A chapter from **"A Bastard Like Me"**
by **Charles Perkins** (1936-2000) from his autobiography published 1975.

CHAPTER 8

The Freedom Ride was probably the greatest and most exciting event that I have ever been involved in with Aboriginal affairs. It was a new idea and a new way of promoting a rapid change in racial attitudes in Australia. It brought, I think, to a lot of people, a confrontation with race relations in a very uncomfortable kind of way. Aborigines were being persecuted in country towns and other areas in Australia, and they were second-class citizens. White people, the first-class citizens, made the laws which kept the Aborigines in their 'place'.

I think the Freedom Ride was the one thing that destroyed this charade with one big swipe. It sowed the seed of concern in the public's thinking across Australia. Something was wrong, something had to be changed in a situation that was unhappy for Aborigines.

It was also a reaction to what was being done in America at that time. A number of students gathered together at Sydney University and thought that they might like to see a Freedom Ride eventuate here in Australia. They all put their sixpenceworth in, saying what should happen and what should not happen. No one had any precise ideas about it and we appealed to the Rev. Ted Noffs of the Wayside Chapel. Then it was left to Ted Noffs and myself and the people who were going to ride, to plan it through. Ted spoke about the American situation and mapped out the Freedom Ride in the form of a sociological survey. The survey never eventuated but the Ride was successful beyond our expectations.

Ted also assisted us to raise the money required and we had many fund -raising ventures at the university. I was very surprised how readily the money came in when we appealed and I did not realise until then what a source of revenue the university really was and how sympathetic university people were to the Aboriginal cause. I was very pleased. Folk singers, like Gary Shearston and Jeannie Lewis, helped tremendously in raising funds. We needed a thousand pounds for the whole thing.

The Ride was co-ordinated at the Wayside Chapel. The Chapel was going to be our contact with all the newspapers, television and radio. We did not think there would be much work involved but the Chapel was completely swamped. Ted was involved with the media and political figures and with parents.

The parents of the young people concerned were apprehensive at the beginning and when the bus was forced off the road and almost overturned outside Walgett, they were ready to annihilate Ted. Then when it came back successfully, the same parents welcomed their sons and daughters as heroes and have been rightly proud of them ever since.

Other people, like Bill Ford who is an industrial relations lecturer at New South Wales University. Kevin Martin of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Peter Martin who is now with the Department of the Media were involved. Jim Spigelman (now the Prime Minister's secretary) was extremely active both in organising and on the Ride itself. I thought that Jim would not go on the Ride. I had a feeling he would back out and never be seen again. I was completely wrong. He was my right-hand man and remained staunch. He was idealistic then and practical. I hope he will always remain that way, no matter what may happen in the future.

Well, we hired the bus. We placed a banner along the front and prepared to start off from Sydney. The Rev. Ted said a prayer on the steps for those who like that sort of thing. I was one, I needed that kind of help.

It was a mixed and motley crew that took off that night. We did not know who was going. I appealed to the Aborigines of New South Wales or anybody else to come with us and we made arrangements to pay all their accommodation and all other expenses for the trip. Not one Aborigine from New South Wales eventually went on the trip. Many of them wanted to participate but they did not even turn up at the bus to see us off. No doubt we had their support however.

Apart from myself, of course, there was a chap by the name of Gerry Mason who was the quietest, humblest and most innocent Aborigine in the whole of Australia. He happened to be in Sydney at this time and had nothing to do for two weeks and thought he was going on a tourist bus trip around the country! He never realised at all what he was going to be involved in. Well, we did not either. But he was doubly ignorant of what was going to happen.

So we took off after the prayer and set out in the general direction of Wellington in western New South Wales, not having any set plan as to where we were going. We had no way of knowing our procedure when we got to particular places, or of knowing what Aboriginal groups we were going to meet or what the resistance would be to our project.

We got to Wellington, had a good look around there and found nothing of any consequence so far as we could see. We talked to a few people in the streets but mainly we rested.

Nothing happened at all until we got to Walgett, a town about four hundred miles north-west of Sydney. That was the real beginning. The decision was made that we should picket the Walgett RSL Club which is supposed to be the centre of the establishment at Walgett and had great status in that particular community. The majority of the graziers and bosses of the town belonged to that organisation The only time Aborigines were allowed in was occasionally on Anzac Day and some were even barred on that day. The supposed reason being that ten years before one of them vomited on the floor.

