



BACK IN TIME

by Tony Beckwith
tony@tonybeckwith.com

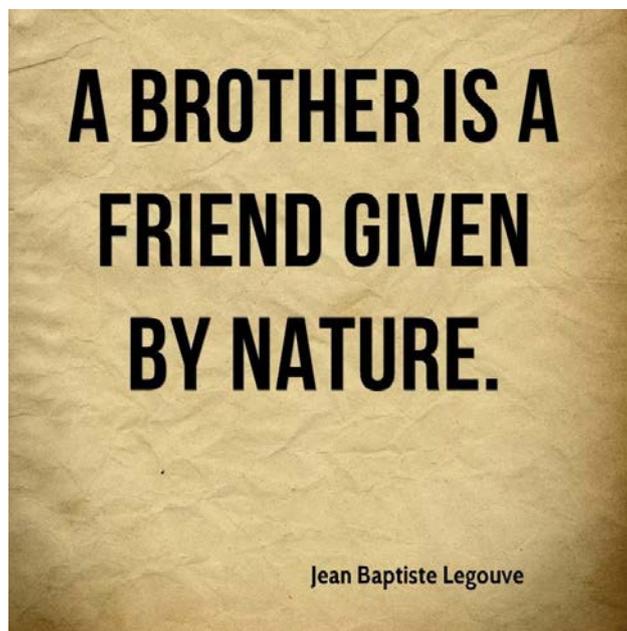
MY BROTHER AND I

On a summer night in the early 1960s I rode my Vespa along the Rambla from Carrasco to Pocitos. The breeze wafted up off the beach, gently buffeting my face. At that time of the year the night air was exquisite, and I was perfectly comfortable in a short-sleeved shirt, cotton slacks, and moccasins with no socks. On nights like that I felt I could ride forever.

As I approached the corner of 26 de Marzo, where I would usually turn off the Rambla to go home, I hesitated. Then I accelerated and kept going. I rode past the Buceo Yacht Club, standing white in the moonlight, a few sails bobbing back and forth on boats riding at anchor in the little harbour. Past the Edificio Panamericano and down to Pocitos beach, where the long row of apartment buildings rose up on my right to face the sea. I turned in at Avenida Brasil and then right again on Benito Blanco, past the Expreso Pocitos—still open, with people sitting on the terrace enjoying the balmy night. Halfway down the block I pulled over and parked. That summer an enterprising parrillero set up shop on the street in the evenings. He had a sawn-off oil drum on legs, full of smouldering coals, with a grill over the top. He served chivitos and had some beer in a cooler. There were no tables, no chairs, no frills. The smell of the thinly sliced meat cooking on the grill was heavenly. Actually, not a smell—an aroma; a sublime fragrance.

I was drinking a beer and smoking a cigarette when, to my amazement, my brother rode up on his motorcycle. “What are you doing here?” we both said at the same time. We were both on our way home after being out on dates. We had

each recently discovered this place, and in a rare case of serendipity had both decided to stop there to round off the evening. We stood on the pavement and chatted. Putting our beers on the running board of my Vespa, we held our steak sandwiches in both hands and leaned forward so that the juice wouldn’t drip on our shirts. Then we ordered a second one.



We chatted easily about nothing much, just small talk, and I marvelled at how well we were getting along. Because usually, unfortunately, we didn’t. I never fully understood why. We were fourteen months apart in age, and had grown up in identical circumstances. There were just the two of us and we still lived with our parents. Our worlds were very much the same. But of course, none of that mattered if a stubborn competitive streak kept us from being friends. We butted heads regularly, over the silliest things, which caused our parents a great deal of anguish, for surely no mother or father can enjoy watching their children bicker and fight.

But that evening, standing on the pavement under the canopy of plane trees, we were getting along famously, like two old friends. Maybe it was because we were on unfamiliar ground, and could accept each other as equals in a place where neither could claim the upper hand. Maybe it was because there was nobody around to prove something to. The light from a nearby street lamp reflected off a plate glass window in the building behind us, creating a mirror effect. Out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of the two of us and suddenly saw something that astounded me. *Continues on the next Page...*



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I made a gesture to emphasize something I was saying, a sort of shrug accompanied by a tilt of the head and a movement of my hands. It was exactly the same gesture I had seen my brother make a thousand times. I couldn't believe it. I had always thought we were so different. Were we really more alike than I had ever dreamed?

I started recalling moments we had shared during the course of our brief lives, neither of us having yet completed our second decade. I remembered him showing me how to "shave like Daddy did" when we were very small, using a ripe banana as a shaving stick and one of Mummy's precious silver table knives as a razor. How he, being older, wanted to tell me the truth about Santa Claus, and then was sorry because I was heartbroken to hear the news. How he, being bigger and stronger, went looking for someone who had bullied me in the school playground and that someone never bullied me again. I remembered us getting into trouble together and sharing a fear of the consequences.

I pictured him giving me a thumbs-up sign as I waited in the wings to go onstage when we were both involved with the Montevideo Players. Just as I applauded him when he and his fellow bagpipers took the floor at the Caledonian Ball.

As I sifted through those memories and others that crowded into my mind I wondered—sadly and not for the last time—why we couldn't get along. Why we had to ruin every chance we got by making sarcastic remarks, pushing each other's buttons, and rubbing salt into old wounds. I envied other sets of brothers who, at least on the surface, seemed to get along reasonably well. I wistfully imagined how good it must feel to be friends with your brother and share your life with him, as Christopher and I shared the hour or so we spent together that night in Pocitos. We would, of course, break the spell by racing each other home afterwards, and the winner would crow as though it was a meaningful accomplishment. But until then it felt good to think that my brother and I could be friends.

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