

Of documentaries and tabloids

15.03.2019, Episode 51

Owen in China

Hello, I'm Owen and this is my podcast for Friday 15th March, 2019. I was a little worried to read about the ongoing trouble between India and Pakistan this month. I'm flying back to India shortly and I'm going to be staying in an area close to the Pakistani border. Hopefully, the situation won't escalate. I had to laugh though when I saw a picture of the captured [1] Indian fighter jet pilot crossing the border back into India. What a moustache! A moustache with wings. Sadly that's pretty much all I've laughed at this month, because the rest of my month has revolved around [2] crime [3].

Today, I'll tell you all about why my month has revolved around crime.

I was looking at the list of nominations and winners of this year's Oscars and I noticed that I haven't seen any of the films, bar [4] one. I hardly watch films these days, all I watch are documentaries, in particular true crime documentaries. Some of them are about white-collar crime [5], such as the 2008 financial crisis, others are about murders - unsolved murders or murders with some mystery attached. For me it all started with a Netflix series called 'Making A Murderer'. I won't tell you what it's about, but I will say that it was incredibly well made. I was absolutely captivated [6] by it. I found it interesting on many levels. For one it gives you an insight into how law enforcement [7] works and how criminal law [8] works. You see how lawyers prepare cases [9] and how they present their arguments in court. And then there's the human and emotional side of it - how do people end up committing crimes? You get to watch and hear interviews with all the people involved: the accused [10], the families, the friends, the police and the lawyers. You get all the different points of view, all the back stories and emotions. And lastly there's the mystery, the uncertainty of what to believe. It's quite voyeuristic and fascinating.



There's one documentary that really stands out [11] for me. It's one of the strangest stories I've ever heard. The title is 'The Imposter' - an imposter is a person who pretends to be someone else. It's about a man who stole a missing teenager's identity. In 1994 a 13-year-old boy went missing in Texas in the US. 3 years later a 23-year-old Frenchman in Spain claimed to be the missing boy. He convinced the Spanish authorities and an American embassy worker that he was the missing teenager. The sister of the missing boy flew from Texas to Spain and confirmed that, yes, he was her missing brother, even though the Frenchman doesn't look or sound anything like the missing American teenager. Nevertheless, the American embassy in Madrid issued him a passport and then they flew him to Texas where he was united with the family of the missing teenager. The family welcomed him as if he were their missing child. He even started going to the local high school. After a number of months, the authorities in Texas became a little suspicious because he didn't look or talk anything like the teenager. The Texas-born teenager has blue eyes and blonde hair, whereas the 23-year-old Frenchman speaks English with a French accent and has brown eyes and black hair. After six months, the Frenchman was arrested and ended up in prison. Sadly the missing teenager has never been found. The story itself is really bizarre, but what makes the documentary so intriguing [12] is that everyone is in it. The Frenchman, who is now a free man living back in France, the whole family in Texas, the American embassy worker in Spain, the authorities in Texas - they are all in this documentary retelling the story. There is a possible twist [13] to the story, but you'll have to watch it if you want to find out.

I've started listening to a radio channel called LBC, which stands for London Broadcasting Company. It's a talk radio station. No

music, just talk. I started listening to it because I read a book by one of its broadcasters. His name is James O'Brien. Every weekday James O'Brien hosts a phone-in programme, where people call in to discuss various topics, often topics taken from the news. He seems to really enjoy it when someone calls in with a different opinion. He likes a good debate. He's good at it too and, on top of [14] that, he's very well-informed. Quite frequently he gets people who call in and haven't prepared very well. It then quickly transpires [15] that they have no clue [16] what they are talking about. Sometimes it's people with rather unsavoury [17] and bigoted views on, for example, immigration, the EU or Islam. In his book he writes about these people and the arguments he's had with them on his programme. Where do they get their opinions and ideas from? The idea, for example, that immigrants are driving down [18] wages or that the EU Court of Justice makes all new British laws? One source [19] of this kind of misinformation James O'Brien covers in his book. It's the tabloids. The cheap, populist, sensationalist newspapers. There's a lot of them in the UK. He argues that they're very irresponsible in the way they treat the news. It's obvious why they do what they do. At the end of the day it's a business. For them it's all about selling newspapers after all. If that means spreading a bit of fear, so be it [20]. I've never read many of these tabloids but I decided to do a little experiment: for one month I was going to get all my news from tabloids, go populist for a month. You know, just to see what would happen, how it would affect me and my views. Did I become a xenophobic Brexiteer? Well, after one month, no, not quite or not yet, I should say. Reading tabloids is quite addictive. But you don't gain that much from reading them, they're big on headlines but rather thin on content. I did, however, get a bit nervous about leaving my house. These newspapers are full of reports on crime. I know I just told you that I have a fascination for crime, but this is different. This is about all the horrific, senseless crime you don't really want to know about. I won't go into details, instead I'll conclude with a little piece of advice: don't read tabloids.

That's just about it for this month. Thank you for listening. You can listen to all our episodes by downloading our app or by visiting our website podclub.ch. Remember that you can also download our vocabulary trainer and you can find us on Instagram. I'll be back on 12th April. Until then, goodbye.

Glossar: Owen in China

[1] **captured:** arrested

[2] **to revolve around:** to centre around

[3] **crime:** an action which goes against the law

[4] **bar:** here: except for

[5] **white-collar crime:** crime that typically involves stealing money from a company and is done by people in important positions in the company

[6] **captivated:** very interested in something

[7] **law enforcement:** police

[8] **criminal law:** a system of law concerned with punishment of offenders

[9] **case:** a legal action

[10] **accused:** a person charged with a crime

[11] **to stand out:** to be better or more significant

[12] **intriguing:** fascinating

[13] **twist:** here: something unexpected

[14] **on top of:** here: in addition to

[15] **to transpire:** to become clear/known

[16] **to have no clue:** to be ignorant

[17] **unsavoury:** here: unpleasants

[18] **to drive down:** to force down

[19] **source:** place of origin

[20] **so be it:** an expression of acceptance