

Tribute to Harvey Volke
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This time last year, no-one in their wildest dreams would have even vaguely imagined that as Shelter entered its thirtieth year Harvey Volke would only just reach the touchstone of 2005, and then suddenly cease to be, and that with his departure we would grapple with the loss of laughing, cajoling, erupting into expletives, but more importantly, we his many friends and colleagues would miss the support, the drawing into a collective value system and a personal politics of kindred minds, prepared to challenge and join allegiance in that ubiquitous struggle for greater housing equity and social justice.

Harvey's passion and ongoing personal commitment to tenants' battles with unfair housing conditions gives impetus to and runs parallel with Shelter's thirty years of struggle for more equitable housing outcomes.

The thought of continuing the vision, sustaining that clarity of purpose, capturing the city and state housing history as it happens, without the enthusiast, the humorist, the raconteur and unrestrained wit - remains incomprehensible.

Somewhere in the crowd we still expect a raucous gruff-like interjection to draw our attention to that other inequity "*speaking up for deaf old bastards*", as he would fondly refer to himself and his disposition, age and disability - it never stopped him, though.

In looking back over thirty years, Harvey was there for the greater part, pen poised, ensuring issues were clear, voices were heard, people's realities were told and recognised, and that the history that makes up each and every housing struggle was captured with a passion, particularly *from* a tenant's perspective, inspiring us to *take up* the challenge, *do* what the situation necessitates, pay the price if needs be, because it demands that we act from the very depths of our beliefs with the utmost of integrity in what we do. In many ways Harvey was driven to deal with issues of injustice, as his work with the Tenant's Union, South Sydney Community Aid, WESTHIRN, Combined Pensioners, Central Lands Council, the Department of Housing and Shelter are testimony to and it is that same quality of drive and momentum that is captured in Shelter's thirty years of housing struggle.

For many of us Harvey was both 'maverick' and 'mentor', highly admired with a humorous, yet healthy sense of irreverence. He was old enough and bold enough to argue very persuasively from a strong, purposeful framework, not without his own idiosyncratic ways but always with the greatest sense of empathy and seriousness for the plight of others. I recall him on those post-grad bus tours of the estates, chuffing away, recounting minuscule details of the history he'd embraced with great relish.

Harvey took great pride in working for Shelter NSW, he loved his job because it allowed for that alignment with his beliefs and sense of purpose. He would even agree to a shirt and tie, where occasional situations demanded it (like maybe not the "*Don't Let the Bastards Wear You Down*" T-shirt" for the Ministers meeting Harv) and he learnt to eloquently master restraint over his lively sense of indignation where he could see greater wisdom in the strategy of influence that situations might require.

Celebrating Shelter's 30 years isn't quite the same without Harvey. At least we have the memories of his cursing "*indescribable fools*" and "*stupid bastards*". He is in the echo of every fight for public tenants, in the struggle for every oppressed housing group, be it squatter, homeless person, indigenous person, old person, young person, person with a disability, or some other victim of a housing system that should have been a lot more than the ill-fated shadow of residualisation it has now become.

Harvey is the memory of unrestrained protest, he embodies a housing activism that reaches out with every fibre of unrelenting determination, to make a difference, a *real* difference to people's lives. He is the voice of the larrikin that yells out the truth - "*the emperor has no clothes*"! It would not be hard to guess at his response to "*Re-shaping*".

Shelter NSW and what it represents over 30 years is symbolically not dissimilar to the legacy left by Harvey Volke in his personal journey and commitment to housing: evoking the vision of a housing system that is fairer, more equitable, more far reaching, more socially just and humanely empowering, an effective means of re-distribution.

In looking back over 30 years, we remember the battles: people being kicked out for redevelopment, strata development, gentrification; the need for a Singles' housing policy; getting women and youth housing on the agenda; the rights of borders and lodgers, caravan park dwellers; people being moved out by large institutions, road works and private developers. From Juanita to Greenbans; from Theeman to TNT; the advent of the Eastern Distributor and the dissolution of the squats, the expansion of Royal Prince Alfred Hospital – redevelopment and change by all sorts of institutions and other players out to maximise metropolitan land values at any cost, pushing poorer people out of whole inner city suburbs.

Shelter NSW has been an integral part of that struggle as have those individuals who participate fully by virtue of their personal politics and fighting spirit in dealing those battles, many lost, but some won. Harvey has been one such individual, always the comrade, the joker, the sage – the wise man and the cheeky guy rolled into one. His capacity for non-conformity remains an inspiration to us. He embodies that quality of challenge with the wisdom that needs to go with it. In particular, he reflects the capacity to respond from a generous heart and an open mind and to stick by the people and the values he truly believes in, maintaining the rage with a sense of profound integrity and the deepest of loyalty. Such is the inspiration that the legacy of Harvey Volke leaves with us, with Shelter and with thirty years of history.