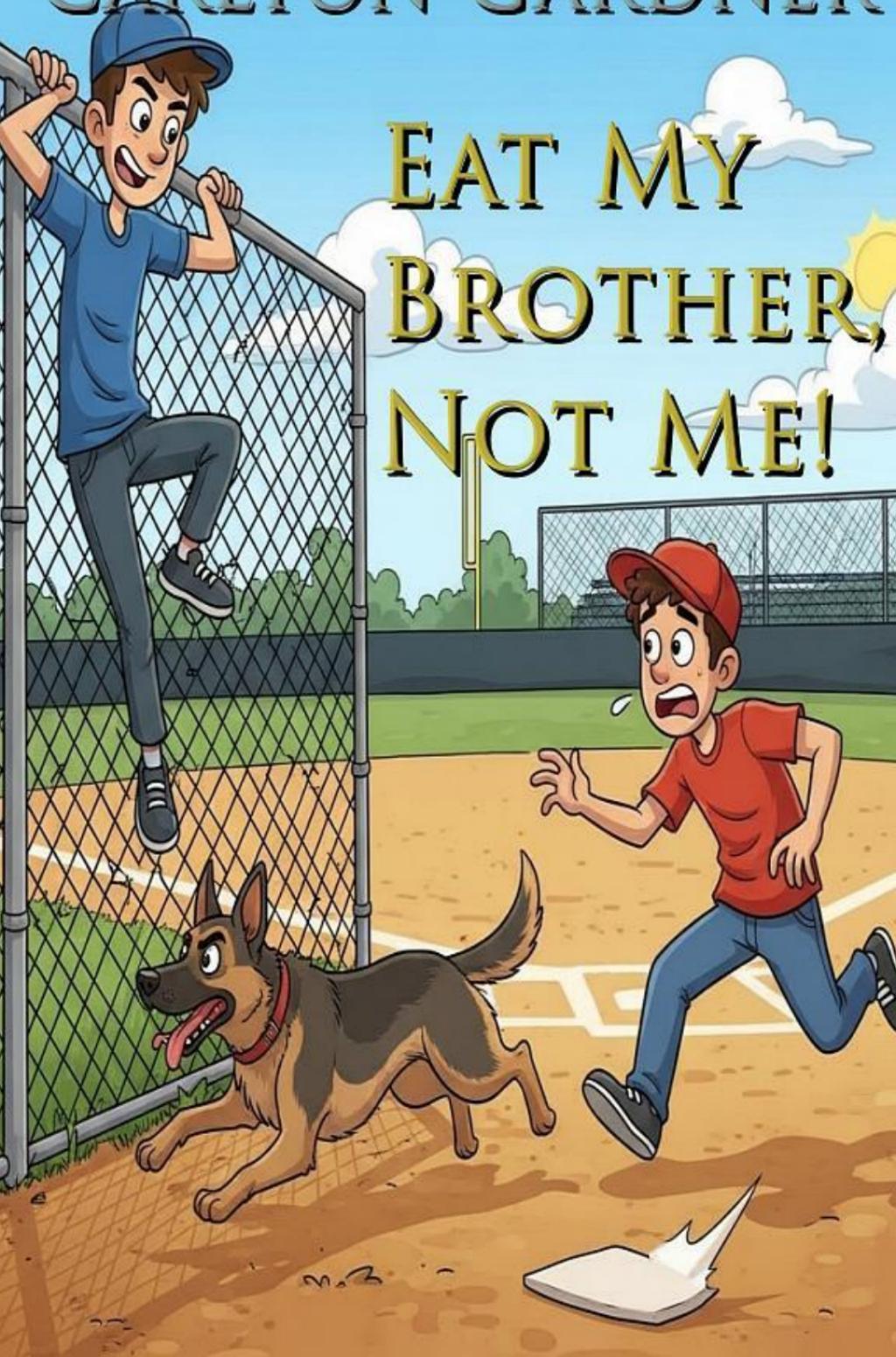


CARLTON GARDNER

EAT MY
BROTHER,
NOT ME!



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A Very Short Story

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First edition

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“The bond between brothers is a powerful, often unspoken, force. Sometimes it pushes you to run, and sometimes, to fly.”

Bagley Park and the Bluebird

This story goes back to my first year of college and involves my brother Mark. It was an astounding realization at the time, a real eye-opener, but, like everything, a learning experience. I preface this by saying that Mark was one of the toughest people I've ever known, and I loved him dearly.

We were interested in buying an old yellow Bluebird school bus we'd seen parked behind Bagley Park in Buckhead, Georgia. Bagley Park was where we played Little League baseball as kids and was near North Fulton, our high school. I was already in college, while Mark was a senior at North Fulton.

It was a Sunday, and the park was deserted. Mark and I wanted to check out the bus to see its condition. It was parked beyond the outfield fence. We walked around the field and noticed the bus door was wide open. We briefly inspected the exterior and then climbed aboard. I settled into the driver's seat and started examining the gauges and fiddling with the controls. It had the old pull lever that opened and closed the door, and I began playing with it.

We hadn't been on the bus long when Mark suddenly jumped off without a word and frantically tried to push the door closed from the outside. I had the door lever and easily prevented him from trapping me inside. After struggling to shut the door, he turned and took off, running across the field and started scaling the outfield fence. I had no idea what he was doing. I stood up and watched him through the windshield, wondering what was going on. It was then that I heard a slight noise behind me and turned to face the largest dog I'd ever seen. It was a huge, long-haired German Shepherd, and it was heading straight down the aisle toward me. I barely had time to jump off the bus and turn to face the "monster." I stood perfectly still as he exited and, fortunately, bounded off in the opposite direction. I like to think he was as scared as I was, but that's probably wishful thinking.

I looked toward Mark and saw him peering at me from the safety of the other side of the six-foot-high fence. I can attest that Mark would stand his ground against anyone at school and was tough as nails. But I learned he could be spooked and sent into a panic by anything unexpected. I let Mark know exactly how I felt about being offered up as dog food just to save his own skin. He had no excuse and was thoroughly embarrassed. He just panicked.



About the Author

While 'Eat My Brother, Not Me!' recounts a moment of brotherly panic (mostly his!), it also captures a small piece of the incredible bond I shared with my brother, **Mark**. He was not just my brother, but my best friend, and the biggest reason I found success, both on the cross-country course and in life.

Mark was the one who saw potential in me I couldn't see myself. He pushed me through countless runs, believed in me when my desire wavered, and ultimately, helped me become a **state champion in Cross Country**. That belief was a turning point, not just for my athletic career, but for my entire future. It led to a scholarship to the **Georgia Institute of Technology**, making me the first in our family to graduate from college – a dream that felt impossible without his relentless encouragement.

Mark continued to live a life of dedication and achievement. He joined the Army, becoming a **Warrant Officer** and bravely flying **helicopters in South Korea**. There, he exemplified his incredible discipline and spirit, becoming the **only soldier in his group to earn a Black Belt in Taekwondo**.

Mark was a force of nature, a mentor, and a fiercely loyal friend. He tragically died at the age of 25 while serving our

country, a loss that left an irreplaceable void. This story, in its small way, is a testament to our brotherhood, and a loving remembrance of the extraordinary man who shaped my life in so many profound ways. He is, and always will be, deeply missed.

You can connect with me on:

⌚ <https://carltongardner.com>