

A Nun's New Habit

A Documentary of Love, Compassion and Refugees by Robyn Hughs

"A truthfully daring documentary, compelling to watch, and guaranteed to bring a tear to the eye of the most hardened of hearts." Benalla Ensign

A **STUDY GUIDE** BY KATY MARRINER



<http://www.metromagazine.com.au>



SCREEN
AUSTRALIA

<http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>



SISTER CARMEL SITS NEXT TO A PHOTO OF JOHN BEDE POLDING (FOUNDER OF THE SISTERS OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN)

ABOUT A NUN'S NEW HABIT

A Nun's New Habit tells the story of Sister Carmel Wauchope, a sister of the Good Samaritans who resides in the outback town of Whyalla in South Australia, not far from the Baxter detention centre, which closed in 2007.

With integrity and determination, Sister Carmel fights for those in need. Her concern for the plight of asylum seekers who have been detained in Baxter detention centre and the ongoing psychological damage and trauma suffered after their release has been the focus of her work since 2001. We follow her story as she visits the centre giving ongoing support to those who have been detained for many years, participates in protests, lobbies politicians and works to raise community awareness. Through her we learn of the ongoing hardships the asylum seekers face and how important it is to maintain a sense of love, compassion and humanity in today's world.

To the asylum seekers in Baxter Detention Centre, Sister Carmel is 'Aunty'. She brings roses and hope to the boys and men she visits. In return,

they openly adore her and eagerly return her generosity of spirit. For Sister Carmel, religious tolerance is of the utmost importance and her respect for the refugees and their Muslim faith is an inspiration. In revealing the details of the asylum seekers' lives, *A Nun's New Habit* encourages empathy and understanding. Like Wauchope, we question the policies, practices and attitudes that have put innocent people's lives on hold.

A Nun's New Habit also allows the audience to experience life as a Good Samaritan nun and the fulfilment and challenges Sister Carmel's vocation presents. Why did she choose life as a nun and has it lived up to her expectations? Did she ever consider marriage and children? Sister Carmel allows us into every facet of her life, her choices, her decisions, and motivation to keep going, even when her health starts to fail. We realise that she has no regrets.

This study guide to accompany *A Nun's New Habit*, a 56-minute documentary by Robyn HUGHAN and EMERGINT, has been written for secondary students. It provides information and suggestions for learning activities in English, Ethics, Media, National Politics, Religion and Society, SOSE, VCE VET Community Services and curriculum projects discussing the issue of asylum seekers.

In narrating the personal story of Sister Carmel, HUGHAN's documentary raises awareness and fosters understanding of the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. *A Nun's New Habit* explores the value of love, compassion, respect and tolerance. The documentary allows teachers and students to discuss social justice and promote social action.

KEY CREATIVES

Robyn Hughan – Writer, Director, Co-Producer

Robyn Hughan has previously worked as an actor and acting teacher in film, television and theatre. In recent years, Hughan has turned her attention to writing, directing and producing for film and television. Many of these projects have been related to human rights. In 2002, Hughan worked as researcher and had a Film Victoria supported 'producer's attachment' on the documentary series *Tales from a Suitcase – The Afghan Experience*, which screened on SBS. Following this, she was researcher for writer Mac Gudgeon on 'The Other War', a proposed political mini-series developed by December Films. She was also researcher for the development of a documentary proposal entitled 'Living in Limbo' about unaccompanied minors arriving by boat from countries such as Afghanistan.

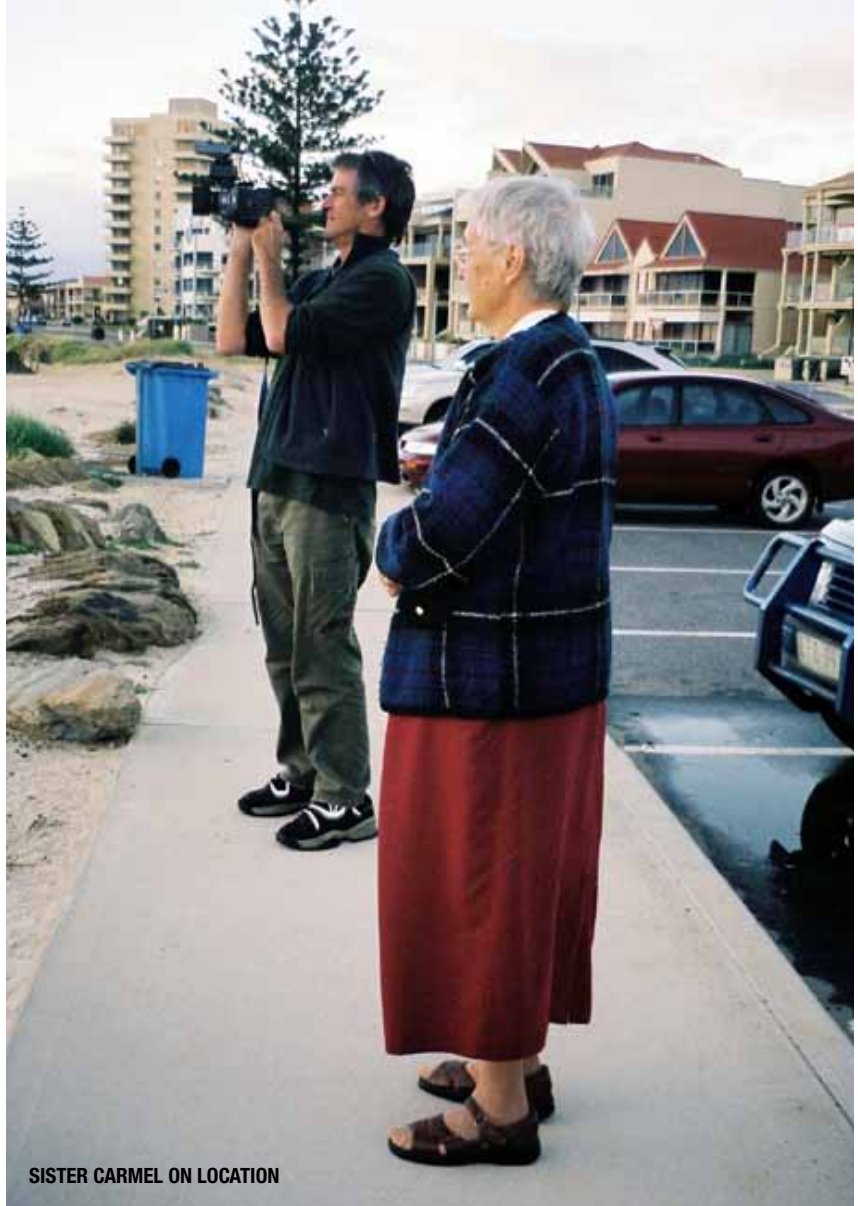
More recently, Hughan wrote, directed and produced the short film *Crimes of the Heart* (2005), which raises awareness of child sexual abuse.

