

Uncertain love in uneasy times

Molly & Mobarak (PG) ★★☆☆½
In Sydney now, Melbourne and Brisbane
Thursday
Wonderland (MA) ★★☆☆½
National release

David Stratton

THERE have been suggestions in the media lately that the tide of public opinion may be beginning to turn in favour of a more tolerant attitude towards refugees. Are we starting to modify our attitudes towards people who travelled dangerous and unauthorised routes to this country to find a better life, yet find themselves not only interned in detention centres but demonised and dehumanised by politicians?

This is not a political column, of course, but these thoughts came to mind when considering the film *Molly & Mobarak*, which I first saw at last year's Sydney Film Festival. It sets out quite explicitly to counter the idea that asylum-seekers from Iran, Iraq or, in this case, Afghanistan are the sort of people we don't want in this country. On the contrary, the film contends, they're the sort of people we do want.

Film-maker Tom Zubrycki is one of Australia's most important documentarists. He became interested in a group of Afghan asylum-seekers released from detention centres on temporary protection visas who found



Restricted romance: *Molly & Mobarak* is about a relationship but also about today's Australia.

work in the NSW country town of Young, where the booming local abattoir meant meatworkers were needed.

Zubrycki centres his film on Mobarak Tahari, a 22-year-old member of Afghanistan's Hazara minority, a people persecuted under the Taliban. About 3000 Hazaras found their way to Australia in the late 1990s and were interned. Mobarak arrived here in 1999 and was released after two years in detention. He joined his countrymen in Young, where he

shared a flat with his friends and attended English lessons organised by local volunteers.

One such volunteer was Lyn Rule, a single mother of a teenage son and of 25-year-old Molly, who offered to teach Mobarak how to drive. From that kind offer a romance developed, although not without all kinds of pitfalls. As the film's title proclaims, it is partly about that relationship but, more than that, it's a film about Australia today.

As you would expect, the people of Young are divided between those who are opposed to the presence of the Afghans (sadly, most of these people fall back on openly racist arguments) and those who are keen to help the strangers assimilate and often find their efforts thwarted by bureaucratic indifference and heartlessness. Ironically, Young was the location of race riots against Chinese immigrants a little more than 100 years ago, a parallel Zubrycki draws on provocatively.

Molly & Mobarak is a fly-on-the-wall documentary. For the first time in his career, Zubrycki operates his little digital video camera himself. It's one-person film-making, and mighty effective. He not only offers portraits of

ordinary people trying to cope with the cards life has dealt them, but also finds humour in the most difficult situations — Mobarak's attempts at Aussie slang, for instance, or his decision to allow Molly to dye his hair.

It's essentially a *Romeo and Juliet* story, without the tragic finale. The ending, indeed, is an open one. Mobarak's temporary visa expired almost a year ago. He now exists on a bridging visa and may at any time be sent back — as many others have — to Afghanistan.

It seems a cruel way to treat people who came to this country to start a new life. Perhaps it was because the film highlights such cruelties, and depicts Mobarak and his friends with such sympathy, that there was a brief attempt to prevent it from screening to parliamentarians and their staff in Canberra in October. The film is critical of the Government's policy, complained R. M. Wedgwood, executive leader facilities and corporate services at Parliament House, in initially denying a standard request to screen the film — a piece of censorship that was, thankfully, quickly overturned. Still, I can't see the film appearing high on the Prime Minister's must-see list. More's the pity.

Don't be confused. The new film *Wonderland* has nothing to do with the excellent 1999 Michael Winterbottom movie. (Surely the makers of the latest production could have shown a little more imagination in choosing a title?) Instead, this is the story of the events leading up to a multiple murder in the Hollywood Hills in 1981, involving '70s porn star John Holmes (Val Kilmer).

Taking a *Rashomon* approach to the subject, by telling the story from a number of viewpoints, James Cox's film has the potential to be a fascinating insight into a bizarre and brutal series of events. However, the relentlessly jagged, all-over-the-place, hand-held look quickly becomes exasperating. This precious approach to the material is partially redeemed by some interesting characters, notably Holmes's wife (beautifully played by Lisa Kudrow), who manages to hold on to her basic decency in the face of the most appalling treatment.

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crash. He said Mr Zeides' cardiovascular system was linked with disease. The inquiry resumes today.

Church what everyone already knew - that Angelo or "Michael", as he was also known, "died a hero".

despite efforts by paramedics and doctors at Liverpool Hospital, he died at 2.30am. In the same hospital lies Mrs

Westmead. Mourners took 40 minutes to file past Mr Koroncos's coffin, their cries heard outside.

40th day after the Greek Easter. "That is a comfort I can offer you, that Angelo will also be resurrected," he said.

a hero. Our thoughts and sympathies must also go to the Waddell family, who have lost two children."

An Afghan and a teacher in Young - unrequited love in a meaty doco



Best film... Tom Zubrycki. Director Ben Rushton

Garry Maddox
Film Writer

Director Tom Zubrycki believes it's his best film. And after a dozen lively documentaries dealing with such issues as a Wollongong miners' strike, independence for East Timor and the battle against apartheid in South Africa, it also deals with the rawest emotions. Only a day before the start of the Sydney Film Festival, *Molly and Mobarak* happens also to be his most rushed film in its final stages. After recording the narration at Fox Studios,

Zubrycki expects to finish the film only two days before it screens on June 15.

That's a tight finish for a documentary that had him quietly shooting 150 hours of footage in the town of Young over more than a year. The film centres on the challenging relationship between a young Afghan refugee, Mobarak Tahiri, and a schoolteacher, Molly Rule. He is one of 90 Afghans who have come to the town to work in the abattoir. She helps him learn English, then how to drive. When the

relationship deepens, Mobarak is devastated when his affections are not returned.

"I wanted to tell the story of what happened when refugees leave detention centres," says Zubrycki. "Most vanished into multicultural Australia but others seemed to be settling into country towns." Making about 20 trips from Sydney to Young, Zubrycki used a digital mini-camera and recorded his own sound for the film, which was backed by SBS Independent. "It's very raw," he says. "There

are stronger emotions than in any other film I've directed."

Events affecting the Afghans in Young were often dramatic. After the Bali bombings, some people saw the refugees as terrorists. "The town is divided between those people who embrace them and the ones who reject them," he says. "That really contributes to a rollercoaster ride. There are some quite confronting racial outbursts." It must be the year for abattoir workers on screen. The 50th festival opens

tomorrow night with an Australian comedy about a rural meatworker who stands for Federal Parliament.

The Honourable Wally Norman stars Kevin Harrington, from *SeaChange* and *The Dish*, as well as Shaun Micallef and Greig Pickhaver aka H. G. Nelson. After a sound mix and subtitled, *Molly and Mobarak* will screen at the State Theatre, with the two main characters expected to be in the audience. Film Festival, trailers, gallery at smh.com.au

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The new seekers

The immigration debate takes on another dimension when love is at stake, reports SACHA MOLITORISZ.

MOLLY & MOBARAK

Director Tom Zubrycki

Stars Molly Rule, Mobarak Tahiri

Rated M

Screening Now at the Valhalla in Glebe

If 2003 was a disappointing vintage for Australian films, there was at least one spectacular highlight. It packed the political punch of *JK*, the emotional intensity of *Romeo and Juliet* and the coming-of-age insight of *The Year My Voice Broke*.

