made the song his ring tone so he would pray for me often.

The picture from above is from the 2013 Outback Bowl when Jadaveon Clowney knocked the Michigan RB's helmet off on a spectacular play that has been viewed millions of times on Youtube. The Gamecocks won the game on a Steve Spurrier drawn up and dialed up bomb with 11 second left. But neither of those plays were what made the day truly special. It was getting to share those moments with my brothers and my dad. I don't remember it but after Clowney made the hit and forced the fumble, Ashley says that I said, "Who was that guy?!?" As if it was to say that it was so amazing I had to ask, even though I knew. Like responding to a superhero moment. It was a special time to relive over and over.

When I got married in 2015, Ashley gave one of the best men speeches and said our mother always told us when we were fighting as children that our siblings would be our best friends when we were adults. She was right. Boy, was she ever right. Because Kim, Tracy, Ashley and Jeremy absolutely know what I think of them. That no matter what happens, or how far from South Carolina I am, that, "I'm with you fellas". They truly are my best friends for life.

