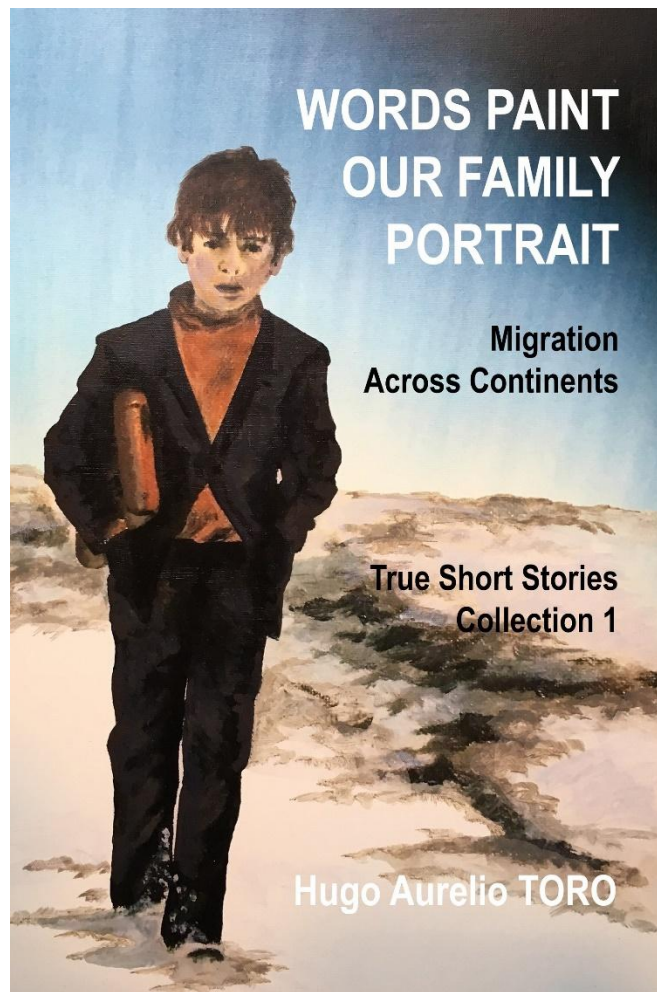


A short story from this collection.



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1.2) The Adventures of Alex and Lelo – Part 2

A short story by Hugo Aurelio Toro



David (Alex) and Hugo (Lelo) off to school – Viña Del Mar 1968.

In 1967, the young family had moved to beautiful Viña del Mar (the city name translates to vineyard of the sea). It is a large coastal resort city that is 120 kilometres from the capital of Chile, Santiago. It is popular with tourists and locals alike. The iconic flower clock is a main attraction in the park at the foot of Cerro Castillo.

Father's employment was secure, so he enrolled his sons in a private primary school. The school is in a prestigious and established area. The avenues are landscaped, and large trees reach across to create a shaded and cool location. Father values education highly and wanted the best for his children.

The boys were six and seven years old when they attended Sacred Hearts Primary School. It was a prestigious school, educating children from wealthy families, yet they were just two boys from the suburbs.

They took full ownership of their new school environment and made it their own. However, other students saw a class divide and referred to them as ‘los pobres’ (the poor boys). It would be ungrateful to discuss this with their parents Carmen and Hugo. The boys internalised this harsh social lesson since there was much more to be appreciative of.

The Poor Boys

The brothers (Alex and Lelo) love going to the beach with their parents. The loudspeakers by the esplanade played the latest Beatles hits, including Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da. The boys stop to listen and dance in their swimmers.

At school, Alex works with numbers competently. He impresses his teachers with his mathematical ability. Curiously, in art class, Alex draws pictures in black and white confusing his teachers. There is no visual condition, he just wants to save his colour pencils from wear.

Lelo joins the Gridiron football school team. He learns to run with the ball, hit the ground upon being tackled, and protect the ball with his body. He was strong and good at the sport. His legs move fast on the playing field.

Another of the places where Lelo finds social connection is The Boy Scouts associated with the school. He participates in the weekend excursions and is keen on all activities. He finds these outings nothing short of wondrous. Camping by a river to experience nature and survival feeds his independent spirit.

