

# FREEDOM STORIES

## MEDIA KIT



Flying Carpet Films 2015

[www.freedomstoriesproject.com](http://www.freedomstoriesproject.com)

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## SYNOPSIS

### 1-Liner

The stories of 'boat people' who are now Australian citizens.

### 50-word Summary

Explores the achievements of former 'boat people' who arrived from the Middle-East around the watershed year of 2001. Locked in remote detention centres and then placed on temporary protection visas, their limbo lasted for years. Now Australian citizens, they are finally building secure lives and contributing to their new country.

### Synopsis

*Freedom Stories* is an exploration by filmmaker Steve Thomas of the achievements and struggles of former 'boat people'.

Now Australian citizens, they arrived seeking asylum from the Middle-East around 2001 – a watershed year in Australian politics sparked by the Tampa affair and Prime Minister John Howard's declaration: "We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come".

Some were only children when they found themselves in indefinite mandatory detention in remote places such as Woomera or Nauru and then placed on temporary protection visas, which extended their limbo for years. It has taken astonishing resilience and over a decade for them to build secure lives and start contributing to their new country.

These are ordinary people who found themselves caught up in the extraordinary consequences of political brinkmanship but have long since dropped out of the media spotlight. They live among us now and given the Government's boast that it has 'stopped the boats' it is time for their voices to be heard.

## TRAILERS & SCREENER

Trailers available at these links:

90 sec Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/127320460> <http://youtu.be/2HuuH2sHpg8>

3 min Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/127212383> <http://youtu.be/gHXxQVQQVOM>

A full-length **Screeener** of the Freedom Stories feature documentary is available online or as a DVD by request from accredited media.

## WEBSITE

[www.freedomstoriesproject.com](http://www.freedomstoriesproject.com)

Please note that some background information on the website is out of date, particularly pertaining to Government policies towards asylum seekers. We are currently upgrading the website content. Please check with us if you are in doubt.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT – Steve Thomas

I first began meeting asylum seekers while making *'Welcome to Woomera'* (2002). I got to know detainees from the Woomera Detention Centre who were then in community detention but 'for their own protection' the Immigration Department would not allow them to tell their stories on film.

My next film *'Hope'* (2008) featured the late Amal Basry, who survived the SIEV X people smuggling disaster in 2001 only to die from cancer five years later in Melbourne. Amal refused to be silenced about her experiences and in travelling around Australia with the film I met more former asylum seekers, who had all been through the experience of Australia's unique system of indefinite mandatory detention followed by Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs were abolished in 2007 but recently reinstated).

I decided to collaborate with some of these people in telling positive stories about their contributions as new Australian citizens to our society. Rather than making a 'political' film I simply wanted to introduce former asylum seekers to audiences that may never have met a 'boat person', because my experience was completely counter to the negative labelling and scapegoating that predominates in the 'refugee debate'.

*"I wanted to get that message across, the message that we're not as different as people portray us, in the media especially. We're just normal people, we're all Aussies too..."* Jamila Ahmadi, student.

As I embarked on this journey I soon realised that for many it had taken the better part of a decade to get their lives back on track and to start achieving something. To reap the benefit of hindsight I decided to work with participants who arrived in detention around 2001 – the controversial period of the Tampa, the 'children overboard' affair and the Howard Government's 'Pacific solution'.

My starting point for filming was 'what these people are doing now' but as I got to know them it became apparent that in one way or another most remain deeply affected by their experiences of the double 'limbo' of detention and TPVs. I was struck by the direct correlation between the psychological damage done and the time spent in detention and on TPVs, as well as age on arrival. So this became a film not just about our shared humanity and the enthusiasm and resilience of people compelled to seek a new home, but about how they are facing past traumas for which we all share some responsibility.

*"If you gain something you lose something. Nothing's for free. I've paid a very high price for everything I've gained today."* Arif Fayazi, construction manager.

*Freedom Stories* features a dozen participants from a range of Middle-Eastern backgrounds and living across four states, some of whom were children when they arrived. They spent between several months and several years in detention and most spent several years on TPVs. In fact we filmed with closer to twenty people and those not included in the feature doc will have short profile films of their own. Each has a story and with the Federal Government claiming to have 'stopped the boats' it is time those stories were heard.

## THE PARTICIPANTS



**Shafiq Monis** is a house painter and visual artist. He spent the year 2000 in the Woomera Detention Centre after escaping from a Taliban jail and then 4 years on a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV). He was separated from his family for 10 years before they were reunited in Melbourne. His daughter **Mahidya** is at University studying media and journalism.



**Mustafa Jawadi** is a motor mechanic in Canberra. He was 10 when the boat he and his family were on caught fire, with the loss of two lives. After being rescued by the navy the family were detained on Nauru for 3 years, where his younger brother **Amir** was born. Mustafa is now engaged to be married.



**Alana Elias** is a primary school teacher with a special interest in using technology in the classroom. After fleeing Iraq in 2000 she and her family found themselves in the Port Hedland Detention Centre and then on TPVs. She lives in Melbourne and has recently completed a Masters in Education.



