

Almanackers do Wynyard while Tigers Do Saints.

The Journey:

Getting onto a small REX airline 30 seater plane at Tullamarine was a relief after a big week of helping my eldest daughter shift into her flat. Being super mum to three kids meant that a weekend away made the before and after very busy. But once I'm on the ride to the airport, the holiday has begun.

When all together, the party was on and didn't end until two days later when we all went back to our "normal" busy lives and the human contact becomes email contact once again. I felt like I was at high school camp, but better with more comforts, the humour, the chums, the football obsession, it felt free as all our normal responsibilities disappeared, except for John Harms who had his media commitments, but more of that later.

We were met by our host Bill Walker, who was gracious, generous and funny and got me three times with his Tassie humour: the first get was that you could see the MCG lights from Rocky Cape at night. Sucked in good and proper. And I wasn't even drinking.

He'd prepared for all of us, like a good mum that he was for the weekend, making sure we were all fed and bedded down where we needed to be, safely transported, and properly entertained and catered for. Our first stop was the local radio station so that Bill could introduce John to the "man", but we saw him in the centre of Wynyard (I'm talking two streets here, and two streets from Burnie airport and I can't work out why it isn't Wynyard airport). Nevertheless, John was introduced except this character regaled us with tales of how the radio station hadn't paid the \$1500 in electricity bills and blithely told us they'd cut the electricity and they were doing the show via the telephone. As if this surprised anyone but him, but we could see would do the talking in the interview of JTH if this brief greeting was any indication of his character. A very funny five minutes indeed. This is one of the media commitments I was talking about.

Then we headed to where all but one was staying at Rocky Cape, stopping first to feed the hungry masses at a roadside petrol and food outlet with the most amazing lamb pie I have ever eaten, or maybe I was starving. Once we'd all been nourished, we continued to Rocky Cape. John Harms got down to work, Gig's got down to reading about the local area, and the rest of us headed to the beach, it was cold and windy and threatened rain, and did rain a little, but the effort was worth it. Magnificent rock formations jutted out from the beach and from the ocean. On a fairly windless day, the Bass Straight was as calm as a mirror.

The walk was wonderful; I came armed with two cameras and had an arty time snapping the people and the area. The weather held off until we were already heading back, where we were fed cheese and biscuits, smoked meat and artichoke hearts and coffee and tea and beer. Bill had gone all out; this was no tasty cheese from a supermarket but the best of Tassie tastings. I put my feet up in the corner and had a few quiet moments. We looked at old newspapers found under the house by Bill and Jane (Mrs Walker who we met at the footy on Saturday). Pamela checked out the shower. The rest just nattered. The log fire was roaring, we were toasty and resting, and stayed that way until we had to be back in town for another phone interview for John in town.

While the others met up with Flynny who so patiently and happily occupying himself in the bar of the Wynyard Footy Club since his arrival from Devonport, Bill took me home to get into my room and change and freshen up. I had ten minutes while Dips and Andrew went with Bill to top up drink supplies for Rocky Cape. I spent the first five minutes searching for the light, and then the quickest change on record happened and we were ready to return to the launch.

The Launch

I got chatting, in my St.Kilda Guernsey as is tradition at launches, to a Saints supporter, his partner Mandy, and friend at the bar. It ended up that this sweet, engaging, charming and funny man and St.Kilda nut, was Max Brown, our launcher, and he borrowed my scarf for his presentation, to be wrapped in his favourite colours.

What ensued was funny and enjoyable, and we travelling Almanackers and Bill were also invited up to be interviewed by John as is his tradition. Once this was all done, and we finished chatting, Pamela and I headed to the restaurant attached to the club. This is in the room behind the bar, and I was wondering at all the people disappearing into this cavern, but once Pamela and I crossed the threshold, we could see the appeal. The story is thus: a very fine chef used to work for one of the three pubs in the area who decided to make their menu exclusively PIZZA. Thus he was out of work, and he approached the Wynyard Footy Club and suggested that he run a restaurant 4 nights a week (Wednesday-Saturday) and they take the bar takings. They upgraded the kitchen to restaurant standard and the rest is history. This has helped this cash strapped footy club regain some strength, and the restaurant serves fine food as well. It was packed the both nights we were there, and worth a visit if you are going by that way.

They kindly put the TV on in the restaurant, and Pamela and I, and Max's friend Mandy, ordered food and began to vaguely watch the St.Kilda/Richmond game while waiting for the food and eating our dinner. Not a good idea, certain to cause indigestion as the Saints showed from the early minutes they were unlikely to win.

The Footy Part 1

St.Kilda were down at half time when I was dropped back to my motel room, and the others trekked back to Rocky Cape, secretly barracking for the Tigers. I sat on the bed, and watched the second half with trepidation, hope, elation, disappointment, sms's flying between Rina at the ground and Denise at home and a phone call with Mum who was really angry at the way the boys were playing. It was warm and cosy and quiet except for when I yelled at the TV at missed shots and opportunities, at mistakes and then good play. The TV didn't answer back, which is probably a good thing. In breaks, I unpacked and made cups of tea and settled in for a good long rest. Then the miracle that was needed happened in the last quarter when the Saints kicked a quick three goals to be ahead by a few points, only to be pipped again, to get the lead again, and then for Richmond to run away, laughing at us all the way to the goal line, especially in the last goal kicked by the mighty Tiger Riewoldt as he strolled into the empty goal square and booted one to the third level of the Dome. The game taken care of, and knowing I could watch properly at home on one of my two recordings of the game, I went to bed.

