

Documentary

# The deathwalker's story

Film about Byron's Zenith Virago will close the festival

Javier Encalada

**Z**ENITH Virago's role as part of the Natural Death Care Centre team and as a marriage celebrant has made her a well-known figure in the Byron Bay area. Virago's story is told in an intimate and sensitive way in *Zen and the Art of Dying*. Filmmaker Broderick Fox unveils the many layers to Virago's life in this 77-minute documentary, but the main focus is on her work around death. "The best way to explain training I'm doing for people now is as a deathwalker," she said. "People find that a bit confronting, we add the title of celebrant as it covers the

other side of that work." As a deathwalker, Virago takes care of those who are close to departing, their families and friends, not just in the legal and social sense, but also emotionally and spiritually. For Virago, her work helps people to reclaim their own sacred rites. "People are very busy getting married but not in a church,

or very busy being buried but not in a church," she said. "Funerary services are being held in parks which then become sacred grounds. "You don't need to have religion to make something sacred, and religion doesn't have a monopoly on rites of passage. "Anybody can get married, except for the gay community, anybody can die and anybody can transition from child to adolescent, to adult and to elder."

The film delves into Virago's own story, her arrival in Australia, her process of self-discovery in a way that is very intimate and loving. Virago is grateful to the people who agreed to be part of the film, especially those who have

passed, and their families. "I am grateful to all the people who allowed the film crew to come in and record their experience, and anybody that showed their experience of death for their loved ones," she said. She has decided not to watch the film until it's screened next Saturday.

**Zen and the Art of Dying** will be screened on Saturday, March 14, from 6.30pm at the Byron Bay Theatre. For details visit [www.bbff.com.au](http://www.bbff.com.au)

**SPIRITUAL: Byron Bay deathwalker Zenith Virago in a still from the film Zen and the Art of Dying (2015).**



THE FILMS

WITH more than 200 films from across the world covering a multitude of topics, the Byron Bay Film Festival offers a generous variety of flicks to enjoy. There are films by Northern Rivers filmmakers, editors' picks, animations, dramas, shorts and features, comedies, documentaries, surf flicks, dance films and environmental movies. The beautiful, the abstracts, the ugly, the taboo and the unspeakable ... they will all be shown on the big screens in Lismore, Murwillumbah, Byron Bay and, for the first time, Ballina. The festival also offers an opportunity to bring out your inner movie star and walk the red carpet dressed to the nines, at two gala events. The Opening Gala, to be held tomorrow at the Byron Bay Theatre, will feature red carpet treatment for patrons plus feature film Tony Benn, Will and Testament, a documentary about the famous and often controversial British Labor MP. The Closing Gala, on Saturday, March 14, will feature *Zen and the Art of Dying* (see story on this page), a film made by Byron Bay Film Festival Alumni Broderick Fox (The Skin I'm In), who met Zenith Virago at the 2012 festival. For details, and to book your place, visit the website [www.bbff.com.au](http://www.bbff.com.au)



The Aussie larrikin who took on the gas industry



CSG FIGHT: Pratzky during an anti-CSG mining protest in Queensland. PHOTO: ANDREW QUILTY / OCULI

## Frackman's fight is anything but a gas

Javier Encalada

**D**AYNE Pratzky is The Frackman, and the movie documenting his adventures fighting the gas industry in Queensland is coming to the Northern Rivers. Pratzky is the embodiment of the Aussie larrikin. A former party boy in Sydney, he moved to Chinchilla in Queensland to shoot pigs and build a farm. Hardly your average environmental activist. But his life changed when Queensland Gas Company started work in his property.

The 90-minute film chronicles his ups and downs within the five years that Pratzky fought to remove the gas company from his land. Pratzky dismissed the idea that some footage on this film could prompt the gas companies to seek legal action against him. "I don't believe I've broken the law," he said. "If the industry wasn't so secretive and dishonest, we could have relied on the appropriate authorities to get the answers I was seeking. "If they had done their

job, I wouldn't have to do what I had to do." As the film develops, it is clear Pratzky could not deal with the pressure anymore. "I was 40, my land was worth nothing, I was in trouble," he said. "I had a mental breakdown - I am not ashamed to admit it. That's the pressure that's put on people when that industry comes to town." Asked how he lasted that long in that situation, Pratzky said the support from places like the Northern Rivers kept him going. "I'll tell you why I lasted

that long: It's because of people from the Northern Rivers and around Australia came to my house and showed they care," he said. "We had busloads of people coming from the Northern Rivers, from the Nimbin Environment Centre, from Lismore and Kyogle. "That made us feel that we weren't alone." This film will screen from Saturday in Byron Bay, Lismore, Murwillumbah and Ballina. For details visit [www.frackmanthemovie.com](http://www.frackmanthemovie.com)

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**AUDITIONS**  
Sunday 22 March - 10am - 5.00pm  
at the Theatre - 24 Swift St - Ballina

**OLIVER!**

Auditionees are to contact the Director Clem Halpin using the following email address [clemshellyhalpin@gmail.com](mailto:clemshellyhalpin@gmail.com)  
Giving your name, contact details and which part(s) you are interested in - It may also help to give some details of your experience. FULL DETAILS at [www.ballinaplayers.com.au](http://www.ballinaplayers.com.au) -

**AUDITIONS**