

Dear St.Kilda

The following is a letter from my footy mate Rina. I know it's not your fault that we all feel a little sucky at present, it's just that I'd forgotten what this part felt like. I fell in love with you again in 2006 and since then, things have been so good between us. There's been such happy times and such sad times, but we were there together. I committed myself more and more to the cause, became a member, got reserve seats, never missed a game if I could help it. I was so in love. With the feeling of coming and watching and winning and it was wonderful. When we lost, we sucked it up, there was always a feeling that tomorrow the world would turn and we would win again. I think I became an addict. I needed the fix of wins, well, at least some, but the last three years have become leaner and leaner, and as Rina says below, we have become meaner and meaner....

(Rina sent this to me after the loss against Richmond last Sunday.)

Dear Yvette,

Well, I am now experiencing the 'other end' of the footy-fan spectrum to winning. Familiar territory for the long-time supporters of St Kilda but a new experience for me since I joined your footy family in the weekly pilgrimage to the games to cheer on St Kilda. We have shifted from the highs of the anticipation of another win and the joyous songs of victory on the way home to worrying about how much St Kilda might lose by this match and then scurrying away under a heavy cloud of disappointment on the way home. Conversation is laden with worry about the next week's likely hammering... again. What lies ahead is a long tortuous road to the bitter end of the season. Gone are the delightful moments when we leaped out of our seats to celebrate successive sweet goals leading to a certain victory. Now, when there is a win, the singing is tinged by the thought that this moment must be fully enjoyed because it could be the last time we'll sing for the season. "Supporters" hurl abuse at the St Kilda players who are trying so hard. People are sullen and scowl, their shoulders hunched. Children are bewildered as they are hurriedly removed from the stands by moody or angry parents. I have looked beyond the miserable in our immediate vicinity to the cheering, flag-waving victors and smiled to myself remembering how it felt, all in a bid to try to draw on a little of the happy energy that brought me to this weekly event. The ear plugs that stream the commentary are no longer enough to provide a cocoon for protection from the surrounding angry yelling that imposes a thick blanket of negative energy over us all. Now, I feel that I am having to find the inner resources to deflect and avoid other people's responses. It's just not fun anymore! It's not good for my inner well being. How do team supporters go through this experience year after year and not become seriously ill? Thank goodness that the Tigers are winning after so many years of disappointment. They need a boost to their health! I get why Essendon was injecting anything they could to into their players. It wasn't to improve performance. It was to avoid serious irreparable damage to their minds, bodies and souls. ☺

Perhaps I am being over sensitive because that's what comes from being surrounded by misery most of the time on a daily basis, for years. Who wants to then spend their precious time away from misery to be replaced by... more misery. Footy used to be uplifting, energising and restorative. I am a pleasure-seeking being on weekends. I need to replenish the resources that I give away during the week. I think I need to organise a massage for myself each weekend and to take up Tai Qi. Go for walks in the park anything else but being surrounded by thousands of very unhappy people!

Here I am at 4 am writing, consumed by anticipatory anxiety because I know that I will be creating huge disappointment when I say that the thought of going to the footy and telling you 'I don't want to go to the footy' fills me with dread.

Drawing on the pearls from the Richmond supporter behind me, I guess I'm just a "soft, wuss".

Xox Rina

Dear St.Kilda,

I wasn't upset or disappointed my friend didn't want to come with me anymore. I get it. Before Rina sent me the above email, I was thinking how hard it was now going to the football, how when your team slides down in the world of AFL, so does club membership, sales of items, seats and tickets for events. All but the most devoted and the maddest quietly slip away. I was thinking about this, it was rumbling about my mind, while Rina was sleepless in her mind and home. At the event celebrating long term members, I was chatting to the Membership organiser, and she said they weren't thinking about further membership drives this year. They were going to concentrate on next year. Just over half way through the year, and it's all dried up. The positivity. The happy thoughts of the future.

Dear St.Kilda,

It's not you. I went to the Doggies Vs Melbourne match on the Saturday night before our loss against Richmond. I went with my sister Denise and her sister-in-law, Becky. We went to see the Womens Round and the women playing hard, fast, fabulous football. Doggies lost the under 18's, the Womens Game and then the men's match. They lost all three games. Doggie supporters know what I'm talking about here. They know this feeling. Their premiership was even further back than the Saints. Teams like Melbourne and Richmond complain about long droughts, but they are teams who have had successive successes. They have a history of winning, even if it's a long time ago.

The brightest part of the Doggies vs Melbourne match was the pre-drinks, and there was a lone lady at our table of the Women of the West function my sister had bought us to. I started talking to Helen, thinking she was another Bulldogs supporter and lo and behold, she was a Saints supporter whose daughter Verity works for the Doggies and organised the function. We chatted about life and art and football and her wonderful daughter. I have a reputation of finding things St.Kilda coloured when shopping, now I find the inner Saints at a Doggies/Melbourne game.

We watched the game and it was awful for the Bulldogs supporters but uplifting for the Demons who finally won a game, and we left 15 minutes into the last quarter when the Demons got their final goal. Nearly home, my sister texted me that the Doggies kicked 7 goals after we left to be only losing by 3 points. Go figure, all the excitement and best play and we missed the lot.

Dear St.Kilda,

I bought a new friend to the footy on Sunday, Sara, and she barracked for the Tiges because her son barracks for the Tigers. Like when I took my sister, it is hard when the "other " is happy and we are not. I tried to find pleasure in her pleasure. I'm not that good at it, but I had a go, as did our boys on the night. It's just that the other boys were better.

Dear St.Kilda,

I still love you deeply. Wounded and hurting, trying to find the positives to write about, I bumped into my guru of St.Kilda happiness and his lovely wife in Elsternwick. This is Mark who always says, We have '66. And so I asked my Mark, give me words that will shift the deflation of my footy spirit. He showed us his phone saver, the scores of the '66 Grand Final. He said, we won this. My orbit shifted as it always does after talking to Mark. I had to laugh. It really is all in the way you look at the world.

Dear St.Kilda,

I have been reading the terrific book "Strength Through Loyalty" by Russell Holmesby, it is about "Saints at Moorabbin and Beyond". Russell talks to so many people and has so many stories, and I have found that reading a little of this book brings me closer to what is happy about St.Kilda. It has so much history, so many great people who have loved the team, as players, as historians, as supporters. It has heartened me. St.Kilda, you have a great story to tell.

And today, I went to see Georgie from the St.Kilda Museum. I had dropped some posters of all my St.Kilda paintings that will be put into the museum, but today, I gave two prints and several posters for Georgie to take to Perth for the Perth based Saints supporters, for their raffles. I helped her choose some items to take on the plane to place around the room where they will meet. Georgie is another person who makes my day. Here she is, working for us to all remember, she collects and catalogues and talks to people. I am making sure I pass on connections to her, the stories that I write about the Saints, I will save them all and give them to a place where all the Saints memories are held. This is sacred ground for me and mine.

Dear St.Kilda,

My uncle Bob loves you, but he's going with his wife love on a cruise and will miss some games. I am going away too, soon, and I will miss our last two. Forgive us. We need our moments. My father loved you, my brother loves you from a distance, my daughter is 50/50 and loves me regardless. My Mum just doesn't have the patience to be a Sainter anymore, but she still listens in, hopeful. Rina needs light and will return when ready. I will go with whoever still wants to come, and I will see what we can bring to the games. I will find something to write about that gives me "Strength Through Loyalty" too. I am St.Kilda. I am part of the whole. And that will have to be enough for now.

Yvette Wroby

3rd July 2013