Walking Wynyard

After a hearty breakfast, and two drizzly to do my Tai Chi, I got a map of the local area from the manager, and lend of a brollie, and headed away from the motel for a walk. I could hear the boys yelling from the footy ground we would attend later. I passed other walkers, passed canoeists and dogs on leashes, past two cannons on the rivers park and a memorial to Gallipoli, past a very old cemetery, run down but all before 1930's. Following the map and the noise, I past the ground, saw the families watching in the grand stand, kept walking until I found the shopping strip. I love browsing on holidays, something I never do much of at home. I purchases a St.Kilda coloured heart shape brooch with an evil smile and black and white eyes, a must have, from the first place. A beret and a small bag to go to the footy with, in the next, and kept walking until I got to a place I spied while walking along the river.

The "White Dogs Book Café" is the sort of place you wander into and fall in love with. Filled with second hand books, but more catching, a beautifully hand painted red, white and black apron hanging on the hooks for sale as I walked in, and I, and the apron, were sold instantaneously. The café's owner and the artist of the apron, and a magnificent painting of two huskies, was Lyn Connell, with bright red hair and the place was her palace. Objects of art and age were everywhere, as was a warm heater and an invite to sit near her friends, Dave Pierson and Alison Edwards. They sat and chatted, I looked and had a cuppa. She told me to go look at the loo's, and behold, she's covered the ladies loo with pictures of flowers which made the journey worthwhile in itself. The men's was covered with comic book pages.

Usually I look through books, but I instead just enjoyed the atmosphere of friends talking. Lyn was trying to sell the whole house and café, she wanted to retire from the business and just paint. Her work is so magnificent I hope she finds a buyer and gets to live her dream. We exchanged details and she'll let me know when she has her next exhibition.

I told her about the Almanac, the weekend, showed her examples of my art. It was a pleasant hour, but now it was nearing midday and I suspected the other Almanackers would soon emerge from the hills.

I sat and read in my room, and shortly after, they came, they checked in (the second night we'd all be in the same motel) and then we headed to the Wynyard Footy Ground for the next 11 hours.

The Footy Part 2

The boys settled themselves into the bar and would wait the three hours for the Geelong vs Great Western Sydney came began. Gig's and I kept up to date with the scores, equal at half time, but the boys had their surprise ruined when before the main game of the day the results of the AFL were broadcast for all to hear as they stood outside and watched the local footy. Remember those days? Local grandstands, loudspeakers, sitting on the boundary, afternoon sun warming your back, good conversations with new friends? Eating the rolls and later tasty hotdogs, getting my peppermint tea refilled with hot water by the kind kiosk ladies, cheering for Wynyard against Darryl Baldocks first team, East Devenport. Collectors came around to collect for the Darryl Baldock Memorial. They need \$400,000. Up to Friday, they had collected \$90,000. Collections were being held in Launceston at the Hawks vs Kangas match and at the Saints vs Tigers match last night.

It was a great afternoon, meeting Bills wife Jane, seeing Max Brown be the goal umpire and then later, stand chatting with the Almanackers along the boundary. There was even a wet area, two yellow lines where the drinkers stood to drink. The rest of the ground was a dry area. Loved it.

And Wynyard gave East Devonport a right thrashing. Bill invited me into the rooms where I took pictures of the boys circle and them singing their song, to the Hawthorn theme, and then sit around as the coach congratulated the boys and highlighted the best players. We all cheered, and then quickly departed before they got naked. Bills son George was best on ground.

Then it was back in the bar, and selling some Footy Almanacs and chatting to the buyers and a builder who worked in the Pilbura country out west. The President of the Club looked so longingly at me and hopefully asked whether we were all coming back that night to the Trivia Night for the Club. We were going to meet Pamela at another pub, but after quick consultation, we stayed, ate another great meal, marvelled at the weird footy results and games of the weekend, and stayed for the Trivia night. It was a long night with much humour, but with the brains trust of the Almanackers, we came in fourth. We did lose half the team who went to watch the last bit of the Melbourne/ Essendon game. We were buggered but followed our moral compass Flynny and stayed until the final siren of the Trivia, I drove all home as designated driver and everyone happily went to bed.

Breakfast with the Prince

All packed up, piled into the large white van yet again, we headed out to the Prince's house 20 minutes up the coast: Clinton Stretton, named the Black Prince by Flynny, had lovingly compiled the best breakfast guests could want, bacon, eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms, avocado, toast, tea and coffee. Bill and I helped Clint prepare a magnificent cooked breakfast, while John did some more work commitments. The man can party and the man can work. He looked and felt a little green.

It was a wonderful way to end the weekend, with a gracious, sweet host opening his home to a bunch of footy writing nuts. We were happy and sated and grateful to Bill and his friends for a weekend not to be forgotten.

Once finished eating (it seemed we ate our way through the weekend) we said our goodbyes as we dropped Bill back to the footy club where he now would drive Flynny back to Devonport. We went to fill up the van with petrol, got directions to the airport (1 minutes away) and got to the airport before it even opened in the morning. The mob waited in the car, I stood near the entrance, in the lovely warm winter sun, and went through my tai chi warm-ups and practice. Getting the cricks out of the old bones, before heading back to Melbourne. It was a wonderful, warm, engaging, mad weekend with my Almanack friends and I will be grateful for it for a long time to come.

Yvette Wroby

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