Walgett RSL was famous for entertaining the Aboriginal troops when they came back from World War 2. For one day. The next day the majority of the Aboriginal community were banned for good. They were not allowed in any of the hotels and they had to get their beer and were sold cheap plonk through the back windows at three times the price, through sly-grogging operations. We made up some posters and set up camp in the Church of England hall. The parish people looked at us side-on most of the time. They did not know what to think when we arrived in town. We took our banners and posters and stood in front of the Walgett RSL. That was in the morning at about eleven o'clock. The heat was tremendous as it was summer-time. We stood there right through until about six o'clock at night, right through in temperatures of one hundred degrees. A couple of the girls fainted and a few of the boys were really exhausted.

While we stood there the town came to life like an ant heap. They had never seen anything like it in their lives. People stared. It was a completely new experience, like seeing television for the first time or seeing a moonship fly past their window. Walgett people could not believe it was happening in Walgett. A protest on behalf of the town niggers!

The Aborigines themselves were speechless for hours on end. They just looked on. They could not believe that a group of people whom they did not know were standing up for Aboriginal rights. Most of all, it was unthinkable that anybody would dare confront the Walgett RSL and the establishment of that racially prejudiced town.

Our posters read, 'CIVIL RIGHTS FOR ABORIGINES,''WALGETT RSL SHOULD NOT BAN ABORIGINES', 'CLOSE THIS CLUB DOWN', 'ABORIGINES STAND UP FOR YOURSELVES' and things like that. They were not very startling sorts of things to say on posters but at that time I suppose they were revolutionary. We were a bit of a joke to the Walgett RSL people in the beginning but crowds started to gather. I would say the whole of Walgett was out in force. The street was packed. All around the RSL Club was packed. All the members of the RSL had to pass right past us and they read the banners. They either laughed at us or spat at us or on the banners. Some of them got banners and tore them up. Some of the local smarties wanted to bash a few of us up.

They said. 'You're stirring up trouble. The dirty niggers don't deserve any better and they are happy how they are.'

We were asked to step around the corner quite a few times by some of the local toughs and this went on throughout the day.

Then at about two o'clock in the afternoon, the people of Walgett realised that we were becoming a tremendous embarrassment to them. A lot of the Aborigines were looking, listening and talking. They were talking to some of the young university students who had gone amongst them to try to encourage them to think about their position in society.

Suddenly some of the members of the RSL came and brought out drinks to us. We gave it back and told them we would prefer not to drink anything coming from such a racist institution.

A few of them were really ashamed of themselves. The hardened ones laughed it off and could not care less. Nevertheless, some of them were ashamed of the fact that it took young university students and two bewildered Aborigines to bring it home to them that they were prejudiced against the black townspeople.

A couple of the Aborigines started to talk to me then. I said, 'Look, you blokes have to stand up for yourselves. We are willing enough to stand here but you people have to do it from this week on. No one is going to stand up for you but yourselves. If you don't do it now, your kids will be in the same position as you are when they grow up. The Aborigines who really came to the front and supported us were the women. They were strong. There were a couple of women who were the powerful ones in the big angry crowd. Arguments began to break out all over the place: not amongst our people only, but also amongst the Walgett community. White people were arguing with white people, Aborigines were arguing with Aborigines, Aborigines were arguing with whites. Friends were arguing with friends, brothers were arguing with brothers, fathers were arguing with sons. We thought a riot was starting.

It was sensational, the effect the demonstration had upon people on that hot day. All the hatred and confused thinking about race boiled to the surface and it was like a volcano exploding. For the first time in their lives people were running around and arguing these points with each other about a very tricky racial situation that was a complete embarrassment to them all. The Aborigines had been suppressed for so long.

Around six o'clock in the evening it had started to get dark and it was cooling off a bit. We decided we had made our point and broke off the demonstration and got amongst the crowd and started talking with the people. The Aborigines were intensely interested in everything that was going on and I remember some of the young boys there who now have grown into men. Michael Anderson, Robert Morgan and Phillip Hall. They saw it all.

