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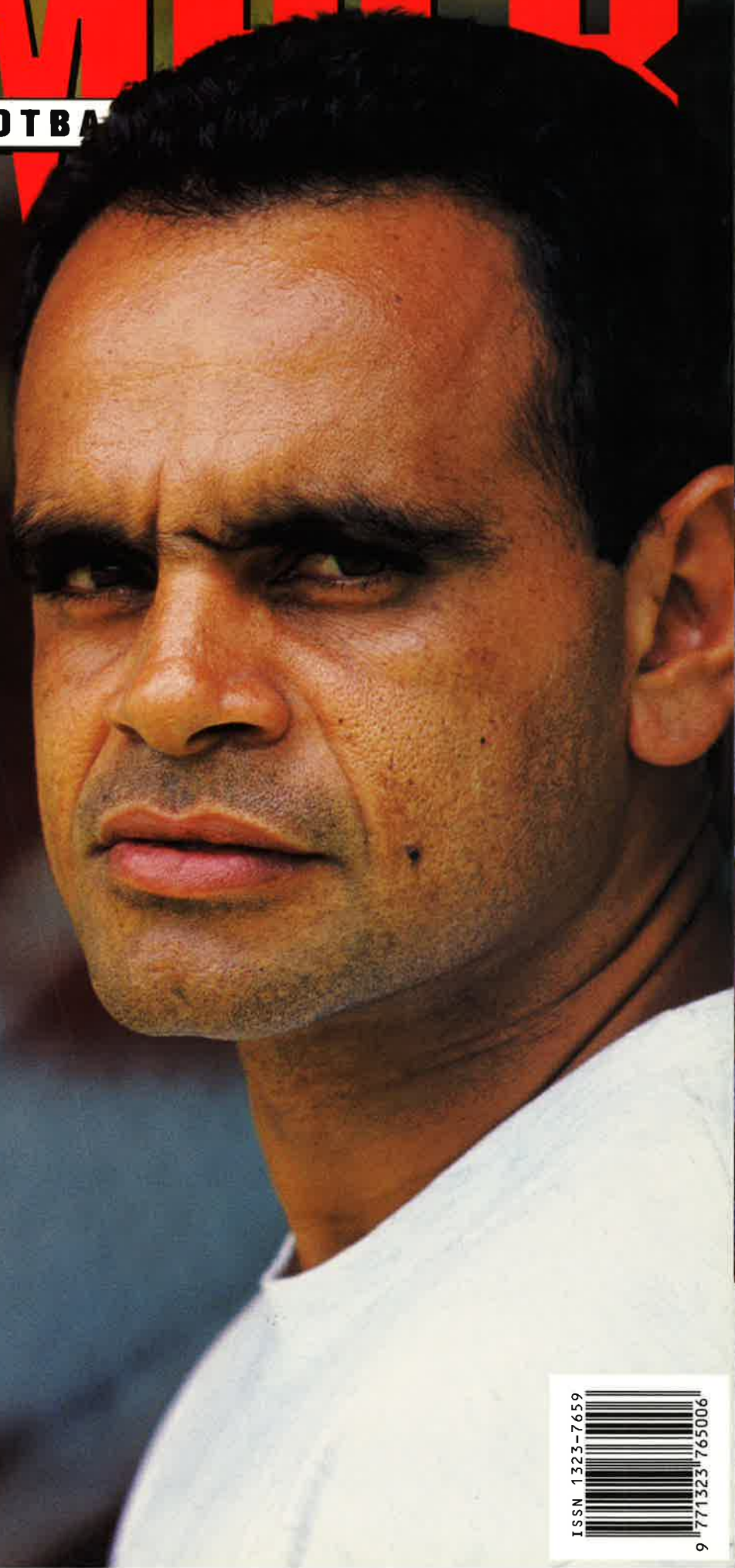
WITH KEVIN SHEEDY'S MID-SEASON REPORT!

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BOMBERS

ESSENDON FOOTBALL CLUB



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ON

HOME
AND
AWAY

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FEATURE STORY

When **Michael Long** travelled back home to Darwin earlier this year for the Ansett Cup match against the Western Bulldogs, it wasn't only for the football. Long approaches the game with the determined professionalism of a career athlete, but he is also adamant about the importance of family in his life.

