

Panther Clark Expected Death, Sister Reveals

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A TRIBUNE reporter interviewed friends, acquaintances, and relatives of two members of the Black Panther party slain 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 be without the shame,
A bullet lodged within my brain.
If I were not to reach our goal,
Let bleeding 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 Alpert [Bunchy] Carter, Panther defense minister who was shot to death Jan. 17 during a meeting of 150 black students in 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 Peoria Panther, Anthony [Tony] Harris, 21, had come 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 8055-59 Merrill av. He was charged with at-

tempted 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 to me then that the Panthers 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 said.

"He was the first member here. Other friends joined but some quit, some were not very 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 far and above being a member of the Black Panther party. He had a feeling for people and placed them before himself," Hardy said.

Mark Clark was born June 28, 1947, in St. Francis hospital, Peoria, the ninth of 17 children of William and Fannie Clark.

William Clark was pastor of Holy Temple Church of God in Christ and worked in the founding of the Caterpillar company for 28 years. He died last May.

Mother in Michigan

Mrs. Fannie Clark spent most of her time as a housewife but at one time worked in St. Fran-



Mark Clark

cis hospital and occasionally did domestic work. She and some of the Clark children now live in Flint, Mich.

Mark went to Lincoln elementary school from 1st thru 6th grade and then attended Roosevelt Junior High school.

"He liked the process of learning, but he didn't like school. Most of his knowledge came from his own efforts," his sister 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.

Flair 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."

"Always Adventurous"

"When he was young, he didn't aspire to the things that most kids do, like 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 neo-slavery," Eleanor Clark said.

"This was when he was a child. He was very sensitive to others' feelings."

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

After Mark finished at Roosevelt he went to Manual High school but did not graduate, his sister said.

While at Manual, Mark had disciplinary problems including one in which he allegedly assaulted a teacher.

"The school has a majority

of black students and there are sporadic outbreaks there all the time because the teachers don't treat black students fairly," Eleanor Clark charged. She added that Mark also had attended classes at Illinois Central Junior college in Peoria.

Beginning in his mid-teens, Mark had several brushes with the law. Peoria police records show he was fined \$25 in February, 1965, for carrying a concealed weapon; sentenced to four months in jail in October, 1965, on a charge of aggravated battery; fined \$50 in February, 1967, for curfew violation and \$100 for carrying a concealed weapon.

In October, 1967, he was fined \$10 for disorderly conduct and in January, 1968, was fined another \$100 for carrying a concealed weapon. In most instances he worked out the fines in the Peoria county jail at the rate of \$5 a day.

Defended by Policewoman

"Mark, in my opinion, was not a criminal but a man who would go along with the crowd," said Miss Donna Cummings, a Peoria policewoman for 27 years. She had known Mark since he was a child.

"He was one of my children," said Miss Cummings, a former juvenile officer, "but no one in the world is perfect."

"The path he chose 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 asserted.

It 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 in 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 were participating. All were alert and pretty much 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 aggressive than 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 teen-agers in line whom we normally would have had trouble with," Gwynn said.

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

"He didn't seem to have too much interest in our meetings unless they were for action. He would rather move than sit and talk," Gwynn 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]," Eleanor said. "We used to tell him the 'pigs' were going to get him but he used to say it didn't matter. He told us he would probably die before 1970."

"He wanted to educate people. He wanted them to read the Panther paper. He thought they should get 'some equipment' and defend themselves," she said.

The family learned of Mark's death from a relative who had heard it on the radio, Eleanor Clark said.

Law enforcement officials never notified the family about the shooting, she added.