



Lew Findlay

Outspoken, hardworking, caring, committed, humble – is how the “Manawatu Standard’s” Ewan Sargent described Lew Findlay when choosing him as their “Person of the Year” for 2006. He is a drug counselor, boarding house for the homeless coordinator, youth worker and general down-and-out supporter. Lew spoke to the editor of “Tupu Whakarangi” earlier this year: --

I was born in Dunedin and grew up in Rotorua. My mother was a solo mum with no DPB in those days and so she had to work and was an assistant matron at an old men’s home, called Gardenholm in Rotorua. We grew up in a little flat with two bedrooms, a bathroom and toilet, throughout our school years. I left school the day I was 15 and until the day I became a Christian I totally wasted my life. I trusted nobody except my dogs. On Labour Weekend 1979 I had a direct encounter with the Lord and He changed me from somebody who hated God and anything to do with Christianity into a Bible believing Christian. I believe this was as a result of the faithful prayers of my best friend’s grandmother. Around the same time a friend of mine also became a Christian and together we opened a half-way house mainly for people who were homeless and street kids. We called it Zion House and it operated for about 18 months.

Because we were young Christians without any depth of wisdom and also because we were given some bad advice we eventually ran out of funds. As a result we had to close down Zion House and then I more or less drifted until I met my wife.

In those earlier days I used to go out on the streets preaching every Friday night. We saw some almost unbelievable things happen on the streets. On one occasion a group of Rastas began throwing tomatoes at us. They never hit us because it was just as if a glass shield was erected in front of us and the tomatoes hit it and fell to the ground. Six people came to the Lord that night and we took them to church next Sunday. During that time I also became involved with Scripture Union for a while assisting with holiday camps.

When I met my wife she changed my life totally. Apart from my conversion to Christ finding my God-chosen partner really was the most fantastic thing that happened to me. She was absolutely everything I would choose in a woman and better. Since knowing her I have never even thought about another woman. We have also had three fantastic children of whom I am extremely proud.

We left Invercargill in 1990 and came to the North Island to work. In the early 90's I had a massive stroke ending up in a wheelchair and my wife was told I would never speak or walk again, but she would not give up believing God had promised that I would recover. She kept on reminding God of His promise that I would get well. She argued with the doctors telling them they didn't know what they were talking about. I was in hospital for three months and when I came out my wife stopped my wheelchair at the doors and made me walk out on the two tripods because she had told the doctor I would walk out of hospital.

After coming out of hospital no-one would employ me because I was still in a wheelchair, so I went to an organization called the Audrey Green Disability Information Centre and we started a newspaper called Disinformation (be mindful of the fact that I am dyslexic). I was the editor, the journalist, the sales person, the paste up man, and also the cleaner when required – all from a wheelchair. We had a lot of other people with disabilities volunteering to help. The paper grew from nothing to a circulation of 7000 24 pages per month. It went to seven overseas countries as well as New Zealand. It ceased to exist because of lack of funding.

I left this work with a vision to help people affected by drugs and alcohol and living on the street. We called a public meeting to see if people were interested. Six people turned up. But we decided to go ahead with the idea to form a Christian organization to help those in need in our community. We then called a second meeting where 15 people turned up, enough to form an incorporated society. This was the birth of Palmerston North Street Van Incorporated.

Thirteen years later we are still involved with Palmerston North Street Van and have trained over 1000 volunteers in that time. It operates two vans on the streets in and around Palmerston North every Friday and Saturday nights. We also formed an organization called Shepherd's Rest Trust which now operates a 63-bed boarding house for homeless, unwanted, uncared for and unloved people. The Shepherd's Rest Trust also operates Ferguson House, a recovery centre helping people with addiction problems.

Besides these recovery centres and vans we also distribute free of charge several pamphlets and booklets all around Aotearoa dealing with the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse and associated problems. The motto of Palmerston North Street Van is *"To help people whatever the need, wherever possible"*.

This year Palmerston North Street Van won the Trust Power National Community Award from hundreds of other organizations throughout the country. This was the most humbling thing I have experienced in my life. I am not often stuck for words but on the occasion of the presentation of the award, all I could say for my speech of reply was, "He tangata, he tangata, he tangata!" Our prayer is that God will continue to touch lives through this ministry and bring people out of bondage and darkness into the freedom and light that is found in Christ.

For further information or if you need help with an addiction problem, contact
Lew Findlay, Street Van PN, on 021-615-245 or (06) 356-337.