Story by **Steven Carroll**

amily and football, the two inform each other. Michael Long was born into a football family, his father Jack being a football legend in the Territory. He has six brothers and two sisters, and the boys all played for the same club as their father, St Mary's. Their mother, Agnes, who died in 1983, encouraged them and made sure they all got to the ground on time.

It was family that gave Long his passion for football, and it was football that gave him the opportunity to recover his extended family's history.

Most families take their history for granted. The stories, tall and true, are circulated with the family photographs. Not so when your parents are part of the 'stolen generations'. And it should be noted here that it is a journalistic furphy that only one generation was affected, for aboriginal children were being taken from their parents in the late 1960s and early 70s.

When the links with the past - the storytellers of previous generations - are taken away, a family can lose vital episodes in its history. The family tale becomes an incomplete jigsaw, with the pieces that would complete the picture missing. It is like a family collectively losing its memory, and when the memory is lost, so too is the family history. The same thing happens to communities and countries. And it's a truism that those who forget their history or have it taken away from them are doomed to remain children. Czech novelist Milan Kundera called it

Photograph by Julian Kingma.

LONGY

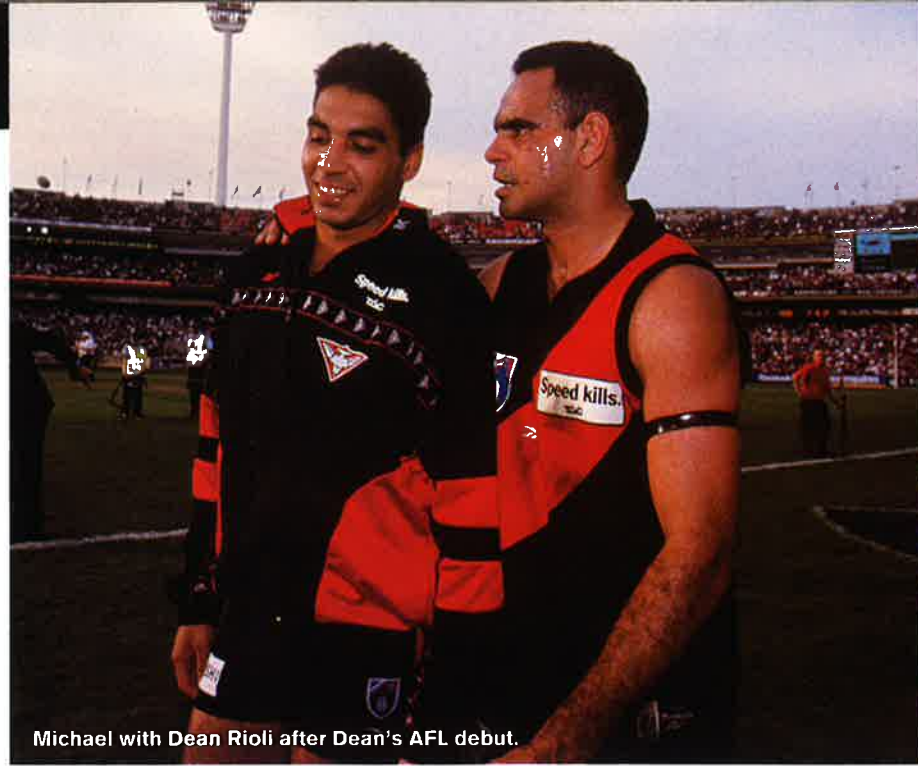
HOME AND AWAY

that had he been born a year earlier he would have been counted as a stock number in the census - that is, with the cattle and sheep. "My brother was born in 1968," says Long, laughing, "and his nick-name is 'stock'".

