

You are in the Mix

So, the last time I could bear to write it was the week after the second Grand Final. I'm sorry to say, it still hurts. But let me fill you all in since then:

Week one: 4<sup>th</sup> October

The week was rough, we came back from the second Grand final and ripped down all the beautiful decorations on the front fence. No more balloons, no more streamers, posters, paintings, multiple scarves hanging around the house. A cleansing of sorts. Couldn't face my Collingwood friends or family just yet.

Celebrated my 55<sup>th</sup> birthday during the week, studied my French and Art, went to classes.

Week two: 11<sup>th</sup> October

Became even more one eyed, had my right hand eye operated on to remove a cataract and put in a long range lens. Love medical technology. My specialist – a St.Kilda nut. Worked after the patch was removed. No football, thankfully.

Very unhappy when the Grand Final Victors posters arrived via post, full of Magpies. Had pre-ordered them in delusional hope that this, yes, not 2009 but 2010 would be St.Kildas year. Unfortunately, Pies had a different idea and it is their mascot pasted over my visual world. Started to donate them to Collingwood friends and family. At least I made them happy and so too the charity that it supports.

Week three: 18<sup>th</sup> October

My beloved first Art Teacher, Zsu Zsi Hartmann, died after a short battle with very invasive cancer. She was the one who opened the doors of my creativity, am heartbroken; she is only late 50's. My son received an award at his school in Year 12.

Gave more posters away to my Glen Eira Artists Society mates. They were very very happy. Gave the rest to my cousins, who were there and part of the happiness of the black and white army. No more posters to torment me.

Make a decision to go to France and meet with my youngest at the end of her exchange program. Decide to spend a month on my own in Aix-en-Provence before meeting her for two weeks in Paris. Start organising. If all else fails (re getting over grand finals) leave the country!

Week four: October 25<sup>th</sup>

More planning for France, French lessons, art lessons. Son doing Year 12 but with his father and I am in a quiet household. My artwork goes up in two places, Westpac Bank in Carnegie has my football painting of Nic Reiwoldt and my cartoons on football and Collingwood. The manager of the Bank is a mad Pies fan but she is never there when I visit. Photos of the Grand Final also on display (as part of my exhibition through my Society). The other place, the Kinch Café, now has a wall of my art for the next year. Take lots of photos. Feel very creative and out there.

Week five: November 1<sup>st</sup>

Lots of art activity, art society meetings in preparation for our Glen Eira Artist Society Paint in the Park Day. More planning for trip.

Week six: November 8<sup>th</sup>:

The week of the birth of Luke J, my close friend is so happy and healthy and new parents are elated. Celebrations. See Leonard Cohen for second time in two years. He and his band are amazing. A month until I leave, footy is beginning to fade, except when I see bumper stickers of Pies 2011 Premierships. Delete all football from the Foxtel IQ.

Week seven and eight: November 15-28

Paint in the Park day succeeds even though the weather is terrible. Beautiful art is created, 10 are chose to be displayed at Glen Eira City Art Gallery. I did cartoon of all the artists in the park with the animals and wind and rain. Did cartooning with young kids brave enough to sit at the table with me. Talked to one father who was French about Provence, he went home and lent me three books on the area.

Week nine: November 29<sup>th</sup>

Eldest arrives home from Perth after three months working in WA.. Mum's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday, lots of organising and photos and family and friends. A wonderful afternoon. Helping eldest and friends to pack up her house. Final preparation to leave. Snow storms have disrupted Europe. Qantas planes keep having trouble. Mum is worried about me flying Qantas. I tell her I trust the pilots, and it may be better to worry about what will happen when I arrive in snow bound Europe. Glad I am staying in the South, quite mild winter there.

Week ten: December 6<sup>th</sup>

Am in France, Paris Charles de Gaulle airport chaotic. Takes hours to get my connecting flight. Totally disorganised, no one tells anyone what is going on. Thankfully, get through booking and into queue for flight to Marseilles, plane only an hour late, lots of queues and madness. Can't seem to get my Travel SIM card to work, but skype and computer connected. Only one piece of luggage (my art stuff) is missing and will arrive when located. C'est la vie.

