

The Peters Family

'You can fight for your country son, but you can't come in here'

By Charles Richards

So how the hell does it get to this...this makes you really angry, it is just not right, makes my blood boil, and I don't care where you come from...It is unjust!

What am I talking about you ask? Well, let me explain.

I have known and admired many great Aboriginal men and women, names like Wandin, Swindle, Smith and Peters. These people strolled into my life, gave of themselves freely and made me a better person.

I have read with great interest of the plights of Vince Peters who fought and died for our country but was banned from public places.

And Jarlo Wandoon who was the father of Jim Wandin, who tried to enlist for World War I, but was rejected due to being an Aboriginal. When he attempted to enlist under his whitefella name, James Wandin, he was accepted into the army and served in France and is listed under that name on the honour roll in the Healesville RSL. On returning home, Jarlo Wandoon had to get permission from the police to visit his mother. He was escorted onto Coranderrk and was only allowed half an hour with her before he was sent to off to the Lake Tyers Mission in Gippsland.

These great men went off to war to fight for this great country, putting their life on the line and in Vince's case being killed in battle, but had segregation unfairly cast onto them.

War is a place where your human frailties are clearly exposed as are your strengths and it is indeed a clear indication of the character of these men that they wanted to protect what was dear to them.

Respect demands that recognition should be dealt out when required. If it is good enough for these men to stand alongside their mates and defend their country, then it is important that we the benefactors of their efforts see fit to remember and respect all that they achieved.

And one look at the pedigree of the Peters family and the proud history that they and the Healesville Football Club have shared, is enough to ensure that when talking in hushed tones about Legends of the Healesville Football Club that the name Peters gets discussed.

We kick off with Vince Peters, and it is fitting that Andrew tells his story:

"Vince was born in 1901, married in 1924, and had a highly decorated football career with Healesville as well as little stints with Yarra Glen and Lilydale with Jim Wandin Sr. He played over 200 games winning a Best and Fairest in 1937. He also won the Most Consistent award in 1938 and was Captain in 1939. History has it that he then stood down to allow Howard

Vaughan to become captain-coach. Like all players of that era and ilk, he reportedly could stab pass a goal from the centre of the ground!

In 1941 Vince went off to fight in WWII at 40 years of age and unfortunately never came home. While on his way home after serving in the Middle East in Java, he was captured by the Japanese. He became a Prisoner of War on the Burma Railway and sadly died there in December 1943.

Vince wanted to fight with his mates, even though many Aboriginal men in Australia at the time were banned from pubs, clubs, and other public areas. He was always accepted here in Healesville. Many local shop owners apparently wiped Nanna's accounts so she didn't have to pay them back after he died. Awesome town, this".

And onto Glen Peters, widely known as Piccolo. Andrew says:

"My Uncle Glen was commonly known as Piccolo, so named after a song called 'Piccolo Pete'. Uncle Glen's career is a standout. Born in 1927, between 1945 and 1951 he played over 100 games. He won three Best and Fairest awards including 1945 and 1948 and he played in the 1945 premiership. He was tragically killed in January 1952, aged 25. I was often told when growing up that Glen was the best footballer that people up here had seen.

There is a photo below of Spriggy Heritage leading Uncle Piccolo's funeral procession with the football club players following in their blazers. The photo comes courtesy of Wes, he's got this up on his office wall in Burleigh".

It is interesting that Andrew mentioned the opinion of his Uncle's ability. My father also spoke glowingly of Piccolo. He used to say Piccolo was a great footballer and one of the best he had seen.

And then there is Harry Peters. Andrew continues on:

"My Uncle Harry played from 1948 to 1955, he also notched up over 100 games across 8 seasons playing in premierships in 1951 and 1954.

After his career finished, he would he would sit and watch and twitch like he was playing and running himself – the game never left him. He would also have "footy boot cleaning day" for his boys, with brush and boot polish scrubbing those boots until they shone and Uncle Harry was satisfied.

Uncle Harry also served in WWII (lying about his age and enlisting at 16), and Mum says he was never the same when he came home. Auntie Beryl also says that Uncle Piccolo was a bit of a villain, and that when he and Uncle Harry played together they would often stab pass to each other."

The three Peters boys achieved great things with the Bloods, playing in numerous premierships, won Best and Fairests, and notched up hundreds of games in a time when seasons were shorter and clubs played considerably less games. Their legacy alone is impressive enough, but there is another chapter to this story...

And so it is we have the modern day 'Peters Family Legend', we couldn't have a Peters Family Legends story without mentioning one of Healesville's favourite sons: Andrew 'Pee Wee' Peters

himself continued the proud family tradition with the Bloods in 334 club games stretching from 1987 through to 2004.