Veronica Sive – Co-Producer

Veronica Sive's credits as a producer include *Photograph* (Sarah Lambert, 2006), *Make it Real (to Me)*, *Outback Opera*, *More Than Horseplay* and *Above & Beyond*.

Stefan Markworth – Editor

Stefan Markworth is a filmmaker whose work illuminates and humanises sensitive issues of social justice and human rights. His directing credits include *Out of Place – Out of Time* (2004) and *Love And Razor Wire* (2005).



USING A NUN'S NEW HABIT IN THE CLASSROOM

Teachers may select from the following information and activities to support students' viewing and close analysis of *A Nun's New Habit*.

Background

There are many reasons why people are forced to leave their homeland as refugees.

Refugees are usually fleeing because of a well-founded fear of specific kinds of persecution related to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The persecution is usually a serious punishment or some

significant disadvantage inflicted by a government or by individuals or a group that the government cannot or will not control.

The 1951 Convention on Refugees imposes a major obligation on countries not to deport or expel people to countries where they face persecution or risk serious human rights violation.

Admittedly it is difficult for government authorities to assess whether someone is a legitimate refugee. People do not always escape their countries with documentation that proves who they say they are or supports their claims of persecution.

Australia's Migration Act of 1958 requires people who are not Australian citizens and who are unlawfully in Australia to be detained. Usually, unlawful non-citizens are people who

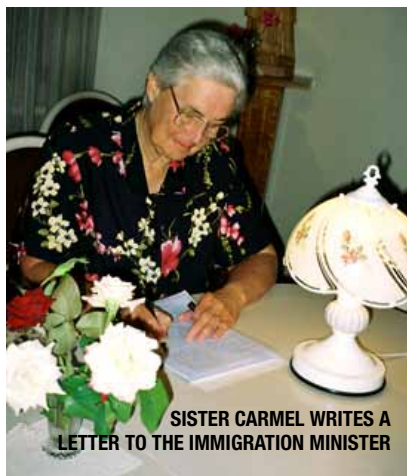


SISTER CARMEL WITH DAUGHTER OF REFUGEE, SEPARATED FROM HIS FAMILY FOR ELEVEN YEARS

have arrived in Australia without a visa, overstayed their visa or had their visa cancelled. Unless they are given legal permission to remain in Australia by being granted a visa, unlawful non-citizens must be removed from Australia as soon as reasonably practicable. This requirement reflects Australia's right to determine who is permitted to enter and remain in Australia and the conditions under which those who cannot remain may be detained and removed.

Australia's immigration detention policy was introduced in 1992 and has been maintained by successive governments. The main focus of the immigration detention policy is to ensure that people who arrive without lawful authority do not enter the Australian community until their identity and status have been properly assessed and they have been granted a visa.

In November 2007, a new government was elected. In August 2008 the temporary protection visa was abolished



SISTER CARMEL WRITES A LETTER TO THE IMMIGRATION MINISTER

and the government claimed it had ended 'The Pacific Solution'. However, detention and processing of asylum seekers will continue on Christmas Island where Australian immigration law does not apply and access to supporters like Sister Carmel is made impossible. The construction of a high security detention centre on Christmas Island was recently completed at a cost of nearly \$400 million.