**Arif Fayazi** started work in Australia employing his tiling skills from Afghanistan, before establishing his own construction company in Melbourne. He spent 10 months in the Woomera Detention Centre and 6 years on a TPV before his wife and son were able to join him. He has a young son born here and works long hours to support his family.



**Sheri Shoari** is a single mother with three sons, including **Ali** who has cerebral palsy. After arriving from Iran they spent 3 years in the Curtain and Baxter Detention Centres before settling in Adelaide. Sheri's youngest son, **Hamid**, was 10 when he arrived in detention and joined the Australian armed forces at 16, while the oldest, **Mohammad**, was 14. He works in a factory and is a keen student of philosophy.





**Jamila Ahmadi** was 7 years old when she and her family arrived from Afghanistan in 2001. They were detained in the Woomera Detention Centre and then spent 3 years on TPVs. Today she is doing a double degree in International and Development Studies at the University of Adelaide, as well as working and participating in various youth activities.



**Amir Javan** was a jeweller in Iran and now works in the real estate business in North Sydney. He spent more than 4 years in the Curtin and Baxter Detention Centres and finally won freedom after his case went all the way to the High Court. **Parviz Avesta** is also from Iran. He is married, runs his own tiling business and as a teenager in detention struck up a friendship with Amir that continues today.



**Reyhana Akhy** is a case officer at the Migrant Resource Centre in Adelaide, where she assists in settling newly arrived refugees. She and her family were detained in the Woomera Detention Centre in 2001 at the height of the riots there and then placed on TPVs. Her daughter **Mariam** was 8 when she arrived and is currently studying Criminology at University.

**PRODUCTION STILLS – Available on request.**



Woomera Freedom Mural



Amir & Parviz



Alana & Robin



Arif & Molly



Molly & Arif



Sheri & Hamid



Nat & Mustafa



Mustafa & Amir



Mahidya & Shafiq



Sheri & Dave



Shafiq



Umbrella



Jamila



Arif



Reyhana



Mohammad



Steve & Jamila



Steve & Amir

## **BIOS**

### **STEVE THOMAS (DIRECTOR):**

Steve Thomas is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and lecturer in documentary at the Victorian College of the Arts School of Film and Television. His previous documentary feature HOPE (2008) told the story of SIEV-X survivor Amal Basry. It won the ATOM Award for Best Social/Political Documentary and was a finalist in the Australian Human Rights Awards and Australian Directors Guild Awards (see <http://www.hopedocumentary.com.au>).

Steve's earlier films include BLACK MAN'S HOUSES and HAROLD, ABC TV documentaries examining black-white history in Australia. The former won a Dendy and the Rouben Mammouljian Award at the Sydney Film Festival. He won the AFI Award for Best TV Documentary with his exploration of multiculturalism in THE HILLMEN – A SOCCER FABLE and a United Nations Association Media Peace Award for LEAST SAID, SOONEST MENDED, an exploration of his twin sister's adoption story.

Steve's interest in asylum seeker issues began with the making of WELCOME TO WOOMERA (2004) for ABC TV and FREEDOM STORIES completes a trilogy dealing with this subject (see [www.freedomstoriesproject.com](http://www.freedomstoriesproject.com)). Steve has an MA by Research in the ethics of documentary making and is currently completing a PhD involving an examination of the making of Freedom Stories.

### **LISA HORLER (PRODUCER):**

Lisa Horler is an experienced Producer of television documentary and digital media. Through her company Licketty Split, Lisa has produced and directed documentary programs like LEVANTES (1998, SBS), FROM HERE TO ITHACA (2002, SBS) and MADE IN HEAVEN (2005, ABC) that aired on Australian television.

In 2009, Lisa produced ALONE IN A CROWED ROOM, a documentary about adults with autism that screened on Compass (ABC 1). Lisa also worked for many years as a freelance Producer, and produced or line produced many documentaries when working for 360 Degree Films and John Moore Productions, including MONASH: THE FORGOTTEN ANZAC (2008, ABC), MENZIES AND CHURCHILL AT WAR (2008, ABC), THE TRIAL (2009, SBS), CHARLES BEAN'S GREAT WAR (2010, FOXTEL), and GALLIPOLI FROM ABOVE (2012, FOXTEL).

Lisa's first website project, SOMAZONE, was created in 1999 and is still in operation today as one of Australia's most popular sites for young people searching for health information. Working for the Australian Children's Television Foundation from 1999-2002 in the New Media Unit, Lisa production managed all developments including Kahootz V2.0.

Lisa's current slate of projects includes producing the feature documentary HOMESICK (Director Mick Cummins), and MISSING INGREDIENT, a one-hour television documentary for the ABC (Director Lucy Paplinska).



## SCREENINGS & HONOURS

World Premiere: Sydney Film Festival 8th June 2015.



Finalist Documentary Australia Foundation Award for Australian Documentary.