Week 11: December 13<sup>th</sup>:

Son got excellent VCE result and emailed them to me. Love Aix, small, friendly, easy for one person to navigate. Shopped in French: "Je voudrais dix pommes, s'il vous plait" See Harry Potter's latest movie in French. Am speaking my deceased fathers language, in his country of birth. At least he and Mum saw the one and only grand final win in '66. BTW, changed my skype name to include "A premiership in my lifetime please". Do a walking tour of Aix-en-Provence and meet some Melbournites who live 15 minutes from me. Happy Collingwood supporters. Of course.

Week 12: December 20<sup>th</sup>.

French lessons spoken in French and my brain is all muddy, art lessons, one good, not so happy with the second painting. Love the French food, have fallen in love with fois gras (pate) again, damn the cholesterol. And baguettes. And the French chocolate.

And then, lo and behold, my son sends me the naked pictures of NR and I begin to follow the terrible embarrassment and saga at St.Kilda. Suddenly, the world is too small and the repercussions are felt as the emailed images bounce from country to country

Saw my third French film and made a friend, and suddenly, have plans for Christmas day and a partner to enjoy movie going. Practice my French. She is an artist as well, so we have a lot in common.

I go to lunch in Marseille with my cousins assistant, we get on well and it is a delightful afternoon with great views. My Art Teacher invites me to her place for the fish dinner the night before Christmas. It is very kind but I am a little worse for wear from all the eating and drinking at lunch time.

The next day, I make an Aussie Christmas day lunch, prawns, salad, wine, sweets. We doze away the afternoon. My friend has a bad cold.

Week 13: December 27<sup>th</sup>

Finally made it to Saint Victorie, where both Picasso and Cezanne painted this magical mountain. First time in a car looking around, all the rest by bus or train. My new friend drove me out, the country side where Cezanne would carry all his painting gear for hours to get to his beloved mountain. When I had done the walk of his special places around Aix, and seen his work in the gallery, it had inspired me to go home and finish my first independent painting in Aix. We also went to the dam and looked at the views. Lots of photos taken.

More is coming out about the photo scandal, and Sam Gilberts photos. Let this be a lesson to all the boys from all teams, and learn well.

New Years is spent with family and their friends, lots of eating and drinking and eating. The day after I plan to get up early and catch a bus to Nice, but my Apple iPhone alarm doesn't work and I wake up too late. I email my sister later, and she investigates the Iphone troubles and finds that I am one of many around the world who didn't get up to their usual alarm on New Years Day.

One day later, and my cousin takes his parents and I to "Catherale d'images" Les Baux de Provence with the topic of Australia. Here we were in an old mountain quarry and the walls, once mined, were now painted white and the images and sounds were Australia. Two artists had spent time in Australia gathering the images and sounds, and here I was, a million miles away, listening and seeing the colours and music of my land. Tears welled up, it was a spectacular moving show. The sounds of magpies (they are everywhere) and cicadas, Koori music and dancing, the big cities and their monuments. A bit of Australia. My cousin did good taking us there. We looked at two other mountain villages before wearily heading home

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Week 14: 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2011

The terrible floods have hit Queensland and I follow on the news and on the computer. In the French news, they report that the flooded area is the size of France and Germany together. It is incomprehensible. I watch the constant news on Sky News and BBC and they are all reporting it. On the ABC news on my little computer, I watch the local reporting. Awful awful news. Croc's and snakes in the water. ,

I say goodbye to Aix, and my friend and head to where my daughter is staying in La Rochelle. It is a journey from Marseilles, 9.30am to 7pm. A long long day, but loved the scenery and made an email buddy of the conductor when he helped me down with all my bags in Bordeaux. Waited 2 hours on the platform before hitting La Rochelle. Was picked up by my daughter and her exchange family's uncle. Very sweet to be so treated and good to see my baby who's all grown up at 16 and speaks beautiful French. Spent the night in La Rochelle and then we headed to Paris the next morning.

Paris by train, a perfect entry. Found our apartments and settled in. Lovely being in the company of my daughter. We shop at the local Monoprix (like Coles and Target mixed in together.) In the queue behind a young man who notices my scarf and my English, so get chatting. He lived in Melbourne for a year studying at Melbourne University, made local friends, all Collingwood supporters, so became a Magpie fan and here's another one on my first night in Paris, a happy French Collingwood supporter.

