

CHAPTER 9

I became a 'kidnapper' unexpectedly. This was due to a social issue which also took place during my student years at Sydney University. A group gathered together one day in the Union. We were told that a young Indian girl, Nancy Prasad, was being deported. It was a major newspaper story at that time. The government was going to deport her to Fiji. Her photographs in the paper aroused everybody's feelings of sympathy. She was only a young girl and people thought it would be a tragedy if she were deported because of her colour.

I was in sympathy with this feeling because I did not agree with people being adversely discriminated against on the grounds of their colour. I thought this was an immoral thing and something ought to be done about it. I hoped I might play some part in it in a minor way by protesting against discrimination against a person on the grounds of race and colour.

It was suggested by a group of people that we get together and go up to the international terminal at Mascot and protest by way of placards and pamphlets over this particular principle. I did not think it would ever go beyond that. I was quite tired and just wanted to go out there, play my part and come home again.

We drove out to Mascot. When we arrived at the terminal there was a sizeable crowd of people there from various organizations demonstrating against the deportation order. We students were wondering how we would attack the subject and bring attention to the fact that a little coloured girl was being discriminated against.

We started getting all our placards ready and writing things on them like 'DON'T DISCRIMINATE AGAINST RACE' and 'A

PERSON'S COLOUR SHOULD NOT MATTER'. All of these things we thought were pretty relevant in view of the fact that the general public would be watching and listening on the television and radio.

Then a group of students got together in one corner and said, 'This is not going to do much good. There are dozens of Commonwealth police around. They will be able to bring her in by some side door and that will be it. It will be all over. We should do something much stronger than hold up placards.'

I was thinking, 'Well, what can we do?' There was not much we could do really.

Then someone suggested, 'What if we kidnap her?' This did not seem a bad idea. We thought if we could return her to her parents quietly for a few days that the immigration authorities might forget about it. The authorities might take no action against friendly kidnapers in the light of the public outcry against her deportation. It was a piece of mad student wishful thinking. The criminal act involved in kidnapping did not occur to us.

Who was going to do it? Everybody said, 'I don't think I can do it.'

I was the only one left. I thought, as I felt strongly about it, I should do it. There were no two ways about it that this was the only action left to us and because of this it had to be done. It was very dangerous thinking but in my 'idealism' I did not weigh the consequences. We decided on a plan.

Before Nancy entered the terminal, one of the students would have a car ready. I would grab the little girl out of her uncle's arms and race her to the car and drive off. It was a simple plan.

Somebody had to first of all organize with the parents, the uncle and whatever relatives might be accompanying the girl to the airport. The Prasad family had to be advised quickly that something was going to happen so that they would not be too shocked by it. We had to reassure them that everything would be all right and get their full co-operation. In true student style the family was advised with great speed and so were a few sympathetic media people. Nancy was already on her way to the airport.

We thought it would be best to 'take' Nancy outside the building

because all the Commonwealth police were inside. There was only one great, hefty, seemingly immovable Commonwealth policeman outside and no reporters or photographers. Before she reached the double doors leading inside, there was only this lonely policeman standing there by himself. There were twenty or twenty-five demonstrators with me so we outnumbered him. We guessed that we could fix him quite easily and bar the doors. It was a perfect set-up.

Inside, everything was lined up so when Nancy entered the terminal she would be hit by the lot: reporters, television cameras, arc lights, microphones, everything. Spectators, demonstrators, Commonwealth police, were all lining up from the door inside to the aeroplane.

Stupid! I do not know who planned that but he should have been fired because he just did not think straight.

Nancy and her uncle got out of the car and I walked up to him and said quietly, 'I'll take her now.'

'Where are you taking her?' he asked.

'She'll be all right. I'll take her to your brother-in-law's place and we'll look after her for a little while. Then you can come and get her. Come to me, Nancy.'

She just came over. I took her in my arms and I walked over to the waiting car very briskly and slid into it.

Then the Commonwealth policeman woke up a few seconds after, when he saw me walking away from the entrance with the little girl in my arms.

He must have thought, 'Well, this is unusual.' If you could have seen his face. His jaw dropped about six feet. The students crowded him then and he began to use his fists. They were obstructing him and getting in his way. His cap was knocked off and he nearly tripped over in his attempts to get at us. We got in the car, surrounded by the students, and the poor police officer had no chance. We revved the engine and drove ahead, but two policemen ran across the road in front of us. We turned the car around and dodged and weaved between them. All hell was let loose. Students and Commonwealth police were being pushed about on the lawns. There were about fifty students by this time. In

addition, the crowd waiting inside came rushing out. The crush effectively barred the door.

Of course, the television newsmen wanted to get in on the action and were thumping everybody too. It was quite exciting.

As the car departed along the airport road, I watched seventy or so policemen, a hundred students, about twenty-five photographers and cameramen all trying to get out of the little miserable swinging doors at Mascot at once, whilst students outside were pushing them backwards.

One newsman from Channel 7 must have been tipped off. He was right on the spot and filmed the whole thing. Good luck to him too. He got everything.

We sped down the road, then out of the terminal. Nobody was following us. It was too easy. We drove off down the road and that was it. There was chaos back at the terminal though. I could imagine the surprise: 'Nancy Prasad had been kidnapped!'

I said to Louise, the driver, 'Where are you going to take us?' 'To her parents' place, I suppose,' she said.

I said, 'I wonder if we should take her to my place?' We eventually decided to take her to her relatives.

I had told Eileen, my wife, just before I left home a few hours before that I was going down to the airport to see what was going on out there. I said I would be back shortly for tea. I was really interested in the case but I expected an uneventful evening.

