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present

ONCE WERE WARRIORS

A film by Lee Tamahori

International sales:

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Press:

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SYNOPSIS

ONCE WERE WARRIORS

ONCE WERE WARRIORS is a moving and violent love story set in a poor suburb of Auckland, New Zealand's biggest city.

Eighteen years after Jake (Temuera Morrison) and Beth (Rena Owen) were married, it is easy to see why Beth found him irresistible - and still finds him hard to resist. Jake is a muscular handsome man who exudes an explosive sexual energy. Even now, after five children, he can still arouse her with one look.

But now Jake spends most of his time at the pub, seemingly proving his masculinity with his fists. And if Beth dares to question him or challenge him, she gets answered with similar violence.

But Beth thinks of herself as a survivor. It will take more than a few knocks to conquer her spirit. And besides, she believes that she is still deeply in love with her husband, in spite of his violence.

So she struggles to keep their family together, though the violence is taking its toll - one son has joined a gang, the next has been taken to a welfare home.

Still untouched is Grace, the beautiful teenage daughter. She is a gifted writer and thinker who embodies Grace's own hopes for a better future.

Tragically, Grace's special gifts set her apart from her tough urban surroundings and make her the most vulnerable member of the family. She's vulnerable and in terrible danger which noone can foresee.

What happens to her, changes the family's life forever. Beth will at last be forced to make a choice and to seek a new alternative for her own survival.

LEE TAMAHORI - Director

Once Were Warriors is the first feature film directed by Lee Tamahori (43) who till now has been best known as a top commercials director with a string of international awards, including a Mobius (US), Facts (Australia) and Axis (NZ).

From a start as a commercial artist and photographer, Tamahori joined the New Zealand film industry in the late 1970s as a boom operator before becoming an assistant director in the early 1980s.

He began directing commercials ten years ago and has since directed more than 100. Acclaimed for his trademark storytelling style, Tamahori cites mainstream action directors like Sam Peckinpah, Francis Ford Coppola, Sergio Leone and Martin Scorsese as influences.

"*Once Were Warriors* was a huge challenge because it was about a subject that nobody wanted us to make a film about and it was being made from a book by the most controversial author in New Zealand," he says.

"This film slotted into the genre I wanted - a tough, gritty, urban-based drama.

"I've always wanted to do films that challenge me and challenge the audience. It's easy to make car chases and 'people-in-love' pictures because there's a formula for all of those. But this was far more difficult.

"It's very hard but it does address problems that we have as a nation and if it opens up a debate about those problems, then it's done a good thing. Casting was a vital element of the film and I always believed the performances would be the key to the film's success. We did the most exhaustive casting process and the people who were delivered to us were phenomenal - I'm very proud of them all.

"The look of the film was another key factor. I definitely wanted a very hard, almost treeless urban experience that not many people in New Zealand would ever have been aware of or seen. So it's a concrete jungle film really. People live in these situations, they live right next to motorways, they live under power pylons."

"But *Once Were Warriors* has hope and a 1994 feel. There's a vibrancy amongst all the kids, everyone from the age of 25 down is seething with their urban lifestyle. If you're that age and you go and see the movie, there are people in there who are like you and speak the language you speak."

Before *Once Were Warriors*, Lee Tamahori directed a popular half-hour drama titled *Thunderbox*, written by Bruce Stewart and starring Wi Kuki Kaa. He also directed several stories in the Ray Bradbury Theatre internationally syndicated television series.

ROBIN SCHOLES - Producer

New Zealand-born Robin Scholes completed her MA at Edinburgh University specialising in film studies and she then taught film studies at Essex University. Returning to New Zealand, she set up the film studies course with Dr Roger Horrocks at Auckland University. At both Essex and Auckland, she initiated several film festivals, in particular, a South American Festival of Films in Auckland and an Auckland/Wellington Festival of Women's Films.

She then became a producer, director and writer, first for Television New Zealand and then at Communicado. *Once Were Warriors* is her first feature film production.

"To my mind, *Once Were Warriors* is extraordinarily moving because ultimately you love these people. But one of them, Jake, has a fatal flaw which he can't change and it's because of that flaw, that everyone must reject him. The audience is left with the feeling 'if only he could change that, it would be all right and wonderful.'

"It's full of passion. It has the right balance between the negative and the positive. Sure Jake hits Beth. However they also love each other and that comes through.

"What I'm most proud of is that people will not be able to leave the cinema and not talk about the film. A lot of people will know the circumstances in which this family lives. The people who don't know - who've never been exposed to it - will realise it emotionally for the first time instead of reading it off the page.

"Violence in our society is a real issue and a shocking 80 percent of it is family-related. But statistics cannot show us the human side, what it's like to be in a family affected by violence.

"This film is at the cutting edge. Until we put these images on the screen, people will not have an opportunity to openly discuss the issues involved. We believe we have made something which is passionate, which will be controversial, but controversial in a positive sense - it will open up discussion."

The making of *Once Were Warriors* fulfils a long time ambition for Scholes to return to her motivating love - theatrical film.

RENA OWEN - Beth

Once Were Warriors is Owen's second film role and she says, "I don't think I'm being unjust saying this, but Beth will be one of the best roles of my life because female dramatic leads are so rare. I'm very blessed to have had the opportunity."

The *Once Were Warriors* part came soon after "a small but juicy role" in the Kevin Costner-produced feature film *Rapa Nui*.

Based in Wellington, the New Zealand capital city, Rena Owen has spent the past nine years working as an actor in theatre and television. She has worked in England as well as in New Zealand, and she has also written and directed several plays.

As an actor, Owen loves both stage and film work but admits the intimacy of the camera holds something special for her.

"When I got the script, I knew it was going to be a very demanding and challenging role. Beth doesn't get many light-hearted scenes but at the same time, she was a gift of a role because I was able to explore a wide range of colours like hate, fear, submissiveness and love. For an actor to get to show so much of yourself is a very good opportunity.

"Beth is an intelligent woman and she's got a good spirit which pulls her through at the end of the day. She's quite a strong-willed woman and she starts off with a lot of dreams and stars in her eyes. But the reality is nothing like that. Violence sets in very early on in the marriage.

"Beth's story is one many women will relate to. Even though at the end she looks strong and she leaves her man, she's going to be suffering. She's going to go through a grieving process but she knows she has to do it in order to survive - not just to survive but to thrive - particularly for her children. It's a very relevant story. People will identify with the film and will see themselves. If it changes one person's life, it's served its purpose.

"Beth is a fighter and I'm certainly a fighter but I would never have got myself in that situation. I can relate to the spirit in her, that wants something better for not just herself and her children, but also her people.

"A lot of people do not think that Maoris should be portrayed in this way. But until you can acknowledge the ugliness in your race, you can't move on. We are all good and bad, we are human and can't pretend we are perfect."

The part made huge demands on Rena Owen's ability to portray emotion. "There was one week where I had one big scene after another and at the end of it, I could not do any more and I knew that if I didn't have a rest, I'd fall apart. As an actor, one of the most demanding things is big emotions, they're not small, subtle emotions. They've all been big and raw.

TEMUERA MORRISON - Jake

Rotorua-born Morrison (33), who is based in Auckland, has extensive television and film experience in New Zealand.

His film credits include John Laing's *Other Halves*, Geoff Murphy's *Never Say Die* and Merata Mita's *Mauri*. He also worked as an adviser on Jane Campion's *The Piano*.

His television credits, besides the top-rating New Zealand television series *Shortland Street*, include *Seekers*, *Gloss*, *Adventurers*, *Shark in the Park* and *Gold*. As well as acting, Morrison has worked on the television programme *Koha* as a researcher and reporter. He was a DJ with Radio Aotearoa and has performed in Maori cultural groups.

Discussing *Once Were Warriors*, he says:

"This film will have universal appeal. It's about real people - they love, they hurt, they cry.

"Jake's a hard man and his horizons are limited. He had a violent upbringing and as a consequence, he has a chip on his shoulder. He's the kingpin of the public bar and anyone that upsets him, he'll smash."

The role was a physical as well as mental challenge for Morrison who had to increase his body weight and bulk with an intensive three-month training programme that took him from 74kg to 83kg.