Harry Hall (Phillip's father) was very impressive. 'Well,' I thought, 'here's a bloke who could give real leadership amongst Aboriginals.' That is exactly what he has done, right from that day. He is a man of courage and principle. He stayed and fought on when we left. This takes guts and he had plenty of it. It is still the same today. When we left town and the pressures were mounting upon him, he never caved in one inch. He stood firm. He was abused by people and sworn at, spat on, and the people hated him. The whole of the Hall family are like that. He lived in a tin shack on the river bank and whenever I went back to Walgett I always stayed with him and his family.

There were a few others too, but he was probably the one who stood out amongst everybody else.

On the way back to the Church of England hall, we were very very tired. We came to a corner. It was getting darker and we started to talk. A big argument took place then between the white people on one side, students in the middle and the Aborigines on the other. This had never happened before. Again, people were arguing with us, we were arguing with them and they were arguing with each other. The street was filled with arguing people. People were calling out to me, 'Hey Perkins, come over here, we'll have a bit of a word with you down the lane.'

One bloke who was a leading hand of the Walgett Shire at that time said, 'l know how to treat these darkies up 'ere. I always treat 'ern real good. I employ them. They don't give me no trouble. You get a fair deal from this town, don't you?' He expected the usual passive reply.

Do you know what they said to him? 'No, we don't!'

And he nearly fainted. He freaked out and had to sit down in the gutter. No Aborigine had ever stood up to him before.

'Well,' I said, 'there's his answer for him.' He said, 'All you 're trying to do up here is stir them up. You're tellin' them what to say!' 'I'm not telling them what to say,' I said. 'That Aboriginal bloke's obviously one of your gang who said that. He'll tell you.' I said to the Aboriginal labourer, 'Do you get a fair deal or don 't you?'

'No, its pretty tough up here,' he said.

'Well, you had better speak up for yourself. We'll be gone soon,' I said. 'You'll be here in this town and you've got to work and live here. We're just passing through.'

There were quite a few incidents like that. They had never said anything before and hence all the arguments around the place.

A few blokes from a big group of whites were becoming really hostile. The whites were yelling and screaming at us, particularly at Spigelman and myself, and calling us a variety of names. They were swearing viciously in an attempt to provoke the fight they all wanted.

Suddenly a black woman came out of the crowd, followed by a few other Aboriginal women. They called back to most of the vocal white men: 'Listen! You whites come down to our camp and chase our young girls around at night! You were down there last night. I know you!' And she called out some names. 'I saw you last night! It's no good tellin' me how good you treat us Aborigines. All you do is chase Aboriginal women in the dark. Why don't you go back and tell your wives where you've been? They're over there in the crowd! Go on, go tell 'em!'

Of course, the men shot off like rockets. I have never seen them again. I think the couple named would have left the town. I am sure that broke up some marriages. The Aboriginal woman told them off right in front of everybody, yelling at one bloke in particular: 'You there, you're nothing but a gin jockey!'

When the Aboriginal woman pointed to a few other white fellows, you should have seen that crowd break up. It was as if someone had thrown a bomb amongst them. They scurried off in all directions.

She kept on yelling, 'Yes, and you! and you! You were there a week ago! You have been going with my sister for two years in the dark! What about tellin' your wife about her? Tell her about the little baby boy you've given her!' The crowd dispersed in minutes as a result of this Aboriginal woman's revelations, and Walgett would never be the same again. I said, 'Well that ends that conversation. We won 't have much to talk about with those fellas!'

You can imagine the hatred that they felt towards us for bringing this out in the open and embarrassing them in public. Of course, some of the Aborigines laughed about it and so did the students. It was really terribly funny after the tension we had been through. It just disarmed the white racists completely. All we could hear were cars revving up and taking off at top speed.

We walked back to the hall. We were very tired. A lot of the Aborigines came with us and we cooked dinner in the kitchen of the hall. The priest was an ultra-conservative type and he thought he was just giving some university students lodgings for the night. He had no idea that he was to accommodate members of the worst demonstration the town had ever seen - probably the only demonstration the town had ever seen. He thought they were nice young people coming in a bus who would just be staying for that night.

Nor did he think we would have the audacity to sleep in the one hall together, boys and girls! He was telephoned frantically by some of his parishioners. 'Those young people are staying overnight in our Church Hall. This is absolutely disgraceful. We can't be associated with social action of this kind!'