Definitions

- **Refugee:** A refugee is a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.
- **Asylum seeker:** An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country of origin, has applied for recognition as a refugee in another country, and is awaiting a decision on their application.
- **Unauthorised Arrivals:** Australia detains unauthorised arrivals while their refugee applications are decided. Those found to be refugees according to Australian migration law and who pass medical and security tests are granted a temporary protection visa. Unauthorised arrivals who are found not to be refugees under Australian migration law remain in detention until they are removed from the country.
- **Detention centre:** Immigration Detention Centres are used to detain unauthorised arrivals, those in breach of their visa conditions, people refused entry at Australia's international airports and over-stayers.
- **Mandatory Detention:** Mandatory detention for asylum seekers arriving on Australian shores was introduced in 1992. Those arriving by boat and claiming asylum were regarded as illegals and perceived to be a threat to national security. During this time, asylum seekers could be detained indefinitely.
- **Temporary Protection Visa:** A three-year temporary protection visa for refugees released into the community was introduced in 1999. The visa prohibited refugees from applying to bring their families to Australia and from going overseas to visit them.

Director's Statement

- Use Robyn Hughsan's statement (see boxed text right) to generate discussions of *A Nun's New Habit* and the filmmaking process.

BEFORE VIEWING A NUN'S NEW HABIT

- A vocation can be defined as a calling to undertake a specific occupation. Do you know someone who sees his or her job in this way? The term is often used to describe a divine call to do certain work for the good of humankind. Nuns and priests are often said to have a vocation to serve God. Have you ever met a member of a religious order? Is anyone in your family or extended family a member of a religious order? What do you know about the way they live their lives?

Teachers working in denominational schools may be able to ask staff who have chosen a religious profession to speak to the class about their vocation and how it influences their personal choices and day-to-day existence.

- *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*

This statement is taken from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Drawing on your knowledge of national and international issues, identify and discuss individuals and groups of people who are denied this right.

- What do you know about Australia's response to refugees and asylum seekers?

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As a campaigner for human rights, I became involved with the refugee situation years ago, specifically after working on the SBS series *Tales from a Suitcase – The Afghan Experience*. Following a subsequent visit to the Baxter detention centre, I met with Sister Carmel and observed how passionate she was about the refugees and the continuing mental deterioration of those detained in Baxter.

After filming a short interview with Sister Carmel, I knew I had found a person with rare qualities. However, what interested me even more was the fact that she was a nun and I wondered what was really motivating her. I decided, as a filmmaker, that there was only one way to find out, and this was to follow her everyday life. I spent much time residing in the convent in Whyalla, living [with] and filming Sister Carmel and the two other resident Sisters.

Sister Carmel quickly became the main focus of the documentary, intercut with those who are part of her life. What drives her and how this relates to her faith becomes visible as the documentary unfolds. Filming of her daily life gives us intimate access to her as a person. Carmel quickly dispels the myth that nuns live a completely structured life without room for spontaneity or a sense of humour.

A sense of humanity and caring for others is paramount, no matter who the person is, or what the circumstances. Religious tolerance is of the utmost importance to her, hence her sympathetic attitude to Islam. There are times when she's alarmed by world events, but she always manages to come back to the teachings of the bible and the strength it gives her.

Interwoven with Sister Carmel's personal journey, is the storyline of the refugees in detention and the ongoing psychological damage felt by those who have been released. We experience this by entering Sister Carmel's external and inner world: a Christian whose heart extends to refugees of all religious persuasions.

The path to making this film was not an easy one. *A Nun's New Habit* is an independent production and has been made with almost no funding. However, I have always been adamant that the film would be completed. In my view, the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia has been deplorable and although the current government is heading in the right direction, this is part of our history that should never be repeated.'

– Robyn Hughsan



DIRECTOR ROBYN HUGHAN



SISTER CARMEL WITH
SISTERS OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

AFTER VIEWING A NUN'S NEW HABIT

- Allow students to share their personal impressions of Sister Carmel Wauchope and the stories of the asylum seekers detained in Baxter Detention Centre.
- Did you find the story told by *A Nun's New Habit* inspiring?
- What will be achieved by telling Sister Carmel's story?

Close Analysis

Sister Carmel Wauchope

'So she's just an absolute individual.'
– Bernadette

- Make a list of adjectives that describe Sister Carmel. Use a moment or a statement from *A Nun's New Habit* to match each adjective. Some words you may like to use include: inspirational, funny, compassionate and determined.
- Bernadette acknowledges that Sister Carmel is a woman of action. Father Tony's claim, 'Carmel can't keep still', endorses Bernadette's opinion of her aunt.

What moments in *A Nun's New Habit* prove this judgement of Sister Carmel to be true?

- What drives Sister Carmel to do what she does?
- *There are times when I really get tired and think I don't care about anybody. I just want to be myself ... I think one of my biggest dangers is that I will not give myself time, that everyone else's needs are more important than mine.*
– Sister Carmel

I have lots of self doubts and ... I think I perceive that I fail people often and that's something that I don't know whether it hurts my goodness or it hurts my pride.
– Sister Carmel

Why do you think the filmmaker included these claims?

- *As I got older I realised how much compassion there was in my home. I know that we tell Mum now that she used to tuck us into bed when we were little kids at night. And she said, just say a prayer and think about the little boys and girls that haven't got warm blankets tonight.*
– Sister Carmel

Carmel was a huge influence all through, you know, growing up. She was just something really special in all our lives, like my brothers and sisters lives as well. And the sense of social justice that we've picked up from probably Auntie Carmel.

– Bernadette

Sister Carmel acknowledges her mother's role in shaping her love and compassion for others and Bernadette acknowledges that Sister Carmel has given both her and her siblings a sense of social justice. Who has influenced your knowledge and understanding of issues of social justice?

