

Plamondon Pun and The White Panther's

Written by Westside ID266

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In rural western Michigan, at the end of a mile-long dirt road, past a sign warning trespassers to keep out, lives a man who once became famous because he tried to change the world.

He was a young revolutionary who cofounded the White Panther Party, a fugitive on the FBI's most wanted list, a suspect in the bombing of a CIA building in Ann Arbor.

He was a pot-smoking, acid-dropping militant who wanted to free all political prisoners and called for an end to money.

"Everything free for everybody," was his mantra.

Lawrence (Pun) Plamondon's radicalism made him a household name.

Then he disappeared for 30 years.

Now, after putting his story on paper, Plamondon is stepping back into the light. Late last week, his memoir, "Lost From the Ottawa: The Story of the Journey Back," hit bookshelves in metro Detroit.

"I had people telling me that my story is ... amazing, man," Plamondon, 59, said.

The story begins in a state mental hospital in Traverse City.

Troubled childhood

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His father was a 52-year-old alcoholic. His mother was a 39-year-old woman being treated for syphilis. He was half-Ottawa Indian; she was part-Ojibwa. While institutionalized, they conceived a son.

Their boy was adopted by a Traverse City couple, who called him Lawrence Robert Plamondon.

His childhood was troubled, and Plamondon left home as a teenager. At the age of 21, he wound up in Detroit. It was 1967, a turbulent year of riot, war protests and counterculture.

On Plum Street, a hippie enclave near Tiger Stadium, he saw young people with long hair, strands of beads hanging from their necks, and sandals on their feet. He began to make friends with writers, musicians, and poet Allen Ginsberg, a New Yorker who was one of the era's most-famous troublemakers.

Plamondon made sandals for money. At night he dropped acid, smoked pot and ate hallucinogenic mushrooms while listening to the MC5, The Doors, and Iggy and the Stooges.

Soon he was spending time with people like hippie guru John Sinclair, journalist Peter Werbe and artist Gary Grimshaw, who were running two underground newspapers, the Detroit Sun and the Fifth Estate.

"They all had something going on," Plamondon said. "I wasn't a writer or a musician, but I liked being with those people so I made myself useful wherever I could."

In 1968, Plamondon and friends moved to Ann Arbor, where they set up a commune in two big houses on Hill Street.

By now, Plamondon was becoming more political, and more militant. He was struck by an interview of Huey P. Newton, cofounder of the Black Panther Party. When asked what white

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people could do to support the Black Panthers, Newton said: "They can form a White Panther Party."

Life on the run

As Plamondon tells it, the White Panther Party was founded in 1968 by Sinclair and him.

They modeled the White Panthers after the Black Panthers, fighting for a clean planet and the freeing of political prisoners. The White Panthers went further, advocating rock "n" roll, dope, sex in the streets and an end to capitalism. Plamondon took on the affectations of a revolutionary, donning a black motorcycle jacket and a swaggering attitude.

"He was an incredible addition to the group of people who wanted to bring about changes," said Leni Sinclair, a former revolutionary and photographer who was married to John Sinclair. "He was very political-minded, very inquisitive, always studying revolutionary text trying to make himself useful to the struggle of the time."

Plamondon went underground in October 1969 after learning he had been indicted in connection with the bombing of the CIA office in Ann Arbor a year earlier.

He cut his shoulder-length hair short, shaved his beard and began wearing wing-tipped shoes. He traveled incognito for 11 months, bouncing from San Francisco to Seattle to New York to Toronto, Germany, Italy and Algeria.

In May 1969, at the age of 24, he became the first revolutionary to make the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list.

"I was a fish out of water," Plamondon said of being on the run. "There were no hippie girls, no hippie guys, no rock "n" roll, no beer. I was lonely and homesick. I came home unannounced."

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After sneaking back into the country, he planned to lay low in northern Michigan. In July 1970, Plamondon and two White Panther members hopped into a Volkswagen van for the ride north, chugging beer along the way. South of the Mackinac Bridge, one of the other men began tossing empty beer cans out of the van. A State Police trooper stopped the men, checked their identities and forced them to pick up the trash before continuing on.

Later, police discovered that George Edward Taft III was Plamondon using false ID. He was arrested 50 miles west of St. Ignace.

At a subsequent court appearance, Plamondon told the Free Press that his arrest was the result of "a lack of revolutionary discipline." He spent 32 months in a federal prison as his case wound its way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In proceedings, federal government officials admitted to wiretapping Plamondon's conversations without a warrant. During his trial, U.S. District Judge Damon Keith ordered that the government release the tapes, but the prosecution refused. The Supreme Court eventually found in Plamondon's favor.

"During the trial Pun was hilarious, he was funny, he was totally fearless," said Hugh (Buck) Davis, a Detroit lawyer who represented Plamondon. "The radical theory is that Pun's case helped bring down Nixon."

Plamondon and his friends celebrated his freedom. But within a few years, the White Panther Party began to fall apart, and its members were forced to find new lives.

Finding purpose

Plamondon began driving a semi-truck full of equipment for rock bands including Kiss and Foreigner. He also joined Bob Seger on five tours, working as a driver and personal bodyguard.

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By now, Plamondon was drinking heavily and snorting cocaine. Seger eventually fired him.

He moved from Ann Arbor to the west side of the state, where he found work as a janitor.

More often drunk than sober, he wrecked his car, wet himself, puked in public places, and once passed out on the side of the road in a patch of poison ivy. The low point came, he said, when he attempted to rape his best friend's wife. She did not press charges.

"There's few regrets in my life, but that's certainly one of them," he said. "I feel a great deal of shame."

After several lost years, his life started yet again in 1981, when he met Lewis Dawaquat, an Ottawa Indian who invited him to sit and smoke a traditional pipe of tobacco. That night, Plamondon told his new friend about the Ottawa father he never knew, about his troubles with alcohol and his shame. His new friend suggested that he learn more about his heritage.

"I started learning the Native American stories," he said. "It might be a story about a rabbit, but actually it was a story about generosity or values or culture. It gave me something to believe in. I finally had something to relate to."

Plamondon has not had a drink in 22 years, and he no longer considers himself a political activist.

Today his long, graying hair is pulled into a ponytail and his once lithe frame has filled out and softened. His pallid complexion hints at the hard life he once lived.

On a 40-acre lot in Barry County, Plamondon shares a home with Patricia Lynn, his wife of 20 years. He earns a living running a carpentry business called Plamondon Inc. and devotes time to telling American Indian stories to young children at libraries and museums. His friends occasionally trek to his home for American Indian celebrations. And he can go anywhere

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without being chased by cops.

What he has now, he said, is peace.

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