

We The People
Program 96
They Have a Friend



Harry Saunders is just like any of us. He was raised in an average family in an average suburban home in average Brisbane. I perceived Harry as pretty old and living rough, barely off the street. Life has thrown a series of unfortunate events at Harry and his life slowly fell apart over time with smokes and drink adding to the painful spiral. It certainly wasn't all his fault, not that fault finding is the issue, for if not for the stroke of the pen we too could tread those boards. I met old Harry last week, alone in a rundown boarding house near Coolangatta sheltering in a small dim, cold room where he struggles to stay warm and where only a feeble shaft of light intrudes. Harry's eyes are a light pallid grey which bear witness to his general malaise while his humble clothes are mere fragments of cloth drawn for warmth rather than fashion. His voice was soft the way it can be when all hope is gone yet he was content to reminisce about the old days when he was young and strong. His features are weathered with worry and disappointment while a stubble as rough as a carpenter's rasp crowds his tired face. His skin is broken and his hands bear testimony to a hard life, stained with nicotine and blistered by time and toil. Harry sits there day after day in Gods waiting room alone and lost just as child might be when separated from its mother. I remembered that feeling when I was young but it only lasted minutes and not decades. I wondered how my fellow man could fall this far and I was soon to find out that Harry's troubles could just as easily have been mine and that my life could have been Harry's if it were not for the unfurling of life's sail just to be at the mercy of the wind.

Harry Saunders is just one of the many Australians I met last week when out with a charity called *You Have a Friend* run by a compassionate, decent man in John Lee and his team of champion volunteers. It seems most fitting John named his charity *You Have a Friend* because that's what the homeless need most of all. John and his seventy faithful volunteers help those who have fallen through the cracks and then rest in the dust, forgotten by most of us. I asked John why he does this day after day, struggling with humanity that would be at home in any slum in Bangladesh. His answer was swift in that we must do this as it is they who deserve our admiration as they fight against the odds and mostly lose.

One cold evening in a park in Murwillumbah I looked on as a group of dishevelled lost souls judiciously lined up for a hot meal, a cup of tea and some conversation. I saw three children playing by street light in the park just a few meters away and noted the youngest just 3 in bear feet while he kicked a ball around unaware of his own plight and the promise of more rough chilly nights as he and his mother and two siblings live in their car. The mother deserves a medal I thought but no one gave her one. This is a side of life I have heard about but never witnessed for myself and now I learn that the homeless and destitute are growing dramatically in number from Coomera to Southport and from Burleigh to Tweed Heads and beyond. How can this be right when we spend billions in foreign aid for others and why isn't rescuing our own fallen Australians a moral imperative when frankly the illegal boat people are given so much while our own starve or freeze to death. It makes me angry that minority groups have high jacked our countries agenda at the direct expense of our own. I say stop the boats until we get our own house in order. I say stop the political correctness which strangles societies voice at the expense of our fellow man. I say we can never again criticise any other country for human rights violations until such time as we get our own house in order. Rudd dreams of a big Australia because of his own misguided ego while the reverse is true if we are to fulfil our human obligations in a world devoid of common sense and to meet the needs of the environment and create a sustainable society. Tonight John Lee will be out again for those who are lost and lonely and forgotten.....those who are hungry and cold, those who are homeless and do not understand how politicians in Queensland could take a pay rise of so much when they have nothing. For the record, old Harry in the boarding house turned out to be just 60 and that's heart breaking.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley.