Panther Clark Expected Death, Sister Reveals

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A Tribune reporter interviewed friends, acquaintances, and relatives of the Black Panther party leader in a raid by state's attorney's police Dec. 4 in an effort to give an in-depth view of their lives. Today's story is on Mark Clark, who was chairman of the party's Peoria chapter.

BY JOSEPH BOYCE
"A slave of natural death who dies can't balance out two dead flies. I'd rather he without the shame, a bullet lodged within my brain. If we were not to reach our goal, let cancer and cancer torment my soul!"

This was the favorite poem of Mark Clark, 22, slain Black Panther party leader, according to his sister, Eleanor, 20. Its originator was Albrecht [illegible] Carter, Panther defense minister who was shot to death Jan. 17 during a meeting of 150 black students at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Killed in Police Raid
Clark, chairman of the party's Peoria chapter, was fatally shot by state's attorney's police Dec. 4 in a raid on an apartment at 2337 Monroe st. Fred Hampton, 21, state party chairman, also was killed.

Clark and another Panther, Anthony [illegible] Harra, 21, had gone to Chicago Nov. 20 to confer with party leaders about shoring up the Peoria chapter which was failing because of a lack of support," Eleanor Clark said.

Harris was arrested Dec. 2 after a gun battle with police in a building at 805-5 Merrill av. He was charged with attempted murder and aggravated battery.

This leaves Peoria with only one active Panther party member, Eleanor Clark said.

Her brother "became interested in the Panthers about a year ago when they started getting some notoriety," she said.

Impressed by Activity
"He said he wanted to join the Panthers we were really doing something in California something worthwhile. This was before anything had started here."

Mark became active in the party after a family friend, a Panther member, came from California to Peoria for a visit, his sister said. "They talked, and the friend gave Mark some literature to read and Mark decided he wanted to join," she told.

"He walked active here. Other friends joined but none were as active, and others didn't participate. Most were in the training stage," Eleanor Clark said.

A Thinker, Friend Says
"Mark was a thinker first and foremost, a Peoria friend, Moses Hardy, 25, said of Clark. "He wanted to do something active, and others didn't participate. Most were in the training stage," Eleanor Clark said.

"He read a lot and a variety of materials. He became interested in the life of man and was especially fascinated by Darwin's theory of evolution -- the relationship of man to other species," she said.

Plair for the Drama
Mark, who was only a fair student, but who excelled in subjects that interested him, displayed a great talent for art, drama, and speech, Eleanor Clark said.

"At the age of 4, he was the youngest person ever to be a member of the Craver Players," a local acting company, she said.

"When she and Mark were in their early teens they were invited to become members of the Peoria Players, the city's most prestigious drama group, she said."

"But he didn't think seriously about it. They had such limited parts and he was determined not to go on stage carrying a tray," Eleanor Clark said.

Always Adventurous
"When he was young, he didn't aspire to the things that most kids do, he eventually becoming a doctor or lawyer, he was always adventurous," Eleanor Clark said.

"I think he finally found what he wanted to do. He didn't accept things as is. He was a nonconformist. He was the type of person who, regardless of whether anyone went along with his ideas, it didn't make any difference. He was going to do what he thought was right and appropriate," she said.

"I remember when we were kids and used to watch stories about the cowboys and Indians on television that he used to tell me all that stuff was a lie."

Admirer of Geronimo
"He used to say the reason the Indians were on reservations was because they were too proud to be slaves. He admired Geronimo because he refused to accept the reservation, or not slavery," Eleanor Clark said.

"This was how he was a child. He was very sensitive to others' feelings," she added.

"Her brother got along well with people even though he wasn't an extrovert, she said."

After Mark finished at Roosevelt High he went to Manual High School. He played football. He was then interested in civil rights. He began to work with the police, the 'pigs,' to get him to believe it was a job and not to talk," she said.

It was this desire for action that led Clark to join the Panthers. "We used to try and get Mark out of the Panthers," said Miss Cummings, a former juvenile officer, "but not in the world is perfect."

"They were always in the presence of the crowd," said Miss Cummings, a former juvenile officer, "but not in the world is perfect."

"The police in life was his destiny. What he was doing, in his heart he felt he was doing for his people. He gave his life for the thing he believed in most," she added.

"I was also during his mid-teens that Mark became active in civil rights. He began, along with his brothers and sisters, to participate in demonstrations in Peoria sponsored by the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [N. A. A. C. P.] branch."

"We were demonstrating against discrimination, employment, housing, and education," said John Gwynn, president of both the local and state chapters of the N. A. A. C. P."

About 13 at Time
"I noticed that most of the Clark brothers had been picketing. All were alert and pretty. We had read up on the issues. Mark was about 13 at that time," he said.

Our practice was to give persons involved whom we considered more aggressively than the average, a leadership position over a small group of our troops.

"We found that persons with his and his brothers' abilities played a major part in keeping them in line whom we normally would have had trouble with." Gwynn said.

"He said he could order when older persons or adults could not," he said of Mark.

"He didn't seem to have much in our in the meetings unless they were active. He would rather move than sit and talk," Gwynn said.

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