



ABOVE: Narelle, centre, in Year 12. The popular Grafton High School student excelled in sport.

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40 YEARS MISSING: Was Narelle Cox murdered by Ivan Milat?

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IT WAS South Cup Day July 1977, and Narelle Cox had the world at her feet. The popular 21-year-old was enjoying the kinds of freedoms young adults are afforded growing up in Australia, one of girlfriends and parties, music and travel, work and plenty of play.

Good times abound with a desire for international travel firmly entrenched in young Narelle's mind as she felt the world was really her oyster. She wanted to be nurse and was waiting to hear back from the Darwin hospital she had applied to train.

Three months went by without a word, and finally frustration prevailed as the chance to relieve the boredom and pay her old school chum Fave a visit at Noosa called.

As wretched as timing would have it, her application papers arrived in the post, the day after she left.

Had she been at home in Grafton she would have stayed and begun the next step of a new career. But she wasn't. And she was never seen nor heard from again.

The Cox family never had a funeral for Narelle. Her body never found. There was no date of death, no marker for the family to start the mourning process.

As the years passed each of them did what they had to do, to muster the strength as they resigned to inevitable, that their daughter and sister was dead.

The grief Narelle's family and close friends endured is unimaginable to most. Smearred across four decades, from the pangs of absolute horror to long dysfunctional silences, morsels of hope cruelly taunting as police procedures left them frustrated and reeling, devastated and ultimately exhausted and broken.

It killed their mother, Narelle's sisters believed. She died six years after Narelle vanished. And their father, never spoke her name again.

As the 40th anniversary of Narelle's disappearance arrives this week, the remaining family members and her closest buddies will gather in Grafton to honour and remember their beautiful sister and much loved friend, a farewell of sorts, a chance to unanimously let her go.