

Grand Final Week: Day 2 Monday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2010

It's 5.30 am and sleep now evades me. I'm too nervous and excited. St.Kilda are in the Grand Final and my credit card is debited with our footy tickets so we are going to the Grand Final to watch the gladiatorial battle of the year. All roads of football lead to this. And we'll be there with bells on, and covered in red, black and white, facing the Collingwood army of many thousands. Bring it on.

My brother Andre rung from East Bridgewater last night. He's finally watched the match and is so excited that we are playing Collingwood. He's left instructions to make sure I get him the winning Sun/Herald poster, and the book of statistics that had Gary Ablett and Geelong last year, he wants the one with St.Kilda in it. I make a mental note to get him a copy of the 2010 Almanac when it comes out as well. And badges with this years Grand Final on it.. Anything I can lay my hands on.

Today I have put all else aside and we're going to watch the boys practice at the old ground of Moorabbin. We need to get there very early, it starts at 10.30 but I want to buy a flag for Rina and get a good position where I may not have to stand for two hours. So we are foregoing our morning walk and will park nearby and head there before 9am.

Did I say I'm really excited? Moorabbin has special meaning for me. When I was twelve and first started going to the football with my friend Deb, it was new. We'd just won the Grand Final, my brother, my father Jacques, my mother Elfie and Uncle Bob had all been. I was only 11 and didn't go, but Deb and I went for 3-4 years to every match we could after it. We'd go by train to away matches, sometimes with family, sometimes by ourselves. We'd get autographs which I have managed to lose. I had scrap books that have now gone. Is that why for the last two years I have kept a scrap book of all the newspaper cuttings, tickets, items of football interest? Since I have been away, I haven't kept sticking them in, so it's piling up, now it's waiting for post Grand Final and the happy results to finish it.

Teenage life took over and football went into the background, a vague interest but not really engaged until several years ago, when my children were all older, and I was in a position to start going regularly and we have. For the last three years, we've tried to not miss a game, either going or watching.

Three or four years ago, my brother came out to visit with his wife Colleen, and one of the things we did together was to scatter my fathers ashes. He died in 1982, was cremated, and there are limits to times that the cemetery hold the ashes before you repay. Mum decided to liberate Dad's ashes to be scattered. We contacted the St.Kilda Footy Club and asked if we could scatter a bit at Moorabbin, where he spent so many happy years. His love of football never went away, and he hardly missed matches unless he was travelling overseas. He died of a massive heart attack at the age of 54. That's a year younger than I am now. Too soon to lose him.

Anyway, St.Kilda FC generously said yes (perhaps this is a very common practice), and Andre, Colleen, Uncle Bob, Uncle Marcel, Mum, myself went to Moorabbin. It was deserted and we were able to look at our old hunting ground and look around the jaded stands and go out in the middle and scatter some ashes. Not all of it, the rest was saved for St.Kilda pier where he can float around the world forever, (or at least the bay).

So a bit of Dad is in the centre of the ground at Moorabbin, so when we go to Moorabbin today he is there in spirit too. It is the open practice session, last years bought 10,000 happy supporters to watch. I am expecting such a crowd today, even if it's a work day.

My other task this week is to finish my Nick Riewoldt painting. I started it in the finals time last

year and have struggled with Nicks face, his deeply contoured lines hard to catch from newspaper photos but the opposition he is marking against is Collingwood, the crowds in the back are either St.Kilda or Collingwood, so it is meant to be. My work will be exhibited in the local Westpac soon and that will take pride of place. It is part of a wider project of the Glen Eira Artists Society that started last year and that I participate in.

I have drawn and redrawn and painted and repainted his face many times, this will be my last attempt and I will concentrate on it in art class on Wednesday to make sure I finish by the end of this week. I have many canvases with our colours, experimental pieces, ones with photos of my family pasted on, they are now all around my hallway with every St.Kilda scarf and piece of paraphenalia that I possess turning the entrance into a shrine. Posters of Nick, of the team from the newspapers and today I will buy streamers and balloons. Hopefully, this year won't rain and the colours won't fade. I have Rachels scarf in the front of my car and red, white and black ribbons streaming out of the left side car window.

Did I say I was a bit excited?

It's Grand Final week in Melbourne and everyone involved is a bit nuts, so I take my pride of place amongst the other nutters. In a weeks time it will be all over. The faith is still there, as is the teams faith, so on we go, marching in.