

“Who knows where the time goes?”

For many years, I had wondered how I could get from my home in the West Midlands to watch Sunderland home games on a regular basis

then in late 2008 I discovered the Heart of England branch of the Supporters Association (affectionately known as the HoE) and found that there were a few people who made the journey regularly.

So it came to pass (see the advent connection there?) that on the 29th of November, 2008, I journeyed for the first time with two complete strangers, by car, to watch The Lads play Bolton Wanderers. On paper we had some decent enough players in the team that day. Kenwynne Jones, Pascal Chimbonda, Steeeeeed Malbranque and Dean Whitehead to name but a few. But as the clichéd saying goes, the game is played on grass not paper and for my first trip with my newly found comrades this was not the script I would have chosen.



Seeing a clearly unfit Craig Gordon concede four goals was bad enough (Cisse scored our consolation goal) but what happened during the return journey put that in the shade. We listened to the radio in disbelief at the news that Roy Keane had been sacked - for having the temerity to think that he could live far from his workplace! To say I felt uncomfortable is to put it mildly.

However, I shouldn't have worried. We soon got over that and this season have just passed the ten year mark and countless games together - our friendship formed and maintained through the love of football and SAFC in particular.

As a postscript, the crowd that day was 35,457. On a recent Tuesday night for a League 1 clash with Barnsley it was 28,500. Sunderland fans, you are wonderful. As Sandy Denny, the tortured soul with the angelic voice both wrote and sang:

“I am not alone when my love is near me”