Yet it wasn't a feature but a documentary. *Molly & Mobarak* was a very Australian tale that marked yet another terrific achievement from Tom Zubrycki, the award-winning veteran whose credits include *Stolen Generations* and *The Diplomat* (about Jose Ramos Horta).

The good news is, if you missed it last year, don't fret. After receiving a standing ovation at its world premiere at the Sydney Film Festival, *Molly & Mobarak* has started a season at the Valhalla in Glebe.

Set in Young, about four hours' drive west of Sydney, the story centres on a handful of Afghans who work at the local abattoir.

"I never wanted to make a film which would just be interviews of people in the town and asylum seekers," says Zubrycki. "I wanted to make a narrative that would involve me following a small group of characters as their visas ran out. So I befriended people and started filming."

Soon enough, Zubrycki had his main characters: local Lyn Rule, a compassionate matriarch; Molly Rule, her beautiful daughter; and Mobarak Tahiri, an enigmatic Afghan.

"It all evolved very slowly," says Molly Rule. "He didn't say, 'Can I film you and your family and your relationship?' He filmed Mobarak and



me while I was giving him driving lessons. We slowly got used to him being there. It sounds strange, but he's a very unobtrusive character."

From early 2002 to early 2003, Zubrycki made more than 20 trips to Young with his digital camera. By invitation, the one-man film crew eventually moved into the Rule house.

"That gave me an incredible advantage," he says. "In these sorts of films, re-enactment is out of the question. If you don't capture something on film, it can't be repeated. Still, at times, Lyn said, 'Put the camera away, Tom.'"

The film's main story became the relationship between Molly and Mobarak: the 22-year-old Afghan was falling in love, but Molly's feelings were more compassionate than amorous.

In the background, Young's residents divided into two vocal camps: those who supported the Afghans, and those who didn't.

After a year of filming, Zubrycki had shot more than 150 hours of film. With editor Ray Thomas, he culled this into a taut 90 minutes.

Even that was too much for some. After its Sydney Film Festival premiere in June, at which the Rules, Mobarak and friends shared a cathartic reunion, the film was scheduled to be shown at Parliament House in October.

Instead, it was refused permission to screen. "The film ... promotes the theme of widespread resistance to government policy," a bureaucrat told Zubrycki in a letter.

"It's interesting that a film which presents a very human story is seen to be subversive," says Zubrycki. "I think that's because it humanises refugees, contrary to the government agenda."

Ultimately, the ban was overturned and the film did screen. Still, the issues are hotter than ever, particularly with regard to Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs).

According to one recent report, 8885 three-year TPVs visas have been issued since the system was implemented in 1999. By June, an estimated 2270 of the 3663 TPVs issued to

Afghans will have expired. For now, most of these Afghans remain in limbo.

Mobarak's case is typical: his three-year TPV has expired and he is now on a Bridging Visa, eagerly awaiting news about whether he will be granted a Permanent Protection Visa.

The bad news is that by last December, 437 Afghan TPV cases had been reviewed and only eight had been granted permanent protection.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister John Howard is facing heat from allies, including the National Party's John Forrest, who want the Afghans to stay. They point out that the asylum seekers work in abattoirs, as fruit-pickers and as labourers, willingly accepting positions in rural regions that are otherwise difficult to fill.

"The refugees enjoy a lot of support among people in the country," says Zubrycki, "in particular in places such as the 'food bowl' in the west of the state, where they're cheap and reliable labour."

Now 24, Mobarak lives in Sydney with his girlfriend, working two jobs as a cleaner.

"I had a visa for three years but that is finished, so now I have a temporary visa," he says. "I'm waiting for a letter from the Department of Immigration."

And what did he think of the finished film? "It's good but a bit sad for me. It's very hard for me to watch. I saw it at the Sydney Film Festival and I was crying. But I think it's good for Australian people to see."

Molly agrees: "Tom brought the almost-finished copy to Young. He was very sheepish, nervous about what we might think. And I was pretty shocked because the first thing I saw was the title: *Molly & Mobarak*."

"But then I thought he was very sensitive with the material. There's a lot of humour in it, which adds a lovely balance to the drama and sadness and heartache of it all. Now we want people to go see it, especially if they wouldn't normally go see something like this."

It's your shout, Mr Howard: Mobarak Tahiri and Molly Rule.

It's interesting that a film which presents a very human story is seen to be subversive. I think that's because it humanises refugees.
Tom Zubrycki



Molly convinces Mobarak that the "neo-mullet" is Australia's most popular hairstyle.

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Parliament backs down on film ban

By Kirsten Lawson

It is a documentary that has opened film festivals around the world and is in line for top awards, but the Government initially judged *Molly and Mobarak* too offensive to be shown at Parliament House.

"The film is critical of the Government's policy," selectively quotes the Prime Minister and promotes the theme of widespread resistance to government policy," Joint House Department executive leader Bob Wedgwood wrote last week, refusing permission for the documentary to be shown. Mr Wedgwood was acting on



Mobarak, left, and Molly, who feature in the documentary, the advice of Speaker Neil Andrew, who has since relented and will allow tonight's screening. The documentary looks at Labor backbencher Tanya

Pihlasek, who is hosting the screening, was shocked to receive Mr Wedgwood's letter. Mr Wedgwood pointed to footage of a demonstration that showed a banner describing government policy as "racism and war against refugees". He said the film attempted to link treatment of refugees with the 1800s gold rush. And it was critical of some people in Young.

"Any function approved by me under the guidelines must be of such a nature that it would be approved by a majority of Senators and Members and unlikely to cause offence to any significant part of the Australian community."

Mr Wedgwood wrote. "Having viewed the film, I have formed the opinion that it does not meet those guidelines."

A spokesman for Mr Andrew said he had initially blocked the screening after receiving "50-50" advice from the Joint House Department and reading a synopsis.

Mr Andrew said his decision had been made on the run by phone from a remote area, with a bad line. He had erred on the side of caution, but when he had returned to his office he had asked for details. By that time Mr Wedgwood's refusal had gone out.

"The criteria is that the majority of Mr's must support the film being screened, now I

didn't think the majority of MPs would support the substance, the themes, of this movie, and that was the decision I made," he said. "On reflection I thought it's not a matter of whether they support the themes of the film, it's a matter of whether they would support it being screened."

Ms Pihlasek said, "I don't want to entirely blame the Speaker for this, I'm pleased that he's finally in the end made the decision that he has, but I just found the initial decision quite extraordinary, and I found the terms of the letter quite extraordinary as well."

"The idea that you would stop something from being

shown in Parliament House because it was critical of government policy is, I think, absurd. By that reasoning we wouldn't have Question Time."

The screening was organised by asylum-seeker Margaret Ashman, who said the film gave a human face to refugees. "While the Government and media have a tendency to vilify the asylum-seekers, saying illegals, boat people, queue jumpers and all those derogatory terms, this film played a significant role to show refugees and asylum-seekers are human beings too."

Film maker Tom Zubrycki, who spent nine months in Young, said the attempted ban was laughable. Far from being

offensive, the film was a warm, engaged fly-on-the-wall documentary following a friendship between two people.

"It's a film that I think makes you rethink your position on people that have been accused of being illegals and queue jumpers, it presents them in a different light. And that's why it's probably politically controversial because it humanises these people who have been demonised and vilified."

