



This is a transcript from *The Messenger* – a podcast series produced by Behind the Wire and the Wheeler Centre. *The Messenger* brings you into the Australian immigration detention centre on Manus Island – and reveals, in intimate detail, one man's experience of what it's really like to flee tragedy and seek asylum by boat.

Episode 5: A Safer Place

Michael Green: From Behind the Wire and the Wheeler Centre, you're listening to *The Messenger*.

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Abdul Aziz Muhamat: You know the feeling, the feeling how is it like when you are in a boat in the middle of the ocean and whenever I look around me I could only see that the sky is blue and as far as I can see, I only see the water of the ocean, so nothing else I can see. And at the same time the good things is, like, we have got company like dolphins - six or seven dolphins are just moving with us.

Well, I still remember the noise that I heard during my trip on the boats. Honestly there are only three types of noises that I can still, picture them in my head, which is, number one: the noise of the of the engine. And then the second is the noise of the waves splashing or splashing on the boats. And the third noise that I could remember is when we go through the water normally it makes bit of noise, kind of like, you know, you're cutting something with a sharp things.

MG: Aziz is somewhere in the Indian Ocean. It's the second time he's got on a boat. But there are two very important things that he doesn't know. In 2012, the Australian government passed a law that made all boat trips to Australia like Aziz's both pointless and unexpectedly surreal.

[Audio from *Ten Late News* 30 October 2012]

News announcer: The government plans to remove the entire Australian mainland from the migration zone in a desperate bid to stop asylum boats.

MG: Under the new law, in combination with Australia's existing migration law, mainland Australia is no longer part of Australia. It's a legal fiction, but it has a real practical effect. It means that now, anyone arriving by boat will have limited

access to Australian law. To put it another way – they can't seek asylum here, because the law says that they never arrived.

So if Aziz's boat had somehow made it all the way to Sydney Harbour, it wouldn't have made a difference. Even as Aziz and the dolphins drew closer to Australia, he was already headed for nowhere – because for any asylum seeker arriving by boat, Australia no longer existed. There was one other thing Aziz didn't know:

Kevin Rudd: The rules have changed. If you come by boat you will never permanently live in Australia.

MG: That was Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, on the nineteenth of July, 2013. It was the day Aziz says he landed in Jakarta, from Sudan. This new policy said that even if Aziz was given refugee status, Australia would never resettle him.

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MG: In Australian politics, it's hard to think of a more loaded, politically charged topic than refugees coming by boat.

Joe Hockey: I remember you as minister for immigration. There were more boats coming in than there were planes at Sydney airport.

MG: That's the former treasurer, Joe Hockey, in mid-2014, baiting the Labor opposition during question time in parliament.

Hockey: But I tell you what, as the boats came in under them, the boats stopped under this minister for immigration. The boats stopped. And not only that, because the boats have stopped we've saved the budget two and a half billion dollars. We've closed nine detention centres. But most of all, most of all, as a result of the actions of this government, there are no children floating in the ocean between Australia and East Timor as occurred under Labor, as occurred under Labor.

MG: In the middle of all the farce and theatre of question time, Hockey's image of children floating in the water is confronting. But it is at the heart of the argument about the morality of Australia's offshore detention policies. And that argument can be boiled down to one issue: stopping the boats. It's one of the most fraught topics in Australian politics, and most of the time it comes out in two soundbites: saving lives at sea, and securing our borders.

You're listening to *The Messenger*. This podcast is about Abdul Aziz Muhamat, and his life inside the Australian-run immigration detention centre on Manus Island. My name is Michael Green.

In this episode, Aziz will tell us about his trip to Australia by boat. What was going through his mind? And what did he know about the journey?

We'll also hear from somebody with a unique perspective to offer, because his job was to stop the boats – and, as we'll hear, he was asked to go to extraordinary lengths to do that.

A: So, first when I arrive in Indonesia on the first months... our intention was only to seek asylum in Indonesia and wait until we get our refugee status in Indonesia and maybe we will get to be resettled in any other country around the world, so we never had an intention to come over to Australia.

MG: It was July 2013 and Aziz had landed in Indonesia. He'd flown there on a ticket his uncle bought him – because Indonesia was very far away from Sudan, and it was easy to get a visa.