Andrew played in Reserves Premierships in 1987 and 1988 (champions), he was twice leading goal kicker (once 3rd in league goal kicking). He figured in the top three at the club eight times and was six times vice-captain. Andrew was proudly made a Life Member in 2002.

He once said to me, *'I didn't have the accolades of most guys I played with, because here was a club loaded up with champions, but no one loved the club more than me'*.

I recently asked Andrew what the Healesville Football Club and the town meant to him;

"The things that make the club and town special to me:

I have been absolutely thrilled to be able to say that I played footy with guys like Gary Lofts, Charlie Richards, Graeme Muir, Terry Lalor, Mark Fisher, Greg Hay, Mark Adams, Gary Adams, Jack Christie, Colin Young...the list goes on. And I also played with Jock's boys Kane and Casey and Horse's son Mitch...awesome stuff.

Getting to come up through the ranks in the late 80s with these club legends to teach us: me, Wes, Wong, Reedy, Rob Luscombe, Finchy etc. Nothing was more important in life at that time that winning games with the Bloods. Coming off the ground, drinking cans and having the last shower – a tradition I continued after retirement a couple of times too!! Was all part of what made us such a tight knit bunch of mates. It used to drive Mongrel bonkers cos he'd always have to delay doing the awards, but there's nothing like being naked, wet and drunk with your mates after a win!!

Also knowing how proud Mum was to see me running around in the Bloods jumper like her dad and brothers...such a super place to grow up. Nowhere else in the world will EVER be home".

He concluded by saying;

"Seeing photos of my grandfather and uncles on the wall at the club, seeing two uncles in the Team of the Century - I just love the Bloods. My heart will always be red with a white V.

It was at this point, reading what Andrew had said, that my typing slowed and the keyboard began to look like your car windscreen during a torrential downpour. Through watery eyes I continued to type...It's bloody powerful stuff that Andrew speaks of, straight from the heart, not loaded up with rhetoric, just from shot from the hip and bang on!

"Love ya, Mate"...It is what I have heard him say a thousand times, to me, to mates, to girls, to everyone, that is how he rolls...it is the only way he knows!

Some people have that unmeasurable commodity that enables them to light up a room when the walk in. You know the type, larger than life regardless of stature, loved by all and respected all over.

I can recall a few of those characters from days gone by people who you knew were destined for greatness and would make a difference. A young John Travolta springs to mind from back in the seventies, not yet a Hollywood Superstar, he got his break playing Vinnie Barbarino in

the hit TV show 'Welcome back Kotter'. And when young Vinnie uttered the words "Mr Kotteeeeerrrr" with his trademark smile, well you knew he was bound for greatness.

Andrew Peters has been the recipient of many wonderful traits from his beautiful Mother Dot, but the one trait that jumps out is his ability to make others happy just by his presence. And that, my dear friends, is priceless. It is powerful thing, Presence, and Andrew possesses it in spades.

So many people with so many positive things to say about the Peters family, Kellie Ward had this to say about Dot;

"I see you are doing a piece on the Peters family...when we were in primary school Dot was the one who looked after you if you were sent to the sick-bay... she was so kind and nice I think more than a few of us faked a tummy ache or the like just to spend time with her...And I'd also like to add that she did more for reconciliation and anti-discrimination in our town long before it was trendy".

So here we are, talking all things 'Peters' and talking about a Healesville legend, loved by all he comes in touch with, with impenetrable friendships forged in the valley and who has garnered respect where ever he has gone.

I am sitting here, it's late at night, and it is as quiet as a mouse, this is when I feel most vulnerable...and most emotional. It's when I can see the seventies, eighties and nineties as if they were yesterday. I can remember the last conversation I had with the great Jock Adams and the smile he flashed at me as he drove off, it's all in my head and it needs to go on paper.

So what do we have here...We have a proud aboriginal man named Andrew Peters, born to a wonderful woman, family man like no other, wonderful father and role model for Jackson and Max, who grew up in the valley and made other people's lives better for having known him.

And as if that is not enough there is much more, he has grown up with a smorgasbord of wonderful opportunities before him and has chosen to become a leader amongst men. Andrew is a lecturer and teacher of his proud heritage. It's not enough to just be aware of the past, it is imperative that the history is respected, discussed and passed on. Because without this the history will fade, and that lessens the opportunity for future generations.

I have had so many people want to contribute to this piece, I usually don't let on about who I have coming up in stories, sometimes people ask, and some really good suggestions have been made. I told a couple of people about this piece and - lo and behold - people came out of the woodwork wanting to share their own stories of the great Pee Wee Peters.

So lets throw to Wes Heritage to kick things off;

"I played footy with Pee Wee Peters from under 10's at age 7 through to age 25 when I left Healesville for the Gold Coast.