Molly and Mobarak, which premiered in June and has been shown around the country, will open a film festival in New York this week. The public is welcome at tonight's screening at 8pm in the Parliament House theatre.

Pets aren't so good for you after all: study

By Kirsten Lawson

Pet owners are fatter, have higher blood pressure and are more likely to be smokers, according to Australian National University research published today.

The study, reported in the *Australian Medical Journal*, throws doubt on the popular belief that owning a pet is good for your health.

It found that pet owners had significantly higher diastolic blood pressure and a higher body mass index.

Researcher Ruth Parslow, of the ANU's Centre for Mental Health Research, said the findings, from a random sample of 5079 people in Canberra and Queanbeyan, were a surprise.

But she said it was unlikely that pets were actually the cause of the poorer health among owners.

"I think it's quite unlikely that pet ownership per se has any effect on your health," she said. "It's much more likely that people who own pets have a cluster of other lifestyle factors or stresses, and it's a collection of factors that affect their overall cardiovascular health."

The study controlled for factors that contribute to high blood pressure — being overweight or obese, drinking harmful levels of alcohol, not doing enough physical activity and smoking.

Even after controlling for those factors, pet owners had significantly higher diastolic blood pressure — an average \$1.8 — than people without pets, who averaged \$1.07. That was despite higher levels of mild physical activity among pet owners. Their systolic blood pressure was similar.



Hazel Hawke reveals: I have Alzheimer's

SYDNEY—Hazel Hawke will reveal publicly tonight she suffers from Alzheimer's disease.

The 74-year-old ex-wife of former prime minister Bob Hawke will appear on ABC Television's *Australian Story* in a bid to raise public awareness about Alzheimer's, an incurable progressive disease that diminishes brain function in the areas of thought, memory and language.

"I hope that, by speaking out about this very private issue, I can help promote openness, awareness and support for all people living with dementia," Mrs Hawke said.

"No illness should carry a negative label. None of us is immune."

"Although I would obviously prefer not to have Alzheimer's, I continue to live a happy and healthy life, with the love and support of family and friends."

"Practically speaking, I hope to help raise much-needed funds by establishing the Hazel Hawke Alzheimer's Research and Care Fund. I have done this together with Alzheimer's Australia."

Mrs Hawke told the program, "I wouldn't have



Hazel Hawke

both felt like we've been hit by bombs." Ms Pieters-Hawke said. "She didn't say much. She just stooped at the door and said 'bigger, bigger, bigger'."

"She doesn't dwell on it, she gets on with her life. She's not a whinger."

Ms Dillon said Mrs Hawke was taking 17 tablets a day to slow the progress of the disease, and needed help preparing food and cleaning her house.

"Hazel was the art's pants; she was the brightest person I've ever known," Ms Dillon said.

"It's really hard to watch it slipping away. A lot of the time she knows she's got it — she calls it the biogly A thing — other times she doesn't think anything's wrong except that took her car off her."

"When push comes to shove, my hardest moment will be when she looks at me in the eye and doesn't know who I am." She said there was never a time when Mrs Hawke had failed to support her children or her ex-husband, from whom she was divorced in 1995. "She would never have done the ball on him, and he did it on her," Ms Dillon said. "I'm not saying anything against my dad, but she would have stuck with him to the end of the earth, just like she does with us. She's been mum and dad and everything to us; we will see her out to the end."

Ms Pieters-Hawke said the family was constantly asked whether Mr Hawke was aware of Mrs Hawke's illness. "People do bug me about whether dad knows or whether he cares, and yes he does know and yes he does care — a lot."

She said Mrs Hawke had thought very carefully before going public with her disease. "It's something she's had reservations about," Ms Pieters-Hawke said. "Maybe it will be helpful to share something that's a very personal issue but one which



MOLLY & MOBARAK: A SUBVERSIVE ACT

Tom Zubrycki talks about his latest documentary, his motivation and his approach to documentary film-making

FOR TOM ZUBRYCKI, MAKING *Molly and Mobarak* was his way to personally contribute to the refugee/asylum seeker debate in Australia. 'The process of humanizing someone can be a political act. When people can identify with someone or a situation, it is then that they can gain insight, or an awareness of, wider issues', said Tom in an interview during his visit to Melbourne for the screenings of his latest documentary *Molly and Mobarak* at the Melbourne International Film Festival.

'It suits the government's agenda to dehumanize these people so they are simply numbers or people behind bars—they're grouped, they're kind of a generic category, they're 'queue-jumpers, they're "illegal", that's the language that's being used to describe them'. This depersonalization, combined with threadbare news stories that usually lack any sense of a human being, angered Tom and motivated him to find a way to give depth to these stories, to these 'illegal' asylum seekers.

It occurred to me to find out first of all

where people were moving to after they left the camps and pick them up at that point. I was interested in what would happen when they suddenly found themselves in a community needing to interact with ordinary Australians.

Tom found his story in the small country town of Young, a four hour drive from Sydney. Ninety Afghan men from the Hazara ethnic minority were working in the local abattoir and, as Tom points out,

in a country town they're forced to interact, the town is too small for refugees to just merge into multicultural Australia—like they can in a big city. What I found was this incredible intensity of relationships, it wasn't just a question of people being polite to each other, it was more than that.

In his production notes Tom writes,

The men had all arrived in Australia by boat and had spent several months in detention before being assessed as genuine refugees. They had all been given 3-year Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), which allowed them to

JOAN ROBINSON



FROM TOP: MOLLY AND MOBARAK • MOBARAK

live and work anywhere in Australia. However the TPV meant they couldn't sponsor their families here, and they were ineligible for a wide range of benefits, including access to English classes.¹



FROM LEFT: MOBARAK AND MOLLY, MOBARAK WITH LYN RULE AND HER DAUGHTER MOLLY

A number of people within the Young community decided to help the Hazaras by teaching them English. Subsequently, they formed strong bonds with each of their students. 'The voluntary tutors all had a particular person that they taught once a week and the teaching grew into exchanging visits. After a few months parties were thrown—it was more than just "come to lunch!" Tom explains that most of the tutors were women who became like surrogate mothers to the refugees and they took whatever happened to their students quite personally. 'By taking on this role of ... educating and resourcing the Hazaras they began to feel a great sense of responsibility towards them. They are now prepared to do almost anything to allow them to stay in the community.'

In the case of Lyn and Mobarak and Molly I was looking at what was happening with one particular family and one particular young Hazara. The complication here was that there was a romantic interest.

Tom followed the Afghan refugees and their tutors in Young over a nine month period in 2002. However, Mobarak very quickly became his main focus. The first time I filmed with Molly and Mobarak was when she took him for his second driving lesson. I asked could I sit in the back seat with my camera... They both agreed and that's how the year of filming started and how their relationship began.²



What is ultimately satisfying about [Molly and Mobarak] is that it tells a universal story, a story of unrequited love, which anyone can relate to, but at the same time, by having the audience connect with that simple story, it engages at a deeper level with issues that affect asylum seekers and their efforts to assimilate into Australian society. Issues like grief, loss and separation manifest gradually and unconsciously while the story is being told. At the end of it all, you can form an analysis and talk about Mobarak's pain, you can talk about why he is so keen to bond with Lyn and Molly because he's suffered the experience of being wrenched away from his own family, and you can perhaps surmise that he's confusing this desire for Molly with his need to adopt a new family.

