



Si Si Si ...

Is that a Spanish title? Well, no ... Please read on!

In an interesting little coincidence, this week's story is a bit special for two reasons; we've reached a nice round number in the index - this is story #400 - and it's also a family 'Birthday Sunday'; my brother Simon is turning 59, so he gets to sit in the hot seat today.

When you first start learning to speak Japanese, you learn an interesting thing about the vocabulary used to identify family members - there is no word for 'brother' (nor 'sister' for that matter). Now of course the relationship *can* be expressed, but you have to learn *two* words: 'older brother' and 'younger brother' are different concepts.

Because of this, whenever Simon has visited me here in Japan, and I am introducing him to people (in Japanese) with, "This is my younger brother Simon ..." they are invariably surprised, and one glance at the photo accompanying this story will show you why. Somewhere along the line, my 'little brother' ended up becoming quite the big guy.

He and I are just over two years apart, and throughout our childhood, were pretty much inseparable. We always shared a bedroom, and a deep toybox, and our days (when not trapped at school) passed in a jumble of Dinky Toys and Meccano constructions on the living room floor, or explorations outdoors on our bikes.

As you can see in that photo, Simon followed the family penchant for music, although in his case he followed it all the way, and has made a living as a 'saxman' ever since leaving home. That photo was taken for a magazine feature story on his work as a 'doubler' - a musician who specializes in playing many different wind instruments. Doublers are a mainstay of any traditional theatre orchestra, and indeed, that is where Simon has found most of his employment over the years. He doesn't always take all those instruments to every job of course, but a typical gig will need three, four, or even a half-dozen of them.

He is currently working in a theatre orchestra in Germany, for a very long-running and famous show, the Starlight Express. When he moved to Germany to take that job, I couldn't help but smile; he in Germany, and myself in Japan ... two countries that our parents' generation were trained to think of as the 'arch-enemy'. Who could possibly predict the way that these things turn out?

Well 'turn out' is always a work in progress of course, and Simon's current and future life is forming an interesting parallel with our father's. As I have mentioned before in these stories, Dad was a dance orchestra musician in Britain in the post war years, but with the change in musical styles during the 50s the handwriting was on the wall for that sort of employment, so he emigrated to another continent to bring up his family. And Simon? He tells me that his orchestra has been trimmed and reduced in size bit by bit over the years that he has worked there, and it seems only a matter of time before the live musicians are completely replaced by recordings. So he too is preparing a plan for the next stage in his life, and for him too, it is going to be on another continent.

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I can't believe I am actually writing this next sentence, because it all seems a bit unreal at this point, but my little brother Simon has - in his holiday times from the orchestra over the past few years - established himself as a rubber farmer in Thailand. His letters to our family mailing list concern such things as digging irrigation ponds for the trees, harvesting the rice fields, or chasing a chicken around the compound to prepare the evening meal.

I'm kind of tied up here with my own work these days, but I am certainly looking forward to the day when I can visit his plantation. Strolling under the rubber trees in the afternoon, and doing a jazz set in a local bar on Saturday nights ... I can certainly think of worse ways to spend one's retirement years!



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