

Purpose: Reflect

Stand up!

The icecream dripped down my arm and I couldn't eat it fast enough as the sun and the heat were against me. As a 7 year old I was fighting a battle I couldn't win and that delicious dairy goodness with the hundreds and thousands sprinkled on top wasn't going to make it in my belly. But this was one of my favourite parts of my day.

I had finished school for the day and like most of the other kids, we all went down to meet our dads by the picket line for our free daily treat that the local Mr Whippy van provided for us. Being 7, I didn't fully understand why we were there and what was going on, but from that early age I had been exposed to the importance of standing up for something you believed in and fighting until the end in order for change to happen.

I stood by my dad's side and amongst the other men, most who were migrants who had left their country to find a better life for their families in the "lucky country". They were fighting for better working conditions and pay from a multi-national company that was making billions, but didn't want to reward or give their workers a fair and decent wage. As they yelled "Scab! Scab! Scab!" at the busload of workers who could no longer afford to strike and decided to cross the picket line, I too joined in as a little girl fighting for justice, but also wanted my dad to see that I was proud to stand up next to him and support his cause.

That strike lasted for months. The community banded together and looked after each other because nobody was getting paid. The mine worked with a skeleton work force and was losing money as the men refused to go back into the mine site. They stood their ground until they were heard by the mighty corporation down in Perth. Times were tough, but they remained determined to beat the goliath of the mining world. And they did.

I learnt a lot that year. I learnt that if you are determined to be heard and never give up, then change can happen. I learnt that even when things are tough, and you continue to persevere that change can happen. And finally, I learnt that my dad was my greatest teacher and that if I didn't use my voice, then change won't happen.

As a girl growing up in the 1980's we were a generation bred from feminists that fought for our rights to be heard. They demanded equity and equality. They demanded that we were granted opportunities only afforded to boys. They demanded a right to work in industries that rejected them based on their gender. Equal pay. Equal conditions. Equal rights. Did they win that fight? Well, we're still fighting for it. We're still shouting to governments for equality. It's better, but it's not equal.

My parents were from a communist country. They were not supporters of the regime and would vocalise their distaste towards their president. My mum would do so in very subtle ways through her clothing or jewelry, but dad would join political parties that were against the regime and at one stage had to flee the country because of his views. He loved his country and was proud of nationality, but he was not proud of his government and the oppression. He crossed the border in the dead of the night, hid in abandoned barns and then ended up in jail in Austria. In order to save himself he claimed refugee status and moved to Australia.

He didn't back down. He believed in social justice and he passed that down to me. He taught me that if something isn't right, then stand up and make yourself heard to make it right. Be the voice for those who are too scared to say anything. Be brave enough to take risks in order to make things better. Be the one who stands up in a crowd that only sits down and

accepts the status quo even if it isn't right. He told me that as a girl, I wouldn't have the same opportunities as my brothers, but I had the power to at least demand that I did.

So today, I continue to use my voice, and fight for equality and justice. To encourage young people that I teach to also fight for what they believe in and make their world a better place. I will never stop standing up for what I believe in even if it scares me and even if I have to suffer the consequences alone. Even if it is only a small change, that's better than no change at all.