



PETER ARNDT

My name is Peter. I'm blind and I like doing the things that everybody else likes doing, like going to places just like everybody else including restaurants. I have thought of a couple of incidents in recent years where I have faced difficulty because of my blindness. I travel with a guide dog and in restaurants in particular I sometimes get staff and management who refuse me entry, even though the law, I think in all states in Australia says that they must permit me to enter the restaurant.

I can remember one particular incident, not long too ago when a very good friend and I were working in Melbourne and on a Friday night had decided to go and have dinner at a local restaurant. We entered and the staff member who greeted us told us we couldn't come in because of the dog. My friend in particular argued with her and said that the law requires them to let me come in to the restaurant. And as we

continued to argue she called over the manager who also said we couldn't come in with the dog.

I was very moved when my friend started to launch a campaign action, literally, on my behalf. He challenged the manager and the staff member by pulling out his phone and starting to record what he was saying. He reported the incident, told people where we were and what had happened and wanted people to know that this restaurant was refusing me entry. And it was even more wonderful when one of the women who was dining in the restaurant had overheard what was going on and she intervened too and she called out to the manger telling him that yes! We're right. By law you have to let me eat in this restaurant and she got the appropriate website on her phone with the information about the legal requirements and wanted to show it to him.

He reluctantly agreed to let us sit and dine but you can imagine that I was feeling a bit upset and that's a common feeling for me when I go to restaurants. But we had a lovely a meal and towards the end of the meal and when we were leaving the staff started to talk to us and apologised for what had happened and thanked us for helping them to learn what their responsibilities were under the law. It all ended very well. It ended well because my friend and that unknown person in the restaurant decided to stand alongside me in what I think was an act of great compassion. They saw that obviously I was feeling upset and pressured by these people who wanted to discriminate against me and exclude me and challenged that unfairness and injustice.

Often we'll think about compassion as somebody doing something nice for somebody who's in trouble. Cooking them a meal when big things are happening in their lives or helping them when they're injured and so on. But I think it's just as much an act of great compassion when people are prepared to stand up and fight for fairness and justice for somebody when they're under difficulty and feeling pressured and treated unfairly. And that sort of story has always stuck in my mind as a great example of people being prepared to reach out in kindness and compassion to me, somebody who these days feels very anxious at the thought of going into a restaurant.

I'm very grateful to my friend and that woman who called out to support me, and there have been other people who do that too. It's a great example, I think, of compassion in action.