Tom says that he had a responsibility as a film-maker to fairly represent the main events that unfolded and impacted on the life of the family over the filming period. He also had a responsibility to get the emotional honesty right as well. 'You are representing people not only in terms of where they were, what they did, but also how they felt and what they believed in.'

And I did this through showing the participants of the film the fine cut, just before the lock off, just to make sure that nothing was seen as possibly unfair to people or events, or that I might have unintentionally put a cast over particular scenes, or that I'd highlighted certain aspects of people's characters over others.

At a forum after a screening at the Melbourne International Film Festival, Lyn Rule, Molly's mother, told the audience that she had repeatedly said to

Tom, 'don't do the love story Tom, don't do the love story'. Then she talked about the participant screening. 'He showed it in our lounge-room; he was looking very nervous, then the title—*Molly and Mobarak*—came up ... But I think he did a beautiful job.'

At that same forum Molly explained that she finds the whole process—of making the film and its after effects—overwhelming and is still sensitive about it all. At the end of the film, when it says that Mobarak's visa has expired, she gets a lump in her throat at the thought of him possibly being sent back to Afghanistan. However, she made it very clear that after seeing the end result she was pleased to have been part of the documentary.

Tom is also in regular contact with Mobarak and sees him every couple of weeks. He is confident that the film will help Mobarak's permanent visa application. 'I feel that I've got a responsibility to him over and beyond the



filming process; our relationship carries on, it doesn't stop at the first screening.'



Since its premiere at the Sydney Film Festival *Molly and Mobarak* has been shown around Australia on an alternative theatrical circuit with screenings being sponsored by local councils, refugee organizations, amnesty groups and political parties, such as the Greens and Democrats. Next year it will be broadcast on SBS.

Molly and Mobarak has also been launched on the international film festival circuit starting with Toronto. This month it opens the Margaret Mead film festival in New York, the largest showcase for



ham and Sam Worthington.

VIEW

night, Regent Cinemas, Wall

ham, naked except for jocks and a pair of rubber goggles, his behind through a too-escape from the law on the Gold

le of many funny and surprising than Teplitzky's impressive Gold titin' Square, written by local yst, which had its world premiere film of this year's Brisbane Film Festival (shown in two Regent) on Tuesday night. ho won a million Australian, is Diver Dan in Sea Change and international roles in The Lord of next year's vampire epic Vargt of a select ensemble cast, in's Timothy Spall, rising nt Sam Worthington and Gary g yek another bad-guy role).

ceptional (down to smaller es for local Carol Burns as head of board and ex-boxer Joe Bugner roles), but it's Wenham's idly performance as a criminal drug habit that makes this his should be rewarded when this an Film Institute honours are be recalled as one of the great male of Australian film, even topping am gave in the chilling The Boys. ra takes the glitz off the Gold Coast d the white-shoe hustlers in a crime a with coarse language) that nes not explored since Carl Schultz's oobybe Paradise - written by Bob y Lawrence and starring Ray made on the Gold Coast 20 years ago. e Sex introduced Teplitzky's cool, style of filmmaking, and it again s this Down Under Pulp Fiction nistic of Britain's brutal

time criminals, crooked cops (the avid Field) and justice officials n in a corker plot that unravels at the start of the film, which then onths of events.

ips' cinematography brings a fresh ie's Gold Coast locations (and other eansland spots), and the pulsating ncluding music by Machine Gun Nick Cave) combines with Nyst's ceters for a distinctive movie that es within its genre, familiar from p shows.

ful short film Clutch, directed by 2, provided a satisfying contrast to nt's hoodlums and hustlers being let ralian cinemas on October 9.

Writing contests

ashine Literary Awards offer r \$250 for best short story and \$150 oem. The entry fee is \$5 for the and \$3 for subsequent entries, s and details are at www. raryawards.com.au, or PO Box 171, ay, 4216. Entries close August 8. Writers Festival Write Small is open for entries until August e's for a story told in exactly 100 a winning entries printed on the rt (the festival runs from October lished in The Courier-Mail and a little swag of prizes. For details, Fun.Stuff section of the website anewritersfestival.com.au or 5 0254.



DRIVEN by passion... Molly with Afghani refugee Mobarak, above, and director Tom Zubrycki, inset.

Only human

Des Partridge

DOCUMENTARY filmmaker Tom Zubrycki set out to show the human face of Afghan refugees in Australia in his latest project *Molly and Mobarak*.

He found his subjects in Young (pop: 11,000), four hours' drive from his home in Sydney, and estimates he travelled about 15,000km between the two cities while he filmed on digital video over about eight months.

"That these refugees are ordinary people is not the kind of thing the Federal Government is particularly keen to convey," says Zubrycki, known for his observational documentary essays of Australians in *Homelands* and *Bilal*.

Zubrycki says he was also attracted to Young because of its historical connection to the White Australia policy.

Local gold diggers clashed with Chinese on the goldfields in the town in the 1860s - clashes that led to the introduction of a colonial bill restricting Chinese immigration to Australia.

Zubrycki calls his latest film a "verite-narrative" because it is structured like a scripted drama with the narration personal and minimal.

The filmmaker - who will present his film at the State Library on Saturday at 3.45pm and on Monday at noon, as part of this year's Brisbane International Film Festival - says he was drawn to the subject because he wondered what happened to refugees after they left detention centres.

His father, a retired academic living in Canberra, told him about an organisation, Rural Australians for Refugees, and further research led him to Young, where he discovered 90 Afghans, all men from the Hazara ethnic minority, were working in an abattoir.

Zubrycki, who brought his film *The Diplomat*, centred on East Timor freedom fighter Jose Ramos Horta, to BIFF three years ago, says the Afghans were living and working in Young under three-year temporary protection visas.

They weren't allowed to sponsor their families to join them and they were ineligible for benefits, including access to English classes.

Aussie films take the high road

SEVERAL Australian films that are to screen at the Brisbane International Film Festival will also be shown at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, which runs from August 13 to 24.

One feature and four shorts, including one animated film, will be seen by festival-goers in both cities.

The feature is *The Rage in Placid Lake*, showing in the Brisbane event on August 5. The short films are *Cracker Bag*, *Expulsion*, *The Projectionist* and the cartoon *Harvie Krumpet*.

In all, three Australian features (Tony McNamara's *The Rage in*

Placid Lake, Rolf de Heer's *Alexandra's Project* and Gregor Jordan's *Ned Kelly*) will travel to Edinburgh, with nine short and animated films.

McNamara intends travelling to Edinburgh to present his film.

Australian Film Commission chief executive Kim Dalton says the Edinburgh selections represent the tremendous range of filmmaking talent available in Australia, with an eclectic and exciting mix of films. "I'm also pleased that so many of the films were produced with the financial assistance of the AFC," Dalton says.

— Des Partridge

"Technically they were second-class citizens," Zubrycki says.

In the typical manner of documentary filmmaking, Zubrycki initially focused on another Young family working with the refugees before he found a 25-year-old local high school teacher, Molly, was teaching a 23-year-old Afghan man, Mobarak, to drive.

"I spoke to Molly's mother Lyn and arranged to take my camera with me when Molly and Mobarak went out for a lesson," he says.

"It all developed from there."