A: Before I leave Sudan I didn't know anything about Australia at all. I was just like ok, you know, like a deaf and blind person... I didn't know anything about Australia, and I didn't know anything about, even where I'm gonna go. But my aim, or my main purpose was only I have to find a safer place.

Well when I came to Indonesia I thought that first time that Indonesia is really safer place and... I'm gonna start my life, my life from there. And then I realised that Indonesia also is the same like Sudan... and then, say oh look this is not gonna work with me.

MG: Indonesia isn't a party to the Refugee Convention. So unlike Australia, Indonesia has no obligation to prevent someone being returned to a country where they fear persecution or torture. It also means that asylum seekers like Aziz have no work rights, no access to social support from the Indonesian Government, and no prospect of ever settling there permanently.

A: I couldn't find any job and then finally what happened is that a friend of mine, who I share accommodation with him, he told me about Australia and then he say 'Man, we

do not have an option to go back to Sudan, because if we go back there we will be persecuted by our own government.

MG: That same friend told Aziz about a rumour that was doing the rounds: that the Sudanese Government had sent intelligence agents to Indonesia to look for, and arrest, Sudanese asylum seekers.

A: So the only option we have at the moment is we have to try.' And I say, 'What do you mean by try?' He say 'We have to try and risk our life, we have to get on a boat.'

First thing I did I called my uncle before and I said 'Uncle I'm in Indonesia at the moment but, I think there is something wrong in Indonesia here.'

My uncle asked me what's wrong in Indonesia and I explained the points to him from A to Z and I told him everything, that it's not really safer place for me to stay in Indonesia. So, would you mind if I try something else, but he told me... if you come back you will end yourself in the jail and you will be just persecuted and you will suffer a lot, so stay.

I thought about it several time and then I called my parents, I called my uncle and I said 'I want to do something very stupid and I don't know whether you guys you're going to tolerate me or not.' And they say 'no, don't worry, whatever you did, if you find it is really good for yourself, we are really, like, we are really happy for you. So just stay safe and god bless you or god help you.'

MG: Aziz says he was driven to the coast in a truck. Then, they were told to board a small fishing boat without an engine, which ferried them to a larger boat.

A: They told me that, 'Okay, this is the boat gonna take you to Australia.' And when he told me like that, and I say 'Man, I don't know how long we're gonna stay on the water', but to be honest when you have ... when you are in a position like that, you have enemy behind you and you have the wave in front of you, probably you gonna chose the wave instead of the enemy. And when you die you gonna die and you will be like a food for the fish, instead of being tortured by your own people.

We took that journey and then we spent, I think two days... I don't know where we, where were we at that time exactly, whether we are in Indonesia or we are out of Indonesia but what happened was we met in an accident.

The boat that ... the smuggler gave to us was an old boat, and then what happened was that it's broken from the bottom and then the water start coming inside the boat and we start, you know, like, there is no pump that we can pump the water out and what we did is we just took off our clothes and we fill it that hole with our clothes.

We probably took control of the water and we stopped the water. And what happened is that we put like three people in every couple of hours, they just shift the water outside. And you know, no way, so we had an agreement among us, all of us, that no way we can go further.

When we start making our way back to Indonesia we spend nine hours or I think fifteen hours on the ocean and then finally we come to the shore and what happened on the shore is like... there is a big wave hit the boat on one side and it turn it to the other side. And what happened was that, 30 or 35 of us, they fall in the water.

Me and other few guys we stood there on the boat and we start helping ... the other people who were inside the water just to pull them up. And then after we pull them up ... what happened is we missed five people from our friends that were with us in the boat ... searching them everywhere and we couldn't find them and we spend more than six or seven or eight hours there just searching for our friends.

Only few of us they have got a life jacket ... you know when the wave hit us, it just pulled them inside the water, and then after that they couldn't find any help and they couldn't get someone to help ... And the last news I heard, I heard from the Indonesian navy, they say they found the dead body, five of them.

MG: Aziz and the survivors were taken back to Indonesia. In 2013, nine hundred refugees were resettled from Indonesia, after registering with the UNHCR there. But that was only 900 out of about 10,000 people who'd registered, and the waiting time to get a first interview was between seven and eleven months.

