

The Battler

Words & Music: Pat Drummond For an unknown hitchhiker The Northern Rd, near Penrith

This was the first song in the project and was included on the 'Live at the Rest Hotel' Album in 1988. It tells the story of a hitchhiker whose life had come completely to pieces in forty eight hours. I can't say he was all that admirable a character, and his troubles were mostly of his own making, but he had something about him of the will to survive, that has so characterised pioneer Australians since the first. Confronted with a land as harsh and unforgiving as ours was, the developing national character revered resilience much more than success. Being a 'Battler' means never giving up no matter how hopeless your situation seems and although, sometimes, it can exhibit itself as a fatalism of sorts, it's one of the great Australian characteristics, and one of which we are justifiably proud.

I picked him up out at Canley Vale.

He had just got out of the Fairfield Gaol.

He was heading out to Bathurst for a week.

And he looked just a little down-hearted;

that's the way the conversation started;

pretty soon he was pouring out his life to me. And he said,

"A week ago I turned twenty-one and I was picking up my pay.

We went out for a liquid lunch and I got a little bit outrageous.

I never got back to work till four o'clock

and the bastards sacked me on the spot."

He shrugged and I heard him say.

Chorus: "It's hard to know how it all began.

But one thing I know is that there ain't no road gonna take me back again.

Now I've got no job and I've got no plans;

but a battler don't lay down and die; he does the best he can."

When he finally drank his courage up high,

he went home and told his wife.

She did her block, blew her top;

and threw him out of the house.

He said he must've got a little upset;

though he swore he never touched a hair on her head,

he said he guessed he must've started throwing some things about.

That's when the bloke next door went and called the cops;
said he was beating up on his wife.

They came round and kicked the door down
and he swore he never copped such a beating in all his life.

Four long nights in the Fairfield Gaol;
one of the conditions of his bail
was that he wouldn't go near his wife.

Chorus: "It's hard to know how it all began.
But one thing I know is that there ain't no road gonna take me back again.
Now I've got no job and I've got no plans;
but a battler don't lay down and die; he does the best he can."

And I'll never forget that look in his eye;
he was determined he was gonna survive
and I never understood what a battler was till I looked at him that night.

Some of us fade at the first attack;
some go down and they never bounce back;
and some of us just keep on swinging until the day they die.

Then he showed me an old address;
of a bloke he knew when he worked out west.
He said he'd stay with him, he guessed, till he got things straightened out.

And for a while he didn't say much more.
I saw his eyes by the light of the dashboard;
watching rabbits as they froze or scattered, as the car lights slashed about.

And the night was cold at the fork in the road
where he went on and I went home.

So I reached in the back for my old grey jacket
and slipped him a ten dollar note.

**And something strange went across his face;
then it was gone without a trace;
and he took 'em both like he took his luck...
he just shrugged and walked away.**

Repeat Bridge

**Now when I've got no luck and I've got no plans,
in the back of my mind I can swear that I can see his face again.
And I think, at last, that I understand;
there's a little bit of the battler in the heart of every man.
And battlers don't lay down and die, we do the best we can.**

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