

Former gang member goes public

by Sonya Haggie

The world of gang warfare rolls from the lips of Te Kuru 'Eddie' Pairama as though there's nothing at all unusual about it.

And to 30-year-old Eddie, one-time president of the Upper Hutt branch of the Black Power gang, there isn't.

What is unusual is that a gang member will go public about life on the other side — a life often filled with violence, bloodshed, and hate.

But Eddie decided to talk about that life after hearing recent reports of the possible existence of a group of neo-nazis, or white racists, in New Zealand because he is dead sure such a group exists.

Eddie returned to Raglan, his hometown, in 1979 after nearly 10 years with the Black Power gang at Upper Hutt and four years leading it.

He is now a family man, tilling the land of his grandfather's farm and caring for his wife and four sons. He is cheery-faced, friendly, articulate, and intelligent.

There's nothing to show that he once lead a violent life — except perhaps the tattoos that cover his left hand and scars kept covered by his clothing.

Although the scars were not visible they must be there. He has been shot four times.

Eddie says he joined the gang when he was 17. He spent the early part of his life mostly on his own and says he brought himself up.

When he joined he was looking for and needed a family. He had been "cast out" by his own family and found security in the gang.

When he led the gang, at one time with 30 members in it, they were peaceful and lived in harmony, doing work for old people and operating working trusts for the unemployed, he says.

He tried hard for unity between the Maori gangs because he hated to see them at each other's throats, repeating what he saw was tribal war.

He was even involved in meetings with Maori Affairs Department secretary Kara Puketapu and prime minister Rob Muldoon, in an effort to unite the gangs.

He says he led his gang in three violent confrontations with Upper Hutt motorcycle gang, the Sinn Fein, after discovering the rival group was "knocking off" Maori people and running Maori women and children off roads.

"I couldn't stand it and I had to do something. I had about 12 members then and we started fighting them" he says.

"I went against Sinn Fein three times



Former Black Power president Eddie Pairama — has seen racism, bloody battles, and life behind bars. Photo Bill McNicol.

and beat them on the last one. But I ended up with seven casualties."

The bloodiest battle with the gang began at Upper Hutt when his vice-president's hand and lower arm were blown from his body.

As Eddie led his friend from the scene, carrying the shattered hand, he was shot.

He suffered bullet wounds to the head, both arms, and leg.

It was soon after that confrontation that he met Wellington neo-nazis who called themselves members of the "Federation".

"When I came into confrontation with them it wasn't much of a joke," he says.

"They're dangerous. If they don't get you they will get your kids."

Eddie describes members of the Federation as similar to the Ku Klux Klan. He says they're high income, big car-driving, suit-wearing businessmen.

He reels off names of members and leaders of the Federation and says two members were sons of court judges.

Eddie's account of his life is often interrupted as he remembers encounters with rival gangs and the police, and incidents during jail sentences and his time as leader of Black Power.

The presidency of the gang was "alright" but was heaped with responsibility and decision-making. The gang led

an organised existence with a vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and sergeant-at-arms.

It even held its own court for offences committed within the gang by its members, he says.

Eddie says he fought hard to get unity between the Maori gangs but wouldn't recommend gang life to anyone anymore.

Gangs have changed now and there's more inter-gang fighting, he says.

"Gang life was good but it isn't anymore. We had a good movement — we were doing things for old people. We had working trusts for unemployed. We used to do a lot of that," he says.

"They haven't got that anymore."

"One time I would have said yes, it's good, it's unity. But now it's not good."

When Eddie left the gang in 1979 he heard from a gang friend that Black Power had put out a \$5000 bounty on him.

He doesn't know whether that bounty still stands.

Most youngsters, he says, join gangs because they've been rejected by their families. He has several brothers in the Mongrel Mob and he hopes to get them out of it.

His life with the gang is over. He's now a content husband and father who is keeping to himself and building a life around his own very important family.