"He's a physically hard man so the only way I could achieve that was to go to the gym," says Morrison who had his hair closely cropped, his face unshaven, and tattoos applied to his arms to become Jake. The transformation helped Morrison jump into the character only a few days after walking off the set of the continuing television drama *Shortland Street* where he plays laid back Dr Hone Ropata.

Director Lee Tamahori says, "Once we cut his hair down to this military-style bouncer's haircut, Tem was Jake - frighteningly so - and he was amazing. People can see that for themselves."

The second day into the shoot, Morrison had a big scene which came at one of the turning points of the movie. He says: "It backfired on me in that I didn't have too much time to worry about it. I just went out there and did it."

He faced many other intense emotional scenes throughout filming. "For those scenes you've just got to have a good talk to yourself. Plus I got help from the director and people like Riwia Brown who actually wrote it. There were some very high emotional levels. But it helps when you're feeding off somebody like Rena Owen who has such an intense emotional energy.

"It's a hard film but the thing is, it's Beth's story. My role in it was to provide the misery."

MAMAENGA ROA KERR-BELL - Grace

"Grace is mature for her age. She's innocent, sensitive, and she sees the good in everything in her life. Her dad beats up her mother but she still loves him - all she sees is positive things."

Grace is a pivotal character in *Once Were Warriors* and newcomer Mamaengaroa Kerr-Bell (16) found the role a challenge.

"It wasn't as I thought it would be. I thought, 'choice, jump in front of the camera, say my lines and then I'm off!' But it's not like that. It's jump in front of the camera, say your lines, then do it over and over again."

Kerr-Bell had some tough scenes to tackle. "Preparing for the emotional scenes was difficult. You got the call sheet the night before and tried to psych yourself up."

Director Lee Tamahori says Kerr-Bell was "frighteningly good in rehearsals" and carried her performance extremely well during filming.

Although she isn't much like her character, Kerr-Bell says, "I used to roam around a lot. I could relate to some things that she goes through in the film, like arguing with her mother and having little brothers and sisters."

Kerr-Bell has two sisters and one brother, all younger than herself. But until *Once Were Warriors*, she had never aspired to be an actor. She was "discovered" in the classic movie tradition while accompanying a friend to the auditions.

"We were playing ping-pong when Don Selwyn (casting director) came and asked if I wanted to audition for the part. I thought, 'well okay, if I don't try then I'll never know' so I went in and auditioned."

When she heard she had won the role, Kerr-Bell remembers "buzzing out" and racing around to tell all her family and friends - "they didn't believe me!"

The Whangarei Girls' High fifth form student is not sure whether she'll make a career of acting. "It's hard. I want to go back to school and I'll see what comes up." But she says appearing in a film is an experience she would recommend to anyone her age.

JULIAN (SONNY) ARAHANGA - Nig

Playing Nig Heke is 22-year old Arahanga's second appearance in front of the camera. His debut at the age of 11 was in the short film, *The Makutu on Mrs Jones*, which was directed and produced by his father, film producer/director Larry Parr.

Originally from Raetihi, a town in the centre of New Zealand's North Island, Arahanga has spent six years in the film industry as a freelance grip working on some 50 commercials, including several directed by *Once Were Warriors*' director, Lee Tamahori. He has also worked on several film and television productions including *The Other Side of Paradise*, *Old Scores*, *The End of the Golden Weather* and *Gold*.

"It's a powerful story. It's going to bring out a lot of different emotions in people. It's a story about love - there are times in the film where Jake and Beth are really in love and then other times it all falls apart."

Nig is Jake and Beth's aggressive eldest son. Sonny Arahanga says the character is "staunch because of the conflicts between his mother and father. He despises his father for beating his mum. But maybe when he was younger, he tried to step in and got knocked about so he's not really game to take on his father. He's got a good heart behind all the staunchness and tough guy image. He's focused in the right directions".

"He reminded me sometimes of when I was a young teenager and really rebellious - always arguing. If I didn't have my own way I'd just split instead of hanging around and talking it out. That's Nig's solution. He puts up a bit of an argument and then if things aren't going his way, he's out of there."

There were some poignant moments for Arahanga during filming but none more so than during the first few days on location in a South Auckland neighbourhood. "I had a ball working in Otara and seeing all the children so interested in what was going on. It was a big buzz for them and they were actually what the film was about. That was quite a good moment for me, to actually realise this film was real, it's not make believe, it's actually happening. "

TAUNGAROA EMILE - Boogie

"Boogie's the shy type but he's pretty rebellious against everyone who puts restrictions on him. He tries to get attention from his dad but he never gets it and he sort of gets on with his mum. He loves her a lot but because she's got three other younger kids, it's pretty hard for him to find attention."

Acting in the film was a challenge for Taungaroa Emile whose only previous experience had been school plays. "I found it hard trying to sort out Boogie from Taungaroa but it got easier."

Emile says he can understand Boogie's behaviour "but my family is totally different."

The 15-year-old Flaxmere youth has three sisters and two brothers. Unlike his character, Emile attends boarding school - Hastings' Te Aute College - where he is in the fifth form. He's a keen sportsman and plays basketball, softball, rugby and rugby league plus regularly enters speech competitions and enjoys debating.

Auditioning for the role in *Once Were Warriors* was a nerve-wracking experience for Emile who was asked by his teacher to audition along with 20 others from his school. After winning the role of Boogie, he looked forward to spending three months in Auckland filming.

"I was really excited about the prospect of being in a film with Temuera Morrison and meeting all the other people."

He hasn't decided whether he'll pursue a career in acting although he is attracted to the film industry. "I wouldn't mind trying my hand at all those other things that people do around the set like being a grip or lighting boy or focus puller."

RACHAEL MORRIS - Polly

Rachael Morris (10) from Tolaga Bay, relished her first experience of acting in a film and says, "I enjoyed it because it's a movie in which sad things happen and those things happen in real life as well."

Rachael says the character she played, Polly Heke, is "cheeky" and looks up to her older sister Grace. Rachael also has two older sisters.

Rachael auditioned for the part after her school drama teacher at Tolaga Bay Area School asked her to try out for the role. Rachael had no acting experience but impressed the casting director, Don Selwyn.

After completion of the film, Rachael returned to the small East Coast rural community of Tolaga Bay. A standard three pupil she enjoys netball, hockey, basketball, volleyball and tennis. She's a talented singer and says, "When I grow up I'm going to be an actress."

JOSEPH KAIRAU - Huata

Joseph Kairau was the perfect choice to play the Heke's cheeky youngest son Huata. The mischievous Huata, a smaller version of Nig, has no qualms about speaking his mind.

Kairau auditioned for the part after his aunt saw the character description for Huata while she was acting in *Shortland Street*. She thought it sounded exactly like her young nephew.

When the six-year-old heard he had won the role, he says it was "choice". But he found the role quite difficult, especially when it came to remembering his lines.

He says the best part of being in *Once Were Warriors* was going on location, especially the marae, "because I got to play and go down by the beach to play on the rocks."

Kairau's family are all very proud of their young actor, as are the congregation at his church and his friends at Manurewa East School. He plans to bank his earnings from the film and buy himself the Moonwalker video game.

CLIFF CURTIS - Bully

Cliff Curtis is a young actor who trained at the New Zealand Drama School during 1988/89 and then worked in theatre for two years.

He moved into film in 1992, beginning with the role of Mana in *The Piano*, followed by the lascivious seducer Fraser in *Desperate Remedies*, and then a cameo role in the Kevin Costner-produced film *Rapa Nui* set in Easter Island.

"To accept the role in *Once Were Warriors* was a challenge," he says. "Do you want to be seen publicly as a rapist - especially of young women? That was a big consideration."

Cliff Curtis eventually agreed to take the role because *Bully* is essentially "just one of the boys. He's quite self-conscious in his appearance in that his hair is always tied back nice and tidy. He's a nondescript kind of person really but the one gaping flaw in his character is that he sneaks upstairs one night and rapes a young girl."

When it came time to filming that moment of drama, Curtis says, "Once you've agreed to do it, you accept the challenges that come with it. It's important not to pretend it's okay when it's not. If it's upsetting, then be upset. It was upsetting. It was a really awful thing to do."

