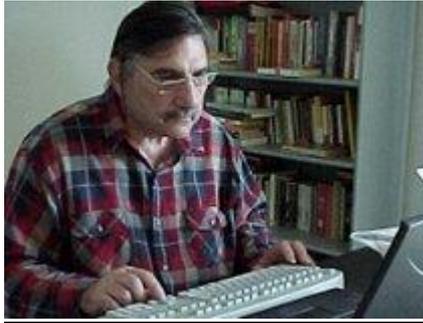


## John Loizou – A Life Dedicated to Truth in Journalism.



John's sister Margaret recalls that her brother was a boisterous and noisy player of Australian Rules football for the local Dandenong team. For him the game was a competition of total concentration and dedication, rather than a social event. After the final siren he would say to his sister, "Come on Margaret, we're going now!" And that is how John played the game of life. When the final siren came, he upped and left us without a word of goodbye. Most likely, that is how John would like to have left this material world, without acknowledgement or ceremony. In football and in life, he played the game roughly but with outstanding talent, so much so that when it came for his home team to present the usual award for Fairest and Best, because of his hard physical contact style of playing the game they could only bring themselves to "Best Player", and exclude the title, "Fairest".

Born in 1942, John honed his politics in the Melbourne Eureka Youth League in the 1950s. To prove their progressive politics, the Eureka League invited Aboriginal youths to join their camps, whose stories may have inflamed John's sense of justice for the oppressed. After the Aboriginal boys stole a car, Margaret remembers a police officer saying to her, "What is a good girl like you mixing with such types?"

As a teenager, John was a voracious reader of Marxist-Leninist literature, Steinbeck, and similar working class novels that he recommended to his sister, Margaret, to the extent of worrying her history teacher, Barry Jones, who advised his pupil not to get too involved in subversive movements and ideas.

At the age of 17, a friend pointed out to John that the ABC was advertising for cadet journalists. John applied, in competition with at least sixty applicants, mostly from academic backgrounds and private schools in contrast to John's training at Dandenong Technical School. The rest is history – John was given the cadetship and at the tender age of 17 sent to the remote outpost of Darwin where he remained with the ABC for the required three years. During that time, his talent as a journalist was noticed by the legendary editor of the Northern Territory News, Jim Bowditch and his rugged good looks by a pretty Darwin girl, Olive Kennedy, a member of the stolen generation. Obviously, John had thrown himself headlong into the Darwin scene of the early 1960s that included such historic events as the Aboriginal fight for citizenship and the campaigns against deportation of Malay divers.

Olive and John were together for over 14 years, marrying in Saint Kilda in 1964 and producing two sons, Brendan and Damien. The family settled in Darwin, in a house in Harney Street, Ludmilla, where they lived until Cyclone Tracy in 1974. John was a respected member of Olive's extended family and Walpiri people. In an ABC documentary, he recorded their experiences of being removed and transported to the Retta Dixon Home in Bagot Road, Darwin.

At the age of 22, John was in the newsroom of The Age in Melbourne when news of the supposed attack by North Viet Nam patrol boats against the destroyer USS Maddox came through. In 2008 he described the mood on the night in vivid prose: "...the bells to alert us of a 'snap' from the wire agencies began to ring in semi-darkened newsroom and we learned of the 'attack.' Later, - the newspaper's news editor and, I the only two members of the editorial team still at work, were chilled at the first reports of 'dogfights' in the skies above the 17th parallel ... as we plated for an extra city edition to tell our small world the news. We thought it could well herald the end of

civilisation as we knew it because of our unfounded fear that the then Soviet Union would enter the war ... The Bac Bo or Gulf of Tonkin incident became, as they say these days, a defining moment for me. I have never again trusted reports out of Washington of far-off provocations and have remand ashamed of my own government's acquiescence in many of the subsequent mis-adventures."

The rest of John's varied career is yet to be chronologically recorded, but at the age of 24, John was for a time the youngest subeditor at the prestigious Canberra Times.

During the Suharto regime in Indonesia, John was sent on assignment to Indonesia for The Tribune, the newspaper of the CPA. Presumably the purpose of the visit was highly secret, so when contact was lost with John for two months, there was a fear that he had been shot. Making contact was made more urgent when his father died suddenly, and John had always been proud of his father's Greek ancestry.

