



## Back In Time

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### Boys Like Us

We are seldom more conscious of our community than at the events known to British journalism as *Hatches, Matches, and Scratches*—the euphemistic terms used for births, marriages, and deaths. And it is at the services following the *Scratches* that we occasionally learn something about our departed friends and loved ones from those who are moved to reminisce about the deceased.

Hugh Rugeroni died on January 3, 2014. He was 75 years old. I was not at his funeral, but if I had been, this is the story I would have told. It is a modern epistolary story in the sense that it unfolds through a series of emails that Hugh and I exchanged in May 2011. In the interests of brevity and clarity I have edited and condensed our correspondence, but Hugh's words are his own.

"Dear Hugh. I was born in 1945 so am a few years younger than you. After you left school, you did something exotic, you went to work on an oil rig in Patagonia or something. I don't remember the details, but it was all about an older boy doing something out of the ordinary, and it really made an impression on me.

Boys like us were supposed to finish school and go to work at *Alpargatas* or *Price Waterhouse* or some company like that. In those days there weren't many other acceptable options and it all seemed a bit preordained, which made me nervous and rather claustrophobic, so your example opened a window for me. I often thought of you as I pursued a somewhat chequered career in various parts of the world, occasionally working at jobs that 'people like us' were not supposed to do, and I never got around to thanking you for what you taught me all those years ago, which is that we make our own boundaries. *Un abrazo, Tony.*"

"Dear Tony. This is a first for me. I had no idea I had ever influenced anyone positively! Anyway, after a brief stint at *Industrias Laneras del Uruguay*, I left to do my military service in the Argentine Navy. *Conscripto clase '38*. After that I had to get a real job, and at age 22 was hired as camp manager for a seaweed and guano company on a beach nine hundred miles south of Buenos Aires. Two months later I had not been paid. Communication with the head office in BA was by shortwave radio. Whenever I asked about money they claimed they could not hear me. So, with the last of my funds I took the company truck to the nearest civilization point, abandoned it there and took a bus to *Comodoro Rivadavia*, where all the oil companies were headquartered. A pretty girl told me to go see *Dowell Services*, an oil well cementing company. Because I spoke English they hired me on the spot. My first request was for an advance on my salary as I was

hungry. They gave me that and placed me in a very nice two-bedroom apartment behind the office. There I created a purchasing department for the field camp. Ran that successfully for three years or so, saving my money. *Dowell* then lost its contract and I lost my lucrative job.

My brother Ian had already moved to Canada with his wife and I was assured a free bed till I got a job. Four months later I finally got my papers and headed for Toronto. Had forty-five interviews in thirty days, then landed a sales job with *Scott Paper Co*. The good part was that it came with a company car. That was important back then. Got transferred to Windsor, across the river from Detroit, as area manager (nice title, no more money). Purchased a nice little sailboat and learnt to sail the hard way. Some friends represented a good sailboat manufacturer, but they had no interest in selling across the border to Michigan. I talked them into introducing me to the manufacturer. With great honesty I told them I hadn't a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of, but how could I hurt them since they had no one representing them anyway? I guess it worked as they gave me half the state of Michigan. Three years later, after I had become their largest dealer, they admitted they thought they would never hear from me again. I spent thirty-five years as a successful sailboat and power boat dealer, but then the market went to hell and I closed down. I am now retired on a small income. My only activities are golf and my daily cocktail hour at the local pub where great political and other interesting topics are discussed.

So that's it, my friend. Thank you for telling me that I influenced you, it makes me proud. I forgot to mention that when I left the paper company to start my boat dealership I had no car and only \$25 in my pocket. A rather desperate situation. Someone suggested I should try modelling part-time, while getting the boat business going. Through the *Yellow Pages* I made contact with a modelling agency. Became reasonably successful, which funded the boat business and my new wife and soon-to-be-born daughter. Times were tough, but when desperation sets in, one makes it happen! Tough times seem to make one more tenacious and harder working than when you have the security of a pay check coming in regularly.

Needless to say, throughout all this I have had a marvellous time and led a humorous and very enjoyable life. I was helped a lot by good friends, a good education at the British School, and honesty and good values instilled at home and by the British community in Uruguay. To all those, Thank you! All the best, Hugh."