Curtis says the fight scene that results was certainly more fun to do as an actor although, "when you see it on the film, it's incredibly violent. It shows a very dark side of humanity where we can snap and be absolutely volatile. Those scenes are like a roller-coaster ride, doing them at speed. There's the element of danger, risk and skill."

Cliff Curtis has also sung with a number of rock bands, and he was New Zealand amateur rock'n'roll champion in 1988.

SHANNON WILLIAMS - Toot

"Toot is a lost person," says Shannon Williams, a newcomer to acting who was chosen for the part of the street kid who befriends Grace Heke.

Williams (15) had never acted before and never intended to be in a film. Director Lee Tamahori was taking auditions at Williams' school, Hillary College in South Auckland, and saw him slouching across the school yard.

With his natural dreadlocks and expressive eyes, Tamahori thought Williams looked perfect for the part and yelled out for him to come in and audition.

His family were surprised and pleased he got the part, including his brother Isaac, who had originally wanted the role.

Williams is now very interested in the industry and is thinking of becoming a camera operator.

PETE SMITH - Dooley

Pete Smith launched his acting career in 1984 by winning a Best Supporting Actor award for his role as one of the only two men left alive in the world, in Geoff Murphy's *The Quiet Earth*. Since then he has gone on to film roles in *Crush*, *The Piano*, and *Rapa Nui*.

Describing *Once Were Warriors*, he says:

"There's lots of violence and aggression in this film and Dooley maintains a level of equilibrium. He's the only one out of all the people Jake surrounds himself with, that he's never had a go with.

"Dooley stands back and says, 'it's your scene, you're the man, you go and deal with it, it's what you like, it's part of your makeup. But I'm your right-hand man so if the worst comes to the worst, sure I'll jump in."

Pete Smith has an affinity with the character which he believes is natural because he's an actor. "You use that as part of your technical ability to apply to the character."

He believes *Once Were Warriors* is a general story that affects everyone, no matter what their race, although it is portrayed by Maoris. "Everyone will have an individual concept of it."

RIWIA BROWN - Screenplay Writer

Riwia Brown has been involved with Maori theatre as an actor in Wellington since the early 1980s. In 1988, she wrote her first play, *Roimata*, and was acclaimed as a writing talent. The following year the play was selected to be part of the *E Tipu E Rea* five-part Maori drama series for television and was adapted and directed by Brown. She has since directed all her own stage plays plus those of other Maori playwrights including *Daddy's Girl* by Rena Owen.

"I really wanted to inject some lighter moments into the screenplay while remaining true to Alan Duff's story. There's a lot of love, a lot of passion. It's a very hard-hitting, raw, reality-type drama.

"For me, reading the book was getting a real feel of pain about what these characters were going through. I carried those feelings over into the screenplay. The screenplay needed more light and shade, more love and a little bit more humour and breathing space for an audience. I think, also, a lot more hope. The other thing which was very important to me was to show the power and the beauty of Maori culture. This family has a choice, there is another lifestyle for them."

When Brown met director Lee Tamahori and producer Robin Scholes, they had already decided Beth Heke was to be the central character of the film.

"I was very excited by that because I enjoy writing about Maori women and making them the heroine. You have to have someone for the audience to follow through and Beth was the obvious choice. All her family has a story which we follow through her.

"Jake was a fascinating character to write because he was always going to be a bit of a bad sort. But it's really important when you're writing characters like that, that they're three dimensional. People mightn't like them but they have an understanding of where their pain is coming from."

ALAN DUFF - Author

Once Were Warriors, Alan Duff's first novel, was published in New Zealand in 1990 and has sold more than 30,000 copies - ten times as many as most New Zealand novels. One critic described the book as having "burning intensity" while another said "his novel is a watershed of social realism."

Once Were Warriors won the Pen First Book Award, won second place in the prestigious Goodman Fielder Wattie Award in 1991, and was awarded the Frank Sargeson Writing Fellowship. Duff was shortlisted for the New Zealand Book Awards in 1991, and George Henare's reading of the book won the Talking Book of the Year Award in 1992.

The critical acclaim launched Duff as a major new literary talent. However, portraying his own Maori people as violent, heavy drinkers has made Duff one of the country's most controversial figures.

Duff has now been a full-time writer since 1985. His first book, a thriller, went unpublished. His second novel, *One Night Out Stealing*, was published in 1992.

STUART DRYBURGH - Director of Photography

Now internationally known for his Academy Award nomination for *The Piano*, Stuart Dryburgh has worked in the New Zealand film industry since 1977. His first eight years were in the lighting department. In 1985, he moved into cinematography and since then, his credits include *Vigil*, *The Leading Edge*, *An Angel at My Table* as well as *The Piano*.

"I'm very interested in modern day stories and the urban genre. When I read the book, I figured sooner or later someone would make a film about it. When I was speaking with Lee (Tamahori) one day, he said he was working with Communicado to put together a film of the book. I was interested.

"Every film has its own unique challenge and qualities. A cinematographer tries to find some kind of visual essence to a film and bring that out in the photography. Working with virtually 100% Maori cast gave us the opportunity to work with fabulous skin tones and really enjoy those colours.

"It's very dark and rich in the colours and the tones. We haven't gone for a documentary look - we've gone for an enhanced reality."

Dryburgh believes *Once Were Warriors* is a timely film. "It's time New Zealand started tackling social issues in its feature films. I think it's a really important story to be told and I'm proud to have been associated with it."

MIKE KANE - Production Designer

Mike Kane earned international recognition for his work on last year's hit New Zealand production *Desperate Remedies* which was officially selected for Cannes and which is to be released in the United States by Miramax.

Twelve years ago he worked on Geoff Murphy's epic drama *Utu*, which was officially selected for Cannes in 1983, and he draws parallels between the design aspects of that and *Once Were Warriors*. "There are a lot of similarities between the Maori gang in this new film and the 1860's Maori tribe created for *Utu*."

Kane has worked on other New Zealand features including *Bad Blood*, *Battletruck* and Geoff Murphy's *The Quiet Earth*.

He has also worked on numerous commercials with *Once Were Warriors'* director Lee Tamahori. He began his career in film and television in costume design and during the last seven years has specialised in art direction.

One of Kane's biggest challenges in *Once Were Warriors* was going to a gutsy, urban feature after the high camp melodrama of *Desperate Remedies*. "We were going for a very simplistic look. The only colour added was red because we were very keen to work with monochromatic tones. We wanted to expose a lot of skin so that we had warm tones contrasting with the cool urban tones of South Auckland. Being contemporary, we were keen to have some reasonably stylish aspects. That gave us the licence to create a gang uniform as such. Tattoos play a very prominent part, the whole cast was tattooed - some extensively - so that was quite complicated."

Style and Tone

by Mike Kane

Red is the warrior colour. It's given to Beth when she goes in to confront Bully in the pub.

Green is used very sparingly. It was deliberately taken out of all the urban scenes at the beginning of the film. For example the dirt was piled on top of the lawn at the back of house which was used for the Heke house. The hedge at the back of the house was also cut down.

This meant that green, when it does occur at the picnic and at the marae feels fresher, brighter and more inviting.

The look of the gang is updated and a futuristic extension of what some gangs are doing now.

It also reinforced the theme of the title - *Once Were Warriors*.

GUY MOANA - Design Assistant/Artist

"The designs were actually part of many tribes," says Guy Moana who created the moko and tattoo designs which feature in *Once Were Warriors*. "The film is affiliated with Maoridom so I thought there should be a wide design base. They were all traditional in design and form.

"If you study Maori carvings, you'll find the patterns are actually designed for certain parts of the body. Basically the design itself tells you where it should be."

The designs, which were made into transfers in the United States, were applied to the skin and filled in with ink. It took up to four hours for a full body tattoo to be applied.

"After the initial panic stages of 'we've got 10 guys to moko', everything fell into place quite easily," says Moana. "Quite a few of the actors wanted to keep the patterns they had on their bodies for a moko. The transformation was pretty awesome to them."

Moana has been carving for nine years and moved into film and television seven years ago after attending a course held by Don Selwyn which taught him all aspects of production.

