

## John Loizou on Sunday.

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### **BUNJI WITH A STORY TO TELL.**

Many stories attach to William Bartlett Day whose book *Bunji*, a story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement, is being launched in Perth today.

They provide a sample of the impetuous courage, and depreciating humor of the man who between August 1971 and November 1983 organised the Aborigines who previously owned Darwin – the Larrakia – in their bid to regain dignity and have their right to own land recognised.

The following stories are among my favourites:

In 1965, Bill the aged 24, was working on board a fishing vessel gill-netting cod off Iceland.

Leaving Reykjavik harbor at night, the crew spotted a woman – a would-be suicide – floating in the water. “I used my Australian lifesaving skills by tying a rope around my waist and dived in and swam to her,” he said.

#### **Freezing**

“It was freezing. It’s so cold you could die in 15 minutes. I guess that is why I dived in and not the Icelanders.”

The effort earned Bill the headline: “Utlandinger – meaning foreigner – rescues woman.”

Later he earned a more notorious headline: “Utlandinger attacks partygoer.”

“There was an American base in Reykjavik,” Bill said.

“I saw a member of the Ku Klux Klan walking down the street so I attacked, telling him to go back to America.

“The trouble was he was an Icelander going to a fancy dress ball.”

Then – in the 1970s – Bill and I were among the leaders of a May Day march, including that venerable former shearer, Communist Party organiser and militant trade unionist, Neil Byron, who were accosted by demonstrators on what was then the Old Darwin Oval – now the Esplanade.

The mood turned ugly.

The vanguard of the march was for throwing the demonstrators over the Lameroo Beach cliffs.

Mindful of the media furore this would provoke, I turned to Bill anticipating help in calming the outrage.

“What do you think we should do Bill,” I asked.

“We should attack them with sharpened sticks,” was the response of my comrade who was then a keen supporter of liberation wars and peasant struggle.

Now, at 53, Bill is a third-year student of literature and anthropology at the University of Western Australia.

His book is based in the 64 editions of the magazine *Bunji* which he founded and edited in Darwin.

It deals with the Larrakia Claim for Kulaluk, Coconut Grove, Nightcliff, and shows that Paul Keating’s Native Title, or Mabo, legislation did not happen in a vacuum. The legislation is the culmination of many and varied struggles.

It also documents the journey of a young middle-class West Australian schoolteacher who hitchhiked north to join the then hippies as beachcomber and ends with a new understanding of himself, mostly prompted by his association with Aboriginal Australians.

It was a journey that should fascinate all who have a regard for contemporary Australian history regardless of their political affiliations.

Three of Bill Day’s paternal ancestors served as the Mayor of Maidstone, Kent.

Another, George Throssell, succeeded John Forrest as Western Australia’s second premier.

His great uncle, Hugo Throssell, won a Victoria Cross at Gallipoli and married the author Katharine Susannah Prichard.

#### **Fought**

His father, William Bartlett Day, fought with the AIF at Balikpapan.

Bill made his own pilgrimage to the battlefields of Gallipoli in 1964.

His book will be launched in Perth by WA Inc Royal Commissioner and deputy chairman of the Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee, Sir Ronald Wilson.

It will be launched in Darwin next week.

It should cost \$19.95 and be available from most bookshops.

Gwalwa Daraniki means “our land” in the language of the Larrakia.

Bunji means “friend”.

[Note: the book was written in 1992 and published by Aboriginal Studies Press in 1994. Bill graduated in 1996 with a BA with joint honours in Anthropology and English, and in 2001 with a PhD in Anthropology. BD 2013].