He is a passionately active member of the Healesville Bloods community. Was a quality footballer and is still a friend of everyone. When I think of Pee, I think of a bloke with more front than Myers. Quick to get up on stage or introducing himself to everyone, front and centre at every footy club function. Whether as host or singing with the band.

A classic Pee move was after a game to limp past the girls for extra sympathy. We also shared 2 hour post game showers over several songs and beers.

Another thing, speaking as a Back man, you hated all the teams you played against! I wouldn't even know their names. Not Pee he was best mates with them all, knew their wives' and kids' names.

I still get plenty of contact from him, asking after family. He's a great friend to many and the Healesville footy club."

And Troy Hill had this to say about his great mate;

"Pee Wee and I lived together in a place simply named "the house". It was the go-to joint for parties in early 90s and we lived there with Duane McMaster. Amongst our regular visitors were Rod "Tilt" Newbery, Dougie Howie, Munky, Powelly and Ash Crow. The fridge pretty much was full of beer and not too much room for food. Often on Sunday there would be bodies everywhere from the previous night's festivities. We all loved our footy and Pee Wee and I were as one-eyed Tigers as there could be.

We also played basketball together with pretty much the crew mentioned above are all still mates. Pee and I are always are on the chat that it is gonna be the Tigers' year. Great fella Pee Wee, love the bloke."

And finally...You can't mention Pee Wee in one breath and not mention his beloved Tigers in the next breath. So what better way to round out this story than his recent interview where he was questioned about his Tigers..."

'Oh we're from Tigerland'

Stories of 'Being Richmond': Andrew Peters, 47, Bayswater.

Favourite all-time player: ^[17]_[SEP] *I really can't give you one. It'd be Matthew Richardson – Geoff Raines in the 80s was a big hero – and Kevin Bartlett."*

Favourite current player: ^[17]_[SEP] *Again, can't nail one. Love Jack, love Shane Edwards, Alex Rance. Through work I've gotten to know a few of the players so I guess that clouds my favouritism."*

"Everyone who was born in Australia or who lives here does so on Aboriginal land, so they have a connection to it," says Andrew Peters; a lecturer in Indigenous Studies at Swinburne University, a Wurundjeri / Yorta Yorta man, a Tigers fan. "Aboriginal culture belongs here, everything else came afterwards".

Early Saturday morning, crisp autumn air, and I meet Andrew by the white trunk of a dead red-gum on a hill above Punt Road Oval to talk football. I'd suggested the location, a Koori scar tree in Yarra Park that Martin Flanagan wrote about in his biography of Matthew Richardson; an extant totem to a rich and living culture.

Australia's Indigenous culture – a way of life – is celebrated in the AFL this weekend, and Richmond and Essendon again take centre-stage with the annual Dreamtime game at the MCG. But with commemoration comes also the history of a settler colonial nation, and sitting with Andrew outside

Punt Road Oval, his two young boys playing kick-to-kick in Yarra Park, he reminds again of hard truths.

“Uncle Doug Nicholls, he went to Carlton and he wasn’t allowed to shower with the others,” says Andrew. “That’s the kind of attitude that pervaded in football for a long time, and that’s the kind of attitude so many have fought against.”

Indigenous Australians comprise about 2.5 per cent of the nation’s population, yet make-up about 9 per cent of players on AFL lists. But sports grounds throughout the game’s history have been far from level for Aboriginal footballers. “Joe Johnson was the first, and from 1906 when he played his last game for Fitzroy to 1968 there were only 14 other Aboriginal players in the VFL,” says Andrew. “Syd Jackson going to Carlton was one of the pioneers of the acceptance we have today.”

Activist Charles Perkins’ 1965 Freedom Ride through country NSW, based on the earlier US Civil Rights campaign, and the 1967 Referendum to include Aboriginal people in censuses, were among the catalysts for change, says Andrew. “The national psyche was shifting and becoming more aware of the poor treatment of Aboriginal people.”

Then in 1969, Carlton coach Ron Barassi recruited 24-year-old Syd Jackson from East Perth. In his first season, Jackson played before 119,165 spectators in a Grand Final (when Richmond beat the Blues), and then came two premierships. He forged a pathway.

Aborigines say if you sleep in the land it talks to you, its spirits sing. For a generation and more of barrackers, to watch Aboriginal players on the open grassland of an Australian Rules football field has been to watch so many singing with the spirits of a game. Geelong ruckman (via East Perth) Polly Farmer, Barry Cable, the Krakouer brothers at Arden Street, Nicky Winmar, Chris Lewis, Gavin Wanganeen, Michael Long, Andrew McLeod, Adam Goodes, Lance ‘Buddy’ Franklin, Cyril Rioli and his uncle, Richmond’s great Maurice Rioli, many others, they’ve given the game much to cherish.

