

Castan Centre Alumnus Fights Australia's Refugee Policy

Jessie Taylor's Film 'We Will Be Remembered For This'

By Erica Contini

As a Monash Law graduate, former Castan Centre global intern to the Australian Delegation to the Human Rights Council and a current masters degree student, Jessie Taylor has not taken her opportunities for granted. During her time at Monash, Jessie spent over 3 years working with refugees and asylum seekers through weekly visits to the Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre and visits to the Baxter Immigration Detention Centre in Port Augusta, South Australia. The plight of the individuals detained and the lack of public knowledge about the situation prompted Jessie to take action to address the issues surrounding Australia's mandatory immigration detention policy.

In 2006, Jessie gathered a group of 9 people from different nationalities, backgrounds, political views, age groups and experiences, and brought them to the Baxter Immigration Detention Centre in order to meet and interact with some of the individuals being detained there. The purpose of their trip was to gain exposure to the realities of detention and to see first hand what the experience would be like. Their three day trip was recorded by video and combined into a documentary, "We Will be Remembered for This".

The group's journey begins as it travels in a white bus from Melbourne to Baxter in Port Augusta, South Australia. Along the way we hear each traveller's expectations of the detention centre, general knowledge or lack thereof of the detention scheme in Australia, and what his or her background is. The visitors include students from different courses, a bookstore retailer, a teacher, a European member of the Institute of Peace & Armed Conflict, and one individual who had actually spent time in immigration detention.

Designed to be watched by people with little or no knowledge about immigration detention, the film provided an overview of the mandatory detention policy in Australia in an entertaining and moving manner. We get to hear about the daily lives and hardships faced by those being detained

through recounts by the visitors following each trip they take into the centre. Additional information on the realities of the policy are presented in interviews with former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, human rights advocate Julian Burnside QC and Professor Patrick McGorry a psychiatrist who discussed the psychological impact of immigration detention.

The stories of other individuals directly impacted by Australia's policy also shed light on the situation. The narrative of an Afghan man who fled his homeland as a child was told throughout the film. His flight into Pakistan and then through a people smuggler into Indonesia and then a boat to Australia, culminated in his gaining his 'freedom' by being detained once he reached Australia. While he has since gained his Australian citizenship after being deemed a refugee, his plight illustrates the additional hardships individuals in detention have faced. Another story told is of an Australian woman who met and fell in love with her husband at Baxter Detention Centre. While the two were married, he was forced to remain in detention and was ultimately deported back to his home country, leaving with a \$210,000 bill for his time spent in detention.



Jessie Taylor, second from left, with her fellow travellers.

The film has screened all over Australia and the Castan Centre organised a screening for Monash University students in early October. The film was followed by a question and answer session where audience members discussed the video with Jessie directly. Some wanted to ask about the experience Jessie had while doing the film and how she got involved with detainees. Others wanted to know what they could do to help change the policy. Even more wanted help in understanding how Australia could support and encourage what appears to be an utterly unconscionable system. Jessie provided further information about the situation but was unable to explain how such a system could be condoned. It was clear from the questions asked and the overall response of the audience that Jessie and her film have succeeded in educating the Australian public about the policy and bringing a human element to the issue.

For more information about the movie, see <http://wewillberemembered.wordpress.com>