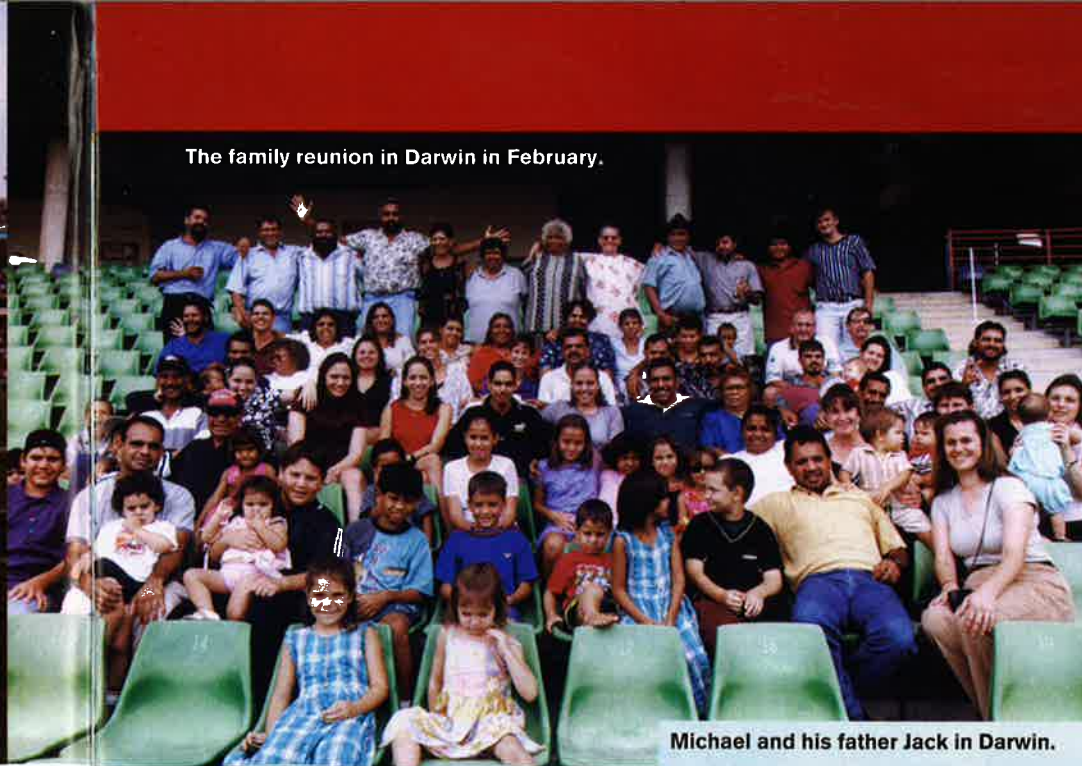
Long's father, Jack - a mild mannered man - was nervous, anxious and unsure in the weeks leading up to the reunion. What he learnt on the day, however, justified the event which, for all its sadness and anger, was a triumphal experience; a way of saying to everybody concerned, 'Look, we came through'

"That day my father found out things he never knew," says Michael. "He found, for example, that his father had tried to get him back - that he gave money to the missionaries to try to get his son returned to him."

But prejudice, laws, and the complicating factor of the war, meant that the efforts of



Michael with Dean Rioli after Dean's AFL debut.

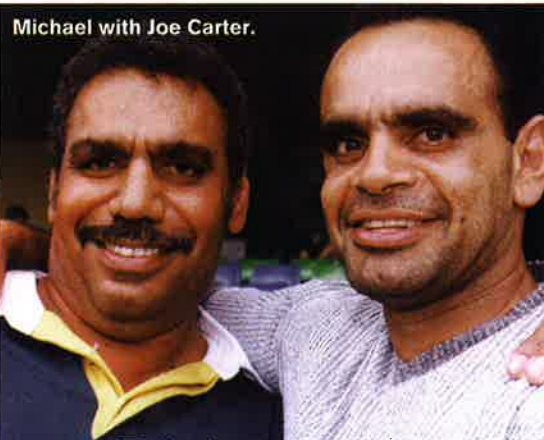


The family reunion in Darwin in February.



Celebrating the '83 flag

Michael and his father Jack in Darwin.



Michael with Joe Carter.

FLYING HIGH



Michael might be flying high on the field this year, but he's also taken to the skies in search of a career after football.

Long has been flying light aircraft for 18 months now and is developing a fly-drive business taking patrons to remote and isolated communities in the Northern Territory. The business, being run in conjunction with Alcaston Gallery, Beverly Knight, Ginger Riley and Fly/Drive tours of the Territory, already has a waiting list of 200 people ready to jump on board and get a rarely-experienced taste of life up North.

Michael says they are developing small enterprises with the local communities to ensure that they are included in the plans.

Michael plans to eventually receive his commercial pilot's licence, and he's being helped in this by the AFLPA Education and Training Program for the Year 2000. Michael's sponsors in Melbourne, Preston Motors, are also supporting him as he plans his life after football.

The venture, he says, will give him the chance "to maintain the best of both worlds - or the best of both homes."