In the meantime, Aziz still had no way of living there. His fear intensified after that first failed boat trip, and after some other Sudanese men told him again about spies – warning him not to go out in public.

A: We have got a message that, from one of the Sudanese guys who live in Jakarta, he told us that 'Guys, Sudan government they send a special intelligence force in Indonesia and every Sudanese guy who is in Indonesia seeking asylum they will take him back to Sudan, so it's just for your knowledge, don't get out of the house.'

MG: With no other options, Aziz kept moving from house to house. Soon, he tried to get on a boat again, but one of the buses in his convoy was stopped by police. They turned back. But he felt like the only thing left to do was to keep trying again.

A: We were on the third house and although we want to go to UNHCR head office in Jakarta to get our asylum but it's really hard for us to go there, because if we got out of the house during the day, probably the police or the, you know, the Sudanese intelligence would see us, especially if we go nearby the UN, UNHCR headquarter in

Jakarta ... So at that moment we thought that like ... so we cannot even, we can't do anything, so the only option we have got is, we have to face the danger again.

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Greg Lake: Christmas Island is absolutely stunningly beautiful ... and I actually just last year in October a few months ago went up and revisited the island, just to see some of my friends and just go back and enjoy the island for what it is.

MG: Greg Lake worked for the Department of Immigration for six years. By the time he quit, he'd worked in some very senior roles. When the Labor Government reopened the Manus Island and Nauru detention centres in 2012, Greg was director of offshore processing in the department.

I called him up a few weeks ago, because I wanted to ask him what the policy of stopping the boats meant, in practice, and what it was like for the people putting it into action. Greg had begun at the department as an economist, working on skilled migration policy. On Christmas Island, he'd taken a different role, as a media liaison.

GL: Yeah look, Christmas Island was my first experience of anything to do with refugees and asylum seekers in Australia ... And I started up there as a media person ... That was in 2010, the beginning of 2010. I have to say as a single guy earning relatively good money it was a pretty amazing experience.

MG: Very soon, he was promoted to director of operations.

GL: So, I moved from what was fairly independent role with journalists into a very operationally responsible role and have a lot more to do with oversight of how detainees were treated inside the detention centre and how the boat arrivals process was handled, so a massive jump and a massive leap for me into an area that I was otherwise relatively unfamiliar with.

I found it challenging of course but ... it didn't take long to get into a rhythm and feel like I had a real opportunity here to really influence the experience of people in detention.

MG: This was back in 2010, after Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had shut down the detention centre on Nauru. Manus had been closed since 2004. Australia's

immigration detention centres were located on the mainland, and Christmas Island.

GL: At the time in 2010 it was fortunate that we could turn our decisions on the question of how to maximise welfare for people in detention.

So, it's not criminal detention, it's not designed as a punishment ... so the idea is that you're only in detention for the purposes of concluding certain administrative processes, if you like, or at least that's what it's like or it was like in the past ...

However, in administrative detention, what you do is you try and ensure that people have access to appropriate health, medical, food, catering. Things like education support, things like legal support... given access to things like contact with home, public access to media, both to contact journalists but also just to read the paper and go on Facebook. All of those things form a part of how you look after a person while they're in administrative detention so while you remove their liberties by putting them in a centre and putting a big fence around them you try and normalise life inside that centre as much as possible. That's what you do if you're behaving like somebody who wants to maximise welfare and make sure people aren't as damaged.

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[Audio from *ABC Radio News*, 17 April 2010]

Elizabeth Jackson, presenter: Immigration authorities on Christmas Island are bracing themselves for a hectic weekend after an influx of 200 new asylum seekers in the past 48 hours. The detention facilities on the island are seriously over capacity. Asylum seekers are being placed wherever there's room and tensions are building.

MG: And so, this is a time when there are lots of lots of people arriving, lots of boats arriving?

GL: Yep. That's right. I mean the boat arrivals were two or three times a week on a good week and more on another week and so large, large numbers of people coming to the island, the expansion of the population in detention even just on Christmas Island was a massive challenge to us.