- 'I probably have found adventure. I never thought about that. I must tell the others I found adventure.'
– Sister Carmel

Why do you think Sister Carmel is pleased with this description of her life?

- Sister Carmel will soon turn eighty. Given all that you have learnt about Sister Carmel, write a speech that would be made at her birthday party.

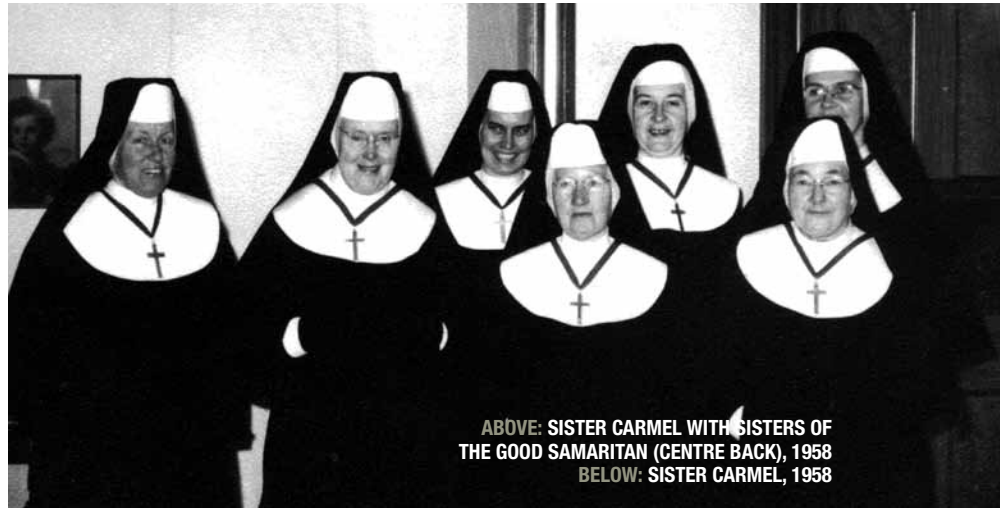
A life of faith

‘At the end of our life we’ll be judged on love, not on achievements or popularity or anything, but we will be judged on love.’

– Sister Carmel

Sister Carmel is a member of the Religious Congregation of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan.

- Having thought of her sister’s announcement that she would become a nun as madness, Sister



ABOVE: SISTER CARMEL WITH SISTERS OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN (CENTRE BACK), 1958
BELOW: SISTER CARMEL, 1958



L-R: SISTER CARMEL IN HER HABIT, 1958;
SISTER CARMEL PROTESTING AT WHYALLA, 2005



Always in the back of my mind was it was only a temporary arrangement, but I know I was pleasantly surprised. I thought it would be as hard, you know, as hard. You know, that was my biggest feeling, was being pleasantly surprised. And it was quite human and we didn’t think it was going to be quite human.

– Sister Carmel

Carmel grappled with her own realisation that she was being called to serve. Sister Carmel was just one month short of celebrating her nineteenth birthday when she entered the convent in 1949.

Use the following claims to discuss Sister Carmel’s decision to become a nun:

And I said talking about nuns, I said I don’t suppose either of them will be a nun, but if there’s one that’s going to be, it will be Carmel. She always had great belief in God and I think she was very honest in what she thought she should do.

– Peggy Wauchope

I think when I considered it, because I was only nineteen and in those days at nineteen you weren’t as experienced as people now at nineteen are. But the reason I did it was because I thought it was the right thing to do.

– Sister Carmel

‘I thought I would die of homesickness.’

– Sister Carmel

I believe that it is not half as bad for the one who goes as the people left behind, because I was going to something new. I think what I went to was this new group of people, that were all like me and we were all in the same boat.

– Sister Carmel

- *I remember, at one stage in my life that, I suppose, it was in my mid to late thirties, thinking, all I really want in the world is someone to love me for me, and to have children. And it was a real thing ... but I had to live through it and work through it and I kept on, because by that time I was aware that my deepest commitment was to this way of life. I suppose, talking in religious terms, this is where God wanted me to be. Gradually over the years, the love of God grows so strongly in you that, it doesn’t stop me from loving others, it actually makes you love others more. But I just had to make a choice which way I went. And that’s what I*



LEFT: SISTER CARMEL ON LOCATION
RIGHT: SISTER CARMEL PROTESTING AT
WHYALLA, 2005



did, I stayed, and I've never regretted it.

– Sister Carmel

In *A Nun's New Habit* Sister Carmel speaks openly and honestly about the challenges of choosing a religious life. Were you surprised by Sister Carmel's admissions?

- *But I used to think we were the original communists. It specifically says everything to be shared in common. Everybody has what they need but nothing more. But, as you can see we don't lack. And we don't lack because we share what we have.*

– Sister Carmel

We've all got something different to give. We need people that can do a lot of stuff and get it done. Imagine this place if they were all like me here. But then, we need a me here too!

– Sister Carmel

I suppose in community you get to know each other's good points and their foibles. That's part of living together, I think. It's really much the same as a marriage relationship really. It's relationship with each other.

– Sister Robyn

What insight does *A Nun's New Habit* provide about life in a religious community?

- 'Being a Christian is to be really counter cultural.'