Jack senior and Weeta Nampitjinpa, his Anmatyerre wife, would be in vain. They would never see their son again.

"That day changed my dad's whole outlook to the idea of a reunion. Now he wants to go back to Ti-Tree and meet all his relations who are still there - which is good news to the family as well. It changed his life. You could tell from the way he looked and spoke."

Perhaps the most profound revelation concerned hitherto unknown information about the family tree. In particular, the

family name. Long's grandfather was of Chinese descent, something that Jack junior was completely unaware of until the day of the reunion.

The gold rushes changed the demographics of the colony of Victoria forever. Not only did the population of the colony increase ten-fold between 1851 and 1860, the racial mix it brought to the colony formed the foundation for what we now call a multi-cultural society.

A significant part of that demographic change was the Chinese population on the gold fields. The name Long may not be the European Long, but the Chinese, may even have been spelt differently then, and anglicised in later years. After the reunion, Long and his sister, Kathy Long Rioli, discovered that the family history could be traced back to the gold mining town of Castlemaine.

As Long puts it, this marks a whole new chapter in the family history. "You'd think someone would know something as basic as that. But he was taken away at two and since then has had to put together bits and pieces of his life. And he's still doing it at 60 years of age."

A similar story exists on Long's mother's side as well. His mother was taken from Daly River territory, then transported to Melville Island. Because the government authorities tried to conceal the children's identities, they called the youngster Agnes Brock, after Brock Creek, where they picked her up. She, too, never knew her father.

In her later years, however, she discovered that her father was of Irish descent, and that the family name was Byrnes. What's more, the family owned one of the largest stations in the Northern Territory - Tipperary Station.

Not long before she died, Agnes travelled from Darwin to the Sydney office of the station where her father was working. With her

daughter, Kathy, Agnes sat in the office reception staring at the door behind which the father she had never seen sat.

After a considerable time the office secretary told both Agnes and Kathy that Mr Byrnes was too busy to see them that day. They left the office and travelled back to Darwin the next day. Agnes and her father never spoke.

"Kathy, who was ten at the time, carried the image of his office door throughout her life," says Beverly Knight. "She just remembered that there was a door between her mother seeing her father or not, and the secretary saying he was too busy."

Perhaps someone else would have brushed the secretary aside and stepped to the other side of that door. But Agnes Long didn't. "My mother," says Long, "was never a pushy person. She was a very gentle person. But she would have judged the reaction, and known her father didn't want to see her. She accepted this. But her heart must have been broken."

M

ost people would consider that Michael Long's finest moment as a footballer came on Grand Final day, 1993. It was, not coincidentally,

a day he had dedicated from the start to his mother, and to his father sitting in the Great Southern Stand. Long played the game of his life that day, was inspirational in Essendon's Premiership win, and was later awarded the Norm Smith Medal for his best-on-field performance. So when the Premiership was won, it was no surprise that it was his late mother to whom his thoughts turned. He shared the moment with her the only way he could.

Once again, it was football and family.



L - R: Michael, his cultural Aboriginal mother Miriam Rose, Beverly Knight, and Michael's brother, Brian, in front of his cultural grandmother Mary Kangi's painting from Daly River - his mother's country.

"Jake and Michaela think of Melbourne as their home. My extended family here, our friends through Lesley's school, all my friends through Essendon and my love of the Essendon footy people make the thought of leaving Melbourne remote."

And that is the way it remains for Michael Long. He has two families, two homes. There is the one he is creating for himself here in Melbourne with Lesley and their children, based initially around his football. "Jake and Michaela think of Melbourne as their home," he says. "My extended family here, our friends through Lesley's school, all my friends through Essendon and my love of the Essendon footy people make the thought of leaving Melbourne remote."

But there is the Northern Territory too, and the extended family history he and his relatives there are still trying to piece together. The distance may be great, but the

bonds are stronger than ever.

That family reunion was an important step in reclaiming what is every family's birthright - its history. Family histories are often obscured and made incomplete by silence and cover-up; a pregnancy that no one talks about, a gap in the records, a relative that nobody sees. But in the case of Michael Long's family the gap in the records was the result of the official government policy of the day.

In this sense the Darwin reunion marks more than the struggle of memory over forgetting. It represents the struggle to gather together the facts of the family story, so that the memories can exist in the first place.