



Back to Belgrano

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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.

My Uncle David was an advertising man. He was among the group of talented young people that entered the Buenos Aires workforce in the late forties, just in time to be employed by an early wave of international companies and their ad agencies that opened branches in Argentina. 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 club rugby when he was very young 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."

After the memorial service in Guatemala City the family huddled together at my cousin's home, a devastated clan wracked with grief. My uncle had been cremated, and his children were planning 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 from Guatemala surreptitiously carrying a plastic zip lock baggie full of grey powder. I felt extremely nervous going through customs, but that was nothing compared to how I felt as I carried the same baggie full 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 David'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 traveled out to Coghlan, the suburb where my grandparents lived while their children were growing up. The smell of the carriage, the hypnotic lurching of the train, and the rhythmic clatter of metal wheels were so familiar, even after all these years, that I was soon awash in memories of my own childhood. When we stood on the sidewalk facing the old family house at Tronador 2725 the

memories bubbled up into flashbacks that flooded my brain. I wafted through the front windows to the central hall and walked up the creaky staircase, the dark wall paneling echoing the shadowy darkness, to Uncle David's room off to the right . . . But the house was obviously inhabited, and we agreed that the residents probably wouldn't approve of having somebody's ashes scattered on their front 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 again (*clackety-clack, clackety-clack*) to Belgrano station, and walked a few blocks through the quiet residential neighborhood to the

legendary Belgrano Athletic Club. My uncle began playing rugby there in the sixth division and went on to become a 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. ★

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