– Sister Carmel

What do you think Sister Carmel means? Do you agree with her claim?

- The film is intercut with archival footage from *She Finds Adventure* (1957), which gives an insight into what being a nun was like at the time Sister Carmel became a Good Samaritan. Vatican II was the Vatican Council that from 1962 to 1965 abandoned the universal Latin liturgy, acknowledged ecumenism and made other reforms to the Catholic Church. Use the internet to find out more about life as a nun before Vatican II and after Vatican II. Use your findings to compile two written portraits that

when compared reveal the nature of the changes.

Good Samaritans

A samaritan is a charitable or helpful person.

The parable of the good Samaritan:

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance, a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and



DIRECTOR ROBYN HUGHAN AND SISTER CARMEL DURING PANEL DEBATE ON REFUGEE ISSUES

bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'

– Luke 10:30

- The story of the Good Samaritan highlights that there are those in society who could assist a fellow human being, but choose not to.

What do you think is the message of the parable of the Good Samaritan?

Can you think of a time when you have been a good samaritan?

Make your own video clip telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. You might like to offer an adaptation that sets the parable in contemporary society or in a particular setting such as the schoolyard or a workplace. Make careful decisions about the resources that you will use to help you tell the story. For example, will you use animation

or still photographs or will you ask your friends to act out the story?

Video clips telling the parable of the Good Samaritan can be found on YouTube. Teachers should view the video clips to assess their suitability for use in a secondary classroom.

- Do you know of other people who deserve to be called good samaritans? Working as a class make a list of modern day good samaritans. Choose a person from the list. Find out more about the person and how he or she works to serve others in society. Create a PowerPoint presentation to share your findings with others in the class.

Early in 2001, Sister Carmel had begun writing to detainees at the Woomera Detention Centre, also in outback South Australia, after a request from a local Catholic priest she knew. When her niece Bernadette suggested that Sister Carmel visit the Baxter Detention Centre she balked at the idea. Bernadette remembers:

She was really worried. She'd write letters and do huge amounts. And in the end I said you know, look here's a bloke that really needs you to go and visit, and I think it's time you went and did it. So, she needed a push to get in-

side the place. She was really worried about what she was going to see.

Sister Carmel was apprehensive about whether she would cope:

I don't know what I was afraid of. I suppose it was the great unknown; and I had heard stories of great injustices and suffering and I think sometimes you wonder how much suffering you can cope with.

- Use the following claims to initiate a discussion of Sister Carmel – good samaritan:

Never can I not forget her. And always I thinking about her, because she was my angel in there.

– Hassan

It's the Good Samaritan story really. I mean if somebody's been robbed or hurt or damaged in any way by somebody else, if we walk past those people and step over them and couldn't give a stuff about them, then I don't think we are human beings, I think we're just like the animals.

– Mathew, Torres Strait Islander and assistant at Community House

'She's got that real empathy and that kindness.'

– Bernadette

‘Carmel, I think whether she’d been a nun or wasn’t a nun she’d still be doing this work. Because I think that’s the kind of person she is.’

– Bernadette

Ever since we opened, Carmel has offered to be here, like on a voluntary basis. Carmel enjoys meeting with people and very good at conversation and for some people that come, that’s what they really need; just someone that can sit and listen. You know, she never likes someone walking out the door without accompanying them out.

– Sister Marie

‘... no matter what you’re talking about, Carmel can bring it back to something to do with refugees or individuals who are there at Baxter.’

– Father Tony

‘And it really affects her, you know, really emotionally it distresses her so much to see that amount of suffering.’

– Bernadette

‘I think those first sisters of ours, the Good Samaritans, they really had it hard.’

‘They had to forge the order. They had to work out which way we’d go and what kind of people we were going to be.’

– Sister Carmel

Sister Carmel is a Sister of the Good Samaritan. Her story of bringing hope to asylum seekers runs parallel to the history of the beginnings of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan in Australia over 100 years ago.

The Sisters of the Good Samaritan were founded by John Bede Polding, the first Archbishop of Australia in 1857. Polding, having witnessed the suffering and despair of many of the female convicts transported to colonial Australia, requested the formation of a congregation dedicated to helping the outcast and downtrodden.

The motto of the Sisters of the Good

Samaritan is *In Omnibus Glorificetur Deus* – In all things God may be glorified. The life of a Sister of the Good Samaritan is focused on the Benedictine vows of obedience, stability and conversion of life. The Sisters of the Good Samaritan are women of hope. They are committed to live in deeper communion with God and with each other and to welcome difference without judgement or prejudice. Their mission is one of compassion and justice.

- Divide the class into two groups. One group is responsible for the ‘Then’ task. One group is responsible for the ‘Now’ task.

Then – Find out more about the early history of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan. Share your findings with others by making a digital story.

Now – Find out more about the contemporary work of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan. Share your findings with others by making a digital story.

A digital story uses multimedia tools and visual and audio resources from personal archives. Most digital stories are approximately two to five minutes in length. Digital stories are a unique and powerful way to tell a story. You will need to construct a storyboard, write a script and source photographs to compose the story. Then there are other decisions. Who will narrate the story? What sounds and music will be part of the digital story? What is an appropriate title? You may want to provide a dedication. You should include end credits.

Further information about digital stories can be found on the website of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image <<http://www.acmi.net.au>> and by typing the term ‘digital stories’ into a reliable search engine.