Discover a different Paris (for me) when my daughter hits all the shops of fashion La Fayette and Printemps and all the beautiful designer shoes, hand made that were pieces of art in themselves. There was even one in St.Kilda colours, took photos. We also went back to my dad's families neighbourhood, saw where he went to school, where he played in the streets before having to become an adult at 12 and steal food for his family in hiding. Went to the Musee de Louvre and Musee d'Orsay and the Musee de Resistance and Deportation, which was mostly about the resistance movement. A lot of denial of past history in France, no one is a relative of the Vichy, only the resistance.

For the first week my daughter cooked every night, a real treat. I tried to meet a friend at the Eiffel Tower but they had been held up so I went up on my own. The day before, there were young men playing Aussie rules in the park in front of the tower. When we stopped to check it out, we were accosted by hawkers who sold us a hand weaved bracelet, claimed to have no change and ripped us off royally. After that, we didn't stop to talk as much.

Week 15: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2011

Watched the news of the worsening floods in Queensland and the beginning of the death toll. Fires surround Perth. What a continent. After a day of looking around, heading back via the subway I am surrounded by the music of Pachelbel's Cannon and a group of students are playing the most exquisite music within the walls of the tunnels leading from one train to another. Am moved to tears.

Week 16: 18<sup>th</sup> January 2011

By the end of the week we are in Sweden visiting my step son, his fiancé, and meeting the family. We spend a wonderful 3 days in full snow, all my winter gear coming in handy. Sightseeing and shopping, see a St.Kilda scarf and buy it for my collection. The family are truly delightful, and they will be coming to Australia in August for the wedding. The kids all built a giant snowman and had snow fights while I had an early night. So the family will be taken to the football of course. Kept up the trend of continual eating, right up to a farewell dinner on the last night.

Back to Paris and another week before heading home together, my daughter begins her preparation for Year 11, we do some artwork, more shopping and more sightseeing. In the last few days, we visit the Holocaust Museum in the Maree, and I find my grandfather's name engraved in the two walls of those who were deported and killed. We locate the researcher who finds me two documents I don't think my uncles have. We light a memorial candle for the grandfather who trusted the French police would let him go after some questioning. Instead, he died in Auschwitz.

Shopping and history in Paris.

And then, it's preparation to come home. Now there is flooding in Victoria. We begin to win the One Day Cricket series.

Week 17: 27<sup>th</sup> January 2011

Starting to think about home. On the internet, I see the news that St.Kilda are paying for accommodation for the young woman and she won't publish any more photos. It goes on and on and on. I start diarising events to be attended in Melbourne. My partners mother-in-law is very ill. I am coming home to family sadness.

And then it's all over and we're on our way home, and its hospital visits and a funeral and my step-son rushing home and making the funeral but not the goodbyes.

Week 18: 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011

Being home is quite an adjustment. My daughter is at school, and we are part of a mourning family and Queensland is now preparing for a Cyclone. The misery of our attempts to survive nature keep coming.

Weeks 19 and 20: February 7 and 14<sup>th</sup> 2011

The Cyclone hits and there is less loss of human lives compared to the disaster to befall Christchurch a few weeks later. I attend the AGM of the St.Kilda Football Club in an attempt to be amongst my fellow supporters in the mess that was St.Kilda's off season. The Club is determined that we are still in the mix. In February, the NAB Cup begins and we watch the new St.Kilda players and have some excitement about their skills. Then the Ricky Nixon story breaks and it is only knocked off the news by the earthquake in NZ. I would say, what was he thinking, but he obviously wasn't.

Week 21 and 22` :February 14 and 21<sup>st</sup>.

More sadness about NZ and their recovery. My eldest takes me to a game of Essendon/Melbourne and I barrack for Melbourne but they are cooked. We sit in the Medallion Club, have dinner, the tickets a treat from her work. . Some joy as a very fit and healthy St.Kilda team demolish the undermanned Geelong side on Saturday night. We watch from the comfort of home.

And so we hit Week 23, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011, and the real footy starts in two weeks, and we couldn't have imagined a more stormy, tempestuous off season, between misbehaving footballers and agents, we have freakish weather, the wettest and coldest summer for many years, and I'm in my warmer footy gear already, and it's only the beginning of March. Seeing the boys play so well last Saturday has left me more confident that we are still a side to be reckoned with. I envy Collingwood's premiership and that sweet taste of success, but also, they had a clean and pleasant summer to match their glory.

So as I prepare for Week 24, and for footy to begin proper in Week 26, other than the two grand final losses, it's been a pretty good few months and I count my blessings as others count their losses. If losing the grand finals is the most I have to complain about, it's a pretty good life I lead.