His work has been seen in *The Piano* and he also featured as an extra in both *The Piano* and *Once Were Warriors*.

PRODUCTION STORY

The Auckland (New Zealand) production company Comunicado bought the rights to Alan Duff's novel *Once Were Warriors* almost immediately after it was published in 1990 because it was exactly the type of story the company wanted to make as its first feature, explains the film's producer Robin Scholes. The book then went on to become a New Zealand best-seller.

"*Once Were Warriors* appealed because its story was contemporary, urban and controversial," says Robin Scholes. "To my mind the history of New Zealand films contained too many polite stories which were distanced from everyday life.

"*Once Were Warriors* contained wonderful, vibrant characters I could identify with. They weren't polite. They drank, sang, loved and hit one another. It was a gutsy passionate story, the kind of story which would make its audience weep and laugh and feel involved with the characters."

Comunicado was almost five years old at that stage and had built a solid business from television and video production. According to Scholes, "We were ready to fulfil our long term ambition to move into feature film production."

Wellington actor/writer Riwia Brown was chosen to write the screenplay and Scholes says: "Riwia's talent for this film was fantastic because she wrote from a woman's perspective and shaped it more and more to Beth's story."

Brown says: "Robin, Lee and I spent three or four days working out a structure for the screenplay, making Beth the principal character and the focus for the family.

During the course of the story, she would re-evaluate her whole lifestyle - her choice to marry Jake, and her decision to find her cultural heritage."

After the script received the investment go-ahead from the Film Commission, Scholes says: "We still had a long way to go to get it to be Beth's story because Jake kept on taking over, kept on stealing scenes and kept on being the lively, vibrant, bad character that he is."

The film's director, Lee Tamahori, was an essential part of the script writing process. Tamahori had gained wide experience in New Zealand's pioneer film industry but needed something special to help him make the leap from his lucrative and award-winning career as a director of commercials.

"I saw this story had potential and a lot of elements that were of interest to me about New Zealand - social politics, high drama and very

interesting characters," he says.

With the final draft in place and backing from the Film Commission, New Zealand on Air, and post-production support from Avalon NFU Studios, casting became the next issue. Scholes explains: "The person who was most difficult to find was Jake. We searched and searched for this character we had in our minds - he was about 7'3" tall, had biceps the size of huge tree stumps, and exuded an explosive energy which was simultaneously dangerous and attractive."

After scouring gyms, prisons and gangs, it was decided only an actor could handle the part. Temuera Morrison put in a stunning audition and secured the role.

Rena Owen had claimed the role of Beth even before she knew the film was reality. Scholes says: "She had read the book and decided that she was Beth and if anyone was going to play the part, it was her. She was undoubtedly the only woman who had the kind of emotional intensity, the power that the character required."

Tamahori agrees. "It was always her part and she's a one-shot person. She's standing there poised, ready to give it so you'd better be ready."

Tamahori knew he wanted the film to have "a really gritty look". It needed to have a hard edge.

"There are a lot of subtleties you can add to these things which become invisible to the audience but they notice them all the time. One of the things I definitely wanted it to be was a very hard, almost treeless urban experience that not many people in New Zealand would be aware of."

That set the colour-tone for the film which Tamahori describes as "saturated colour". It's very atonal - the only colours in it are black, browns and some very earthy colours. The only primary colour that comes into it is red. They're also very Maori colours which permeates through all the costumes."

Skin tones were enhanced and Tamahori explains, "If you've got people with dark skin, you can actually enrich it by a judicious choice of filters and that's what we did. It brought up everyone's skin tones which gives a very rich look."

Director of photography Stuart Dryburgh (*The Piano, Angel At My Table*) and production designer Mike Kane (*Desperate Remedies*) were responsible for realising Tamahori's vision for the film.

Woven into the total image were the Polynesian/Maori style tattoos worn by the gang. Tamahori says: "The costumes and tattoos for the gang were very confrontational - probably more so than any other gang I've ever seen."

"Originally I thought *Once Were Warriors* was going to be much more of a hardened, realistic piece of New Zealand, sort of poverty zone, ghettoised and urban. Although that's there, it's got style on top of it."

Tamahori believes *Once Were Warriors* marks a milestone in New Zealand film making. "It will make people sit up and talk about it on both sides of the fence because I know it will engender controversy."

Robin Scholes says: "This is a film which takes people on an emotional roller coaster. People will cry, and when they leave, they will be emotionally changed. The deep responses triggered by the film compels people to talk about the issues involved. It will provoke a lot of discussion which is exactly what we want."

COMMUNICADO

Though *ONCE WERE WARRIORS* is its first feature, Communicado was in fact established in June 1986 and has become New Zealand's largest independent production house.

The company's shareholder/ directors include chairman, Neil Roberts - one of the most experienced multi-media journalists and producers in New Zealand television; director Robin Scholes - responsible for television series and feature films who had a successful academic career before gaining wide experience in all types of broadcast programming; director Garry McAlpine - responsible for tourism programmes who is a former musician and educationalist; and financial/facilities manager and director Murray Roberts who comes from a marketing background.

All four of the company's directors will be in the New Zealand delegation at Cannes.

The company has three new feature scripts in development.

NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION

Established 15 years ago, the New Zealand Film Commission - which is the major investor in *ONCE WERE WARRIORS* - invests in the development and production of New Zealand films and promotes and sells the films in which it has invested.

It has been attending Cannes every year since 1980, to present the newest and best feature films from New Zealand.

A total of seven of its features have earned official selection at Cannes in past years, including Vincent Ward's *VIGIL* and *THE NAVIGATOR*, Alison Maclean's *CRUSH*, and Stewart Main and Peter Well's *DESPERATE REMEDIES*.

The New Zealand Film Commission's chairperson Phil Pryke and chief executive officer Richard Stewart are heading the New Zealand delegation to the 1994 Cannes Film Festival.

OPENING TITLES

1. A Comunicado Film (LOGO)
2. In Association with the New Zealand Film Commission (LOGO)
Avalon Studios (LOGO)
and
New Zealand On Air (LOGO)
3. Rena Owen
4. Temuera Morrison
5. ONCE WERE WARRIORS
6. Mamaengaroa Kerr-Bell
7. Tangaroa Emile
Julian Arahanga
Shannon Williams
8. Mere Boynton
Cliff Curtis
Pete Smith
George Henare
9. Designer Michael Kane
10. Cinematographer Stuart Dryburgh
11. Music Murray Grindlay
Murray McNabb
12. Editor Michael Horton
14. Story Alan Duff
13. Screenplay Riwia Brown
15. Producer Robin Scholes
16. Director Lee Tamahori

Communicado and the
New Zealand Film Commission
present

ONCE WERE WARRIORS

Directed by Lee Tamahori

World sales:
New Zealand Film Commission

Synopsis

Once Were Warriors is a violent love story set against a contemporary urban backdrop.

Eighteen years after Jake and Beth Heke married in the first flush of teenage love, it's easy to see why Beth found him irresistible. Jake is a muscular handsome man who exudes an explosive sexual energy. Even now, five kids later, he can still arouse Beth with one look.

But Jake now spends most of his time at the pub proving his manhood with his fists. And if Beth answers back, she's likely to get the same treatment.

But Beth's a survivor. It will take more than a few knocks to conquer her spirit and besides, she's still deeply in love with Jake.

At home, Beth struggles to keep the family together but the violence is taking its toll. One son has joined a gang, the next has been taken into welfare. Still untouched is Grace, the beautiful teenage daughter, a gifted writer and thinker who embodies Beth's own hope for a better future.

Tragically, Grace's special gifts set her apart from her tough urban surroundings and make her the most vulnerable member of her family. She's destined to be cut down before she's had a chance to mature.

While the loss of Grace is the worst tragedy Beth can imagine, it is also the very thing which turns her own life around for the better. Forced to make a choice - her man or her family - Beth finds the strength to seek a new alternative.

Brief Synopsis

Once Were Warriors - the powerful story of a woman in love with a man locked in a circle of urban violence.

Beth and Jake Heke are bound by an 18-year marriage and five children.

But the Heke family is in crisis - their future is at the crossroads.

Ironically, a tragedy opens up an alternative path. For Beth Heke, this means a tough choice.