“And it’s not just the players,” says Andrew. “Where would we be without Kevin Sheedy? He was an old Tiger.”

Andrew was born an only child into a community with its roots in Corranderrk, a government Aboriginal reserve in Healesville running from 1863 to 1924 for those dispossessed of their traditional lands.

“Some people think the missions and reserves were set up by the Aboriginal Protection Act for altruistic reasons, whereas others think they were essentially to remove people off the land,” says Andrew. “What they’ve ended-up doing is creating really strong communities”.

This sense of this connection to place, to its people, is how Andrew barracks for Richmond. His mother was Collingwood, but at kindergarten in Healesville a neighbour’s father took him to the football.

It’s a story that’s woven into Martin Flanagan’s *Richo*, on page 191, with Andrew Peters making a cameo appearance:

“He’s a Richmond supporter, has been since he was a four-year-old kid when a German family came to live next door. They were called the Horts. They had a son called Royce. Royce Hort. In the strange world in which he found himself, Royce Hort identified with Royce Hart. The Horts took Royce and his little mate, the Koori kid from next door, to see the real Royce Hart play”.

Now on the cusp of completing a PhD, with an abiding interest in the role sport can play for young Aboriginal people, Andrew is developing research partnerships with the Korin Gamadji Institute at Punt Road Oval.

“It’s a fantastic model of how a football club can engage with Indigenous communities,” he says. “I could not be happier to support a club like this that’s so connected with Aboriginal culture.”

A prominent example came last year after the controversial boeing of Adam Goodes. Richmond’s players wore their Dreamtime guernseys in the Round 18 game against Hawthorn, in support for the dual Brownlow medallist and all other Aboriginal footballers. The club made a stand, a statement of solidarity for a cause, a belief.

“We simply weren’t prepared to be a bystander on the issue, and Friday night ensures that isn’t the case,” said the club’s CEO, Brendon Gale, at the time. The game was played before 66,305 spectators and a national TV audience, and Richmond had a rousing win, and for many earned an even deeper respect.

Andrew Peters knows all too well of the issues of identity and belonging facing so many Aboriginal Australians in the suburbs – “fringe dwellers” as he calls them – and of the division caused last year by the pointed boeing at the football.

“We are lucky it was Adam Goodes who stood up and said what needed to be said,” he says. “A lot of people don’t like it because the issues make a lot of people uncomfortable.

“Buddy Franklin and Cyril Rioli are never questioned about their identity because they never speak out about these things, not that they should,” says Andrew. “But we need people like Adam who are activists, who get people to start thinking about so many issues facing Aboriginal Australians.”

Football, in the end, was the great equaliser. Football had a power to heal, to offer a greater understanding, to help with an ongoing cause.

Now on the eve of the Dreamtime game, with the Tigers on the prowl, tails up and looking to maul a wounded foe, Andrew Peters is happy on Saturday night to sit back and watch the game and for two hours delight in its feats of athleticism. He’s particularly happy another Rioli is at Richmond, who he hopes will rejoin the team.

Shane Edwards, Daniel Rioli, Nathan Drummond, Richmond – and ties that bind, among others, Phil Egan, Michael Mitchell, Andrew Krakoeur, Richard Tambling, Justin Murphy, Maurice Rioli.

“I’ve said this to everyone, I’ve said it to Kevin Sheedy and I said it to Ian Dicker the former Hawthorn president,” says Andrew. “It’s an absolute disgrace in the AFL that all the Rioli’s didn’t play for Richmond”.

Go Tiges! And go Andrew and his two boys at ‘Dreamtime at the G’ on Saturday night!

As a ruckman you are involved in the second activity of a football match. The umpire has the first action in bouncing the ball, and then it’s your turn. It’s a privilege really to have the opportunity to get your hand on the leather before your opponent and if you can guide the tap out to your team mate then your team is off and running.

I played a lot of games of football for the Bloods alongside my little side kick, Andrew 'Pee Wee' Peters. I have to confide that in the moments before the umpire bounced the ball, a quick glance across the centre to see his smiling face, a quick wink and I knew we were good to go. Now to just get my mitt on the ball and put it down Pee Wee's throat.

Many times the two of us combined and many times I watched as he sped away from the ball up with the Sherrin safely in his hands and our forwards salivating down field because Pee Wee had the ball and they knew he would deliver.

I think a lot of footballers of Aboriginal heritage are born with the 'smart footballer gene'. That is the gene that enables them to read the game like no other. They have an almost instinctive third eye that puts them in the right place at the right time. They play smart.

I thought it very apt to load this story about our great mate on this weekend as it is the AFL Indigenous Round.

*Andrew Peters, it is still early in your journey of life,
great things lie ahead of you, continue to be a
leader, and be proud...because you should be!*