Others said, 'Sticking up for the Aborigines is just not in our line!' This must have been the general way of thinking. It must have been such a hypocritical sort of dialogue that they had with their priest. Some of these establishment type Church of England people were responsible for the conditions of the dark people who were living and dying under their very noses.

We settled down, eating our food. singing songs, when suddenly the priest appeared, followed by the Parish Council. 'Mr Perkins, we would like to speak with you, if you please.'

They took me over to a corner: 'We would like to know one thing, please. Are you young people intending to sleep together?' 'Well,' I said, 'we are intending to all sleep in the same hall, if that's what you mean.' They said, 'Does this mean you are going to sleep under the same roof? Boys and girls together?'

'Well, quite frankly, yes,' I said. 'We've got our sleeping bags and we're exhausted. You could not expect anything bad to happen tonight. Everybody 's so dog-tired. All we can do is eat and sleep.'

'We can't have this!' they said. They went into a huddle, then came to us with an ultimatum: 'You have to go! It is not the custom of the Church of England to allow men and women to sleep in the same hall overnight. Not only that, you people have been in this town upsetting our Aborigines. We don't want to be associated with you at all. We want you to move.' I was flabbergasted.

'That's fair enough,' I said. 'We'll move tomorrow morning.'
The church authorities replied, 'No, now!' I said, 'You're not joking, are you?' 'No, now!' they replied.

We could not believe it. We had to get out there and then.
So I climbed up on a small stage and said, 'Look, the church people here have told us to move. We've got to pack up all our gear, get in the bus and go.'

Well, the bus driver, who was a nice kind bloke from a Sydney suburb and who had never said 'boo' to his next door neighbour all the fifty years of his life, began to realise what sort of university people he was getting tangled up with. He had previously thought we were a tourist group and he was sort of getting a bit nervous.

'What, getting booted out? I don't know if I should go on with you people. You caused a bit of a disturbance in town, you know. You've upset all those people,' he said.

I said, 'Well, that's the way it is. There's probably more to come!' He nearly collapsed. When he was told that he had to drive on at night he could not believe that either.

The visit was something that took the town by storm. People were being liberated. There were lots of Aborigines standing around by then. There were a large number of cars outside and a crowd of both black and white people who were friendly towards us. Everyone was there, playing basketball, singing, playing guitars, laughing and talking with us. We started to load the gear. Eventually we got in the bus and drove off. The cars came from nowhere. They lined up behind us in a procession. I reckon there must have been about forty or fifty cars. Trucks joined the parade. We started to wonder then, what was happening. Who was following us?

As we were pulling out of town the cars kept following and tooting their horns, passing and calling out to us. 'Oh,' we said, 'they are friendly people after all.' Presently we came upon an area a few miles out of Walgett where the road is leveed to a height of about thirty feet. It was built up because of the heavy floods which occur around these areas. Walgett is surrounded by levee banks, in some cases fifteen to thirty feet off the ground level to stop the roads being covered by flood waters.

We were travelling along this road two or three miles out of Walgett and the cars were still streaming right behind us. The next minute a big truck came out of the line of cars. We were watching through the rear window of the bus because we were worried.

We said, They can't all be friends.·Some people as they passed by threw stones at the bus. We had said, 'Oh, that's all right.' Then people started saying, 'Hey, come and have a look at this. There's a great truck coming.'

We saw a truck roaring up on the outside. We were doing about forty miles an hour then, and on the top of a levee bank. The truck pulled close in front of us and hit the front of the bus. The bus driver swerved and nearly went off the road, but came back on again. We were terrified. The girls screamed. The blokes screamed. And so did I. It threw us all over the place. Some of us were hurt, knocked up against the windows, the railings and so on. Cases and equipment were thrown about everywhere. We nearly went off the road into the thirty-foot ditch at forty miles an hour. You can imagine what would have happened. That would have been the finish of us. We said hopefully, 'Oh, that must have been an accident. He didn't mean it.' The truck slowed down and we passed it. Then the next minute while we were still recovering, he came up again. He was on the outside of us. We knew it was for real.

The driver yelled, ' Look out! Here he comes again!'