John developed many friendships with people in Indonesia and particularly a Balinese leader, who shared John's concern about the increasing sale of Balinese villagers' land to foreigners. His involvement in the East Timorese liberation struggle included assisting to operate the Top End clandestine radio communications with occupied East Timor. John's work has been recognised by Mari Alkatiri, General Secretary of Fretilin, who wrote in part: "We in Timor-Leste who have struggled for justice and peace know very well and close to our hearts John's love and commitment to both principles. He gave his time selflessly coming over to see for himself the crisis that enveloped our nation and people in 2006 and writing about it in the coming years."

By the 1970s, John was a subeditor at the NT News with Jim Bowditch, ensuring that the underdog was given a voice by reporting prominently on the Darwin Aboriginal land rights protests, including the raising of a flag to claim back Darwin, the blocking of peak hour traffic in sit downs on Bagot Road, the preparation of a petition for land rights to Queen Elizabeth and many other actions that might not have otherwise been reported.

Along with Stewart Harris, another journalist of similar persuasion from Canberra, John also supported the Aboriginal land rights fighter and Kulaluk defender, Fred Fogarty, with whom John often met his match in heated debates on activism and tactics around a campfire at a house that Fred had built on an island in the swamps behind Ludmilla.

Following Cyclone Tracy, social life was being restored in Darwin, much centred around the popular "Restaurant Cri" in Austin Lane, which had incidentally provided John with a distribution point for his occasional anonymous reports in The Tribune, much to the displeasure of some customers. A friendship blossomed, and many will remember John driving around Darwin in Cri's mini-moke, with the strong proviso that he was not to drive while drinking. The restaurant closed after four years.

John and Cri then invested in a 17-metre wooden fishing boat in need of repairs. For over ten years, the couple, with Brendan and Damien and other helpers, worked on making the boat seaworthy, sometimes living on board at Doctors Gully and then at Frances Bay. At the Dinah Beach Yacht Club, they were once told by an angry member, "Go back to the Workers Club where you belong!"

Tragedy nearly struck on the Mariana's second fishing voyage, when the boat was swamped during Cyclone Lawrence. Fortunately, the crew consisting of John's son Brendan and Marshall Haritos and his son were saved by the Navy in a dramatic rescue that made national headlines.

During this time, John had worked in various newspapers and as a morning announcer for the ABC. He also reported for the Sydney Morning Herald and the Age.

There had been a newspaper workers' strike after Jim Bowditch had resigned as editor. John later detailed his interpretation of the strike in an interview recorded with Sarah Everingham of the ABC. His name was cut from the final report. In the 1980s John reported for The Star and The Advertiser in Darwin. Then in 1995, John and Cri accepted a position with the Vietnam News in Hanoi where they stayed on and off for the next 15 years.

In 2000, John and Cri launched their next venture, the Southeast Asian Times, at first as a broadsheet and later, for 12 years, as an on-line newspaper, reporting on Southeast Asian affairs.

The Southeast Asian Times epitomised John and Cri's visionary belief that the Top End of Australia and Darwin in particular is an integral part of the Southeast Asian region with a shared history, geography culture and developing economic interests.

The development of the above ideal can be followed in John's reporting, variously described as being "of depth and substance", "old school", "committed and inspiring", "impeccably balanced", and with "a great hunger to tell a good story". Others described him as "a journalists' journalist" or "a craftsman". Nigel Adlam wrote that John "had a great hunger to tell a good story and hold the rich and famous to account." Adlam continued, John "often shook his head in disbelief at the way that tabloid newspapers 'crunched' the English language". Brian Cassells remembers John as a journalist who "dug for his own information and did not rely on ministerial releases ... a dedicated anarchist who never revealed his sources... the last of his kind."

In a full page story in *The Australian* (July 13-19, 2000, Media p.5), Paul Toohey cites John's revealing observation that "my fellow journalists in Hanoi didn't ask me how much advertising I had in my first edition [of the Southeast Asian Times]. All the Australians ask the same question: How much advertising did you get?"

Throughout John's career there always remained the motivation of serving truth and justice. In the early 1990s he won the NT Journalist of the year award and on other occasions John was himself the story, as will no doubt be shared over drinks in Darwin for years to come. He will be sadly missed by all, in particular his beloved partner and workmate, Christine Pas, his sons Brendan and Damien and his siblings, Margaret, Charles and Peter. We wish them our sincerest condolences.