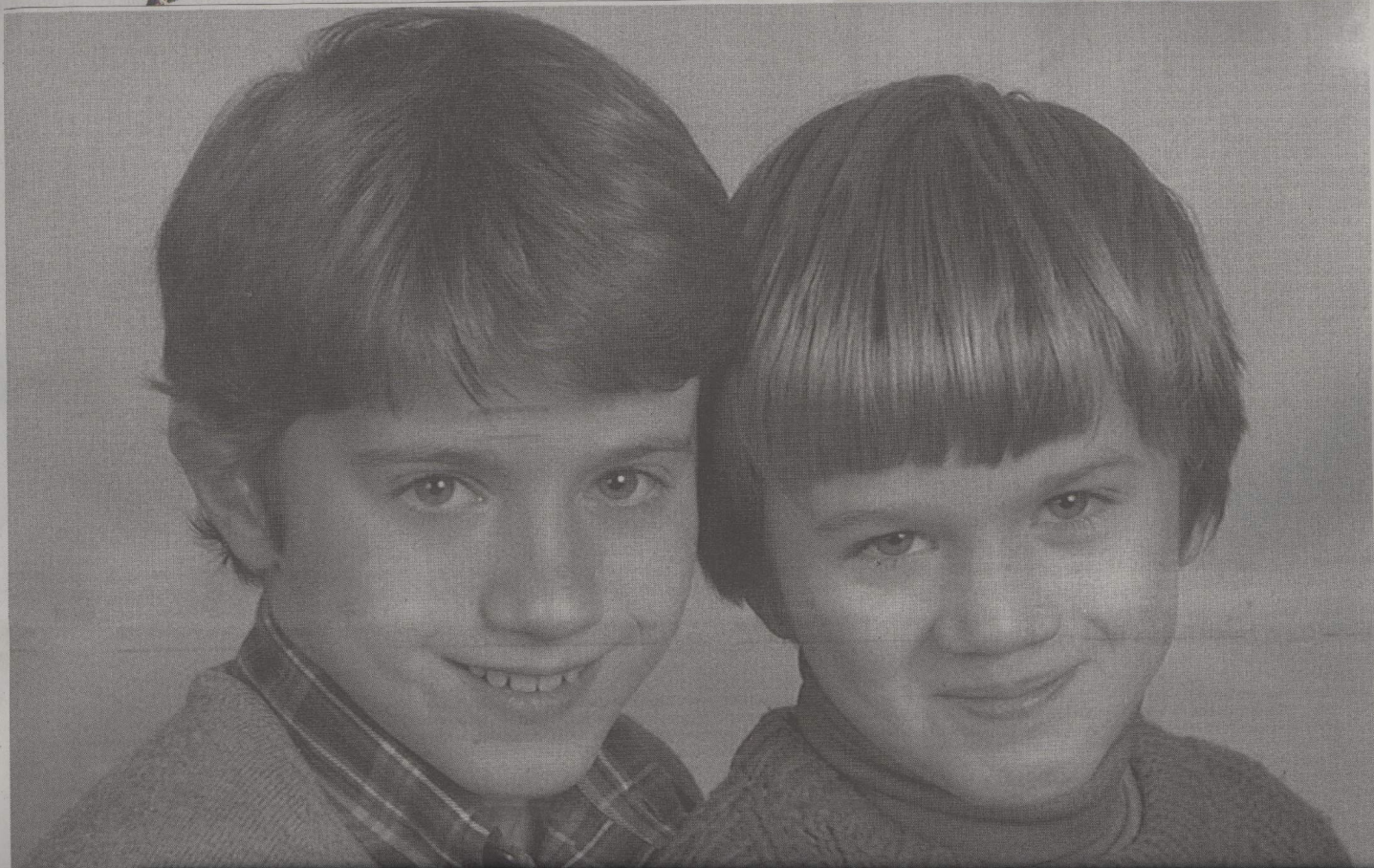




'God, my dad's here' ...
We peek inside
teenagers'
diaries
» Page 4

On working with children and animals » Page 3



When brothers fall out

Nick Duerden and his brother stopped speaking 10 years ago. They will probably never speak again, he thinks. Heartbreaking - or perfectly normal sibling rivalry?

In the full decade since I last saw my brother, he has had children, changed jobs, moved house, survived 9/11 (he worked nearby) and, by my grandmother's reckoning, has at last grown into the beard he started nurturing in his early 20s. In the meantime, I have progressed comparably throughout the course of my own adult life (albeit without the facial hair), though he, like me, wouldn't know this directly but rather secondhand, our respective lives separated by the Atlantic ocean and an altogether different kind of divide that, I think I can now confidently predict, shall never be breached again.

While this is an admittedly regrettable state of affairs, two grown men incapable of behaving like, well, two grown men, it isn't a particularly unusual one. Sibling rivalry is as old as the hills, and you need only

alight upon Jeremy Kyle of a weekday morning - or the films of Mike Leigh, come to that - to be reminded that familial strife of some kind is, if not quite mandatory, then at the very least expected of us all.

A recent story in *Psychology Today* suggests that more than a third of us have a distant relationship with our brothers or sisters as adults because of a childhood rivalry that never fully dissipated, while any hopes of an ultimately long-term ceasefire tends to arrive only in our dotage, when all the fight has finally deserted us.

According to Karen Doherty, who, with Georgia Coleridge, has just written *Sibling Rivalry: Seven Simple Solutions to Stop Fights, Prevent Jealousy and Help Your Children Get On Better*, it is virtually the rule, not the exception. "Four out of five siblings will torment, kick, punch, fight and annoy one another at some

point during childhood," Doherty, a sunny Californian living in London, tells me. I ask her why, and she smiles. "Ah. Well, there are 101 answers to that question."

The overriding one, it seems, is that the arrival of a younger sibling very often brings with it a brand new sensation for the elder: hatred. This is, after all, the point at which we, the senior, learn that life isn't fair after all, and very likely won't be ever again. A potential usurper has arrived; cunning is required. And if we are then subsequently treated differently by our parents, however unwittingly, with different ideals and perhaps even preferential treatment, that hatred can be expected to run deep.

Jonathan Self, the older brother of the writer Will, knows the feeling well. "I have to say that Will was actually incredibly sweet and loyal to me

throughout childhood," he begins, "but, yes, there was an awful lot of rivalry between us. Why? Well, my parents favoured him in a way that was impossible to miss."

He explains that his parents considered their younger son a genius by the age of three, and that theirs was a family that prized intellect above all else. "To their credit," Jonathan says, "they weren't wrong. Will did have an unusually smart mind. Still does."

If their rivalry continued into adulthood it was largely because both shared similar ambitions: to write. But Will was, baldly, by far the better writer, prompting Jonathan to give up on his dream (he eventually turned to the world of business). Now 51, and with three children to Will's four, they enjoy a mostly harmonious relationship these days, specifically, he suggests, because of the children.

"We've discussed this at length, as

Two little boys ... Nick Duerden, left, with his younger brother in 1979

it's important to us. We know that it really upsets our children if he and I fight, and so we don't, mostly. If they see us not getting on, then it is effectively like saying it's OK to give up on your brother. And neither of us wants that," says Jonathan.

My own experiences differ from the Selfs' not only because there were, sadly, no such flashes of brilliance within my family, but also because my brother and I were never as closely competitive. Instead, we were poles apart, so comprehensively different in character and temperament that we could rarely find common ground. I'm two and a half years older than him. We had different friends, different interests. Rarely did they appear compatible.

We both hoped that things