[Audio from *Ten News*, 15 December 2010]

Ron Wilson, newsreader: ... But first this morning, Prime Minister Julia Gillard has cut short her holiday to personally deal with Australia's latest asylum tragedy. Babies and

children were among 80 people on an Indonesian fishing boat which crashed into rocks at Christmas Island. As many as 50 Iraqi and Iranian refugees are feared dead...

MG: What was it like when you got news of, you know, a boat that had had had sunk or people that had died?

GL: We found out a lot about when interceptions were likely and when boats were expected, and it was remarkable how often it happened that boats that were expected just simply didn't show up... And so sometimes what would happen is you'd just have a few people in detention who said my family are supposed to be on a boat that left Indonesia, you know, two months ago and it still hasn't arrived and I'm worried about them.

We knew all the time weekly there were boats that didn't make it in 2010, and you couldn't always know how many people were on board – and you couldn't always know exactly the, you know, what happened to these boats, but what you knew for a fact was that there were a lot of boats going down and ... quite a few times the Navy was successful in arriving and picking up whoever was left.

But we'd get calls quite regularly that there were boats that had been intercepted, but were taking on water and there were a number of people in the water and of course the Navy had no idea how many people they were looking for at that point, and so we'd have phone calls saying you need to be ready first thing in the morning when the Navy boat arrives back with the survivors, because we had people who'd been in the water for who knows how many hours. And that means a whole bunch of medical challenges etcetera, which we had to work through.

So, had some very confronting experiences, which we knew daily was happening and it was a combination of the humanity of it and seeing the survivors and their families dealing with the grief and the guilt, the survivors guilt or the grief of lost ones.

MG: It's a pretty heavy situation to deal with for the staff as well.

GL: Yeah. Yeah, look I mean it that when people say you know, what they did to stop the boats was stupid, why don't we let boats come and, you know, when they do let's welcome them into Australia. I don't—I think that's a deficient policy simply because they don't think this operation of people smugglers, in putting people on these boats and sending them across a dangerous stretch of water is at all appropriate and should be anything that we should accept as Australians ... And the kinds of organisations that prepare these trips are lying and deceitful organisations who give false hope and are often heavily involved in other international organised crime activities around people. Movement and trafficking guns and weapons, drugs, any

number of other industries ... but um, I just I just can't buy the idea that somehow boats are ok. I just think that makes no sense at all.

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MG: That's the kind of sentiment we often hear from politicians too, when they talk about people smugglers. Like Kevin Rudd, in 2009:

Kevin Rudd: 'People smugglers are the vilest form of human life. They trade on the tragedy of others. That's why they should rot in jail, and in my own view, rot in hell.'

MG: But I wanted to know what Aziz thought.

A: Let me talk about the role, the role of the smugglers. The smugglers are very, very smart peoples ... Hard to find them ... They always hiding themselves. But in their first role they play as a lifesaver but in their second role they play as a killer. So the role that they play as a lifesaver is, you run away from a danger and you are looking for a tiny ropes or stick that you can just hold it to save your lives ... But on the other hand we call them killer because they always cheating people, they don't tell the truth. They say okay, we gonna put you in a ship. But when the day of the journey comes, you will find out only a rickety boats, which is a fishing boat and very old boat.

MG: And once you see that old boat, it's too late. You're on it, and there's no safe way of changing your mind.

A: If you get off the boats, that you wanna swim back to the shore, it's a really long distance, you can't make it, you gonna die. And if you remain on the boat also you gonna die. So what option you have? There is there are no other option you have so you gonna stay in that boat. Okay, let's go.

We don't trust them because, you never see them. From the first day you come and they take your money and everythings. You never see them. Until the last day you get out of that place, you never see them... So I think those people are getting advantage of us as like, asylum seekers ... who are fleeing the war and the persecution in their country.

MG: Even though you know that you can't trust the people smugglers, and you've tried once and you've seen people die already, you still decided to get on that boat. You know for me, it's just so extraordinary to hear that and to ... Yeah, I've been sitting here trying to imagine what it might, might be like to be in a position to make that decision.

And I ... there's just nothing in my life that leads me to be able to comprehend what that must feel like.

A: I know it's hard for you or for many other people to comprehend that kind of situations, but honestly for me what I did was, I just overcome my fear and the reason why even I decided to overcome my fear is because I do not have any other options. Although I don't trust them, although I know the journey is risky, I know, and I know that it's like, death or life so what else I that I do have on my hands.

