

MICHAEL WURSTLIN: A PIECE OF THE TRIVIAL PIE

BY LAUREN MANDARINO

Albert Einstein once said, "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity," but as RSGC parent Michael Wurstlin (Lucas Wurstlin, Class of 2020) learned from experience, sometimes the biggest opportunities don't look like much at first.

He moved to Canada from Germany at age 9 with his mother and grandmother, and lived in a housing project in Toronto's Moss Park. Michael dropped out of the Ontario College of Art after a year and a half, and, in his mid-twenties, was fired from his job as a graphic designer at an ad agency because "I didn't know what I was doing."

And then something happened that would forever change his life.

Just as his unemployment insurance was running out, Michael was approached by two scruffy-looking

young men who had an idea for a board game. Chris Haney, a photo editor for the *Montreal Gazette*, and Scott Abbott, a sports editor at the *Canadian Press*, needed a designer for the game's board. The game was called Trivial Pursuit.

"The guys had the mechanisms on how the game would be played and how physically it should function, the idea of the circle, the pie-shaped things, and the score keeping," said Michael. "I was definitely wanted it to be adult in nature. I gave them two designs: a circus one and a grown-up blue box. They went with the blue design."

Michael didn't know Chris or Scott. He had been recommended to them by another guy who was fired from the ad agency at the same time as Michael. Chris and Scott had initially approached that guy, but he was already working at his father's agency

and was too busy to take on the job. Michael took on the job with the promise of a \$1,000 paycheck.

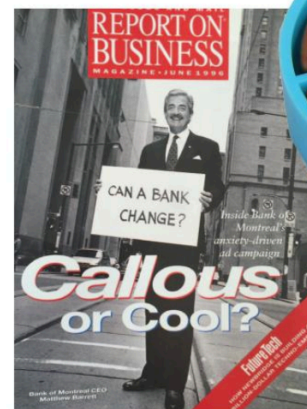
"I was seriously contemplating going back to work in manual labour jobs, but these guys came along with the promise of a little bit of cash," said Michael. "After I finished, they said they can give me the money or they can give me shares. I wanted the money because it was worth about four months' rent, but they convinced me to take the shares. I realized that it was because they didn't have money."

That ended up working out quite well for Michael, who received his first cheque in the mail about two years later.

"I got a cheque for \$800 and I thought, 'Fantastic, I got most of my money back!' I went out and bought a winter jacket – the best winter jacket I'd ever had. It was a full-length down Polo jacket. I thought, 'That's it, I'm never seeing those guys again,'" said Michael. "But then another cheque came in for several thousand dollars, and then it kept coming. I was basically catapulted into the middle class. We lived in a cheap walk-up on Queen St. West. I was able to buy a real house, although we couldn't afford to move in at first – just rented it out for a few years."

From then on, life was different for Michael. The extra money coming in annually and the success of the board game gave him a leg up when it came to getting jobs.

"It was like this magical pixie dust sprinkled on me. It gave me an aura of success that helped open doors for me," said Michael. "Everywhere I went, it was like, 'Oh, you're the Trivial Pursuit guy,' and people thought I was successful."



Designing the Trivial Pursuit board helped launch Michael's career, during which he worked on many well-known advertising campaigns.

Michael climbed the corporate ladder, spending about 10 more years in various agencies and working his way up to Associate Creative Director. Eventually, he and two other men started their own firm, Garneau Wurstlin Philip (GWP). Michael and another business partner also founded Wurstlingroup.

Between the two companies, Michael has had the opportunity to work with and either launch or completely rebrand huge companies including ING Direct, Manulife, Rogers Communications, Chatr Wireless, George Brown College, Grocery Gateway, Bank of Montreal, A&W Root Beer, Expedia and Delta Hotels.

Michael retired a few years ago with an impressive resume. And when he looks back at his Trivial Pursuit experience and

at the game itself, he smiles.

"It's like an old friend when I look at it," said Michael. "I've done many things since then. I have fond memories of it – it's my earliest child. I'm proud of it for sure."

As for his son Lucas, he has grown up seeing his father's creative advertising all over the city, but he has never played Trivial Pursuit.

"It doesn't have much sentimental meaning to me, but I do think it's really cool that he had a part in shaping the game that is so popular," said Lucas.

What Lucas does think about, however, is the way in which his father became a success.

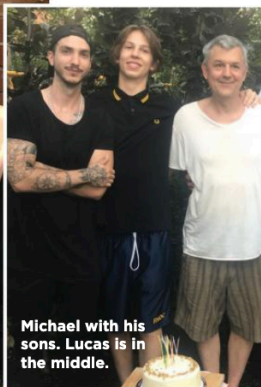
"He made it from nothing," said Lucas, who also hopes to have a career in some form of art. "I have such a great

start – look at the amazing school I'm in. I can't waste the opportunity that I've been given."

Michael feels blessed that he is able to give his son the gift of an RSGC education and is thankful that Trivial Pursuit led to the path his life took. He says there are several key lessons that can be taken from his story.

"One is obviously perseverance. Another is the role of luck. When opportunities knock at your door, you should take them," said Michael. "Beyond that, you just have to make sure you do a great job of something when you do it. I could have taken a sloppy, 'who cares' approach because I knew those guys didn't have much money, but I devoted hundreds of hours to this project, and look how it worked out!"

Michael and his twin sister



Michael with his sons. Lucas is in the middle.

Michael and his grandmother, coming to Canada in 1963 on the SS Ryndham.



Chris Haney, left, was the best man at Michael's wedding.