

Philip Whaanga

— calling the tune for *Tu Tangata*, and sometimes singing the blues.

Whaanga accepted the compensation and joined the dole queue. He was plucked from it to act as public relations man for a fundraising effort at the Auckland Technical Institute.

Next they tapped his librarian skills. And then the call back to journalism loomed in an advertisement for the editorship of *Tu Tangata*.

In September 1981 the bureaucrats at Maori Affairs got their first taste of Whaanga. They nearly fired him over the first issue.

It was election year so he planned an election special. Deadlines for copy were set and Ben Couch missed them.

"Tough," said Whaanga, "He misses out."

"No he doesn't," said the bureaucrats, "he's your boss."

Whaanga got his first taste of humble pie and he hasn't been hungry since.

"I'll be honest. I was unemployed and that was the pits. There was a Maori something in me but first of all I wanted a job (and, with four of his five children now born, he needed one). I didn't take on the cross of serving my people till later."

Despite promises, Maori contributors were thin on the ground. Whaanga had to use his journalist contacts to get the issues he wanted covered. There is no doubt he built up a magazine that presented issues Maori people rarely read about, heard or saw in the mainstream media. But Whaanga quickly became dissatisfied.

"There were about five or six journalists who identified as being Maori at that stage, so nearly all of my writers were Pakeha writing about Maori. And it was important that Maori readers should be able to see their people doing things."

"But I got sick of writing **about** Maori people rather than **for** Maori people. I was wakening up to what it was like to be a Maori in New Zealand."

That led to frustration at his own inability to communicate and Whaanga set forth to learn the Maori language. An intensive course and the search to improve his skills has given him what he describes as adequate conversational Maori. The energy surrounding this time was succour to an emerging spirit.

"In the midst of this, imagine what sort of articles were coming out, because I was made aware of what wasn't happening in the wider media. I was one of those born again ones."



Back at the magazine Whaanga's religious zeal was tempered by reality. He was still stuck with relying on Pakeha journalists. The compromise was to build for the future, so Whaanga got heavily into promoting training for Maori journalists.

Enter Gary Wilson of the Journalists Training Board.

Wilson and Whaanga bullied and caajoled their way through the industry, exploiting every ounce of Pakeha conscience they could extract. The fruits of their efforts are born and maturing through students on established courses, but mainly through the separate training school for Maori journalists at Waiariki Community College, Rotorua.

"Training is a very slow way of getting people through and I need stories now. I haven't really solved that yet."

But Whaanga doesn't want any Maori journalist. He says that *Tu Tangata* needs experienced Maori journalists

who can present a Maori perspective with authority.

"There's enough Pakeha media missing the point of the story without me getting into that too."

So how is Whaanga going to solve his dilemma?

"It's training. We have to hang in there for five or ten years until the people come through and gather the experience. Meantime we've got to look for senior Pakeha journalists who have unpacked their cultural bags and don't get squeamish about *taha Maori*."

There are other hurdles to clear before the magazine can realise the potential he sees, and effectively serve Maori interests — and the interests of the department.

He lists more funding, more promotion, more commercial hustle, and independence from the department.

Philip Whaanga isn't short of challenges for 1987.