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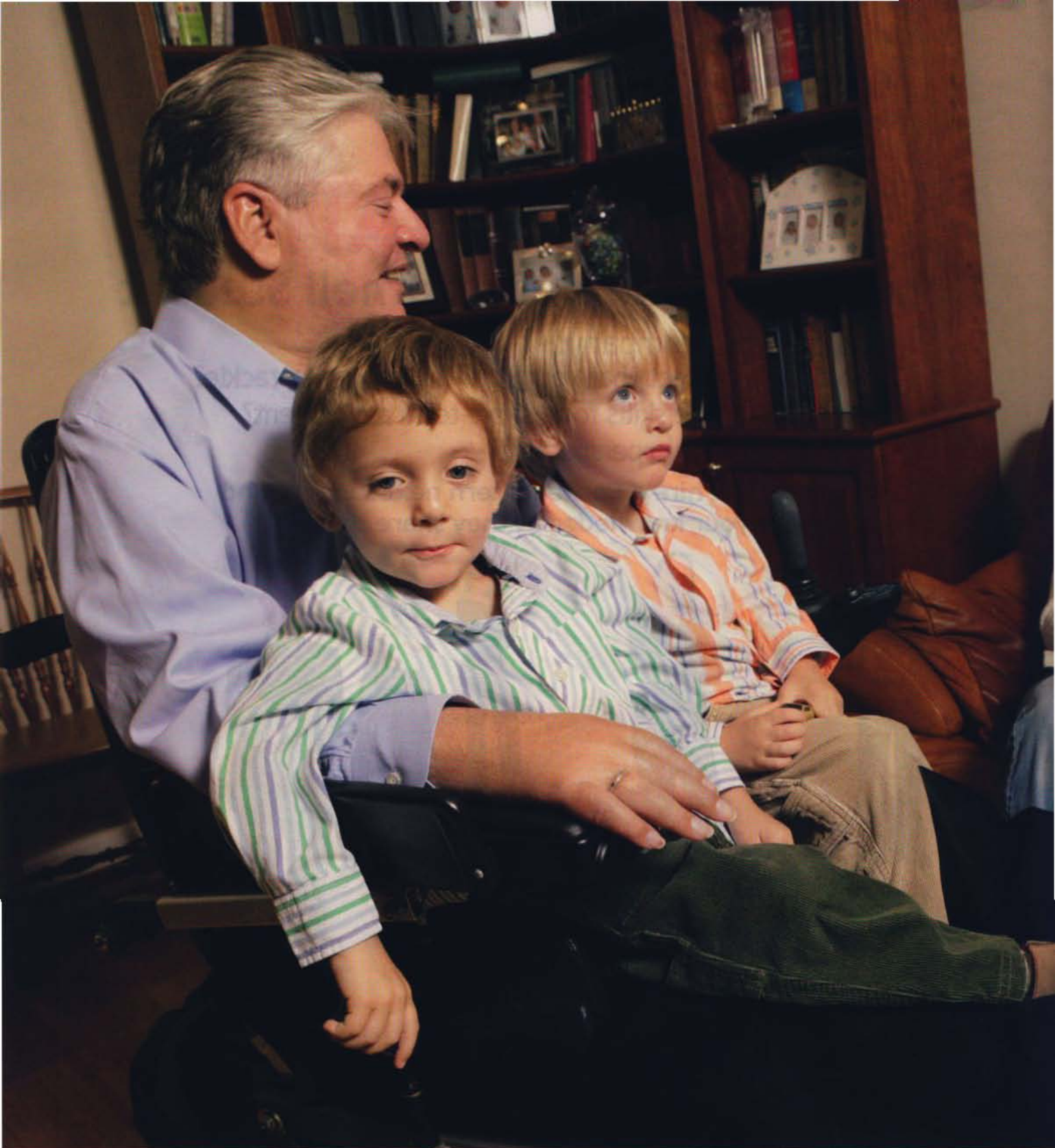
# Cornell

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## Life Is Beautiful

He was paralyzed playing football, but Ken Kunken '72 never slows down



As a Cornell junior, Ken Kunken '72 was paralyzed by a football injury and given little hope for a full life. Today, he's a Long Island D.A. with four academic degrees, a happy marriage—and three-year-old triplets.



# Father Courage

By Beth Saulnier

Photographs by John Abbott

**T**he Kunken boys have turned their living room into a combination obstacle course and trampoline. Having taken the cushions off the sectional sofa to form a padded square, the tow-headed triplets are running and hopping and somersaulting in a manic loop. A few months shy of three years old, the brothers are a force of nature as they race around the room—falling, laughing, and picking themselves up again. Their father looks on, wearing a smile so wide it borders on the comical. Ken Kunken '72 is sitting in a motorized wheelchair, almost completely paralyzed from the neck down for the past thirty-seven years, and he is deliriously happy. "They're not putting on a show for you," he tells a visitor to the family's spacious ranch house in Rockville Centre, Long Island. "I swear, they're like this every single night."

Even in an age when fertility clinics are commonplace, the arrival of Joey, Jimmy, and Timmy in January 2005 was enough of a medical marvel that it attracted a flurry of local news coverage; there's a framed *Newsday* cover story over the mantle in the Kunkens' den. "Paralyzed Man Fathers Three Sons," announced the local CBS affiliate, declaring that the triplets prove "that the impossible is achievable." Kunken was fifty-five when his Polish-born wife, Anna, gave birth by C-section. Although the boys spent several weeks in the neonatal ICU, they emerged with no lasting health problems. "When we were talking about getting married, Anna told me that she'd like to have my baby," Kunken says. "Not just a baby, but she wanted *my* baby. She wanted to see a little Kunken running around."

They went through three unsuccessful rounds of *in vitro* using electro-ejaculation before Kunken had surgery to retrieve sperm directly from his testicles. On the fourth try, at Weill Cornell Medical Center in Manhattan, doctors implanted three fertilized embryos in the hope that at least one would develop. They all survived, and the Kunkens were thrilled; both have close relationships with their siblings and were determined to have more than one child. The boys are fraternal rather than identical, and their distinct personalities have already begun to emerge. "They're very different, but

**All in the family: Kunken at home in Rockville Centre, Long Island, with his wife, Anna, and sons (from left) Jimmy, Timmy, and Joey. The Kunkens did extensive renovations to make the house accessible for his motorized wheelchair.**





