A tenuous hold on hope
The men were committed to trying to escape to Australia and eventually, after two months in Jakarta, Hamid and Dalir* embarked on their trip Down Under.

‘There were 10 days without being able to eat, in rough seas in the smuggler’s boat,’ says Hamid. The roller coaster of a journey saw the father and son squeezed together with 170 people, squeezed into 50 feet of misery. Diesel fumes from 50 barrels of fuel sickened everyone.

When discovered by the Australian Navy, all those aboard were arrested and spent three days and nights in a navy vessel.

‘The navy took us to Darwin, where we received three month bridging visas, and then we were taken to Melbourne,’ says Hamid. A relative there was able to assist them.

A bleak 11 months after they arrived on Australian soil, Hamid says, A'idah fled from home and met with the same smugglers in Jakarta. She spent 36 hours on the water, and ended up at Christmas Island in 2013. She was incarcerated for a month and then transferred to the Melbourne Detention Centre / MITA (Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation) before being reunited with her husband and son.

Compared to what people endure under the current detention regime, with the indefinite mental agony inflicted upon those imprisoned, A'idah, Hamid and Dalir were fortunate indeed.

‘A'idah was very brave,’ Hamid says. ‘She escaped from home while she was under surveillance; every two weeks she had been questioned again – “Where is Hamid?! Where is your husband?!”’

In her flight, A'idah had to practise ‘rashvet’ – bribery of police– both in her homeland and in Jakarta. There was no other option. Power corrupts; the old axiom can be seen on every continent, in every nation.

The price that A'idah faced for her conversion to Christianity may have been steep. The week that I spoke to Hamid and A'idah, they tell me that back in their homeland a pastor had been drowned, martyred for his faith, in a swimming pool. The brutal parody of baptism saddens them.

‘I miss home,’ she says. ‘My father and my sister are both home, suffering from cancer, and life is hard for them. A bowl of fruit is too expensive for ordinary people. It is only the corrupt, the “jib bozorg” (“big pocket”, or a taker of bribes) who profits.

“Everyone should be sharing in the wealth of our homeland, but corruption reigns.’

A normal family now living life in Australia, Hamid and A'idah attend a Salvation Army corps (church) each week. That’s not to say that their story comes to a neat resolution without difficulties.

The family still awaits the processing of their claim for asylum. Hamid and A'idah are struggling with serious health issues, and have barely enough to live on.
Like many people aided by The Salvation Army, they are ill with the accumulated stress of waiting for safety and security to be assured.

They labour under the negative Australian policy towards them, and the generalised public apathy about them.

But Hamid and A’idah, and their son, Dalir, know that life could have been very different for them. Death could have been the result of their decisions.

A flight from a beloved but oppressive homeland is not undertaken lightly. And the welcome that has been given to three strangers, by their new friends and neighbours, is not taken for granted by them – especially knowing the misery that other people in similar situations are still experiencing in offshore detention.

*Names have been changed to protect their identities.*