

Neither time nor miles can break brothers' special bond



"Mom, Mom," my nephew Ethan wailed as he raced into my in-laws' house in Texas. "Seth's pickin' on me ..."

"She's not here, Ethan," I said, setting down the news-

paper and motioning him my way. "What's the problem?"

Ethan, 6 at the time, rubbed teary eyes and sat next to me on the couch.

"Seth won't let me shoot baskets," he said between sobs. "Keeps takin' the ball away and laughin'."

"He hasn't passed you the ball at all?"

"Only to bounce it off my head!"

"You know, Ethan," I said, putting an arm around him as I suppressed a smile, "I had two big brothers who did stuff like that. I'd get so mad I couldn't see straight. Scott was wrestling with me one time and jammed my head into the wall ... I had to get six stitches. Tim and I shared a room and he made me sign a contract that I couldn't cross the

floor without his permission. Dad tore that up when he found out ... But guess what? They didn't pick on me forever. They stopped."

"What happened?" Ethan said, no longer crying, brown eyes wide with concern. "Did they die?"

I am happy to report that Scott, 10 years my senior, and Tim, five, are alive and well. Furthermore, as unbelievable as it may be for Ethan to believe, they do not pick on me, at least not on a basketball court. I am 6-foot-2 and they are 5-foot-10 (in their dreams).

Though separated by time and miles, I think of my brothers often, particularly when other brothers are in the news. Most recently on the national scene it was the Manning brothers — Cooper, Peyton and Eli.

"I'm proud of Peyton," Eli, the youngest, said before the Super Bowl in February where his New York Giants were playing the New England Patriots. He had been asked for the one-hundredth time about the hubbub surrounding Peyton's contract with the Indianapolis Colts.

"I've talked to him this week," Eli continued. "None of that comes

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up ... he does a great job of trying to keep me relaxed. We talk a little football and talk about New England some. He's supported me ... I know he's just working hard trying to get healthy and I'm supporting him on that."

Eli went on to lead the Giants to their second championship in four years while garnering MVP honors. In so doing, he surpassed the future Hall of Famer Peyton in Super Bowl wins and stepped out from his big brother's long shadow.

While the win certainly altered people's opinions about Eli's career, I doubt whether the Giants winning or losing would have changed his relationship with Peyton. They are brothers, close brothers, and career success or failure does not factor into the equation.

Their older brother, Cooper, who could not play college football because of spinal stenosis, was once asked if he harbored any repressed jealousy for his two younger brothers' athletic accomplishments. "No, zero of that."

I believe him. Brothers can be hard on one another, but they celebrate successes as if they were their own. They also close ranks when support is needed. Scott invited me to live with him in Chicago when I was 20 and struggling to figure out what to do with myself, helping me find a job at a bank while encouraging me to return to college. Years later he unexpectedly toasted me at Christmas dinner at the end of my first year as a business owner, congratulating me on its success.

Tim and I lived together after I graduated from college and began

my career with State Farm Insurance in Dallas. It is rumored that Tim has the first dollar he ever made tucked into a safe deposit box in an undisclosed location, but he paid the rent and gave me spending money until my paychecks started. Recently he called me on a Sunday morning to offer congratulations on my novel and inform me he "read it straight through ... it really is good, Mike."

About a year after my conversation with Ethan, my wife, Yolanda, and I were back in Texas. I had just finished playing basketball with Ethan, Seth and their neighborhood buddies. As I sat down in the living room with a cold glass of water a door slammed behind me.

"Mom, Mom," Ethan wailed. "Seth's pickin' on me ..."

I settled into the couch, smiled and thought of my big brothers.

Mike Pemberton's short stories have appeared in such literary journals as *Aethlon*, *Touchstone* and *Euphemism*. His first novel, *"Transcendental Basketball Blues,"* was published in 2011. He lives in Hoopston and can be contacted at www.mikepembertonbooks.com.