- *We all work towards God, in our own way, and I’m doing it the Christian way and the Benedictine way, because that’s my life. They do it the Muslim way. Other people do it from their humanity. Like, I*

don’t think there’s one way.

– Sister Carmel

Do you live in a religiously tolerant society? Do you live in a religiously tolerant world?

Advocacy and activism

‘You feel as powerless as they are but you know that you’re not.’

– Sister Carmel

- An advocate is a person who supports or speaks in favour of another.

An activist is a person who uses vigorous campaigning to bring about social or political change.

Carmel has her own way of challenging the policies and system that deny those most in need of freedom.

Which description do you think best fits Sister Carmel’s work with asylum seekers?

- While Sister Carmel’s initial response to the protests that were staged at Woomera Detention Centre in 2002 was positive, she came to believe that the decision to help detainees escape was unwise given they had to live as fugitives until they were returned to detention.

Locate media reports from the time. Do you think the protest was worthwhile?

- *The Sisters have rocked up to, I think, to nearly all of our protests. I mean there are times, of course, when they’re out of town on other things, but they’ve been really great support in that area and usually come along with a banner or two. Very willing, very up front.*

– Rosemary Collinson,

Chairperson for Whyalla branch of Rural Australians for Refugees

By joining the protests of Rural Australians for Refugees, Sister Carmel along with other Australians living in rural and regional Australia pro-

tested against the former Howard Government's detention policy for asylum seekers.

Why does Sister Carmel value the work of the RAR?

Use the internet to learn more about Rural Australians for Refugees. What other organisations exist to support refugees and asylum seekers?

- Do you think *A Nun's New Habit* has the potential to influence government policy on the treatment of refugees seeking asylum in Australia?

Baxter Detention Centre

'And apparently, there's a psychologist that went through it that day and said, this place has been deliberately designed to send people mad, and it's succeeded!'

– Sister Carmel

Baxter Immigration Reception and Processing Centre was an Australian immigration detention facility near the town of Port Augusta in South Australia. It was the focus of much of the controversy concerning the mandatory detention of asylum seekers in Australia. It was located on part of the site of the Australian Defence Force's El Alamein Army Barracks and became operational in September 2002. It closed in August 2007. More than fifty detainees were transferred to a psychiatric hospital. Many of those released remain psychologically damaged.

- What does *A Nun's New Habit* reveal about the workings of Baxter Detention Centre? Photography and filming is not permitted in Australia's immigration detention centres. How does the filmmaker use visual cues and filmic techniques to portray Baxter Detention Centre?

The asylum seekers

'I just think what a pity with all this, beauty outside, all this wonder, and

all they see is dirt and sky. It's such a tragedy.'

– Sister Carmel

- *The letters make me feel quite inadequate that they are so grateful for so many tiny things. And they think I help them but I tell you what, I've learnt more from those kids than they ever learnt from me. Amazing, yeah! You put yourself in their place. You know, living in terror for the last five years and still being able to produce that.*

– Sister Carmel

I often think since I've met the refugees, particularly the ones I've met at Baxter, I've learnt many things. You know, these people were wonderful to me, even though I was part of a society that rejected them. And that I would hope, what I have learnt, is that I could keep on being so courteous to people who are rejecting me. I've found through them, that all you need to do is love people. And I suppose that is the good old Benedictine compassion isn't it? I think it taught me a lot too, as I said in what our ability is, if we really love we've got the ability to do anything.

– Sister Carmel

'But they just, they love her, those young men. They just think she's amazing.'

– Bernadette

*Dear Auntie,
When I receive your lovely letter, I am so glad, like I am free. It's your greatness to come and visit for me, and to give me patience and hope, like I am sitting with my family. I pray that in every way of life you will be successful. We hope that in this year we will free by your great prayers. Thankyou. All my love and prayers,
Your friend, Karar*

– Sister Carmel,
reading letter from detainee

Drawing on the above statements and other moments and statements from *A Nun's New Habit*, discuss the following questions.

How does Sister Carmel help the detainees?

What do Sister Carmel's stories make you realise about the men's characters, their lives and their fates?

What do her recollections and the comments made by her family and friends reveal about her relationship with the asylum seekers she visits?

*Dear Senator Vanstone,
I have known Hassan for over a year now and have come to admire his goodness and courage. However, I am increasingly concerned about his health. Hassan is suffering from severe depression. The children continuously ask him why he does not come to see them. But Hassan is open to danger if he returns to Iran.*

– Excerpt from letter Sister Carmel wrote to Senator Vanstone

Hassan is a refugee and former detainee of Baxter detention centre. After more than seven years Hassan received permanent residency. He is still waiting for the opportunity to be reunited with his children.

- What does Hassan's story highlight about the existence of an asylum seeker? How has Sister Carmel helped Hassan?
- What do the stories of the Baxter detainees tell us about the human spirit?
- During the years of the Howard Federal Government, asylum seekers were often labeled queue-jumpers, illegals, unlawful non-citizens. Do you think that these misconceptions about asylum seekers still persist?
- Working in small teams, use online news services and newspapers to locate news stories about people who have sought asylum in Australia. Read the articles and discuss the dimensions of each story.

