

## Oh Brother...Part 2

My brother rang several weeks ago when he saw that the St.Kilda Hall of Fame would be held while he was in town. Like minds. I was already on it, had already booked tickets on the same table as another Almanacker, Stephanie and her daughter Lydia. Cool. We were going to be joined by Jenn and Scott, more Sainters who came to my exhibition. After a mix up of the tables, we were all together. Including Uncle Bob. But that was all AFTER.

Andre is an enthusiastic soul. We got to the Melbourne Room in the Melbourne Exhibition Centre way early, like 6.15pm when the doors didn't open until 7.30. That turned out to be really cool. In the foyer the Saints had the fabulous book "Strength Through Loyalty" which I bought him as a gift. He looked at it and thought it was a bit heavy to carry through the night. He and Uncle Bob looked through the book written by Russell Holmesby, about the St.Kilda Football Club from 1965 to present day. I chatted to Bryce Lay, an old trainer at St.Kilda, who worked for the Club for 30 years. He was busy spotting old players he massaged and trained over that time. Retired now, he enjoys these events and catching up with old players and staff he knew. I was sitting near him and enjoyed watching him work the room.

Then, as the room began to fill, we were lucky enough that Carl Ditterich, the love of my 12 year old life, walked our direction. He was intercepted by Andre once he was pointed out (by Bryce or myself) and Andre got his autograph on the page of the book with Carl's picture in it. Of the flying young man with the golden locks. Andre then told him a story:

Our father took Andre to his first St.Kilda game at the Junction Oval in 1965. They had seats, and the stands were full. Just before the game started, an older woman (according to Andre) came up the stairs. (She was probably OUR age now). There was no seating and my father Jacques, ever the French gentleman, asked Andre to sit on the steps so that she could take his seat. She thanked them, and introduced herself. She said her son Carl was playing his first game for the Saints, at 17 years old. This was the beginning of a friendship for Dad, they often sat together after that. And it's a memory Andre has always wanted to share with Carl or Carl's mother.

So Andre told Carl and they became mates through memory. Carl loved the story, and Carl's wife (forgive my poor memory please) told me that she had died 40 years ago, Dad had died 31 years ago, so we all lost our parent too early. Carl is now in his 60's, and sat with us for 20 minutes, chatting with Andre, letting us have photos with him, he hugged my Uncle Bob. Bob remembered his first game and shared that with Carl. I GOT A KISS ON MY RIGHT CHEEK, yes, it has been washed but it will stay with me FOREVER. I told Carl's wife that I was AT THIS VERY MOMENT painting a picture of a Footy Exhibition to be held at the ARTISTS GARDEN, a Fitzroy Nursery with a gallery upstairs. Mum and I had gone there years ago, and it has been in abeyance for too long. I may not be here in September, but my painting will be.

The Brief for this exhibition is: fond memories of the football before all the scandals and big money. I am painting a picture of the 12 year old me and Deb, getting our autograph books signed by Carl Ditterich and Ross Smith at the change rooms at Moorabbin. My favourite and her favourite. And now, I have become that 12 year old again at the Hall of Fame night with the Saints. And I got to tell both men about my painting.

Carl then was approached as others got his autograph and the moment passed, but he saw Andre several times and asked him how his mission was going (to get his book signed by the 1966 players). We were all now old mates.

I saw Kenny Whiffen who I have been doing a series of interviews with. He has been a trainer at the Saints for 49 years. He has stories coming out of his ears.

The night itself was fabulous, with Louis Armstrong's version of "Oh When the Saints" backed up by a local Jazz band. The food was fabulous, the company was great and we watched Robert

Harvey be given the Hall of Fame membership. On top of that, there were 3 Legends named, the wonderful Trevor Barker, the ever young, very school teacher-ish Ross Smith, and the amazing Neil Roberts, who gave the best 30 minutes speech EVER. So funny, so natural, such a great story teller.

And then there were the photographs and autographs and cuddles with the players. Between Jenn, Stephanie, Lydia, Andre and I, we nabbed so many passing players. Andre went on the hunt and collected Ross Smith, Bob Murray, Verdun Howell, Ian Sydman and Brian Morrow.

He'd already collected Nick Riewoldt signature outside in the foyer and told Nick another story, of when we had gone the night before to Docklands and been surrounded by Pies supporters. Andre told Nick how much he had hated the Pies, in a deep abiding, gut-felt way that had surprised him. Nick wasn't surprised, his wife felt the same about the Dallas Cowboys who the rival team to her Houston boys. Nick understood via Catherine the overwhelming feeling more primal than expected.

So we got cuddles and photos from Stephen Milne, Ben McEvoy, James Gwilt, Ross Smith, Jason Blake, Nick Del Santo, Armed Saad (what a great smile that young man has), Joe Montagna, Robert Harvey, and Lewis Pierce and Neil Roberts. Stephanie thinks he's a young, tall, Clark Kent, and he played well for Sandringham on Sunday, but more of that in the next article. It was fan heaven, the boys were generous with photos and autographs and it made the night even more special. The food was magnificent. A band came on after all the formalities. We got to see the oldest remaining football jumper that was a St.Kilda one, it may be the oldest in the world, certainly in our league and in Australia. It will go into the AFL museum at the G.

**OK, so now here's the sealer. I got a cuddle with Lenny and got to tell him he was my MUSE. I gave him my invite to my exhibition because all the work is now online. His Mum had told him about the painting, she liked it, he said, because his nose was straighter in the painting. He thanked me for introducing myself to him and even though the powers to be were trying to help him leave, he and I had a photo and my heart is full. I got a cuddle from Lenny. I am so 12 again.**

A kiss from Carl, a cuddle from Lenny and my brother isn't the only one with a big smile plastered across his face all evening.

We saw fellow Almanacker David Downer who came for a visit across to our side of the room. We were happy and together and gave Andre a night he will NEVER ever forget. He has not stopped talking about it. He was an old cheer squad member back in his element. He was a man meeting his old heroes and meeting the current boys who make up a club he still religiously watches in the States in his spare time. He got to enjoy the one good outfit he bought over for the event. I had a date with two men, my Uncle Bob and Andre, and we all scrubbed up well for the night. It was a special treat for all of us, made more special by sharing with with Stephanie, Lydia, Jenn and Scott. If you are going to be a mad Sainter, it is sure nice to share it with other mad Sainters.

I thought a lot about our little Premiership success and wondered if what makes St.Kilda special is that it has found a way to appreciate and share the culture in a club where friendships, commitment and long, history making events. Support and story- telling become the things that sustain us while we keep hanging in there. It works for me.

Yvette Wroby

9<sup>th</sup> May 2013