The extremely human drama that unfolds, as Mobarak's friendship with Molly develops into something deeper, makes Zubrycki's film quite exceptional.

"I could sense the emotional trail early in the piece," recalls Zubrycki, who describes himself as a "concerned citizen" rather than political activist filmmaker.

"I knew that this could provide a narrative structure as well as emotional power.

"Being a universal story about unrequited love would give the film strong audience appeal, but what would make it complex and poignant would be the underlying cultural differences, and Mobarak's vested interest in remaining



in Australia." Mobarak, who is now living with a young Aboriginal woman in Sydney, and Molly, who still lives in Young, attended the film's premiere in Sydney.

It's also been programmed for the Melbourne International Film Festival, and Zubrycki - who did his own photography this time because he wanted his shooting arrangements to be flexible - is working on securing a theatrical release through an Australian cinema chain for later this year.

Next year the film will be shown on SBS-TV. Zubrycki says he edited 150 hours of footage to arrive at the end result of 84 minutes.

For his next project he's considering returning to Young for another film, but he doesn't want to give away the possible storytelling just yet.

Meanwhile, the unlikely film star, Mobarak, is living in Australia on a bridging visa, and if his application for permanent residency is rejected he could be deported.

EXPRE

with Noel Mengel

SONGWRITER Mark Eitzel has been mixing things up lately. His last album, *Music For Courage and Confidence* covered songs by performers from Bill Withers to Glen Campbell at Culture Club.

For his latest, *The Ugly American*, he went to Greece to record with producer and comp Manolis Famellos, arranging 50 of Eitzel's best-loved songs for a band of traditional Greek musicians.

Can't say we've ever imagined songs by Eitzel's old band, American Music Club, played at the bouzouki, but those who've a preview say it works a treat.

Another maverick still patrol the fringes where most of the interesting music lives is Joe Henry produced last year's soul classic *Don't Give Up On Me*, by his new album continues his so adventures as a recording artist.

The sound is augmented by avant-garde jazz players Don E on clarinet and trumpeter Ron Miles. It's not jazz but it's certainly free-spirited. The album is out through Shock on September 8.

■ THAT garage rock thing is going away just yet, and there's plenty of it when the Livid Festival hits town in October.

Play time

WOMEN were first, diva experiences, fears fantasies about their parts with humour, frankness depth unheard of on stage. Now men are standing up to in a mix of comic, somber insightful vignettes - we means to have a penis.

New Auckland theatre production *The Viagra Monologues* written by a woman, attempt run the gamut of male sexual response to the notorious *Monologues*, performed by actresses such as Glenni Winona Pyder and Meryl St

Well-known Auckland actor playwright Geraldine Brophy she was inspired to write about after she saw America Enslers' original *Vagina*, based 200 interviews with women.

Brophy says she admired for the way it incorporated ous, painful and quirky as female experience and what men might say if giv

12TH Brisbane Film

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WHAT'S ON TODAY

Showcase 1 - Laurel Ca

On the road to the perfect life and Alex take a little detour, and engaging flick with a star cast and cool indie score feat Mark Linkous of Sparkdehors Folk Implosion. Keep your ticket gain entry to the exclusive party at the Hilton Champag

see **tv** Michael Idato**EARLY DESIRES**

The Ten Network may consider running the sanitised version of *Sex and the City* when it begins screening the series next year. Ten programmer David Mott told *The Guide* the so-called "8.30pm version" of the series was an option, but no decision had been made between it and the racier version, which Australian audiences are more familiar with. The advantage of the toned-down version for Ten is that it can be programmed earlier in the evening, exposing it to a younger audience who may not have seen it before. Ten's new output deal with Paramount runs until 2008 and includes the repeat rights to all 96 episodes of the series.

NINE'S BIG SWAG

The Nine Network has renegotiated its output deal with Warner Bros International Television, the agreement that gave Nine access to a swag of top-rating programs, including *Friends* and *E.R.* The multimillion dollar deal lasts until 2011 and includes access to current and coming television series, feature films and the Warner Bros program library. The Warner deal also covers Nine's rookie hits, *Without a Trace* and *Nip/Tuck*, the acclaimed series *The Sopranos*, *Six Feet Under* and *The West Wing*, and the yet-to-be-seen *Cold Case*, from producer Jerry Bruckheimer.

ISLAND PARADISE

Cable channel FOX8 has clinched the Australian rights to the US reality soap *Forever Eden*. The series, which launched in the US earlier this year, is billed as the first "open-ended unscripted soap opera". The series is filmed at a secret location in the Caribbean and begins with 11 contestants who have chosen to take an indefinite break from their regular lives. They earn money based on the length of their stay and, when a contestant is evicted or leaves, another is flown in to replace them. *Forever Eden* was created by Phil Roberts and Howard Davidson, whose credits include *Paradise Hotel*.

NEW HEELERS

Geoff Morell, the star of *Change* and *Grass Roots*, is to join Seven's long-running drama *Blue Heelers*. Morell will play career policeman Sergeant Mark Jacobs. The series, produced by Southern Star for Seven, has recruited three other new cops, to be played by Rachel Gordon, Danny Raco and Samantha Taji. The four new cast members begin shooting in May and will appear on air in July. "We're thrilled to have such a diverse group of actors join the cast," producer Gus Howard says. "This is going to give us the chance to change the story structure considerably and the viewers will begin to see that from July."

READER'S MAIL

What a shame you gave a thumbs down for *Shacks: Last Port of Call* (ABC, Tuesday, 8pm). It was a wonderful glimpse into the delightfully eccentric life of former merchant seaman Arne Eriksson, who has built himself a driftwood kingdom on Flinders Island. Inspirational. We look forward to more of this series.

Rosemary Ombler, Turramurra

Send letters or emails to the editor - details below.

**MUST SEE THIS WEEK**

IN THE LINE OF FIRE, Ten, Saturday, 8.30pm

THE SOPRANOS, Nine, Tuesday, 10.30pm

BRAIN STORY: ALL IN THE MIND, BBC World, Sunday, 7.10pm

**The love boat**

Young and the restless: Mobarak Tahiri and Molly Rule.

This SBS film goes to the heart of the refugee crisis, writes **Cynthia Banham**.

A couple of weekends ago, on a platform at Central Station, a young Afghan refugee, Mobarak Tahiri, clutched the hand of Lyn Rule, a mother of four from Young in rural NSW, as her train was about to depart. Rule, who had taken the 25-year-old man under her wing more than two years ago when he came to work in the local abattoir, describes how she told Tahiri, "I've got to get on the train." Unwilling to let her hand go, Tahiri, who now lives in Auburn and had met Rule for dinner that night, followed her onto the train. "I just turned around and walked away, and I didn't even look," Rule says.

Tahiri, who holds a temporary protection visa (TPV), has already lost one family and, Rule says, fears he is about to lose another. He, Rule and her daughter, Molly, with whom Tahiri fell in (unrequited) love during his time in Young, are the main characters in Tom Zubrycki's moving film *Molly and Mobarak*, which screens on SBS on Thursday.

Tahiri came to Australia by boat in 1999 after two of his brothers went missing during the reign of the Taliban. His parents have since fled to Iran, his Australian visa has expired and he doesn't know whether the Federal Government will let him stay in Australia permanently or deport him.

Tahiri's relationship with the Rules forms the narrative for the film, which deals with the wider theme of Australia's temporary refugees.