Being junior to the other boys, the bullying is relentless. Lelo deals with it as best as he can. Despite his heart pounding in his chest and the choking feeling in his throat, his approach is to not be submissive. He faces bullying head-on time after time, gaining more respect with each encounter. He is a strong boy, so he deals with the boys himself, never reporting the bullying to his team leader or parents.

The wealthy schoolboys learn to accept Lelo and Alex, still the class divide is branding.

Dark, and sombre days seem to string together. Lelo is feeling overwhelmed by the world. It is bigger and scarier than he can reasonably take in.

On one especially difficult day at the private primary school, Lelo’s hand goes up to go to the bathroom. The teacher refuses his request, and his hand is up again. Even more agitated, the teacher accuses him of time wasting.

He is hurt by that poor characterisation. Left in a vulnerable situation, he could no longer hold his bladder and wet his pants in class. At that moment, Lelo blocks out the world and the ridicule from classmates, sobbing for the first time in his short life.

The two brothers are taken to see the principal who expresses kindness and contacts their father at his work. It isn’t long before father is at the school to pick up the boys. He observes the situation and acts with wisdom.

Father took his son Lelo by the hand and washes him in the school bathroom. Then, unexpectedly, the three head to the city centre. It was mid-afternoon, and the stores are still open. He takes his sons into a clothing store and bought them a full new outfit:

underwear, pants, shirt, socks, shoes and even a new brown leather belt. The boys feel amazing to be in new clothes.

At that point, Lelo looks up at his father and realises that he has a friend by his side – more than just an authority figure.

At home that evening, Carmen is kind and understanding. The brothers show off their new clothes to her. At night, they pack them neatly in their bedside drawer. The next morning, they leave the past behind, and mother sends the boys off to school again. She didn't fuss unnecessarily and gives them the strength to press on.

The brothers don't have close friends at that school. There is only one boy with whom they are friendly. He is also a 'poor boy' from the suburbs. A nice, gentle boy. Together, they catch the bus to and from school.

One afternoon, their friend has a tragic accident when he gets off the bus. He steps off the bus with his school bag over his right shoulder, head down, and keen to get home. Their friend crossed in front of the parked bus and into the path of oncoming traffic. From the bus window, the boys unaware, watch for their friend to wave goodbye to him, but he is not to be seen, since something dreadful has occurred.

The bus is stationary, and the children stay fixed in their seats as emergency vehicles converge around them. An ambulance rushes their friend to hospital.

Days pass, and there is no news of the boy. They wonder how he is doing.

One late afternoon, when the boys arrive home from school, their friend's parents are visiting. The adults sit in silence in the lounge room looking downwards. The room then floods with sadness at the news of the boys passing; it is as if a thick fog is filling the room reaching every corner.

The boy's guitar is gifted to Lelo just for being his friend while he was on earth.

Alex Goes Missing

After school one day, Alex fails to meet Lelo at the end of the day like he normally does. It is likely, Lelo thinks, that Alex was released from class early and he decided to walk to the city centre on his own. It is too far to walk there but Alex would be undeterred.

The teachers are naturally concerned and contact the parents instantly. Their parents rush to the school in a panic. Lelo reassures them that he may know where his brother is and walks ahead of them at a good pace.

They walk along a broad and shady avenue where the mature trees reach across the road to touch each other. Beautiful large houses and quaint boutique shops line the shady avenue. It isn't long before they see Alex casually strolling up ahead and admiring the shop windows.

They are relieved to find him, and Lelo is secretly pleased with his little brother for venturing out on his own. Lelo wonders what his parents thought about their two boys seeking out such adventures. Are they concerned or are they resigned to their boys exploring?

Lelo recalls instances when their enthusiasm for adventure and play run parallel with risk. The neighbourhood children like to play war games. In a quiet street in the newly built area of the estate that is unoccupied, they form barricades with cardboard boxes and left-over building materials. Two cohorts face each other a distance apart, and they gather rocks and sticks. Primed and readied behind their rustic barricades, the children launch missiles. War starts quite

civilised with the odd rock hitting the cardboard shields but soon progresses to a dangerous melee with projectiles thrown with force.

Lelo has a particular knack for sending rocks over the barrier, and it just so happens that one of his rocks bounces off the top of a boy's head. The injured boy runs home crying, and his team quickly surrenders.