Sure enough, he hit us again! The tray of the truck hit the front of the bus. I just cannot imagine why it was not a more serious accident. At that time the road was lower and the levee was about four feet high. We went straight over the edge at fifty miles an hour. Bang! Across the ditch and into the bushes. If the levee had been a foot deeper we would have tipped over at that speed. That would have been the finish of the Freedom Ride.

I yelled, 'Quick, everybody grab a bottle.' We were really shaken up and some of the girls were crying. But they grabbed some weapon or other. Jimmy Spigelman and I raced up the front. He had a shoe or some stupid thing in his hand. I don't know what he was going to do with that. I had a milk bottle and a Coke bottle and I don't know what I was going to do with them either.

We poured out of the bus and were standing round the bus ready to defend ourselves. The bus driver was a mass of sweat. He was absolutely terrified, poor bloke. So were we.

The cars surrounded us then and pulled up. They shone their lights on us. Then people jumped out of their cars and called. 'Are you all right?' They were friends, most of them. A few of them went off with the truck which sped away...

A couple of blokes chased him to get his number and we later found out who he was. He was the son of one of the wealthiest graziers in Walgett This bloke would do anything for Aborigines. Isn't it funny? He would take them from one place to another in that very truck, and yet, he tried to kill us all.

We sat down for a while to talk and have a look at the damage. The front of the bus was smashed in slightly but apart from that it seemed in good shape. The inside was a mess with our gear spilt everywhere. It shook us up a lot but nobody was seriously injured.

I think there were about seven Jewish kids on that trip. One of them was a medical student in his final year and he checked us out. We decided to board the bus and go on. Once again the Walgett people waved us goodbye and gave us their encouragement. They thanked us for coming!

We went on a hundred miles or so and camped at a reserve at Collarenebri. There was a park there with some trees and we put our blankets down and slept. We were soon dead to the world.

Then the Freedom Ride hit the headlines. Nobody had taken any notice of us until then. You can imagine how Ted Noffs must have been besieged. After midnight his phone was running hot with parents asking for details. All the newspapers wanted to contact us. But we were asleep in a park without any such facilities. People were waiting for us for interviews.

As for Jerry Mason, our touring Aboriginal, he was white. He turned white that night. When that bus went off the road he went white. He never got back his blackness until the next morning at Collarenebri. I looked at him and thought, 'Well, there's a change of colour for you!'

He never said one word. He was absolutely speechless. He was trying to say what a shocking thing it was but he could not say a word. We got something out of him. 'That was terrible, wasn't it!' he blabbered at Collarenebri and then went to sleep. I think he just gave the game away. He just could not believe it.

Yet from that point on Jerry was very staunch in support of our cause. He stood with us all the way. He held banners at Moree. He came to believe in Aboriginal rights. It was new for him because he came from one of the quietest tribes in South Australia on the River Murray, near Berri.

When we woke up the next morning we were pretty hot news on all the radio broadcasts. The sun was burning down upon us and no one could move. We were still so tired. All the girls were sleeping here and the blokes were sleeping there. But everyone slept close together for a bit of comfort and for safety.

We decided we must have something to eat. So we had some wheat-bix and boiled the billy. We drank tea with the water from the park taps, which was terrible! But it was something to wash the food down with.

The town of Collarenebri had forty tin humpies within a half mile of its post office. All of the Aboriginal families lived in these horrible shacks.

Of course, then the town awoke, came around. The bus trip was a sensation! The Freedom Ride banner was dragged across the bus: 'STUDENT ACTION FOR ABORIGINES' it read. We started off then for Moree about seventy or so miles away.

On the road to Moree we picked up a couple of people. I don't know how, but they latched on to us in some way or another. They turned out to be newspaper reporters who had been trying to catch up with us. We picked one fellow up in Walgett and he made his name on that trip as a reporter. He came to me and said, 'I believe there's a bus load of university students up here? I'm the local country reporter. Give me a couple of lines on it, will you? I've got to get back quick.' But then he got a direct line from the editor: 'Stick with 'em!' So he never left us.

The other was Judith Rich who was travelling with us and became a reporter for a top newspaper in Sydney. Now she is reporting for the Sun in London, and has her own column. Judith was a student, in my class as a matter of fact, at university. She came along and the experience turned her into a top reporter.