Cinema Nova, Melbourne – 23rd July to 19th August 2015

Harlem International Film Festival, New York – September 2015



Muslim Film Festival, Atlanta – September 2015

Canberra International Film Festival – November 2015



Peace on Earth Film Festival, Chicago – March 2016

Universe Multicultural Film Festival, California – April 2016



## EXAMPLES OF REVIEWS:

Phillipa Hawker (The Age):

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/freedom-stories-review-documentary-gives-voice-to-asylum-seekers-experiences-20150722-gii2f6.html>

ABC RN Feature article:

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/drawingroom/freedom-stories-people-just-like-us/6517876>

### **Sunday Age – Melbourne Inside Out – Craig Mathieson 19/7/15:**

Not only timely in its depiction of how a previous generation of refugees have productively fitted into Australian society, but also fascinating for how it draws out – or even inspires – undercurrents of unease, this deceptively complex documentary by Steve Thomas deliberately sets out to introduce people previously dehumanised by both rhetoric and forced detention. “He’s a pretty good mechanic”, says a customer of Mustafa, an Afghani who fled the Taliban as a 10-year old and spent three years on Nauru, and the film shows everyday interaction as a means of emphasising the social contribution; the folksiness of the filmmaking has a point. Thomas has long covered this field, and in revisiting former subjects he sometimes triggers difficult memories, but it’s intriguing to hear how different generations remember the dangerous trek to safety in Australia, and now interact.

### Quotes from audiences/reviewers:

*"Uplifting and inspiring."*

*"Deceptively complex."*

*"Exudes humanism from every pore."*

*"An amazing pastiche of unique characters."*

*"Warms the heart sometimes and enrages us at others."*

*"Both timely and fascinating."*

*"A thoughtful, quietly involving documentary."*

### FILM INFORMATION

Production Company:	Flying Carpet Films, Melbourne
Producer:	Lisa Horler
Co-Producer/Director/Narrator:	Steve Thomas
Principal Cinematography:	Philip Bull, Jenni Meaney, Peter Zakharov
Editor:	Uri Mizrahi
Composer:	Brett Aplin
Genre:	Feature Documentary
Completion:	February 2015
Duration:	99 mins
Locations:	Vic, NSW, SA, ACT
Shooting Format:	XDCam
Master Format:	HDCam SR
Screening Formats:	DCP, Blu-ray, HDCam, DVD
Website:	<a href="http://www.freedomstoriesproject.com">http://www.freedomstoriesproject.com</a>
Facebook Page:	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/freedomstoriesproject">https://www.facebook.com/freedomstoriesproject</a>

## FILM CREDITS

Very Special Thanks To Those Who Shared Their Stories

Mustafa & Amir Jawadi

Shafiq & Mahdiya Monis

Reyhana and Mariam Akhy

Amir Javan

Sheri, Mohammad, Hamid & Ali Shoari

Arif Fayazi

Alana Elias

Jamila Ahmadi

Parviz Avesta

Director, Narrator, Co-Producer,  
STEVE THOMAS

Producer  
LISA HORLER

Editor & Screen Designer  
URI MIZRAHI

Composer  
BRETT APLIN

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Conform Editor JOHN KERRON

Soundwaves

Sound Editors FRANK LIPSON  
PETAR RISTIC  
ERIN MCKIMM  
Foley JOHN SIMPSON (FEET'N'FRAMES)  
Sound Mixer ANDREW MCGRATH

Freedom Stories Advisory Panel  
Matthew Albert, Sister Brigid Arthur,  
Julian Burnside AO QC, Kate Durham,  
Rt Hon Malcolm Fraser AC CH,  
Mustafa Najib, Prof Louise Newman AM,  
Robert Sessions, Shahin Shafaei,  
Fionn Skiotis, Assoc Prof Suresh Sundram,  
Arnold Zable, Mike Zafiroopoulos AM JP

'Welcome to Woomera' (2004) excerpt &  
Woomera Detention Centre Footage  
Archive supplied by the NFSA Film Australia Collection

'Hope' (2008) excerpt  
Courtesy Flying Carpet Films - [www.hopedocumentary.com.au](http://www.hopedocumentary.com.au)

Woomera protest footage (2002)  
Courtesy Bill Runting, Rockhopper Productions



Extract from 'Kan Yama Kan' (2002)

Courtesy Robin Laurie

Stock Footage

Alessandro Zavattero and [www.alexfreestockvideo.com](http://www.alexfreestockvideo.com)  
Sunrise footage courtesy Supranaut - [www.beachfrontbroll.com](http://www.beachfrontbroll.com)

Archival Photos

National Library of Australia,  
Dean Sewell, Dr Caroline Fleahy,  
Wayne England, Peter Russell,  
Greg Uhlhorn, The West Australian,  
Nic Ellis, Fairfax Syndication

Song

'Not One of Us'

Written by Luke McDermott & Tom Lynch  
Performed by SWAP

Special thanks to others who participated in filming  
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Ferial & Fatin Al Khil Khali,  
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