

A Meeting of Hearts and Minds

Perhaps the Almanac evening last Thursday night with Brian Matthews should be called the meeting of tragics. I have read Brian's wonderful autobiography "A Fine and Private Place" and in fact, it was probably John Harms who first alerted me to this memoir. It is often hard to come across town for a function on a weeknight, but the events are always worth the effort.

For me, walking into an Almanac event is like a meeting of old friends, I've only met this mob in September 2010 when I first attended a Grand Final lunch. John wasn't there that day, but I was welcome by fellow editor Paul Daffey and welcomed by John Mosig and David Downer and Gigs and Dips and Andrew Fitfall and John Butler and a Pies supporter wearing a fake Dane Swan tattoo sleeve. Rina and I couldn't believe how friendly and warm and engaging these mostly blokes were. Since then, my world has shifted on its axis and I feel blessed with all the warm friendships, connections and opportunities that community of writers and footy tragics have provided. Thursday night was no exception.

When John Mosig and I mossiered in from the bar, we ended up sitting next to the guest of honour and his wonderful wife Jane Arms. And John Harms. John Harms is one of the most generous people you are likely to come across, he introduces and shares people's love of this world in a way that you feel instantly connected to each other. I felt in awe as I sat and listened to tales from the two Johns, Brian and Jane. With entrée's out of the way, John interviewed Brian in his casual, thoughtful, funny way and that led Brian to tell stories about life, love and football. Jane added a few fragments of stories and all 25+ participants drank it all in. This was a room of story tellers, of people sharing what engages them in life.

While eating our main meal and beyond, Jane and I talked separately and together to the young men at the other end of the table. One had heard about this event and invited his friends to a catch up and so they became connected through food, wine, beer, talk and later the cricket. The staff turned the TV on to the second day of the cricket, and as we talked, wicket after Australian wicket fell and suddenly, we were all disengaged. Still chatting, Agar began to bat, and moment by moment he drew our table in. Most of the others had retired to the bar, or were chatting around the wonderful real fireplace. We could hear the cheers and groans float into our room as the game progressed.

As the evening went on, Jane, an accomplished editor, publisher and agent, and I began to talk to each other. By the end of the night, I had new firm friends and fellow mad Sainters, and the possibility of meeting again in the future at a game or in life. The Almanac community, via John Harms and Paul Daffey hard work and inclusive love of sport and writing and people, leave us all welcomed and engaged. I will be forever grateful.

As the staff were hustling us out of the dining room and we joined the boys at the bar, Agar was leading us out of the cricketing desert and was to become a phenomenon and juggernaut of expectation by the end of the night. The Aussies may have not won the First Ashes, but they have won back the hearts and minds of the cricketing world and we will be glued to the next lot on Friday as we watch the drama continue.

Meanwhile, after chatting with Cookie and another new friend Troy, I gave Brian and Jane a lift back to where they were staying, fully sated in meeting up with great people and sharing a world event that we would remember for many years to come.

Yvette Wroby

15th July 2013