Once Were Warriors, an emotional roller-coaster of love and violence.

Lee Tamahori - Director

"Once Were Warriors was a huge challenge because it was about a subject that nobody wanted us to make a film about and it was being made from a book by the most controversial author in New Zealand.

"This film is a ground-breaker. It slotted into the genre I wanted - a tough, gritty, urban-based drama.

"I've always wanted to do films that challenge me and challenge the audience. It's easy to make car chases and 'people-in-love' pictures because there's a formula for all of those. But this was far more difficult. It's very hard but it does address problems that we have as a nation and if it opens up a debate about those problems, then it's done a good thing.

"Casting was a vital element of the film and I always believed the performances would be the key to the film's success. We did the most exhaustive casting process and the people who were delivered to us were phenomenal - I'm very proud of them all.

"The look of the film was another key factor. I definitely wanted a very hard, almost treeless urban experience that not many people in New Zealand would ever have been aware of or seen. So it's a concrete jungle film really. People live in these situations, they live right next to motorways, they live under power pylons."

"But Once Were Warriors has hope and a 1994 feel. There's a vibrancy amongst all the kids, everyone from the age of 25 down is seething with their urban lifestyle. If you're that age and you go and see the movie, there are people in there who are like you and speak the language you speak."

Once Were Warriors is the first feature film directed by Lee Tamahori (43, of Ngati Porou descent) better known as a top commercials director with a string of international awards, including a Mobius (US), Facts (Australia) and Axis (NZ). From a start as a commercial artist and photographer Tamahori joined the film industry in the late 1970s as a boom operator before becoming an assistant director in the early 1980s. He began directing commercials in 1984 and has since directed more than 100. Acclaimed for his trademark storytelling style, Tamahori cites mainstream action directors like Sam Peckinpah, Francis Ford Coppola, Sergio Leone and Martin Scorsese as influences. His ambition is to combine directing feature films with commercials.

Rena Owen plays Beth Heke

"When I got the script, I knew it was going to be a very demanding and challenging role. Beth doesn't get many light-hearted scenes but at the same time, she was a gift of a role because I was able to explore a wide range of colours like hate, fear, submissiveness and love. For an actor to get to show so much of yourself is a very good opportunity.

"Beth is an intelligent woman and she's got a good spirit which pulls her through at the end of the day. She's quite a strong-willed lady and she starts off with a lot of dreams and big stars in her eyes but the reality is nothing like that. Violence sets in very early on in the marriage."

"Beth's story is one many women will relate to. Even though at the end she looks strong and she leaves her man, she's going to be suffering. She's going to go through a grieving process but she knows she has to do it in order to survive - not just to survive but to thrive - particularly for her children. It's a very relevant story. People will identify with the film and will see themselves. If it changes one person's life, it's served its purpose.

"Beth is a fighter and I'm certainly a fighter but I would never have got myself in that situation. I can relate to the spirit in her, that wants something better for not just herself and her children, but also her people.

"A lot of people do not think that Maoris should be portrayed in this way. But until you can acknowledge the ugliness in your race, you can't move on. We are all good and bad, we are human and can't pretend we are perfect."

The part made huge demands on Rena Owen's ability to portray emotion. "There was one week where I had one big scene after another and at the end of it, I could not do any more and I knew that if I didn't have a rest, I'd fall apart. As an actor, one of the most demanding things is big emotions, they're not small, subtle emotions. They've all been big and raw.

Once Were Warriors is Owen's second film role and she says, "I don't think I'm being unjust saying this, but Beth will be one of the best roles of my life because female dramatic leads are so rare. I'm very blessed to have had the opportunity."

The *Once Were Warriors* part came soon after "a small but juicy role" in the Kevin Costner-produced feature film *Rapa Nui*. Wellington-based Owen, whose links are Ngati Hine, has spent the past nine years working as an actor in theatre and television in New Zealand and England, and has also written and directed several plays. As an actor, Owen loves both stage and film work but admits the intimacy of the camera holds something special for her.

Temuera Morrison plays Jake Heke

"This film will have universal appeal. It's about real people - they love, they hurt, they cry," says Temuera Morrison who took on his greatest acting challenge with the role of Jake Heke.

"Jake's a hard man and his horizons are limited. He had a violent upbringing and as a consequence, he has a chip on his shoulder. He's the kingpin of the public bar and anyone that upsets him, he'll smash."

The role was a physical as well as mental challenge for Morrison who had to increase his body weight and bulk with an intensive three-month training programme that took him from 74kg to 83kg.

"He's a physically hard man so the only way I could achieve that was to go to the gym," says Morrison who had his hair closely cropped, his face unshaven, and tattoos applied to his arms to become Jake. The transformation helped Morrison jump into the character only a few days after walking off the set of the continuing television drama Shortland Street where he plays laid back Dr Hone Ropata.

Director Lee Tamahori says, "Once we cut his hair down to this military-style bouncer's haircut, Tem was Jake - frighteningly so - and he was amazing. People can see that for themselves."

The second day into the shoot, Morrison had a big scene which came at one of the turning points of the movie. He says: "It backfired on me in that I didn't have too much time to worry about it. I just went out there and did it."

He faced many other intense emotional scenes throughout filming. "For those scenes you've just got to have a good talk to yourself. Plus I got help from the director and people like Riwia Brown who actually wrote it. There were some very high emotional levels. But it helps when you're feeding off somebody like Rena Owen who has such an intense emotional energy.

"It's a hard film but the thing is, it's Beth's story. My role in it was to provide the misery."

Rotorua-born Morrison (33), whose links are Te Arawa, has extensive television and film experience. His film credits include *Other Halves*, *Never Say Die* and *Mauri* and he worked as an adviser on *The Piano*. His television credits, besides *Shortland Street*, include *Seekers*, *Gloss*, *Adventurers*, *Shark in the Park* and *Gold*. As well as acting, Morrison has worked on the television programme *Koha* as a researcher and reporter. He was a DJ with Radio Aotearoa and has performed in Maori cultural groups.

Mamaengaroa Kerr-Bell plays Grace Heke

"Grace is mature for her age. She's innocent, sensitive, and she sees the good in everything in her life. Her dad beats up her mother but she still loves him - all she sees is positive things."

Grace is a pivotal character in *Once Were Warriors* and newcomer Mamaengaroa Kerr-Bell (16) found the role a challenge. "It wasn't as I thought it would be. I thought, 'choice, jump in front of the camera, say my lines and then I'm off!' But it's not like that. It's jump in front of the camera, say your lines, then do it over and over again."

Kerr-Bell had some tough scenes to tackle. "Preparing for the emotional scenes was difficult. You got the call sheet the night before and tried to psych yourself up."

Director Lee Tamahori says Kerr-Bell was "frighteningly good in rehearsals" and carried her performance extremely well during filming.

Although she isn't much like her character, Kerr-Bell says, "I used to roam around a lot. I could relate to some things that she goes through in the film, like arguing with her mother and having little brothers and sisters."

Kerr-Bell has two sisters and one brother, all younger than herself. But until *Once Were Warriors*, she had never aspired to be an actor. She was "discovered" in the classic movie tradition while accompanying a friend to the auditions.

"We were playing ping-pong when Don Selwyn (casting director) came and asked if I wanted to audition for the part. I thought, 'well okay, if I don't try then I'll never know' so I went in and auditioned."

When she heard she had won the role, Kerr-Bell remembers "buzzing out" and racing around to tell all her family and friends - "they didn't believe me!"

Of Ngapuhi and Ngati Hine descent, the Whangarei Girls' High fifth form student is not sure whether she'll make a career of acting. "It's hard. I want to go back to school and I'll see what comes up." But she says appearing in a film is an experience she would recommend to anyone her age.

Julian (Sonny) Arahanga plays Nig Heke

"It's a powerful story. It's going to bring out a lot of different emotions in people. It's a story about love - there are times in the film where Jake and Beth are really in love and then other times it all falls apart."

Nig is Jake and Beth's aggressive eldest son. Sonny Arahanga says the character is "staunch because of the conflicts between his mother and father. He despises his father for beating his mum. But maybe when he was younger, he tried to step in and got knocked about so he's not really game to take on his father. He's got a good heart behind all the staunchness and tough guy image. He's focused in the right directions.

