

Emyr Williams

I have been asked to speak on behalf of the SYCC as President of the club during Em's first few seasons here.

Em played his first game for the Yarras on Sunday 30 November 2003 in the 4s. He made 27 on debut and the Yarras won outright over Bayswater. Two of Em's long-term mates - Tav Makin who made 46 and Wayne Biggins who took 6/28 – also played in that game. It was the first of 47 games Em played for the club up to March this Year when he was 12th man for the firsts in a losing semi-final.

In October that same year 2003, Sven (aka Peter Petersen) also played his first game at the Yarras. He also played in Em's last game here this March. They became great friends and together their contributions to the club - on and off the field – made the club's heart beat. They really enjoyed the cricket,

the training and the socialising but they also selflessly took on all the jobs that make cricket clubs tick. I seem to remember they took over running the bar and the barbie from the moment they arrived and they were both on the committee by their second year here.

Em became President in 2005/6 and captain of the second XI the same year. That says a lot about Em. Em wasn't the club champion batsman but he did have a top score of 68 and a lot of very solid 20s and 30s. He was really good in the field with all that energy. He cut off countless runs and took 20 catches as a fielder and 17 as wicket keeper – nearly a catch per match. And as for bowling. . . I think even Em would concede that he must have been close to the worst bowler at the club.

But the stats don't capture Em's personal qualities which were so truly outstanding that he was asked to take the leadership roles in the club after such a short time.

Em had levels of energy that make the Energiser bunny look a bit lethargic. I used to think how exhausting it would have been keeping an eye on him as a child as he bounded from one sport to another, and probably another again if anyone was up for it, and all on the same day.

He also had such a candid and open manner about him that people were drawn to him. He seemed to genuinely take people as he found them and to enjoy them for who they were. As a captain, a committee man and President, he dealt with disagreements in such a calm and reasonable way that it was almost irritating. Even the totally unreasonable actions of the cricket bureaucracy didn't seem to throw him off his stride. I was lost in admiration.

He seemed to enjoy life to the full and to draw people around him, and he still does tonight at this memorial. For those

reasons, it is truly fitting that from today, we will name the award for best clubman, the Emyr Williams Clubman of the Year trophy. We thank his Melbourne relatives, Elizabeth, Owen and Phil Jones for donating the trophy.

At the end of the Vincibles, Gideon Haigh wrote an Epilogue about the camaraderie of a cricket club, this cricket club. It is a great social gathering point where people from all over the place meet up and share a little bit of each other's lives over summer. Aside from the cricket, we share each other's doings and celebrate occasions. This year two Yarras babies have arrived to Peter Macaulay and Grant Stockwell. James Murphy was married in March.

We have had our sad times too. There was the tragic loss of Anthony Burnell in a car accident in 2001 and now another tragedy in Em's death. Those losses make us sad but they also make us stronger and better. Better because they bring out

our common humanity and because they bring out the best in us. We have heard about Scott and Dizzy risking their own lives attempting to save Em. Two strangers on the beach also risked their lives. In the following days, others have gathered around to support those nearest to Em here in Melbourne, and to help with the sad, mundane tasks which have to be done. And we have all gathered here tonight to share our loss and to pay our respect to a fine man. He still draws us together.

Our thoughts go out especially to Em's mother, Catherine Williams, and to his sister Elen, brother in law Andy, and to Em's niece and nephew, Catherine and Edward.

I was speaking to Em's mother on the phone last Thursday. She told me he used to love to play the trumpet. I never heard him play but she made me think of this short poem by William Yeats. It's based on a Gaelic myth about spirits in the sky - called the Host of the Air - who steal our loved ones away. In

the poem, the loved one they steal is Bridget, the bride of O'Driscoll. It's a bitter/sweet poem and perhaps catches something of the feeling tonight.

The Host of the Air

O'DRISCOLL drove with a song,
The wild duck and the drake,
From the tall and the tufted reeds
Of the drear Hart Lake.

And he saw how the reeds grew dark
At the coming of night tide,
And dreamed of the long dim hair
Of Bridget his bride.

He heard while he sang and dreamed
A piper piping away,
And never was piping so sad,
And never was piping so gay.

And he saw young men and young girls
Who danced on a level place
And Bridget his bride among them,
With a sad and a gay face.

The dancers crowded about him,
And many a sweet thing said,
And a young man brought him red wine
And a young girl white bread.

But Bridget drew him by the sleeve,
Away from the merry bands,
To old men playing at cards
With a twinkling of ancient hands.

The bread and the wine had a doom,
For these were the host of the air;
He sat and played in a dream
Of her long dim hair.

He played with the merry old men
And thought not of evil chance,
Until one bore Bridget his bride
Away from the merry dance.

He bore her away in his arms,
The handsomest young man there,
And his neck and his breast and his arms
Were drowned in her long dim hair.

O'Driscoll scattered the cards
And out of his dream awoke:
Old men and young men and young girls
Were gone like a drifting smoke;

But he heard high up in the air
A piper piping away,
And never was piping so sad,
And never was piping so gay.

David Neal

31 March 2008