Then there was another fellow called Darcy who was reporting for the ABC. He was a real radical. He certainly copped it from the ABC. They commissioned him to take all the tapes of everything that happened. He was on the scene right through. Even when the bus crashed he was taking a recording of it: 'Now we're going over the edge,' and all that sort of thing. He took it all down. He was a good bloke and believed in the cause. I wonder if he still does.

As we were going to Moree some of the students thought we ought to turn back and we had a few people who actually withdrew from the project. A lot of them called their parents from Collarenebri to let them know they were safe and some of the parents told their sons and daughters to get off the bus and come back. Most of the students said they would go through with it. We told them to pull out if they wanted to. One bloke started to cause a bit of trouble with us, because we were demonstrating. We soon got rid of him. He thought we were going on a sociological survey, you see. One of them left us at Walgett and one of them pulled out at Collarenebri. They tried to encourage others to leave as well. Another bloke wanted to come along with us but did not want to take part in any demonstrating. That was all right.

Anyhow, we set off for Moree. Halfway there we decided to relax for a while. We had a few boomerangs and Jerry Mason got out and started throwing them out on the flat. One of the boomerangs came back and hit one bloke right on the head. I told him, 'Look, it's going to come back behind you so turn around and watch for it.' Next time he was watching the wrong way again and the boomerang struck, clunk! Right on the head. It cut the back of his head badly and blood was pouring out. It was Darcy, the ABC reporter. It flattened him. Of course, we had to bandage him up and stop the blood running. That finished that little bit of an exhibition by Jerry. We set off again for Moree.

We went directly to the Methodist Church hall and they were very good to us there. Opposite was the Services Club and we thought that was going to be a similar sort of thing to Walgett. But there was no prejudice there. We went around checking on all the hotels and places to see if there was any discrimination.

We were very nervous. We were doing the right thing but we thought, 'It's difficult to do the right thing. It's breaking new ground.' People whom we did not even know were spitting and swearing at us and so on. It was a very uncomfortable feeling to go into a new situation and be abused by strangers, not knowing what was going to happen.

The next day we began to fully investigate what was going on in Moree. We found out the Council had discriminatory laws against Aborigines who were not allowed to go inside the Council chambers, nor use the toilets. A number of hotels were not serving Aborigines. Some still refuse service, even today.

The biggest point of discrimination was the local swimming pool. Aboriginal adults were not allowed to swim there at all. Aboriginal children were let in on a Wednesday afternoon during school hours between one and three. But then, after the school hours finished, the whistle blew and all the Aboriginal kids had to get out and only the white kids were allowed to stay. The swimming pool was the one point we thought we would hit at first.

Before we did that I thought we should go to the Aboriginal mission and pick up Aboriginal people who would want to support us in this venture. We wished to tell them what we were doing and to seek their support. We thought we should always involve the Aborigines and get their approval first.

We went down to the mission with a few of the students in the bus and we explained to some older Aborigines. They were very apprehensive. Then we went to on a particular road in town where a lot of Aborigines live. They were the 'upper-class' adult Aborigines and they did not want anything to do with us at all. Their attitude was 'Let sleeping dogs lie.' They had a pretty good run in the town and could put up with the prejudice. So we went back to speak to the young Aboriginal people on the mission: 'Yeah, we'll support ya!'

'Well, pile in the bus!' I said. About twenty or thirty of them got in and off we went. We went back and picked up the students and decided that we would go to the baths and attempt to go into the pool with the Aborigines. When we got down to the pool I said, 'I want a ticket for myself and these ten Aboriginal kids behind me. Here's the money.'

'Sorry, darkies not allowed in,' replied the baths manager. The manager was a real tough looking bloke too. He frightened me. We decided to block up the gate: 'Nobody gets through unless we get through with all the Aboriginal kids!' And the crowd came, hundreds of them. They were pressing about twenty deep around the gate.

Then the police arrived. They had received instructions by this time from the Labor Party which was in power in New South Wales at that time, to lay off us. 'Don't do anything that will cause any controversy with these people. Go with them as far as you can,' seemed to be government advice to the police. It was pretty dicey. The elections were coming up and things looked bad for the Government. So much for the so-called Labor Party race relations policy.

