

THE PROMISED LAND: Foreign Correspondent Tuesday February 5 at 8pm



Two young men escape the misery of Manus Island to forge new lives in North America. Reporter Eric Tlozek charts their progress and their pitfalls over 18 months.

On his sleepless nights, Imran paces the floor grappling with ghosts from half a world away and many months past.

“I’m wide awake and I call my friends’ names. ‘Hey Zaina! Hey Faisal! Where are you?’ But they’re not here, they’re on Manus.” Imran, 24, Rohingya refugee who spent nearly five years on Manus Island.

But come daylight, Imran can revel in his new home - Chicago, 14,000 kilometres from Manus. It’s been more than seven years since, aged 16, he fled persecution in Myanmar. Along the way he was held hostage by people smugglers and detained in Indonesia before making his fateful journey to Christmas Island. Now, thanks to a refugee deal with the US, he has a job and is finishing school.

“I’m free, that’s all that matters to me. People have been welcoming and I am loved. So, it’s home, it definitely feels like home.” Imran.

An old friend of Imran’s from Manus is also making a new life. Amir was 14 when he left Iran. Now 25 and living in Vancouver on Canada’s west coast, Amir has a job in tourism and is set to study law. His good fortune flows from a chance meeting with



Chelsea Taylor, a Melbourne nurse who worked on Manus and talked her Canadian-Australian parents into sponsoring him.

“You rescued me from an island which so many governments and so many countries were not able to do.” Amir, to Chelsea’s parents Wayne and Linda in Vancouver.

Correspondent Eric Tlozek first met Amir and Imran on Manus Island more than 18 months ago. He follows them from behind the wire to their new lives in North America in the most intimate and detailed account so far of life for Manus refugees.

In Canada and the US, Tlozek meets Australian expats, like Wayne Taylor and fashion designer Fleur Wood, who are pitching in to help ex-detainees now that Australia is done with them.

“When I heard about them being resettled in America I knew how little help they’d be getting.” Fleur Wood, co-founder of Australian Diaspora Steps Up.

Nearly 500 ex-Manus and Nauru detainees are scattered across the US, receiving only brief and basic support from the government. Wood’s group hustles to find them housing, bedding and clothing.

When Wood searches for some Rohingyas who are just off Nauru, she ends up at a rundown building in North Chicago where four men share a tiny apartment, eking out casual work, dishwashing and cleaning. One is seriously ill.

After five years on Nauru, these men aren’t coping with their newfound freedom in America. They still want to come to Australia. Bizarrely, some even want to go back to Nauru.

But for those who are faring better, life is what you make of it.

“You can be in the worst place on this planet and make it a heaven for yourself. And you can be in the best country on this planet and make it a hell for yourself.” Amir in Vancouver

The Promised Land airs on Foreign Correspondent on ABC TV at 8 pm Tuesday February 5 and on the ABC News Channel at 7.30 pm Saturday February 9 and 5.30 pm Sunday February 10; also on iview.

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