

Dear Cup Week, I love you, and it is time I told you the truth: the whole truth.

In darkness you rescued me, and in the fading moonlight I discovered beauty at a time of deep melancholy.

In 1995 I was made redundant. Twelve months and 400 job applications later I found you: Hooray, hired for Cup Week as a casual 'parking attendant'!

You gave me a chance: first the interview, then job, a hi-vis jacket, a sandwich and a week's wage: and when all the cars were parked you even gave me a *shovel n broom* to scrape up any unwanted decoration the thoroughbreds had left behind.

Above all, you gave me time.

Starting work in the darkness I was a solitary figure ready to dutifully operate the boom-gate adjacent to your famous 'straight six'. Through the stillness and early morning mist I could smell your roses: we caressed. I savor this moment, around 5am, yet again: the eerie silence, those huge empty stands, the vacant bird-cage and the shadowy expanses of green grass being lightly sprinkled. Alone, I waited for sunrise and your impending transformation.

Absorbed then in anticipation, absorbed now in gratitude, I love you. The reason is simple. Mine was a mid-life crisis; navigating unemployment had become treacherous. But you gave me a purpose: a sacred space of sorts, for timely reflection. At dawn your empty *Church* seemed *Saintly* then: and so it came to be.

The crowds would come and go, laughter and tears would disappear and some of our roses would even become garbage. Yet ever so gently your beauty returned afresh each morning to cleanse me with a spirit of a **new beginning**. This was your unexpected gift to me, a most cogent insight into the reality of unemployment. Redundancy and the accompanying jargon, *let-go, down-sized, laid-off, right-sized* had become absolutely demoralising.

My journey in unemployment I now realised was akin to that well-known description of a marathon: "a beginning, a middle and a new beginning".

Dearest Cup Week, in the tranquillity of the track, you remain my new beginning.

Love p.c