



## 2 Episode 2: DETENTION CENTRES

### SYNOPSIS

Morteza is a 30-year old, former ‘boat person’ who landed on Christmas Island after fleeing Iran. He spent four uncertain years in detention during which he converted to Christianity, escaped from Woomera Detention Centre, sparked the riot that burned down the Port Hedland Detention Centre and famously sewed his lips together in the Villawood Detention Centre. He is exactly the sort of asylum seeker Jenni from Queensland says should not be allowed to stay in Australia. However, Jenni had never met a ‘boat person’ until she met Morte. Living in each other’s worlds is an explosive and emotionally draining experience for both of them. However, neither Jenni nor Morte, could have predicted the way the experiment would end.

### BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Carry out the following activities on the issue of refugee and asylum seeker detention centres. (For further information, see ‘Detention centres’ in website references.)

- First, the term ‘boat people’ is used during this episode of *Living With the Enemy*. Define ‘boat people’. When did this term originate, and why? Is it merely a descriptive term, or does it carry with it a deeper range of meanings and attitudes? For example, is it used as an epithet, a term of criticism – and if so, by whom, and why? (See ‘Boat people’ in website references.)
- Define what you take to mean by the term, ‘detention centre’. Who is sent to detention centres? Why are they sent? Does being sent to a detention centre imply or even prove

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criminality?

- Explain what it means to be ‘screened’ and ‘processed’ at a detention centre. What is the process, who carries it out, and how is it carried out? What are those carrying out the process attempting to find out? Comment on the results of screening and processing, and how this affects the lives of those who are held in detention centres.
- Carry out some research then write a short report on when refugee detention centres were first instituted in Australia, and where they were situated. Explain the events that brought about their introduction. Why and when did the Australian government make the decision to set up detention centres off the mainland? Where have these off-shore centres been operating?

### THE PARTICIPANTS

Carry out the following activities on the main participants in this episode.

- From the program write a short description of the following participants, showing not only who they are, but also their stance, their beliefs and opinions on the issue of refugee or asylum-seeker (or boat people) detention centres.
  - o Jeanette (Jenni)
  - o Morteza (Morte)
  - o Dr Zachary Steel





- Early in the episode Jenni refers to refugees attempting to enter Australia by boat as 'illegal'. Discuss whether she is correct, by international and Australian law. Explain her apprehensions and fears about the arrival of boat people. She and her friends at the local bowls club believe that if asylum seekers keep arriving, the nature of Australian society will change. Discuss what you think they regard as typically their 'Australian' culture. What kinds of changes do they fear will happen to it, and upon what evidence do they make these statements? We are told that Jenni has never met an asylum seeker, nor never been to a detention centre, therefore where might she and her friends derive their views and assumptions?
- On the way to Jenni's house, early in the episode, Morte compares his feelings at that moment to his feelings of having been an asylum seeker. Explain why, as an Australian citizen, he now draws this comparison. What feelings is he experiencing, and why?
- Comment on the function and relevance of Zachary Steel's relatively brief participation in the program.

### THEMES AND ISSUES

Carry out the following activities arising from your viewing of this episode.

- Comment on Morte's opinion that, 'Detention centres are not designed to process but to punish'. What evidence, in the form of a comparison, does he offer to Jenni and her friends at the bowls club to demonstrate this claim, and why are they immediately unable to accept his statement, with cries of, 'Rubbish'? In what way is Morte challenging their deepest-held beliefs about the nature of Australian society, its people and its government?
- Explain what Jenni is attempting to prove to Morte when she shows him photos of both the refugee camps that exist in other parts of the world, and the detention centre on Christmas Island. Why does Morte reject her assumptions about what the images in the photos suggest?
- Jenni suggests that for their sake and their safety the children of asylum seekers held in detention centres should be removed and placed in foster care. Is she correct? What might be the ramifications of this procedure were it to be enforced?
- Why does Jenni think the inmates in detention centres riot, set fire to buildings and commit acts of violence? What is Morte's response to this? Comment on whether Dr Zachary Steel's observations later in the episode support either Jenni or Morte's opinions.
- Explain Jenni's purpose in taking Morte out in a boat to gaze upon the pristine beauty of the Whitsundays coast. Why does this end in a devastating argument between the two? Comment on Jenni's views as to what might eventually happen to her locale, and whether they based on fact, logic and rational argument. Is she being 'selfish', as Morte asserts – or do her feelings run deeper than this?
- While on the boat, Jenni claims the statistic that, as a 'compassionate' country, Australia is 'second in the world per capita in the number of refugees we take into here'. Is she correct? You may wish to research the figures on intake