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MG: Between 2009 and 2012, when Greg was in senior roles within the immigration department, an estimated 610 people drowned trying to make it to Australia by boat. Julia Gillard had taken over from Kevin Rudd, but the Labor government was still under pressure.

[Audio from news clip]

Newsreader: The latest Galaxy poll shows the Labor government is fighting for survival, with only three in 10 voters saying they would vote for the party in the next election.

[Audio from 7News]

Newsreader: Julia Gillard is seeking to restore her authority as prime minister, tackling the asylum seeker crisis with new vigour ...

Newsreader: Responding to pleas from her marginal seat holders to muscle up on the issue.

GL: It was only really I think as the government realised it was on its last legs in 2012 that it said, we've gotta do something as a dealbreaker, game changer, and came up with a whole new policy framework ... Which instead of turning on the question of maximising welfare and moving people as quickly as possible into the Australian community with support once they arrive, we move to a policy that said you'll never come into the Australian community.

While you're in detention you won't have access to things that give you good outcomes, and we're not as interested in your welfare as we are in sending a message of deterrence.

MG: So where did the policy of deterrence come from? As Greg said, in 2012, the Labor government was looking for a 'game changer'. That's not surprising, when you realise that boat arrivals can make or break governments in Australia. When Australia first tried offshore detention, it was announced in September 2001 – two months before the federal election. And in 2010, political pressure about the boats was one of the reasons that Kevin Rudd was deposed by his deputy, Julia Gillard.

So, in 2012, the government sought advice from three men about what to do. Their names were Angus Houston, Michael L'Estrange and Paris Aristotle, and together, they made 22 recommendations. But it was only two recommendations that got all the headlines: the reopening of the detention centres on Nauru and Manus.

GL: Look, the recommendations were all geared around this notion of 'no advantage' ... And they really centred on things like ... establishing a processing capability in, Malaysia and Pakistan, so that people could actually access UNHCR assessments for their refugee status, earlier in the chain, if you like. It involved looking at things like ... some sort of third country resettlement possibly with New Zealand involved.

There was a whole suite of things which is saying, how do we construct a whole suite of policies, designed to both, stop people getting on a boat ... by giving them other options.

MG: Greg told me that the Government adopted, either in full or in part, all 22 of the expert panel's recommendations. But as he explained to me, adopting a recommendation is different from actually implementing it. Adopting it simply means making it part of your policy. An intention, if you like. So the recommendations about establishing safer pathways and a regional solution never happened. In fact, only a small number ever made it into real-world actions.

GL: And when they did, like the establishment of Manus and Nauru, they did it with this policy of deterrence as the underpinning thing, and so, missed the nuance that the expert panel was trying to offer.

MG: In practice, deterrence directed every aspect of Australia's approach to boat arrivals.

GL: And instead of providing access to immigration officers who could provide information about their case and their immigration status, we would remove all access to Australia immigration officers so they couldn't ask any questions of those detainees, as a regular part of their day.

And instead of giving them access to funded legal services we would remove legal services and not only the services but actually remove the legal avenues that they

might go through to challenge any decision that's made about their circumstances by under the Immigration Act.

And so, as you chip away at all of those things, a person's ability to take control of their situation, to feel a sense of hope, to have decisions made, make decisions for themselves instead of having them made for them is undermined, and a person loses the capability to actually feel a sense of future because they are institutionalised in that circumstance. And you could do that across everything.

So that's at the kind of legal level, but you could also do it at the practical level, so you actually allocate things like shampoo, for when someone's shampoo runs out, and you determine when they can have a shower and for how long, and you basically take control of every circumstance or every factor of their life inside the fence. And it's incredibly demoralising and ultimately institutionalisation, the removal of legal options, and no way of contacting family and accessing appropriate health services leads to a person losing hope.

MG: Just there, Greg confirmed something that both Aziz and Manus Island psychologist John Zammit had suspected but couldn't know for sure – that the sense of hopelessness was a deliberate part of the Australian Government's policy.

GL: Deterrence, at its most fundamental level, means creating an environment that is worse than the place people are fleeing from, because if it's not worse, there's no deterrence. And so it's very knowing that these strategies are intended to create an horrific environment that is supposed to make people unhappy.

