



Back In Time

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Back To Belgrano

The phone rang and the words I heard turned me to stone: "...your Uncle David passed away suddenly in Guatemala..." The following morning I was on a plane heading south, staring out of the window into the past.

My Uncle David was my idol when I was a boy. He was my mother's brother and she too thought he hung the moon. When we visited family in Buenos Aires, the best part for me was seeing my uncle. He was tall, dapper, and dashing, with a ready smile; a warm, gentle man who seemed to be exactly who I wanted to be. When he occasionally came through Montevideo on a business trip and stopped overnight at our house, my excitement knew no bounds.

David Evans was an advertising man. He was among the group of talented young people who entered the workforce in Buenos Aires in the 1940s, just in time to be employed by an early wave of American companies and their ad agencies that were opening branches in Latin America. He was a natural in the agency culture, where his creativity served him well and where good relationships with clients were highly prized. He was also an athlete, playing rugby in his youth and eventually captaining Argentina's national team. In about 1939 he played for the San Isidro Club where he recalled that "one of my fellow players was Ernesto Guevara, who later on became better known as Che Guevara."

On the way to the memorial service in Guatemala City, my aunt asked me if I'd say a few words. "Something to do with his life in Buenos Aires," she said. "Nobody here knew him back then." All I could think of on the spur of the moment was that in Argentina, as in Uruguay, there is a tango for almost every occasion, and they tend to be a vicarious way to express the feelings of joy and grief that overwhelm us all at one time or another. So I stood before the congregation and recited the words of one of the saddest tangos of all, *Adios muchachos*¹, which translate loosely as: "Goodbye my lifelong friends, beloved gang from those good old days. It's my time to slip away and leave you all behind. Goodbye boys, I know that no one cheats destiny. No more parties for me, my wasted body can't take it anymore." The words welled up in my throat and almost choked me, and I don't know how I managed to finish without breaking down.

After the service the family huddled together at my cousin's home. My uncle had been cremated, and his children wanted to scatter his ashes in a few special places. One of those places was Buenos Aires: they wanted to send part of him home. As it happened, I was going there later in the year, so I returned to Texas carrying a zip lock bag full of greyish-white powder. I felt extremely nervous going through customs, but that was nothing compared to how I felt as I surreptitiously carried the same bag of ashes through the airport in Buenos Aires a few months later.

In one of those serendipitous twists of fate that make you wonder about things, my uncle's daughter arrived in BA on business the very next day, and she joined Lillian and me on the last leg of this odyssey. We took the train at Retiro station and travelled out to Coghlan, the suburb where my grandparents lived and where David grew up. The smell of the carriage, the hypnotic lurching of the train, and the rhythmic clatter of the wheels were so familiar, even after so many years, that I was soon awash in memories of my childhood. When we stood on the pavement facing the old family house at Tronador 2725 the memories bubbled up into flashbacks that flooded my brain. But the house was obviously inhabited and we agreed that the current residents probably wouldn't appreciate having someone's ashes scattered on their garden. So we went back to the railway, to a level crossing near the station from which David had come and gone so many times and finally left for good. We stood in silence on the rails and scattered half the contents of the bag.

Then we took the train (*clackety-clack, clackety-clack*) to Belgrano and walked a few blocks through the quiet residential neighbourhood to the Belgrano Athletic Club. David started playing rugby there, where he was known to all as "Taffy," and went on to become a sports legend in his own right. It was a sunny day, and we walked around the field—now surrounded by apartment buildings where once there was wide open sky—and sat in the stands, listening for the roar of the crowd on a distant afternoon. Then, as the shadows lengthened, the rest of the ashes fluttered to the ground under the goal post, and my Uncle David was finally home.

¹ (1927) Lyrics by César Felipe Veldani, music by Julio César Sanders, immortalized by Carlos Gardel.