



BACK IN TIME

by Tony Beckwith
tony@tonybeckwith.com

PIXIE'S FAREWELL

There are sounds that strike fear into the hearts of young and old. Sounds like the screeching of tires that tell us a vehicle has had to come to a sudden stop, but do not tell us if it managed to do so in time to avert a tragedy. I first heard that sound on a night that, for a number of reasons, I have never forgotten.

It was in 1950, when I was five years old. At that time we were living in a ground floor apartment at 445 calle Guipuzcoa in the Punta Carretas neighbourhood of Montevideo. It was a cosy place, just a few blocks from the city's main prison, which probably meant that the rent was within the family budget. The notorious Punta Carretas penitentiary, modelled on the Fresnes prison in France, was built in 1915 and housed many guests of the Uruguayan government until it was decommissioned and converted to a trendy shopping centre that opened in 1994.

One evening my mother was giving me my daily bath, a routine she performed with her usual efficient good humour. Suddenly, as she was rinsing my hair, we heard a screeching of tires out on the street. I rubbed the water out of my eyes and looked at her. "What was that?" I asked, the mood completely broken. She looked as startled as I felt, and just then my father poked his head around the door. "Just going outside to take a look," he said, and something unseen passed between my parents that I could sense but couldn't understand. "Is Pixie all right?" I called, but he had already disappeared. Pixie was our dog, a sweet little mutt who was mostly Chihuahua. She was black and white, with pointed ears and a tiny tail that wagged whenever she was excited, which was all the time. She was our first pet, and my brother and I adored her. Christopher,

already bathed and in his pyjamas, poked his head around the bathroom door and asked, "What was that? Is Pixie all right?"

My mother got me out of the bath and dried me off, then herded us both back to our bedroom. We were anxious—scared stiff, actually, because Pixie would usually be all over us at that point in the evening—and Mum had her hands full trying to get us settled onto the lower bed of the bunks we shared. She made us lean back against the pillows and proceeded to read to us, which was also part of our bedtime routine. The previous evening she had begun to read from Edward Lear's "Nonsense Songs," and now she launched into perhaps his most famous poem:

*The Owl and the Pussycat went to sea
 in a beautiful pea-green boat.
 They took some honey, and plenty of
 money, wrapped up in a five pound note.*



From Edward Lear's book, *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets*, 1871.

The light-hearted whimsy of the poem managed to distract us, and my mother was just starting to read the second verse when my father came into the room. We looked at him, clamouring to know what had happened out there in the street. He struggled to appear composed as he sat



BACK IN TIME ...Continued

down next to Mum, and then looked at the book in her lap. He picked it up and squinted at Lear's illustration at the top of the page. Then he smiled and turned to my brother and me and said, "I have a message for you from Pixie!"

He told us that Pixie had received word from a family member who was in need of her company. So he had taken her to La Estacada beach, a couple of blocks away. Beyond the beach there was a rocky part of the coast, strewn with flotsam and jetsam of all kinds, a favourite place for our beach-combing walks on weekends. There he found half a walnut shell,

hollowed out and worn smooth by the tides—a perfectly seaworthy hull. Nearby was a straight twig and a good-sized leaf, which he fashioned into a mast and a sail. Then he and Pixie went to the water's edge, where a ribbon of moonlight made a glittering path all the way to the horizon. He settled Pixie into the homemade boat, gave it a gentle push, then watched as she sailed away. "She sent you her love," he told us, "and said she'll send a friend of hers to keep you company until she gets back." A few days later the friend arrived: Buster, an easy-going dachshund who lived with us for many years.

RIVERSIDE PIPE BAND

Event! Do not miss The Shamrock Cup.

This is a piping competition taking place in a pub in the Ciudad Vieja on the 20th May, at 6pm.

This year is the seventh edition, and there are pipers coming to play from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and of course Uruguay.

Come and support our locals, while having a pint (or a cup of tea). Probably the largest concentration of kilted noisy men you are likely to see in Uruguay this year!

**When: Saturday the 20th of May. Starting at 6 pm.
Where: The Shannon Irish Pub.**

Entrance is free, though buying a piper a pint is always welcome!