"He reminded me sometimes of when I was a young teenager and really rebellious - always arguing. If I didn't have my own way I'd just split instead of hanging around and talking it out. That's Nig's solution. He puts up a bit of an argument and then if things aren't going his way, he's out of there."

There were some poignant moments for Arahanga during filming but none more so than during the first few days on location in a South Auckland neighbourhood. "I had a ball working in Otara and seeing all the children so interested in what was going on. It was a big buzz for them and they were actually what the film was about. That was quite a good moment for me, to actually realise this film was real, it's not make believe, it's actually happening. "

Playing Nig Heke is 22-year old Arahanga's second appearance in front of the camera. His debut at the age of 11 was in the short film, *The Makutu on Mrs Jones*, which was directed and produced by his father, film producer/director Larry Parr.

Originally from Raetihi, Arahanga, who is of Ati-Haunui-a-Paparangi/Ngati Raukawa descent, has spent six years in the film industry as a freelance grip working on some 50 commercials, including several directed by *Once Were Warriors'* director, Lee Tamahori. He has also worked on several film and television productions including *The Other Side of Paradise*, *Old Scores*, *The End of the Golden Weather* and *Gold*.

Taungaroa Emile plays Boogie Heke

"Boogie's the shy type but he's pretty rebellious against everyone who puts restrictions on him. He tries to get attention from his dad but he never gets it and he sort of gets on with his mum. He loves her a lot but because she's got three other younger kids, it's pretty hard for him to find attention."

Acting in the film was a challenge for Taungaroa Emile whose only previous experience had been school plays. "I found it hard trying to sort out Boogie from Taungaroa but it got easier."

Emile says he can understand Boogie's behaviour "but my family is totally different."

The 15-year-old Flaxmere youth of Ngati Kahunganu and Ngati Porou descent has three sisters and two brothers. Unlike his character, Emile attends boarding school - Hastings' Te Aute College - where he is in the fifth form. He's a keen sportsman and plays basketball, softball, rugby and rugby league plus regularly enters speech competitions and enjoys debating.

Auditioning for the role in *Once Were Warriors* was a nerve-wracking experience for Emile who was asked by his teacher to audition along with 20 others from his school. After winning the role of Boogie, he looked forward to spending three months in Auckland filming.

"I was really excited about the prospect of being in a film with Temuera Morrison and meeting all the other people."

He hasn't decided whether he'll pursue a career in acting although he is attracted to the film industry. "I wouldn't mind trying my hand at all those other things that people do around the set like being a grip or lighting boy or focus puller."

Rachael Morris plays Polly Heke

Rachael Morris (10) from Tolaga Bay, relished her first experience of acting in a film and says, "I enjoyed it because it's a movie in which sad things happen and those things happen in real life as well."

Rachael says the character she played, Polly Heke, is "cheeky" and looks up to her older sister Grace. Rachael also has two older sisters.

Working with Temuera Morrison was a special thrill. "He reminds me so much of my real dad, that's why I like him so much. He's funny, he plays the guitar, my (late) dad used to be the best on the East Coast."

Morris auditioned for the part of Polly after the drama teacher at her school - Tolaga Bay Area School - asked her to try out for the role. Rachael had no acting experience but impressed the casting director, Don Selwyn.

After completion of the film, Rachael, who descends from Ngati Porou, returned to the small East Coast rural community of Tolaga Bay. A standard three pupil she enjoys netball, hockey, basketball, volleyball and tennis. She's a talented singer and says, "When I grow up I'm going to be an actress and a singer."

Joseph Kairau plays Huata Heke

Joseph Kairau was the perfect choice to play the Heke's cheeky youngest son Huata. The mischievous Huata, a smaller version of Nig, has no qualms about speaking his mind.

Kairau auditioned for the part after his aunt saw the character description for Huata while she was acting in Shortland Street. She thought it sounded exactly like her young nephew.

When the six-year-old, whose links are Ngaphuhi, heard he had won the role, he says it was "choice". But he found the role quite difficult, especially when it came to remembering his lines.

He says the best part of being in *Once Were Warriors* was going on location, especially the marae, "because I got to play and go down by the beach to play on the rocks."

Kairau's family are all very proud of their young actor, as are the congregation at his church and his friends at Manurewa East School. He plans to bank his earnings from the film and buy himself the Moonwalker video game.

Cliff Curtis plays Bully

"To accept the role was a challenge. Do you want to be seen publicly as a rapist - especially of young women? That was a big consideration."

Cliff Curtis eventually agreed to take the role because *Bully* is essentially "just one of the boys. He's quite self-conscious in his appearance in that his hair is always tied back nice and tidy. He's a nondescript kind of person really but the one gaping flaw in his character is that he sneaks upstairs one night and rapes a young girl."

When it came time to filming that moment of drama, Curtis says, "Once you've agreed to do it, you accept the challenges that come with it. It's important not to pretend it's okay when it's not. If it's upsetting, then be upset. It was upsetting. It was a really awful thing to do."

Curtis says the fight scene that results was certainly more fun to do as an actor although, "when you see it on the film, it's incredibly violent. It shows a very dark side of humanity where we can snap and be absolutely volatile. Those scenes are like a roller-coaster ride, doing them at speed. There's the element of danger, risk and skill."

Curtis trained at the New Zealand Drama School during 1988/89 and then worked in theatre for two years. He moved into film in 1992, beginning with a role in *The Piano*, co-winner of the 1993 Cannes Palme D'Or award, followed by *Desperate Remedies*, and the Kevin Costner-produced film *Rapa Nui* set in Easter Island.

Shannon Williams plays Toot

"Toot is a lost person," says Shannon Williams, a newcomer to acting who was chosen for the part of the street kid who befriends Grace Heke.

Williams (15), of Tainui descent, had never acted before and never intended to be in a film. Director Lee Tamahori was taking auditions at Williams' school, Hillary College in South Auckland, and saw him slouching across the school yard.

With his natural dreadlocks and expressive eyes, Tamahori thought Williams looked perfect for the part and yelled out for him to come in and audition.

His family were surprised and pleased he got the part, including his brother Isaac, who had originally wanted the role.

Williams is now very interested in the industry and is thinking of becoming a camera operator.

Pete Smith plays Dooley

"There's lots of violence and aggression in this film and Dooley maintains a level of equilibrium. He's the only one out of all the people Jake surrounds himself with, that he's never had a go with.

"Dooley stands back and says, 'it's your scene, you're the man, you go and deal with it, it's what you like, it's part of your makeup. But I'm your right-hand man so if the worst comes to the worst, sure I'll jump in."

Pete Smith has an affinity with the character which he believes is natural because he's an actor. "You use that as part of your technical ability to apply to the character."

He believes *Once Were Warriors* is a general story that affects everyone, no matter what their race, although it is portrayed by Maoris. "Everyone will have an individual concept of it."

Smith, who descends from Te Raukawa and Te Aupouri, launched his acting career by winning a Best Supporting Actor award for *The Quiet Earth*. Since then he has gone on to film roles in *Crush*, *The Piano*, and *Rapa Nui*.

Riwi Brown - Screenplay Writer

"I really wanted to inject some lighter moments into the screenplay while remaining true to Alan's story. There's a lot of love, a lot of passion. It's a very hard-hitting, raw, reality-type drama.

"For me, reading the book was getting a real feel of pain about what these characters were going through. I carried those feelings over into the screenplay. The screenplay needed more light and shade, more love and a little bit more humour and breathing space for an audience. I think, also, a lot more hope.

"The other thing which was very important to me was to show the power and the beauty of Maori culture. This family has a choice, there is another lifestyle for them."

When Brown met director Lee Tamahori and producer Robin Scholes, they had already decided Beth Heke was to be the central character of the film.

"I was very excited by that because I enjoy writing about Maori women and making them the heroine. You have to have someone for the audience to follow through and Beth was the obvious choice. All her family has a story which we follow through her.

"Jake was a fascinating character to write because he was always going to be a bit of a bad sort. But it's really important when you're writing characters like that, that they're three dimensional. People mightn't like them but they have an understanding of where their pain is coming from."