Human rights and Australia's responsibility

'It is never illegal to seek asylum.'
– *A Nun's New Habit*

- What does Sister Carmel think of Australian society's response to asylum seekers?
- Australia prides itself on being about a fair go. When does *A Nun's New Habit* prove this view to be true? When does *A Nun's New Habit* challenge this view?
- *Isn't it unreasonable Ruddock keeps them locked up. These poor people, we should just let them go ... might have tuberculosis ... might have been a criminal ... might have, might have been working for a terrorist organisation. So, detention of people who arrive unlawfully, processing of them and preferably being able to send them home is the best result and the one we work for.*
– Philip Ruddock

Why do you think the filmmaker decided to include footage of Philip Ruddock, the then Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs?

- 'We are one, but we are many.'
- Sister Carmel claims that she feels like a hypocrite when she sings the chorus of 'We are Australian'. Listen to the song's lyrics. Do you think her hesitation is valid?
- *I don't think it's right! I think they should be better cared for but also I don't think it's just to lock them up like that, without more being done. It's against all Christian principles I think.*
– Peggy Wauchope

Peggy Wauchope was 102 years old when she was interviewed by the filmmaker of *A Nun's New Habit*. What did Peggy's denunciation of Australia's detention policy make you think?

- World Refugee Day occurs on 20 June. On World Refugee Day, we

turn our attention to the millions of refugees who live without material, social and legal protection. Use the internet to find out more about World Refugee Day.

Production Values

- Examine the opening and closing sequence of *A Nun's New Habit*. What are the filmmaker's intentions?
- Discuss the filmmaker's decision to use:
 - » Still photographs
 - » Archival prints, paintings and drawings
 - » Archival news footage
 - » Archival footage from *She Finds Adventure* (1957)
- The filmmakers take us to Baxter Detention Centre. What purpose do these scenes serve? What other locations are used in *A Nun's New Habit*? How do these locations tell the story of Sister Carmel and the asylum seekers that she has helped?
- What part does music play in *A Nun's New Habit*? Listen to 'Little Boats' <<http://www.cyndiboste.com.au/buylittleboats.html>>, 'Rainbow over Baxter' and 'Sick Heart' <<http://www.soundvault.com.au/Alyce%20Platt.htm>> the songs that are part of the soundtrack, to help you answer this question.
- Why do you think the filmmakers decided to call the documentary *A Nun's New Habit*?

Read

- Read 'Rare spirit of compassion' written by Farah Farouque and published in *The Age* on 6 June 2009.
- Read 'Refugee Policy Under The Rudd Government – The First Year', an address to the Refugee Council of Australia given by Senator Chris Evans, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship on 17 November 2008. The address can be found at <[\[immi.gov.au/media/speeches/2008/ce081117.htm\]\(http://immi.gov.au/media/speeches/2008/ce081117.htm\)>.](http://www.minister.</div><div data-bbox=)

Teachers will find this resource useful in informing their knowledge and understanding of the current Federal Government's response to refugees and asylum seekers. While senior school students will also find the address helpful, it should be edited for use in junior and middle school classes.

Review

Read the following comments that have been made about *A Nun's New Habit*:

This remarkable documentary portrait of Sister Carmel Wauchope from Whyalla is not in any way a soapy sketch of someone dedicated to two 'R's' – religion and refugees. It is a story of someone, just like thousands of other ordinary Australians, who developed a fiery, feisty and determined habit following the Tampa period and the ghastly treatment of asylum seekers during the period of the Woomera and Baxter detention centres. A Nun's New Habit makes you both smile and feel proud of being an ordinary Australian. It is a dedication to the Rural Australians for Refugees' advocates as well as to the many others around Australia, who did not – did never – relent from their determination to express their fierce stand of taking a 'Not In My Name' position when it came to the treatment of refugees during the Howard years.
– Jack Smit, Project Safecom

A Nun's New Habit is a fascinating profile of an ordinary religious sister with extraordinary compassion for some of the most marginalised people in Australian society – refugees and asylum seekers. Your film would be an excellent educational tool for senior primary and secondary students in units of Religious Education, Politics, Social Science, Legal Studies, Ethics or Religion and Society. It is also a wonderful contribution to the promotion of religious life, where professed women and men, in the name of Christ and in the spirit of their founders, seek out the lost, poor and broken of our own day, and advocate on their behalf. A Nun's New Habit gets behind the slogans and stere-

otypes of the immigration debate and religious life by presenting the humanity of the people involved.

– Rev Dr Richard Leonard SJ,
Director Catholic Television

- Write your own review of *A Nun's New Habit*. Spend some time re-researching the qualities of a review before you begin. You will need to decide on the type of publication that will feature your review. Are you writing for the television guide of a broadsheet newspaper? Will your review appear in a journal devoted to film? Use vocabulary and adopt a tone that best suits the publication that you have chosen. Ask your teacher to act as your editor.

Respond

The following topics could be discussed via written text responses, debates, panel discussions and online forums.

- 'Carmel Wauchope is dedicated to social justice.' Discuss.
- '*A Nun's New Habit* is a celebration of Sister Carmel's ministry.' Discuss.
- '*A Nun's New Habit* changes the way we see the world.' Do you agree?
- '*A Nun's New Habit* shows us how we can become a more just and compassionate society.'
- 'The hopes and dreams of most asylum seekers are not so different from our own.'

When does *A Nun's New Habit* show this claim to be true?