Tahiri is one of the many Afghans granted temporary protection rights in the wake of the Tampa crisis and the Howard Government's crackdown on boat people. Today, more than 2700 Afghans with TPVs are awaiting decisions on their futures.

The documentary was filmed in 2002, when Tahiri had one year left on his

I was in love with her. Now is better, not like before.

Mobarak Tahiri

visa and his situation caught the attention of Zubrycki, who travelled to Young after hearing about a group of 90 Hazara men working in the town's meatworks. Zubrycki ended up living with the Rules while filming and got intimate access to the family's interactions with Tahiri.

Molly and Mobarak may be two years old but the issues at its core are unresolved and the film still holds a lot of pain for its main characters. Zubrycki, who sees the film, with its theme of unrequited love, as "a metaphor for how Australia treats asylum seekers", acknowledges it is "incredibly personal" and says he was initially concerned with how it might affect his subjects.

Tahiri says he still cannot watch the film because it "make me sad, and make

me cry". He left Young towards the end of filming to get distance between himself and Molly, a high-school teacher with whom he developed a close relationship after she gave him driving lessons. She had a boyfriend and did not return Tahiri's affections.

"I was in love with her," Tahiri says. "Now is better, not like before, because you know that was very close ... all the time, 24 hours spend together, that's why I left Young. I feel better."

Tahiri now has a girlfriend and works two jobs. He plans to study computers if allowed to stay in Australia. But Lyn Rule says Tahiri is "freaking out" over the uncertainty of his future. She saw it in his behaviour at the railway station. Rule, who is proud of the film for the way it touches people and because it "humanises refugees", believes she has to remain a stable mother figure for the young Afghan regardless of the situation between him and her daughter.

She recalls a scene in the film where Molly Rule is about to leave Young to go overseas and Tahiri repeats over and over: "You'll forget me, Molly."

"I think that's more like 'I'm losing it again'," Rule says.

Molly Rule still talks regularly to Tahiri by phone. She says initially it was heartbreaking to watch the film. "It was very difficult trying to be supportive of Mobarak because of the situation he was in, because I cared for him as a friend but I also knew that I was the reason for a lot of his sadness," she says.

Molly and Mobarak airs on SBS on Thursday at 8.30pm. See preview, page 16.

Reality needs renovation

There are few certainties in television but you can be sure that this morning executives at all three commercial networks will be poring over last night's ratings for *The Block*. The first series of Nine's real estate/renovation series scored record ratings - an average of 2.2 million viewers a week and a peak of 3.1 million for the final episode - and was considered a strong enough brand to withstand viewers' fatigue with reality shows this year.

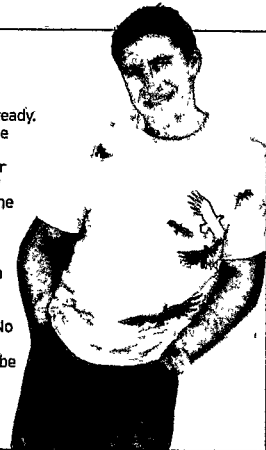
But the new figures have Nine's chiefs concerned. The second series opened a fortnight ago to only 1.5 million viewers; last week that slipped to 1.3 million.

There are mitigating circumstances. The series started almost two months earlier this year, with last year's ratings benefiting from a cold winter, and last week's episode fell on the Anzac weekend, with a sharp drop in Sydney's ratings consistent with a holiday weekend. Melbourne, where there was no

public holiday for Anzac Day, held steady. The biggest immediate issue for Nine is meeting the high expectations of advertisers and sponsors. But longer term, the performance of *The Block* casts the darkest shadow yet over the reality-television genre.

It is not the first reality series to stumble this year but it is the first strong brand to take damage, which leaves Ten, the owner of two other strong brands, *Big Brother* and *Australian Idol*, feeling vulnerable. No longer will *Big Brother* be watching you. For now at least, everyone will be keeping a close eye on *Big Brother*.

The Block's Jamie Durie



Cover photo of Dean Winters as Ryan O'Reilly in *Oz*, courtesy of Warner Brothers.

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Inner West

YOUR PROPERTY AND LIVING SECTION

Ban sign of film's success

by AMELIA BALL

WHEN Parliament House in Canberra refused to screen Tom Zubrycki's new documentary about refugees, the Leichhardt filmmaker knew he had succeeded.

"I realised it was probably more subversive than I anticipated," Zubrycki said.

The ban was overturned a few days later and now *Molly & Mobarak* is about to open at Glebe's Valhalla Cinema.

The film is about 90 Afghan refugees who travelled to the south-western NSW town of Young to work at the local abattoir.

It follows the story of 23-year-old Mobarak and his burgeoning friendship with local teacher Molly, 25, who teaches him how to drive.

"The reason I made it was because it was a framework of looking at other issues and looking at the cross-culture relationships in general against the background of a divided community," Zubrycki said.

He said it was interesting to watch Young's response to the newcomers and to see their negative attitudes dissipate over time.

The Afghans even had a float in the cherry parade the same year, which was symbolic of the town's acceptance.

Zubrycki said his film was about unrequited love, with Mobarak wanting more from his friendship with Molly.

"The whole intention was to put a

"You kind of make the film in a way that's intensely personal, you're just as much a part of it"

human face on the refugees," Zubrycki said.

"It's a really in-depth understanding of what it means to experience separation, grief and loss."

Mobarak was one of 3500 illegal boat people from the Hazara ethnic minority who arrived in Australia between 1999 and 2001, fleeing persecution from the Taliban.

Mobarak is currently living in Auburn on a bridging visa, waiting to hear from immigration on whether his claim for permanent residency has been accepted.

Zubrycki has made documentaries for 25 years, enjoying watching characters' lives unfold and becoming part of the action.

"You kind of make the film in a way that's intensely personal, you're just as much a part of it," Zubrycki said.

Molly & Mobarak opens tomorrow, January 29, at the Valhalla Cinema, Glebe Point Rd, for two weeks.



Tale of unrequited love... Tom Zubrycki's tried to show the "human face" of Afghan refugees in his new documentary. Photo: DANNY AARONS