And so, you know, it's no surprise to me that we hear stories of people who are so broken that they commit acts of self-harm and they commit acts of protest and they commit acts of abuse ... And it's a horrible thing to realise that that that's what we've actually encouraged in our centres.

MG: In 2012, with deterrence well under way, Greg was appointed as Director of Offshore Processing and Transfers in the department of immigration, in Canberra, before taking on a three-month stint as the director on the ground in Nauru.

GL: When I was doing the offshore processing transfers job, the Director of Offshore Processing and Transfers, my role included the selection of the first group of people to go to Manus Island ...

So I was instructed ... to select the children on the basis of how young they looked because we wanted to send the message to people smuggling networks that even the youngest children were eligible for transfer to the island, which was very

confronting for me, looking at these photos and effectively deciding the fate of those children.

And at that point I went, hang on, everything I'm doing is lawful, everything I'm doing is a reasonable direction from a Minister and as a public servant it's my job not to so much question the decisions of the leaders but instead implement them with professional integrity. I asked myself the question: *well that's what this job leads to, is that something I wanna do ... Is it ethical for someone to stay in these roles? If you leave, could they replace you with someone who's actually going to make life worse for the detainees ...*

And at the end of the day, that was the tension that I couldn't resolve. I couldn't find a way to be a professional and do a good job implementing a policy of deterrence that is explicitly about removing hope. For people who should be offered dignity and support and protection. And when you put all that together it really doesn't matter who they replace you with, and it really doesn't matter how much you don't have a job to go and you've got no idea what this will mean for your future. Those two things, if you can't reconcile them, it's a pretty good sign you should leave. And so I did.

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MG: I asked Aziz what he thought of all this – about the debate in Australia over stopping the boats.

A: I think for Australian government for the Australian politician to keep talking about the drowning and on the sea ... I think there is another way that you can stop the drowning at the sea, which is ... try to facilitate the process for the people who are fleeing a risk of the death in the, in their country, facilitate for them, make a pathway for them in a neighbour country.

So, like let's say for me from Sudan, if I fled the war and the civil war there in Sudan and I'm seeking for asylum, so where should I go? Because I can go to the neighbour country but I will not get the safety that I want. I will still live in the risk of killed every minutes. So the only way for me to guarantee my safety and my life is I have to get far away, as far as I can. And that's the only reason that we came here.

MG: Maybe it's a silly question but I'm curious ... so I was wondering, when you were in Indonesia, did you think about trying to catch a plane to Australia?

A: Well, this is a really a weird question Michael. To be honest ... I don't have the possibility or the credibility to take a plane to come to Australia, because you know, getting a visa with my, with a person who like me, it's something, impossible. I can't get a visa to come to Australia ... And also, many, many people that I heard their stories, when I was Indonesia, they were try, they try and try to get a visa to come to Australia when they were in their country, but it is really impossible to get a visa ... I never thought about it.

And, honestly, for people who actually coming from a place which is very dangerous like me, like Sudan or let me say any other country which is there is a lot of war going on there – it's really hard for them to get an opportunity to, you know, find a visa to come to a country like Australia or to go to United States or any other country around the world. So, we always think of the alternative option which is like you have to risk your life ... So that's why we you know seek asylum through the dangerous places. Or through the dangerous way.

MG: So, two months after his first failed journey from Indonesia, Aziz got on a boat, again.

MG: You know it's amazing to me to hear you tell about your first boat trip when five of your friends drowned, and then to hear you say that you got on the boat again. I guess I was wondering what you think about, about that boat journey now?

A: Well, on my first attempt to cross the oceans, which is I didn't make it, and I have lost five of my friends, so that kind of memory is still exist in the back of my head and I'm gonna live with that memory I think for the rest of my life.

A: My feeling at that at that moment was, like, I just block it ... I don't wanna even like think about it. I don't think about how bad it is ... And one other thing that could do that if you were in a situation like that is try to be, try to overcome your fear, try to not think about it, about the, the badness or the goodness, try to not, you know, even think more and more and more. Try to feel it. Feel. Not thinking. Because at that, you know, in that situation thinking can't help you. The only thing can help you is the feeling.

