

Streets under siege by gangs

GANGS, from Page 1B

one night last August tore through her front window. It ripped through a kindergarten certificate hanging on the porch and penetrated the thick outside wall before lodging in a living room wall.

On Cahalan, a father described how his 12-year-old was ordered by a school counselor not to wear a blue-and-black coat, because wearing those colors could cost him his life. Every weekday, the father picks up his older son from high school and orders the boy into the house. He says it's the only way to keep his son alive and safe.

Everyone interviewed on these blocks knew of at least one young man who had been killed or paralyzed — shot, knifed, hit in the head with a machete or a baseball bat.

"To put it bluntly, we've lost control of the neighborhood. It's anarchy on a nightly basis," the 4th Precinct veteran said.

Garages and store walls are splattered with the gangs' painted symbols and codes — a secret, deadly language in which young men boast about whom they have killed in opposing gangs, and whom they plan to kill next.

Crowns and dollar signs signify the gangs that dominate these particular streets. A five-year cycle appears to be firmly entrenched. Younger boys are bullied and cajoled into joining the gangs. As they grow a few years older, they replace the previous leaders as those young men are killed, jailed or retire.

Those who get bullied too often end up bullying back.

One day last week, 14-year-old Eddie hurried down Lane Street with his coat collar turned up against the chill wind — and to ward off stares and threats from any gang members in passing cars.

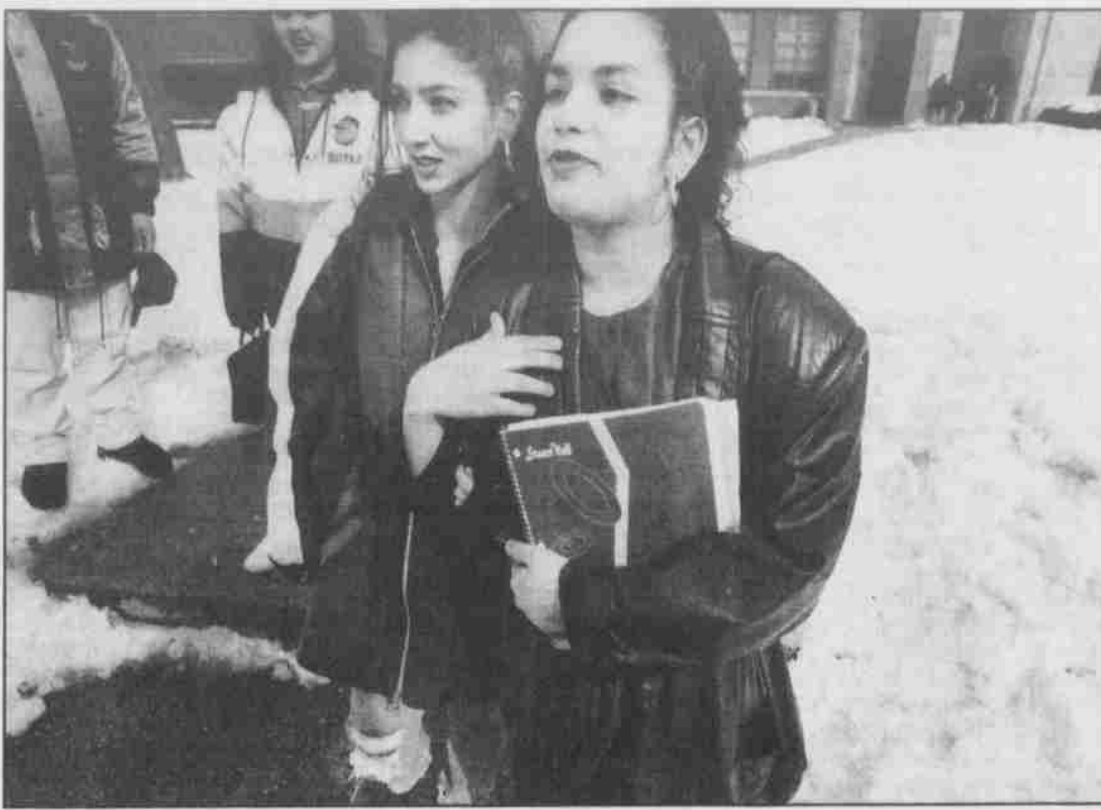
Eddie said he is not a member of a gang, and never will be. His mother told him he will have to move out the day he joins one.

That happened after he was beaten up two years ago in a nearby alley — by lifelong friends. They had decided to form a small gang.

Mimicking the words and actions of older boys, they told him to prepare for his initiation. He lay down and three of them beat him for 60 seconds.

As he lay aching and bruised on his bed back home, his older brother told their mother what had happened. She ordered him to get out of the gang or get out of the house.