Eileen was quietly sitting by the television waiting for me to arrive when my face came on the screen: 'THIS MAN IS WANTED BY THE POLICE FOR QUESTIONING ON A KIDNAPPING CHARGE.'

Eileen nearly fainted. She had to go and make a cup of tea and was shaking and flopping all over the place. A few minutes later I walked in.

We had taken the little girl to her family's house in an inner city suburb near my home. Louise drove around and dropped me off home and I just walked in the house.

By this time the kidnap news was right across the nation, over the air, on the television: 'This man is urgently wanted for questioning.' With my photograph, on the box.

We were quietly sitting watching the rest of the news when the next minute policemen were knocking on the doors, newsmen were banging on the windows, photographers were trying to come in our windows. Other people were climbing over the back fence. It was like an invasion.

'Eileen,' I said, 'we had better make some tea or something for these people.'

There were about fifty in our house. I could not even get out to the kitchen. I wanted to help Eileen and I was crushed. Reporters asking for interviews, students celebrating, and all the mob from the Freedom Ride arrived. We thought we had done pretty well to highlight the fact of racial discrimination. It was an unusual thing to do, I must admit. But we made our point, I believe.

No maliciousness was involved in the kidnapping. Nancy was not frightened at all. In fact, she was asleep by the time we reached her home, and she was very calm when I woke her up to go inside. She missed her plane, but a couple of days later the immigration authorities ordered her on to another.

Some were of the opinion that it was a mistake to take Nancy back to her home because the police went there first. Perhaps we should have left her with some other relative and kept her away from the police for two days or so. Anyway, the police found her immediately and the whole thing was over.

However, we had drawn attention to the fact of racial discrimination existing in Australia.

A number of people were upset afterwards, particularly the Commonwealth Minister for Immigration at the time, Hubert Opperman, who was very obstinate. He did not consider that there would perhaps be a change of thinking to keep up with current events around the world. I do not think he was flexible enough in his own mind to allow for changes. As a result he made many foolish statements which created a bad image for himself and, for that matter, for Australia, by his particular action on this issue. His actions and reactions were like those of many Liberal and Country Party politicians, out of date and generally stupid. At least it revealed to the Australian public something of the mentality of some of our politicians, Labor Party included. The Australian

Labor Party is just as bad—regardless of Al Grassby's verbage.

If I had to go through the Prasad kidnap again I would, for precisely the same reasons as I've given already. However, in terms of coloured people other than Aborigines, I think I should explain my position. It may seem hypocritical of me to say that I do not believe in the current so-called 'White Australia Policy' on immigration being changed, at this point of time. I am of the opinion that we should have no coloured immigration into this country until such time as the Aborigines are satisfactorily placed in Australian society, their needs met and the needs of their descendants. The same restrictions should apply to white racist countries, for example South Africa, America and so on.

Indians, for instance, and I am not saying this to be against them, have an inclination towards subjugating indigenous peoples when they come to a country. It is through sheer ability, I would think. They have a community spirit which tends to unite them into a powerful economic force which is often most beneficial to the Indians themselves, but detrimental to the indigenous people. In addition to this is their own background of a caste system which is racist to say the least. The plight of the indigenous Fijians and their poor economic standing in their own country is a classic example. The Indians run the place and the Fijians just hang around and look cultural.

I think the same thing would happen here, because I do not think that Indians in particular and Asians in general are concerned for Aborigines or the Aboriginal question. I do not think they are interested in helping to elevate the Aboriginal people. They are only interested in elevating themselves. I suppose that is quite understandable, but what we want in this country is coloured people who are prepared to stick with us and help us become a more contributing, and stronger, force in the community, economically, socially and politically.

I have less objection to other indigenous people like Maoris, New Guineans, Malaysians and Indonesians, Polynesians from the Pacific Islands and so on, coming here and living here. They think much the same as the Aborigines: they have the same feelings and values, the same kind of easy come, easy go type of personalities. I

have great feeling towards those people. I am jealous of the Maoris as a group because they are much more successful in New Zealand than we Aborigines have been over here. Perhaps this is the basis of my feelings towards the Indians and other Asian groups, that they tend to take the minds of ordinary Australians off their own indigenous racial problems. They complicate the race situation in this country before a solution can be worked out for the existing situation.

You often see Australian white people socializing with and welcoming people of Asian nations. But they seldom socialize with Aborigines, for the Australians seem too self-conscious to mix with Aborigines. They have a stereotype about Aborigines that dictates their relationship.

Coloured people are coming to this country in larger numbers now and I think it is a mistake. We are starting another racial problem which we can do without because we have not solved our original one yet. Also, Aborigines could become third-class citizens instead of second-class. That is the basis of my objection to the easing of the White Australia Policy at this stage.

All this may seem in contradiction to the Nancy Prasad question, but I feel Nancy was a special issue at that time. On the general scene, however, I must press for control on coloured immigration until the Aborigines are elevated to their rightful place in Australian society. The present Minister for Immigration is making a big mistake in the current 'open door' type immigration policy. Al Grassby will be reflected on in history as precipitating race disaster in this country. He is ignorant of race questions.

The Indians and Pakistanis coming into this country are only using the liberal interpretation of the present policy for their own benefit and not for the benefit of this country. The Australian general public cannot even yet work out a decent relationship with its own indigenous people, so how will it cope with another racially different group? There is a big social problem ahead for Australia if this trend continues.

You cannot buy friendly relations with Asian countries by importing some of their citizens—rejects or otherwise.