The deathwalker's story

Film about Byron's Zenith
Virago will close the festival

Javier Encalada

ZENITH 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 this 77-minute documentary, but not in a church, she said. “People are very busy getting married but not in a church. They have their own sacred rites. Anything can get married, except for the gay community, anybody can 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.

Her process of self-discovery was a gradual one. It started when she was 23 years old, and it has continued ever since. "It's because of that transition from child to adolescent, to adult, and to elder," she said. "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.

The film 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 today at the Byron Bay Film Festival, will feature red carpet treatment for patrons plus feature film Tony Boin, Wild 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, to book your place, visit the website www.bbff.com.au

Frackman's fight is anything but a gas

Javier Encalada

DAYNE Pratzky is The Frackman, and the movie documenting his adventures fighting the gas industry in Queensland is coming to the Northern Rivers.

Pritzky is the embodiment of the Aussie larrikin. A former party boy in Sydney, he moved to Chinchilla in Queensland to shoot gas 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 had 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 people on places like the Northern Rivers kept him going.

"I'll tell you why I lasted that long: It's because of people coming 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