The whole of the police force from Moree and surrounding towns were called in. Our bus was pulled up by that time just in front of the pool. The mayor of the town rolled up. (Recently when I went to Moree he shook my hand and reflected on what a good thing the Freedom Ride was for the town. But at that time it was a different story.) The mayor ordered the police to have us removed from the gate entrance. They took hold of my arm and the struggle started. There was a lot of pushing and shoving and spitting. Rotten tomatoes, fruit and eggs began to fly, then the stones were coming over and bottles too.

It was very hot and nobody was able to get in for a swim. They just could not get past us at all. The mayor again ordered the police to remove us. As soon as they got one student or Aborigine off the rails, another one would take his place. The person on the rails would then go to the end of the line. The police did not know what was happening until they saw the students coming up the line for the third time round. A policeman said, 'Damn it! I've had that bloke twice before!' They realised we would not give in.

The crowd got ugly then. One of our students, Jim Spigelman, was punched to the ground by one of the tough boys who did not like what we were doing.

The mob from the hotel across the road decided that they were going to show these university students and niggers and black so-and-so's whose town this was. They came over and did most of the kicking, throwing and punching, and the spilling.

The bus driver by this time had locked himself in the bus and his bus was covered with splattered eggs. You should have seen it. There were eggs all over it and spittle too. They were spitting at him. He was desperate, because he did not wish to be involved. He was only the driver. He was trying to explain to the townspeople with signs but as he would open the window they would throw something at him. He was absolutely stunned. The mayor and the police had a quick conference and made a decision. The situation looked very bad. The police then said, 'Right. we'll let them in.'

They let the kids in for a swim and we went in with them. We had broken the ban! Everybody came in! We saw the kids into the pool first and we had a swim with them. The Aboriginal kids had broken the ban for the first time in the history of Moree.

Word quickly spread right back to the mission and among all the other Aborigines on the river banks, shanty towns and camps: 'The ban's broken. The Aborigines can swim in the town baths!'

It was really great to see all the little kids coming up shaking our hands and kissing us and saying how pleased they were that they could swim in the town baths. It was a wonderful moment. Some of these kids have become young men and women who have shown leadership qualities since. One of them was Lyle Munroe.

The police then asked us to leave because the crowd was becoming uglier and there were fights breaking out. It was getting dark too. A lot of the blokes were really set on giving us a going-over. The police called in more reinforcements and formed a solid line of police to the bus. It was not very wide and we had to go through it. I got a couple of punches on the shoulder and a couple on my side. I was literally covered in spit. Rotten eggs and tomatoes continued to be thrown at close range. They were throwing dirt in our faces. But I did not get as much as the bloke in front of me, escorting me through the police line. He was a cop, six foot four tall, and everything was landing on him because of his height. His white helmet was dripping with eggs. They were aiming at me with spit, rotten eggs and tomatoes and hitting him instead.

By the time we made the bus, the driver was really worried - and I don't blame him. 'Quick,' he muttered, 'let's get out of here! I haven't insulted these people. I've nothing to do with them and yet they 're calling me all the names under the sun! I don't even know them and I've never met them before. I told them I'm just the driver.' He had to put the windscreen wiper on and the eggs and tomatoes were oscillating across the windscreen. It was terribly funny in a way.

We cut around the corner at high speed and who do you think we were missing? Jerry Mason. Nobody knew where he was. The police at the baths were holding back a crowd of nearly a thousand people, most of them furious at us. Having given us protection with squad cars on either side, in front and at the back, the police were escorting us through the town. And suddenly we were missing our 'tourist' Aborigine! The police car had to go back into town and pick him up.

All this time cars were pulling up beside us on the road and trying to get at us. People were endeavouring to open the doors and the police were pulling them back, while we were waiting for Jerry. The police found him somehow down a deserted street. When they eventually found Jerry he said to them he had never been to Moree before, which was pretty obvious. He was walking around with a couple of other blokes and he did not know any action was on.

The police brought him out and shoved him in the bus and told us to get going. They gave us an escort for about twenty or thirty miles out of town. There were cars streaming along behind us, people yelling and throwing things at the bus.

So that was our first confrontation with Moree. A confrontation which resulted in turning the town upside-down.

Before we left we said to the Aborigines, 'If you are banned again, we'll be back.' We also told that to the mayor and the police. We did have to go back, too. That was another story in itself.