

THE GLUE OF OUR COMMUNITY



Early this year, CAROLINE BEATTY enrolled as a full-time postgraduate student in the Master of Information Management course at RMIT University. As the end-of-year assignment writing time was getting closer, so too was the end of the footy season for her beloved Western Bulldogs. Their journey to the AFL Grand Final was proving something of a distraction for Caroline, so she decided to reflect on how this passion of hers intersects with her studies.

In 1989, as a single mother, I received a small bequest from my grandfather that allowed me to put a deposit on my first house. The only places I could afford were Daylesford, Collingwood and Yarraville. (None of which I could afford now!) I bought a very small house in Yarraville, in the western suburbs of Melbourne, adjacent to Footscray, and my daughter and I moved in around the middle of 1989. I had not grown up in the area, was not familiar with it and I knew nobody. But we were welcomed by the community with a warmth I had never experienced before. It was a challenging time – I worked way over on the other side of town, and my daughter and I had long days. They were difficult times in other ways too, when interest rates were at 17 per cent, and unemployment in the western suburbs was at an alarmingly high rate.

I was not a football supporter in 1989. But in October of that year I read in the local paper that the league wanted to 'merge' (read: get rid of) the Footscray Football Club. Having experienced the amazing community support in the local area, this hit me hard. I knew the footy team was incredibly important to the social fabric of the area – it was the glue of the community. For me, this was not about footy but rather a social justice issue. I went along to the first rally at the Western Oval, which precipitated a fightback, the like of which had never been seen. The league said we had to raise \$1.5 million in a few weeks in order to save the club. My daughter and I spent evenings at fundraising headquarters and shook tins on street

corners on the weekends. I will remember forever one old lady who came in to make a donation – she handed over her piggy bank to me and said I should take it all. I gently suggested maybe she could keep some, but she told me that without her footy team, she might as well be dead.

We succeeded in raising the money, against a background of financial hardship in the poorest part of Melbourne.

I became a club member, and in the first round of 1990 I went to my first ever Footscray football match. We won that game, and afterwards I saw tough, tattooed, young men singing the club song with tears streaming down their faces. I couldn't help but wonder what they would be doing if their club had been taken away from them. I fell in love first with the community spirit, and then with football. I've been on a journey with the Bulldogs ever since, and they have taught me a lot about integrity, justice, and the belief and spirit of the underdog.

So, this year I quit my job to study the Master of Information Management full-time. My motivation is to find a way to contribute to making a better, more equitable society. I truly believe that information can change the world, and the values of librarianship sit very well with my personal ethics. I want to help the underdogs of the information world. Public libraries, not unlike football teams, are the glue in our communities. Equal access to information can change people's lives. Research directly impacts society. Social justice matters, and libraries make a real difference. As I look back, much of what motivates me now in my career change was learned at the Barkly Street end of the Western Oval. Perhaps my journey to librarianship actually started back in 1989, when I was privileged to witness and understand the true meaning of community.

P.S. The Western Bulldogs won the 2016 Grand Final, for only the second time in their history. The first time was in 1954. Sometimes equity and justice is a long time coming – but it's always worth fighting for. 🌟