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A corner of Corsica that is forever Finland

Today we're on a pilgrimage, near Calvi. To a place that was marked by tragedy but nonetheless holds a haunting beauty: an innocuous left-hand corner just before a wooded valley, whose peace these days is in stark contrast to the fiery violence of the accident that claimed two young men's lives at the height of their powers.

We're talking of course about the spot where Henri Toivonen and Sergio Cresto perished more than a quarter of a century ago.

It's a pilgrimage that many people have made, but Henri's younger brother Harri hasn't been there yet. He says that one day he will, but for now, he's not quite ready. For Harri, it's all still as raw as it was on that terrible day in 1986: he says he finds it almost impossible to believe that so much time has already passed. But there is a consolation.

"As long as people keep remembering him, it means that Henri will never really die," says Harri – and that's why it's important to go. If only to spend a few quiet moments next to a memorial that is faded, cracked and worn – not just through a constant battle against the elements but also against the tide of people who have come to see it, touch it, and leave a few tributes before they go. Henri Toivonen occupied a special place in peoples' imaginations, so it's no surprise that his memorial stone is a bit like Jim Morrison's grave at the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

"Everyone loved Henri because he had such a straightforward personality: I think it all goes back to our mother and our father and our life at home," adds Harri. "We had a very happy childhood and our parents made us the people we are. In all our life together me and Henri only ever had one big fight, which is remarkable."

Henri's father, of course, was Pauli Toivonen: the reluctant winner of the controversial 1966 Monte Carlo Rally (when the dominant Minis were disqualified for a trumped-up headlamp infringement) as well as the 1968 European Rally Championship – of which Corsica now forms a part.

Such was the family's mutual trust that Henri asked his brother to prepare his ice notes for the Monte Carlo Rally, which he won in 1986. After what had happened 20 years earlier, Pauli said with relief when Henri crossed the finish ramp first, fair and square, that the 'name of Toivonen had finally been cleared.'

Less than four months later Henri was no longer with us.

"What people maybe don't know about him is what a loving brother he was," concludes Harri. "I'm four years younger and he was always looking out for his little brother, just as he had done all his life. It really doesn't feel like more than 25 years have passed. He was my brother and my best friend and I think about him probably every day."

As the Tour de Corse heads to Calvi tomorrow, we'll all be thinking of Henri too.

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