

WELL-FOUNDED FEAR

a film by SHARI ROBERTSON / MICHAEL CAMERINI

FILM PARTICIPANTS

Asylum Officers



"All this job is, it's tying common sense questions with sometimes esoteric knowledge. And you put the two together and that's how you do an interview. This ain't rocket science."

—Peter



"It's the best job I've ever had. And the hardest. I've seen hundreds of stories just like this...but that doesn't mean that this one's not true. It's just that you know that the odds are that it's not. But that doesn't mean it's not. And he's not going to have anything other than his own testimony that's going to help me out... I hate these."

—Gerald



"It's hard having to listen to this. It's like, that could be my father, that could be my mother. Or my grandmother. And these people are just abused. And it's hard to have to sit there and listen to these stories. Sometimes you just get these people and it's like, 'Well, I have to grant her because there's no way I can send her back. She would be killed.' So you just try to do what you can."

—Charlene



"Here I am, this kind of humanitarian, you know, and I wanna believe that everyone's telling me the truth, and then, to come to the realization that, most of the claims we hear are fraudulent, you know. Yeah, I guess I was surprised, but I don't think that it's affected -- I hope it hasn't affected my decision making. I still apply the law.."

—Kevin



"My purpose today is to understand your story. It is not my purpose to trick you, and it is not my purpose to make you say anything that you don't want to say. However, we do not have very much time, so it's very important that you answer my questions honestly and in detail."

—Todd



"I think you certainly become very cynical. And I think at some point, you don't want to take crap from people, that you certainly don't want to do. If you gain anything from this job it's that. I mean in the beginning, you're more reasonable, you're more naive, and you're grant rate's probably a lot higher."

—Jim



"This is not a moral situation. If somebody's lying because they want to stay here, that's perfectly understandable to me. I don't think that's a good or a bad issue. It's not like you trust somebody and they lie to you, betray you. I mean, to me, somebody who's in this country illegally, it's like people park illegally. Yeah, it's against the law, but I don't think a person who parks in the wrong parking space is a bad person."

—Martha-Louise



"On its face, it's a fairly simple job: you're basically, deciding whether or not an individual meets the definition of refugee. The definition of refugee boiled down to its essentials are: ...you're afraid, you're unwilling or unable to return to your country because of fear, and it's on account of one of the five grounds. But, you know, you can get into so many little back alleys through that, that, uh... sometimes it boggles the mind."

—Larry, Supervisor

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Asylum Applicants



"When I arrived at Kennedy Airport, I thought that my luggage had been robbed, and of course I started to search through it. What was missing from my bag were only papers, my research papers. No personal goods, jewelry, or other valuable things. Nothing was missing but my papers. In these papers were documents of my receiving in the church, personal papers, personal acts... and this was the point when they found that I am an Anglican."

—Ana Maria, Romania



"A group of young men were standing by the door waiting for the train to stop. Honestly, I was surprised. How can Russians instantly recognize Jews? Maybe I have a Yid's appearance, so to speak. They began to insult me. And then... I'll be precise: On Russian trains the doors are opened by hand, not automatically. They had already begun to open the door, saying, 'Now we'll throw him from the train.'"

—Boris, Russia



"Who am I?
I am the crying soul of a waterfall.
I am a poem of eternal isolation.
The traveling voice of my song is the impulse of a dream.
My only listener is the silence."

—Huang Xiang, China



"At the funeral, strange people came to ask the neighbors where the members of the dead person's family were, where we lived, who we were. This made our friends very suspicious, and we were even more afraid."

—Gladys, El Salvador



"I was detained in a small room alone. They used to torture me by taking me outside under the sun for three hours. The temperature would be 120 degrees. This is the hardest part ... The sun in Sudan could kill you if you are exposed to it for more than two or three hours. You stand barefoot."

—Jamal, Sudan



"We lived in terror in Algeria. You always feel fear. You always feel that at night someone is coming to kill you. We never sleep, for example, like people who sleep well until the morning. If you sleep, then you wake up, you watch, you look to see if there is someone who has entered the room."

—Farida, Algeria



"How can you express a life experience in a few minutes? It's impossible to imagine. It's really impossible to comprehend. You're taking it as a story. It's one thing to tell a story about something, it's a completely different thing to live it."

—Cristian, Romania



"We've been through so much hardship, all for the sole purpose of having a son. Everything we did was for having a son. A friend of mine found a 'snakehead' (smuggler) and got me a passport. They could get you a passport to any country. But I knew that the United States is the most open country."

—Shao Po, China