Brown, of Ngati Porou Te Whanau-A-Apanui and Taranaki descent, has been involved with Maori theatre as an actor in Wellington since the early 1980s. In 1988, she wrote her first play, *Roimata*, and was acclaimed as a writing talent. The following year the play was selected to be part of the *E Tipu E Rea* five-part Maori drama series for television and was adapted and directed by Brown. She has since directed all her own stage plays plus those of other Maori playwrights including *Daddy's Girl* by Rena Owen.

Alan Duff - Author

Once Were Warriors, Alan Duff's first novel, was published in New Zealand in 1990 and has sold more than 30,000 copies - ten times as many as most New Zealand novels.

One critic described the book as having "burning intensity" while another said "his novel is a watershed of social realism."

Once Were Warriors won the Pen First Book Award, won second place in the prestigious Goodman Fielder Wattie Award in 1991, and was awarded the Frank Sargeson Writing Fellowship. Duff was shortlisted for the New Zealand Book Awards in 1991, and George Henare's reading of the book won the Talking Book of the Year Award in 1992.

The critical acclaim launched Duff as a major new literary talent. However, portraying his own Maori people as violent, heavy drinkers has made Duff one of the country's most controversial figures.

Duff has now been a full-time writer since 1985. His first book, a thriller, went unpublished. His second novel, One Night Out Stealing, was published in 1992.

Stuart Dryburgh - Director of Photography

"I'm very interested in modern day stories and the urban genre. When I read the book, I figured sooner or later someone would make a film about it. When I was speaking with Lee (Tamahori) one day, he said he was working with Communicado to put together a film of the book. I was interested.

"Every film has its own unique challenge and qualities. A cinematographer tries to find some kind of visual essence to a film and bring that out in the photography. Working with virtually 100% Maori cast gave us the opportunity to work with fabulous skin tones and really enjoy those colours.

"It's very dark and rich in the colours and the tones. We haven't gone for a documentary look - we've gone for an enhanced reality."

Dryburgh believes *Once Were Warriors* is a timely film. "It's time New Zealand started tackling social issues in its feature films. I think it's a really important story to be told and I'm proud to have been associated with it."

Dryburgh has worked in the film industry since 1977. His first eight years were in the lighting department. In 1985, he moved into cinematography and since then, his credits include *Vigil*, *The Leading Edge*, *An Angel at My Table* and *The Piano*. His work on *The Piano* was honoured by an Academy Award nomination.

Mike Kane - Production Designer

"We were going for a very simplistic look. The only colour added was red because we were very keen to work with monochromatic tones. We wanted to expose a lot of skin so that we had warm tones contrasting with the cool urban tones of South Auckland.

"Being contemporary, we were keen to have some reasonably stylish aspects. That gave us the licence to create a gang uniform as such. Tattoos play a very prominent part, the whole cast was tattooed - some extensively - so that was quite complicated."

Kane worked on another predominantly-Maori feature film *Utu* and draws parallels between the design aspects of that and *Once Were Warriors*. "There were a lot of similarities between the gang we had and the 1860's tribe created for *Utu*."

Kane has worked on several New Zealand features including *Desperate Remedies*, *Bad Blood*, *Battletruck* and *The Quiet Earth*. He has also worked on numerous commercials with *Once Were Warriors*' director Lee Tamahori. He began his career in film and television in costume design and during the last seven years has specialised in art direction. One of Kane's biggest challenges in *Once Were Warriors* was going to a gutsy, urban feature after the high camp melodrama of *Desperate Remedies*.

Guy Moana - Design Assistant

"The designs were actually part of many tribes," says Guy Moana who created the moko and tattoo designs which feature in *Once Were Warriors*. "The film is affiliated with Maoridom so I thought there should be a wide design base. They were all traditional in design and form.

"If you study Maori carvings, you'll find the patterns are actually designed for certain parts of the body. Basically the design itself tells you where it should be."

The designs, which were made into transfers in the United States, were applied to the skin and filled in with ink. It took up to four hours for a full body tattoo to be applied.

"After the initial panic stages of 'we've got 10 guys to moko', everything fell into place quite easily," says Moana. "Quite a few of the actors wanted to keep the patterns they had on their bodies for a moko. The transformation was pretty awesome to them."

Moana has been carving for nine years and moved into film and television seven years ago after attending a course held by Don Selwyn which taught him all aspects of production. His work has been seen in *The Piano* and he also featured as an extra in both *The Piano* and *Once Were Warriors*.

Robin Scholes - Producer

"To my mind, *Once Were Warriors* is extraordinarily moving because ultimately you love these people. But one of them, Jake, has a fatal flaw which he can't change and it's because of that flaw, that everyone must reject him. The audience is left with the feeling 'if only he could change that, it would be all right and wonderful.'

"It's full of passion. It has the right balance between the negative and the positive. Sure Jake hits Beth. However they also love each other and that comes through.

"What I'm most proud of is that people will not be able to leave the cinema and not talk about the film. A lot of people will know the circumstances in which this family lives. The people who don't know - who've never been exposed to it - will realise it emotionally for the first time instead of reading it off the page.

"Violence in our society is a real issue and a shocking 80 percent of it is family-related. But statistics cannot show us the human side, what it's like to be in a family affected by violence.

"This film is at the cutting edge. Until we put these images on the screen, people will not have an opportunity to openly discuss the issues involved. We believe we have made something which is passionate, which will be controversial, but controversial in a positive sense - it will open up discussion."

The making of *Once Were Warriors* fulfils a long time ambition for Scholes to return to her motivating love - theatrical film.

New Zealand-born Scholes completed her MA at Edinburgh University specialising in film studies and she then taught film studies at Essex University and set up the film studies course with Roger Horrocks at Auckland University. At both Essex and Auckland, she initiated several film festivals, in particular, the South American Festival of Films in Auckland and the Auckland/Wellington Festival of Women's Films.

She then became a producer, director and writer, first for Television New Zealand and then at Communicado. *Once Were Warriors* is her first feature film production.

Production Story

Communicado bought the rights to Alan Duff's novel *Once Were Warriors* almost immediately after it was published in 1990 because it was exactly the type of story the company wanted to make as its first feature, explains the film's producer Robin Scholes.

"*Once Were Warriors* appealed because its story was contemporary, urban and controversial," she says. "To my mind the history of New Zealand films contained too many polite stories which were distanced from everyday life.

"*Once Were Warriors* contained wonderful, vibrant characters I could identify with. They weren't polite. They drank, sang, loved and hit one another. It was a gutsy passionate story, the kind of story which would make its audience weep and laugh and feel involved with the characters."

Communicado was almost five years old at that stage and had built a solid business from television and corporate video production. According to Scholes, "We were ready to fulfil our long term ambition to move into television drama and feature film production."

Wellington actor/writer Riwia Brown was chosen to write the screenplay and Scholes says: "Riwia's talent for this film was fantastic because she wrote from a woman's perspective and shaped it more and more to Beth's story."

Brown says: "Robin, Lee and I spent three or four days working out a structure for the screenplay, making Beth the principle character and the focus for the family. During the course of the story, she would re-evaluate her whole lifestyle - her choice to marry Jake, and her decision to find her cultural heritage."

After the script received the investment go-ahead from the Film Commission, Scholes says: "We still had a long way to go to get it to be Beth's story because Jake kept on taking over, kept on stealing scenes and kept on being the lively, vibrant, bad character that he is."

The film's director, Lee Tamahori, was an essential part of the script writing process. Tamahori had gained wide experience in New Zealand's pioneer film industry but needed something special to help him make the leap from his lucrative and award-winning career as a director of commercials.

"I saw this story had potential and a lot of elements that were of interest to me about New Zealand - social politics, high drama and very interesting characters," he says.

With the final draft in place and backing from the Film Commission, the next step was securing a broadcaster. TV3's Programming Director Geoff Steven, a film-maker himself, loved the script and encouraged the channel to support the project.

With New Zealand on Air funding, and post-production support from Avalon NFU Studios, casting became the next issue. Scholes explains: "The person that was most difficult to find was Jake. We searched and searched for this character we had in our minds - he was about 7'3" tall, had biceps the size of huge tree stumps, and exuded an explosive energy which was simultaneously dangerous and attractive."