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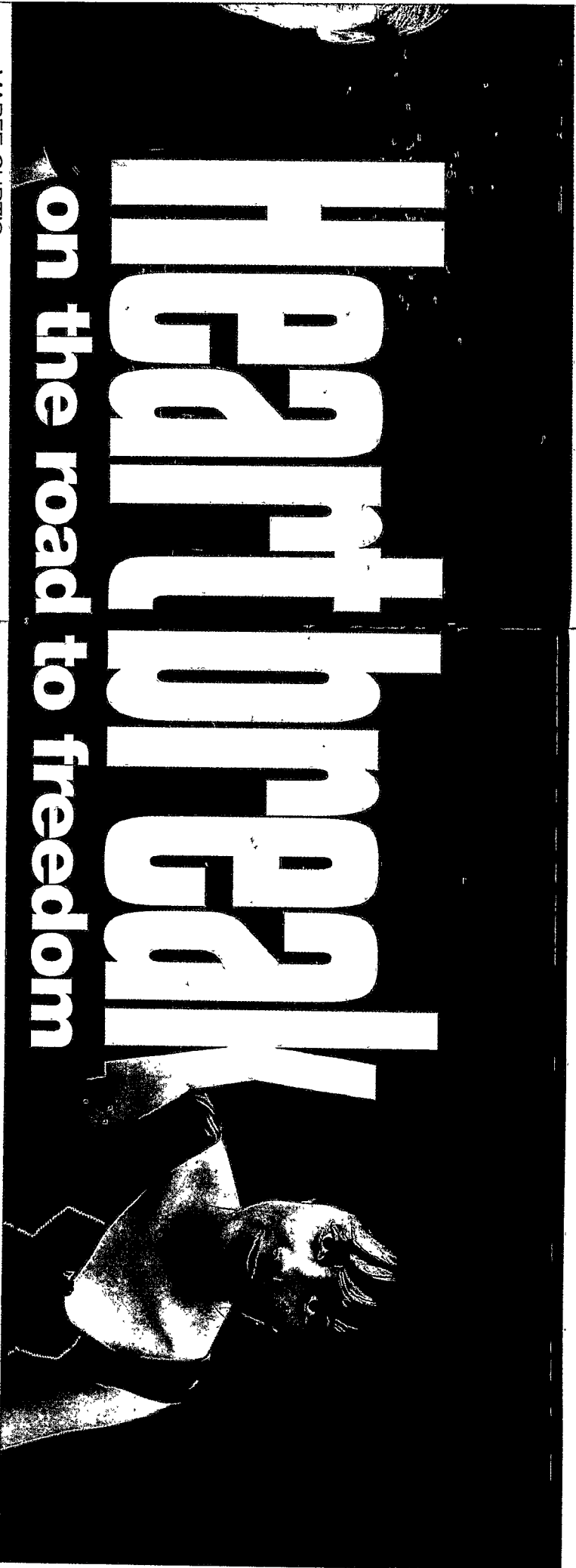
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Mobarak

on the road to freedom

BY MAREE CURTIS

PICTURES: PIP BLACKWOOD

If life really did imitate art — as defined by Hollywood, anyway — the story of Molly Rule and Mobarak Tahiri would have a happy ending. Picture this: a handsome young refugee flees persecution in his homeland, ends up in a small country town where he falls truly, madly and deeply in love with the high-school teacher. Ethnic, religious and language differences are swept aside, the government finds its heart and allows the young man to stay in the country (even though his Temporary Protection Visa has expired), and they live happily ever after. The End.

Unfortunately, in the real world things are rarely so neat and tidy. The true story, as told by veteran Australian documentary filmmaker Tom Zubrycki in his latest project *Molly and Mobarak*, is not how Tahiri Town would have scripted it. In reality, for the moment at least, there is no happy ending for Mobarak. Not only is his love for the pretty Molly unrequited, he is, a man living on borrowed time. His temporary visa expired in June and he is appealing to stay in Australia. His precarious status means that he could be

detained and deported to his native Afghanistan at any time. Should this happen, Mobarak, 22, believes he will be murdered.

It is easy to see why Mobarak fell in love with 25-year-old Molly. She is doll-like pretty, with big brown eyes, glossy dark hair, a soft voice and gentle manner. Even more importantly for a young man barely out of his teens, who'd known little more than deprivation and cruelty in his short life, Molly offered him friendship and kindness. She was also the first woman even close to his age he had encountered in years. Alone and afraid in a strange country, far from home and family, Mobarak fell for Molly, with all the emotional havoc that accompanies first love. As if he didn't have enough to contend with.

Molly and her mother, Lyn, befriended Mobarak when the Afghan refugee moved to their small NSW country town of Young in late 2001. At 17, he had fled persecution from the Taliban in his homeland and spent two years in detention before being found to be a genuine asylum seeker. He was vulnerable, needy and desperate to stay in Australia. He just wanted

to be one of us. "I realised he had a crush on me when he'd been in our lives for a couple of months. I had a boyfriend and I wasn't interested in Mobarak in that way, but it was really hard to know what to do. This wasn't a normal situation," Molly says.

Equally concerned for the welfare of the young man who now calls her mummy, Lyn Rule sought advice from the older members of the Afghan community, while Molly spoke with grief counsellors. "By this stage mum and I were both pretty worried. Their advice was to keep my distance from him." For the Rule women this was not an option.

"Wed made a relationship with this boy, wed listened to his stories," Lyn says. "He has never known stability in his life. Things stop abruptly, people disappear, people die. He had become part of our family and we couldn't tell him to go away."

Ironically, by embracing a western lifestyle — not to mention falling in love with a western woman and declaring his new beliefs publicly in Zubrycki's film — Mobarak has become a target, not only for religious extremists in

Afghanistan, but also for some members of his own Hazara community in Australia. "Other Hazaras dislike me because I've changed. They will report on me to the people in Afghanistan. Since I've been in Australia my beliefs have changed. There is one God, Muslims, Buddhists, everyone is the same. Everyone is a human being," he says.

"When I was in Afghanistan I believed what they said. (That) we should be ready for jihad, we should kill infidels. But since I've been here I don't believe any of that. If I go back they will know the supposedly bad things I've done here. They could come one to death like the others they've killed. Everyone knows I've changed everything. I drink, I go to nightclubs, I go out with girls, I do anything I want."

Zubrycki had not intended to make a love story — a sort of Romeo and Juliet of the Aussie bush — when he first visited Young, a sheep-farming and cherry-growing community, population about 11,000, in early 2002. He had heard that the town, four hours' drive south-west of Sydney, had a group of 50 men from Afghanistan's Hazara ethnic minority who had

been given TPVs and he was interested to find out what happened to these people once they were released from detention centres.

But Zubrycki stumbled across a story of unrequited love which he knew would have universal appeal, and decided to use the documented relationship as a framework for examining other issues in the community, including racism, the invariable cultural divide and a town's growing understanding that behind the headlines and statistics, there are human beings suffering under the Australian government's hardline policies.

"I started to film with several families who had adopted Hazaras, one of them was Molly and her mother Lyn," Zubrycki says. "The first time I filmed Molly and Mobarak was when she took him for his second driving lesson. That's how the year of filming began and how their relationship started."

The older, wiser and less emotionally charged Zubrycki could see from the start what Mobarak could not. "It became apparent this was more than just an innocent friendship. Mobarak had romantic intentions for Molly. >

The road to freedom

which weren't necessarily reciprocated. I knew this would lead to complications down the track."

His film premiered at last year's Sydney Film Festival, has been shown at festivals in Toronto, New York and Amsterdam and has been nominated for an AIF (Australian Independent Film) Award for best documentary. For Molly, any embarrassment at watching her life played out on screen like a soap opera is outweighed by the potential for the film. "I want people to see that these are people just like us. We're just ordinary, working-class people. All we did was reach out to another human being."

In many ways, Mobarak's story is similar to many others we have heard in recent years. When his two older brothers fled to the mountains to join resistance fighters, Mobarak stayed at home with his father, mother and two sisters in their small village outside Kabul. The Hazaras were persecuted by the Taliban who would come at night to round up young men from the villages. Like others, Mobarak would hide in the roof while they searched and hold his breath while they shot bullets into the ceiling.