And also you can try to image, next like, after the journey, maybe my life's gonna be better, maybe I'm gonna be in a safe place, so you always try to, see, try to jump one step, which means the step that you gonna jump is the risk that you gonna take. So the step off the boat and the oceans you gonna jump in. Just try think about like my life next, what will be. I will be in a safe place and I will be able to, you know, reunited with my family and I will be able to support my family. I will be able to, you know, like fulfil my dreams.

MG: Feeling and not thinking. There's something quite philosophical about the way Aziz describes this second boat journey. It's as though, by getting back on that boat, he caught a glimpse of another part of himself.

A: You know when I got on the boat with, you know, the guys, the only thing that I ... I personally was think about it is like, what kind of human being am I? And I couldn't find any descriptions for the kind of human being that who, you know, I am. And like everyone on that boat was, you know, shocked and was, and was terrified and was devastated and was nervous, except me.

They were really, really, really, you know, scared. And some of them, they were screaming, some of them they were like, you know, silent, they don't even talk to each other ... I don't actually even know how to describe you their feeling at that moment, but the only thing that I saw on their faces were the fear.

But for me personally ... I was just laying down. I put my, I had a jacket, I put it as a pillow on my head, and I just like laying down ... I keep saying to myself ... *we gonna make it, we gonna make, we gonna make it.* And I keep repeating that: *we gonna make it, we gonna make it, we gonna make it.*

MG: Aziz's second boat trip came to an end somewhere in the Indian Ocean.

A: After we spend three days or four days on the boat around seven o'clock ... I was sleeping and ... when I woke up I saw the Navy ship just came, came close to us ... and then the Navy ship send one small boat and they came to us and in that boat there were only three Australian sailors and ... they were interrogating with me because I was the only guy that speak English.

MG: They were taken aboard the ship. And that was when he was first given his number.

A: The first day when we came on the ship, we, you know, they took my names away from me ... they don't call me Aziz. They just call me QNK002, which is three letters, and then in the other, like when they put them in a context, they say Quebec November Kilowatt 002.

MG: Then, the navy took Aziz and his boat mates to Christmas Island.

MG: I was wondering if you could describe what it was like when you first arrived and what did you see and what did you think, how did you feel?

A: When we came there we were just hugging each other and we were you know smiling and that, and we were just saying to ourself that finally we did this.

Although we risk, we risk our life but finally we did this together, everyone was smiling, you know, smiling and they were chatting and we haven't slept that night actually. We spent all the night we just talking to each other ... and then the early morning ... I just call my parents and I say hello and I just I arrived safely in Christmas Island, and so don't worry about me and I will let you know for more informations or if there is any progress.

MG: And what did they say, were they happy to hear from you?

A: And when I call them first like I was really excited and even my parents they were really excited because finally I did the journey and they were actually worry a lot about me about that, the way that I'm not going to make that. But I did it finally, and my dad, he was really smiling and he was really happy and he said finally I succeed to send you in a safe place.

And then I even I spoke with my mum, the same thing she said to me, she said like – oh man, we just praying for you to get in a safer place and finally you did now, so look after yourself and just let us know if there is any progress.

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MG: Next time on *The Messenger*...

A: We already finished up our interviews and everything so we need to know what's going to happen to us ... So this moment we thought about it and we said okay let's change the game. So... when we change our plan, the way we change it is like, 'Okay, let's go on hunger strike.'

Hunger strike was a part of our rights and it's a peaceful and it's a very strong, it's strong. So the only way we can send message is the hunger strike ... And that was the only moment that when the entire world knew about this detention centre.

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To find out more about The Messenger, and to subscribe, visit wheelercentre.com/themessenger. The Messenger is a co-production of Behind the Wire and the Wheeler Centre. It's produced by Michael Green, André Dao, Hannah Reich, Bec Fary, with Jon Tjhia and Sophie Black and the team at the Wheeler Centre. Theme music by Raya Slavin. Thanks to Ben Doherty and Angelica Neville, and also to Claire McGregor and our team of volunteer transcribers.

Behind the Wire is a volunteer-run oral history project that helps people who've experienced immigration detention in Australia tell their stories. To find out more and to support their work, head to behindthewire.org.au.