After scouring gyms, prisons and gangs, it was decided only an actor could handle the part. Temuera Morrison put in a stunning audition and secured the role.

Rena Owen had claimed the role of Beth even before she knew the film was reality. Scholes says: "She had read the book and decided that she was Beth and if anyone was going to play the part, it was her. She was undoubtedly the only woman who had the kind of emotional intensity, the power that the character required."

Tamahori agrees. "It was always her part and she's a one-shot person. She's standing there poised, ready to give it so you'd better be ready."

Tamahori knew he wanted the film to have "a really gritty look". It needed to have a hard edge.

"There are a lot of subtleties you can add to these things which become invisible to the audience but they notice them all the time. One of the things I definitely wanted it to be was a very hard, almost treeless urban experience that not many people in New Zealand would be aware of."

That set the colour-tone for the film which Tamahori describes as "saturated colour". It's very atonal - the only colours in it are black, browns and some very earthy colours. The only primary colour that comes into it is red. They're also very Maori colours which permeates through all the costumes."

Skin tones were enhanced and Tamahori explains, "If you've got people with dark skin, you can actually enrich it by a judicious choice of filters and that's what we did. It brought up everyone's skin tones which gives a very rich look."

Director of photography Stuart Dryburgh (The Piano, Angel At My Table) and production designer Mike Kane were responsible for realising Tamahori's vision for the film.

Woven into the total image were the Polynesian/Maori style tattoos worn by the gang. Tamahori says: "The costumes and tattoos for the gang were very confrontational - probably more so than any other gang I've ever seen.

"Originally I thought Once Were Warriors was going to be much more of a hardened, realistic piece of New Zealand, sort of poverty zone, ghettoised and urban. Although that's there, it's got style on top of it."

Tamahori believes Once Were Warriors marks a milestone in New Zealand film making. "It will make people sit up and talk about it on both sides of the fence because I know it will engender controversy."

Robin Scholes says: "This is a film which takes people on an emotional roller coaster. People will cry, and when they leave, they will be emotionally changed. The deep responses triggered by the film compels people to talk about the issues involved. It will provoke a lot of discussion which is exactly what we want."

ONCE WERE WARRIORS END CREDITS

Director
 Producer
 Screenplay
 Story
 Director of Photography
 Editor
 Production Designer
 Casting Director
 Music

Lee Tamahori
 Robin Scholes
 Riwia Brown
 Alan Duff
 Stuart Dryburgh
 Michael Horton
 Michael Kane
 Don Selwyn
 Murray Grindlay
 Murray McNabb

Cast

Beth Heke
 Jake Heke
 Grace Heke
 Nig Heke
 Boogie Heke
 Polly Heke
 Huata Heke
 Bully
 Dooley
 Bennett
 Mavis
 Toot
 Taka (Gang Leader)
 King Hitter (in pub)
 Judge
 Te Tupaea
 Matawai
 Policeman
 Policewoman
 Prosecuting Officer
 Youth Advocate
 Male Youth #1
 Male Youth #2
 Taunter at court
 Woman #1
 Woman #2
 Old Drunk
 Nig's Friend
 Nig's Girl
 Joking Man Outside Pub
 Karaoke Singer
 Party Guitarist
 Evicted Partygoer/Pub Goer
 Gang Rape Victim
 Bully's Girl

Rena Owen
 Temuera Morrison
 Anita Kerr-Bell
 Julian Arahanga
 Taungaroa Emile
 Rachael Morris Jnr
 Joseph Kairau
 Clifford Curtis
 Pete Smith
 George Henare
 Mere Boynton
 Shannon Williams
 Calvin Tuteao
 Ray Bishop
 Ian Mune
 Te Whatanui Skipworth
 Rangi Motu
 Robert Pollock
 Jessica Wilcox
 Stephen Hall
 Wiki Oman
 Israel Williams
 Johnathon Wiremu
 Richard Meihana
 Edna Stirling
 Ngawai Simpson
 Spike Kem
 Arona Risetto
 Fran Viveaere
 Brian Kairau
 Charlie Tumahai
 Tama Renata
 Guy Moana
 Maree Moschonas
 Riwia Brown

Core Gang Members**Jake's Mates**

Mac Hona
Percy Robinson
Jason Kerapa
Robbie Ngauma
James Dean Wilson
Chris Mason
Brian Kairau
Marshall Kairau
Joseph Te Whiu
Jim Ngaata
David Rare
Donald Allen
Charles Marsh
Winstone Bedgood
Piki Mark
Royal Waa
Jack Grace
Manuel Apiata
George Tiopira
Maru Nihoniho
Jaye Cassidy
Vivienne Wilson
Hiraina Kume
Thomasina Perana

Production Manager
Production Co-Ordinator
Production Secretary
Production Accountant
Production Runner
Location Manager
Unit Manager

1st Assistant Director
2nd Assistant Director
3rd Assistant Director
Director's Assistant
Continuity

Focus Puller
Clapper Loader
Video Split Operator
Gaffer
Best Boy
Lighting Assistants

Janet McIver
Carol J Paewai
Jane Denton
Tricia Lafferty
Setu Li'o
Peta Sinclair
Neville Howe

Chris Short
Robin Murphy
Tiwai Reedy
Riwia Brown
Melissa Wikaire

Cameron McLean
Lee Allison
Paul Samuels
Richard Llewellyn Evans
Mark Archibald
Henare Mato
David (Milky) Alac
Tony Pikari

Key Grip
Grip Assistants

Sound Recordist
Boom Operator
Art Director
Props Buyer/Standby Props
Art Department Assistants

Carvings and Tattoo Designer
Model Maker
Set Painter
Painter
Wardrobe Supervisor
Wardrobe Assistant
Wardrobe Standby
Wardrobe Runner
Construction Manager
Carpenters

Design Assistant
Machinist/Cutter
Make-up Supervisor
Hair Stylist
Make-up Assistant
Prosthetics Supplied By

Casting (Wellington)
Casting Assistant
Fight Co-ordinator
Chaperone
Car Wrangler
Animal Wrangler

Stills Photographer
Additional Stills
Publicity
Educational Video Director
Maori Music Consultant
Sound Post Production
Sound Manager
Sound Designer
Sound Tracklayers

Dialogue Editor

Brian Harris
Rourke Crawford-Flett
Dean Mexted
Graham Morris
Richard Morrison
Shayne Radford
Brad Mill
Carey Johnson
Chris Peacock
James Dickson
Adam Evensen
Rob Callaghan
Guy Moana
Gary McKay
Annette Patrick
Robert (Wid) Gosney
Pauline Bowkett
Leslie Pohatu
Gavin McLean
Elizabeth McGregor
Mike Harvey
Kerry Bos
Chris Halligan
Inia Taylor
Janis McEwan
Debra East
Peter Underdown
Deirdre Haworth
Richard Taylor

Riwia Brown
Ema Walters
Robert Bruce
Adrienne Peke
Ian Hunter
Mark Vette

Kerry Brown
Ann Shelton
Rachel Stace
Hineani Melbourne
Hirini Melbourne
The Film Unit
John Neill
Kit Rollings
Don Paulin
Ray Beentjes
Emma Haughton

Dialogue Supervisor
Foley Recording
Foley Artists

Sound Transfers
Mixer
Assistant Mixer
The Film Unit Production Executive
Laboratory
Colour Grader
Rostrum Camera
Opticals
Laboratory Post Production Liaison
Laboratory Liaison
Projectionists

Script Adviser
Script Development
Completion Guarantor

Consultants

AIT Consultant
Legal Adviser
Security Guard

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DB Breweries
Film Facilities Ltd

Annie Collins
Helen Luttrell
Sally Stopforth
Beth Tredray
John Van der Reyden
Michael Hedges
John Boswell
Sue Thompson
The Film Unit
Lynne Seaman
Reiner Schoenbrunn
Brian Scadden
Colin Tyler
Grant Campbell
Ted Morgan
Neil Crichton
Ian Mune
Ross Jennings
Motion Picture Guarantors

Tucker/Endeavour
Murray Newey
Judith Trye
John Barnett
Toby Curtis
Karen Soich
Te Ari Heta