- 'A documentary of love, compassion and refugees.' Is this an apt tagline for *A Nun's New Habit*?
- Is Australia's refugee policy too strict?

Create

- 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances

under which they come.'

– John Howard,
former Prime Minister of Australia

'Under the Howard government many people were left to languish in detention for years on end – even after they were found to be refugees.'

– Chris Evans, Minister for
Immigration and Citizenship

John Howard's notorious 2001 election speech summarised his government's policy on asylum seekers. Use online newspaper services to locate news reports, feature articles, opinions, editorials, letters to the editors and cartoons about the Howard Federal Government's response to asylum seekers. Search your library's audiovisual resources catalogue and use the internet to find video and audio segments about the Howard Federal Government's response to asylum seekers. Turn your classroom into a time capsule by creating an installation that makes a statement about the Howard Federal Government's response to asylum seekers. Invite other classes to visit your installation and learn more about this period in Australia's recent history.

- Design an A5 flyer that would be used to advertise *A Nun's New Habit*. Show students examples of these flyers that are usually placed in the foyer of cinemas. As a class, discuss the format, purpose, written language and visual language of this type of publication.

Research

Working in a small group, complete one of the following research tasks. Present your research to the class. You may choose the format of your presentation.

Research project 1

'Labor believes in treating asylum seekers humanely and is committed to meeting Australia's international obligations under the UN Refugee Convention.'

– Chris Evans, Minister for

Immigration and Citizenship

'Now we know that the people smugglers have received the message that our policies or Mr Rudd's policies are soft and that we've become a soft target.'

– Malcolm Turnbull,
Leader of the Federal Opposition

What is the current Federal Government's response to asylum seekers?

Research project 2

Since the start of 2009, eleven boats transporting asylum seekers have arrived in Australian waters. Using online news services, research these unauthorised arrivals. Present the results of your investigation to the class.

Research project 3

What is life like for an asylum seeker in an Australian immigrant detention centre?

Research project 4

Who are Australia's most outspoken advocates for refugees and asylum seekers?

Going further

- Organise a fundraising activity to support the outreach work of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan.
- Invite a spokesperson from an organisation providing support for refugee communities in Australia to speak to the class.
- Learn more about Australia's role as a refugee resettlement country by accessing the Refugee Council of Australia's website at <<http://refugee.council.org>>.
- Working in small teams, use online news services and newspapers to locate news stories about people who have sought asylum in Australia. Read the articles and discuss the dimensions of each story. Draw conclusions about the role of the media in influencing community perceptions about refugees and asylum seekers.

- Visit <<http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/hotwords/index.php>>.
 - » Visit the hotwords section of the website. Read the information on the page. Explore the hotwords that are relevant to our study of refugees and asylum seekers.
 - » Visit the activities section of the website. Complete the quizzes.
 - » Visit the e-learning section of the website and view paintings by and about refugees and asylum seekers.

When you have finished exploring this website use a search engine to find other websites about refugees and asylum seekers. Make a list of three websites that you think are interesting and explain why each website is worth visiting.

- Visit the school or local public library and borrow a novel that tells the story of a refugee or an asylum seeker. Write a brief review. Post your review on the school library page of the intranet.

Links

- *A Nun's New Habit*: <http://www.intprods.com/nunsnewhabit.php>

- Sisters of the Good Samaritan: <http://www.goodsams.org.au>
- Radio interview with Sister Carmel and director Robin Hughan on SBS *World View*: <http://www20.sbs.com.au/podcasting/index.php?action=feed&details&feedid=12&id=33981>
- Farah Farouque, 'Rare Spirit of Compassion', *The Age*, <<http://www.theage.com.au/national/rare-spirit-of-compassion-20090605-bylo.html>>, 6 June 2009.
- Tim Kroenert, 'Good Habits of an Activist Nun', *Eureka Street*, <<http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=14338>>, 11 June 2009.
- 'Carmel's Compassion', *The Recorder*, <<http://www.portpirierecorder.com.au/news/local/news/general/carmels-compassion/1550812.aspx>>, 25 June 2009.
- WINTV News Report – YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxUFH90VGqo>
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship: <http://www.immi.gov.au>

The role of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship is to manage the entry and settlement of people in Australia.

- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission: <http://www.hreoc.gov.au> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission is a government body overseeing the application of federal legislation in the area of human rights, anti-discrimination, social justice and privacy.
- Amnesty International Australia: <http://www.amnesty.org.au> Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people campaigning to protect human rights.
- Australian Refugee Association: <http://www.ausref.net> The Australian Refugee Association is a not for profit organisation. The organisation's mission is to seek the fair and humane treatment of refugees in Australia.

References

A Nun's New Habit post production script, 2009.

A Nun's New Habit press kit, 2009.

Distributed by Ronin Films
P.O. Box 1005 Civic Square
A.C.T. 2608 AUSTRALIA
ph: (02) 6248 0851 fax: (02) 6249 1640
<http://www.roninfilms.com.au>



This study guide was produced by **ATOM**. (© ATOM 2009)
editor@atom.org.au

For more information on **SCREEN EDUCATION** magazine,
or to download other free study guides,
visit <<http://www.metromagazine.com.au>>.

For hundreds of articles on Film as Text,
Screen Literacy, Multiliteracy and Media Studies,
visit <<http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>>.