When the brothers reach home, there is a commotion at their front door. The injured boy's father is agitated and waving a fist at their father. Lelo is proud of his rock throwing accuracy, but he can see how an injury would be upsetting. The injured boy's father demands instant punishment, but Hugo is more sensible and is satisfied with a sincere apology from Lelo.

The apology is provided with honesty, and rock throwing is ceased from then on.

Doggy Escape

To reflect on his own, Lelo is up early on a Sunday morning exploring new places in the neighbourhood.

The streets are quiet and there is no one about, only the council dog catcher going about his task. The council worker drives a small truck clearly marked 'Perrera' (dog pound). On the tray is a large steel cage. With interest, Lelo sits at the curb to watch from a distance, learning the trade.

The dog catcher spots a dog while he drives slowly along a street. He parks the vehicle and follows the dog on foot with a lasso rope, eventually cornering the dog and roping it in. The dog yelps and pulls tight on the rope. No one comes out of their homes to claim the defenceless animal. Back at the iron cage, the dog catcher lifts the cage door and shoves the dog in. The other dogs cower against the back mesh.

Lelo knows that these dogs do have homes. They are just out walking themselves, as he is. Neighbourhood children often complain that their dogs had gone missing. Just then, a sense of injustice surfaces in him. While the council worker is chasing after the next dog with a lasso in hand, Lelo climbs onto the truck and over the steel cage. There are seven frightened dogs in the cage, including a small and extremely cute white terrier. Lifting the cage door, it is a thrill to watch the animals eagerly take back their freedom and disperse in all directions.

Fatherly Bond

Father takes the boys on a journey back to the capital city. He plans to see a friend in the central business district. He often speaks of his close friend Marcelo, and what they got up to when they were younger and working together in government.

Hugo told the story of falling out with his friend over a young woman. Marcelo was keen on her. Unfortunately, she was seen with another man. Father did not share Marcelo's enthusiasm and without wanting to discredit her or fight over their perceptions, the two friends drifted apart.

With time, Marcelo realised that the young woman wasn't for him and mended the relationship with Hugo. That episode in their lives was behind them. The two work colleagues, looked ahead in friendship from then on.

They meet Marcelo for lunch at a favourite city café, which is busy with a lunchtime crowd. They talk with the warmth of close friends. The boys sit high on bar stools having a bowl of hot lentil soup and listening patiently. Sitting there, they study the strong connection.

Lelo and Alex are grateful that their father had invited them to witness friendship. It is then that Lelo decides to take any opportunity to stand by his father, like he had stood by him that past dark school day.

Motherly Trust

Their youngest sister, Patricia is born late 1968. She is a delightful addition to the family and a little sister to baby Paulina. The two boys visit their mother and the new baby in the hospital.

There, mother shares with them the fate of another mother in the ward. To her right, by the window with the sun streaming in, is an incredibly sad new mother. In hushed tones, Carmen reveals that the young woman was the victim of a rape and is refusing to hold or nurse her baby. There is nothing that the doctors and nurses can do or say to convince her otherwise.

Lelo is still a young boy of eight, and the mature concepts stretch his understanding of human interactions and abuse. Nevertheless, he is grateful that his mother trusts him with that information, and that makes him a wiser boy.

A year passes and Carmen conjures up a big plan, to migrate the family to Australia. She carries equal authority and responsibility at the head of her family for decision making. She is ahead of her time, a pre-feminist. In late 1969, putting her trust in Lelo, she asks him to assist her with the enquiries and application forms. The boys are good readers and even study English at school. Their prestigious school instructs the students in a second language for those worldliness skills.

Australia is reaching out to skilled migrants post its White Australia Policy, which was abolished in 1965. In Carmen's eyes, it has become a friendlier nation. A combination of Alex's health issues, and father's wellbeing, is Carmen's motivation.

Alex had an unfortunate accident at play and his health was deteriorating. His doctors admitted to having limited specialist treatments for him in Chile. Doctors advised that Alex may need surgery in the future, but it was best to wait and see.

At that same time, Hugo was dealing with high levels of stress at his work. Chilean politics was shifting towards the right in the late 1960s. Hugo was transparent about his leftist views and was a strong supporter of the democratically elected Allende government. Conflicts at work with colleagues of a different political view was increasing.

The boys, young as they are, understand from serious family conversations around the dining table that there is a real need to seek migration. The family submits a careful and complete application to the Australian authorities.