So he walked back to the alley to tell his friends that he wasn't in the gang after all. For the second time that day, he was ordered to lie on the ground. For a second time, he endured 60



Tanya Saldivar, 16, left, and Letty Salazar, 17, talk outside Western High School in southwest Detroit. Some residents have learned to live with the neighborhood's gang violence, but others have left.

seconds of painful hits, kicks and punches to his side, ribs and back.

"But I was out," he said.

In one block of Lane, three families moved out in the past year because of gang activity their sons or neighbors were involved in.

After Jonah Eli Ramirez, 18, was charged with first-degree murder in the shotgun killing last summer of a 17-year-old, two neighbors' homes were hit with bullets. His sister wept as she told a friend they were moving before it was too late, that the bullets were meant for their house. Before Ramirez's father moved the family off the block, he said of his son: "He's gone. I lost him."

Ramirez is scheduled to stand trial on the murder charge next month.

Young people such as Gary who don't want to join gangs can't even pick the colors of their clothes innocently.

Gary said that when his mom takes him shopping, he now tells her not to buy blue, white, black or red. Combinations of those colors are claimed by warring gangs.

"It makes me mad, because I'd like to wear some of those ... colors sometimes," Gary said. "I like blue."

A few blocks away, 19-year-old Pablo Bonilla, who has been released on bond since his arrest in last week's federal sweep, says he is getting out of the gang. But he says the gangs will never go away. The only solution, he says, "is to move — or suffer in the southwest side of Detroit."

Many Alonzo lives a block away, on Cahalan. He has become cautious enough to pick up his son David, 17, from Southwestern High after school. Alonzo, a disabled factory worker, makes sure David goes inside when they get home.

But Alonzo vows, as do many members of neighborhood improvement groups, not to take Bonilla's advice.

"I'm not running away, and I won't give in," he said, as he sat on his living room sofa. "This is my house, and my neighborhood."



DETROIT FREE PRESS

TO GET HELP

Here are some places to get help if a gang tries to recruit you or someone you know.

- Detroit Police Department anti-gang hotline: 224-GANG.
- La Sed community organization: 554-2025.
- Latino Family Services: 841-7380
- Council Against Gang-Related Violence: 842-3450.
- U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (firearms violations): 1-800-ATF-GUNS.

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CHECK DIRECTORY FOR SHOWTIMES

Kevorkian says end is a hard thing to see

He tells magazine he's cried at suicides

Free Press Staff and Wire Reports

NEW YORK — Dr. Jack Kevorkian says it isn't easy watching someone die, but it's something all doctors must do.

The retired pathologist is quoted in Newsweek magazine's March 8 edition as saying that tears came to his eyes several times as he helped people commit suicide. The magazine goes on sale today.

Kevorkian has helped 15 people die in Michigan since June 1990.

Asked how he feels while helping someone die, Kevorkian said: "It's tough on me. You've got to steel yourself. Every doctor does. If a doctor didn't do that, he couldn't function."

"These are not happy moments. The ending of a human life can never be a good moment."

Kevorkian said none of the people he has helped showed a fear of death.

"I've had all kinds of religions," he added, "and not one wanted a religious consultation. Religion is totally irrelevant to what they want."

Kevorkian and his attorneys have accused religious conservatives of forcing their values on Michigan citizens by helping push through a ban on assisted suicide.

The ban first was scheduled to take effect March 30, but on Thursday, lawmakers moved up the effective date, and Gov. John Engler signed it into immediate law. Violators can be sentenced to up to four years' imprisonment and a \$2,000 fine.

Kevorkian's supporters question the motives of prosecutors and the religious groups that recovered a document that casts doubt on whether the 13th person he assisted really wanted to die.

Macomb County Prosecutor Carl Marlinga is considering homicide charges against Kevorkian based on a document retrieved from the garbage of Kevorkian's assistant and friend, Neal Nicol.

The report suggests that 70-year-old Hugh Gale of Roseville twice demanded that a mask delivering lethal carbon monoxide be removed. Kevorkian's attorney, Geoffrey Fieger, said it was an incorrect copy.

The American Civil Liberties Union has said it will file a lawsuit today, seeking to strike down the ban, which Kevorkian repeatedly has vowed to defy. He repeated the pledge to Newsweek.

"I will help a suffering human being at the right time when the patient's condition warrants it, despite anything else," he said during the interview at Fieger's Southfield office. "That's what a doctor should do."

He said he didn't fear being jailed for his actions.

"Well, I've been there twice and I wasn't frightened," Kevorkian said. "When you walk down the aisle with holding cells on each side, and someone spots you and then there's suddenly an uproar of cheers, and hands come through the bars to shake your hand, would you worry?"

"That happened both times."

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