Eventually, Mobarak's father, who had run a small farm and a shop before the Taliban forced him to close his business, took him to the mountains to join his brothers. By selling almost everything the family owned, Mobarak's father scraped enough money together to pay people smugglers to get one of his sons out of Afghanistan. Mobarak walked through the mountains into Pakistan and then flew to Indonesia where he boarded a leaky boat for the treacherous last leg of his trip to Australia, where he and his family believed refugees were welcome. "They didn't know that what they were doing was considered illegal in Australia. They boarded the boat at night and it wasn't until it was too late that they realised it was an old rust bucket. They paid a lot of money, they were hoodwinked," Lyn says.

The boat arrived in Australia in late 1999 and the asylum seekers were taken to Curtin Detention Centre in Western Australia where Mobarak spent six months before being released on a TPV. In one of the few lucky moments in his life, at the time of his release the town of Young was bucking the general trend in rural communities and enjoying an economic growth spurt thanks to its meat industry. Unable to find enough local workers to meet expansion plans, a manager at the local abattoir came up with the idea of hiring Afghans. Mobarak arrived in Young with 89 other Hazara refugees, all men.

It is somewhat ironic that this should happen in a town which once proudly proclaimed to be the birthplace of the White Australia Policy. In 1860, angry miners rioted and drove the Chinese from the goldfields, forcing the government of the day to introduce a bill limiting Chinese immigration. The townsfolk, including Lyn's great-grandfather, a



Lovelorn: Lyn and Molly Rule (above) welcomed Mobarak Tahiri into their home but faced a tough decision when they realised he was in love with Molly (left).

former mayor of the town, financed and starred in a 1928 film about the uprising.

These days, Young is no better and no worse than any other small town anywhere in the world. Unlike busy multicultural hubs such as Melbourne and Sydney, differences are more noticeable, and while the town has its share of racists and bigots (cowards who shout witty banter from moving vehicles, such as "go back to where you came from wog"; and the ill-informed who think refugees are taking jobs from Aussie workers, despite evidence to the contrary), it has just as many, if not more, people of goodwill.

"You'll never change 89 people's minds," Lyn says. "They are uneducated, but what's worse is they don't want to know the truth. But at the (annual) Cherry Parade recently, the Afghans marched in their traditional garb and they were clapped down the street. That was really good."

Locals who wanted to help the newcomers organised sporting events, social gatherings and

English lessons. And so it was that Molly met Mobarak.

Throughout the months of filming, Lyn, a no-nonsense, down-to-earth single mother of four, found herself increasingly caught in the middle between her daughter and the young man she had brought into their family. "I knew the best thing he could do would be to leave Young and make a fresh start, but how could I tell him to do that. How could I say to him, 'go away'. He said to me once, 'while I'm in Australia will you be my mother?'. We were the only family he had."

Unable to cope with Mobarak's clinginess, Molly took off for a five-week overseas holiday, leaving a disconsolate Mobarak begging her not to forget him. It fell to Lyn to explain to a weeping Mobarak that Molly did not love him the way he loved her. "I did the mother talk, and he handled it. It's like any first love. You find a way to cope."

Eventually Mobarak realised that staying in Young was simply prolonging his agony. Before he left just over a year ago, however, he asked Molly and Lyn to dye his hair blonde so people would think he was Australian. "We put in really subtle tips but he didn't like it so he went to the supermarket and bought another packet and tipped the lot on his hair."

Perhaps it was the hair, but not long after moving to Sydney, Mobarak met Rebecca who is helping him get over his first love. They live together in Sydney's western suburbs and Molly couldn't be happier. "We talk on the phone often and do a big catch-up."

While he waits for the Immigration Department to decide whether he will be allowed to stay in Australia, Mobarak works two jobs, as a cleaner and stacking supermarket shelves. On weekends he enjoys going clubbing with Rebecca.

After intermittent contact, he has not been able to get in touch with his family in Afghanistan for four months. But like a good son, he rings Lyn weekly and he came to visit the weekend before Christmas. "I think he's changed, he's a bit more understanding of life's processes. When he came here, we were the first real western contact he had. Now he has a better understanding of western culture and western relationships. He has made a big effort to do that."

An effort that all who have met Mobarak hope has not been wasted. He expects to hear any day whether his application to stay in Australia has been approved. It is, for Mobarak, a life-and-death decision. "I'm afraid because my life is in danger. As soon as I go back I will be killed. The Australian Government says it is safe, but the Taliban is still there, people are still being killed. It's just not on the news."

Molly and Mobarak opens January 29.



Pain in the frame: Mobarak and Molly from Zubrycki's film about them

Filming on trust

Documentary makers are embracing subjectivity, writes Rosalie Higson

IF Australia's documentary film-makers have one thing in common it is subjectivity. Many of their strongest and most successful works are intensely personal, with a strong point of view and an almost fictional style of narrative.

Veteran Australian film-maker Tom Zubrycki calls it narrative *verite*. It is an international trend, he says.

Cultural, political and social concerns form an undercurrent to the love story in his latest film *Molly & Mobarak*, which opens in cinemas later this month.

Zubrycki, who has been directing and producing films for 25 years, is best known for the multi award-winning *The Diplomat* about East Timor's Jose Ramos Horta. He also produced *Exile in Sarajevo*, which won an International Emmy in 1996, and *Gulpili - One Red Blood* in 2002. He says being a documentary maker is a labour of love and only half in jest, that it amounts to taking a vow of poverty.

"Documentary makers operate at the margins," he says. "It can be hard to make a living, especially for younger film-makers." He is passionate about his work and the local industry and points out that internationally our documentary makers receive as much acclaim as our feature film-makers.

Molly & Mobarak continues a theme he began to follow in the 1990s, making observational essays of Australian families — especially immigrant families — during times of intense change or personal crisis. This time he wanted to find out what happened to refugees after they left a detention centre on a three-year temporary protection visa. "The premise being," he says, "that to be on a temporary visa is a further, subtler form of

punishment." He ended up in the NSW town of Young, filming Mobarak Tahiri, a handsome 22-year-old Hazari, from Afghanistan, and the pretty girl who teaches him to drive.

"I found out that refugees were moving into small towns and taking the jobs other people didn't want — dirty jobs, working in abattoirs, fruit picking. The Hazaris discovered this was a way of getting reasonably good money on a casual basis rather than queuing in an unemployment line."

Zubrycki met other Hazaris and volunteer worker Lyn Rule, her daughter Molly and other members of the town's refugee support group — and plenty of non-supporters. He was invited to move in with the Rule family, enabling him to follow the progress of the star-crossed lovers.

Zubrycki set up his camera (mini-DV, the camera of choice of documentary makers), and left it in the corner of the living room. "You've got to be right there," he says, "because you don't get a second chance." There's a scene where Mobarak and Lynn have a heart-to-heart conversation about Molly — had I not been there and stolen into the kitchen, I wouldn't have captured that moment.

Nor would he have caught the scene when Rule and her daughter gently but firmly push Tahiri out the door and say goodbye. "This boy wants to be part of the family, so these were deep emotional moments... and I knew I had to put them into context."

For Zubrycki, the relationship between film-maker and subject is one of trust, and he gives viewers close-ups of some painful and intimate moments. "I felt it was dangerous territory to some extent. I didn't want to be privy to things that were of such a sensitive nature that they would later feel compromised by those moments. But very quickly they told me if they didn't want the presence of the camera... They did keep an eye on me."

Tahiri, who now lives in Sydney, awaits his fate at the hands of the Refugee Appeal Board. *Molly & Mobarak* opens in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane on January 29.