

**PANTHER, from page 8**

then Robert F. Kennedy. Not to mention all the people who were always shot, innocently killed throughout the country and even in Seattle. We were saying, "We're not gonna take this anymore: If you're gonna shoot at us, then we're gonna shoot back. We're gonna defend ourselves."

**R.R.:** *One of the stories that really got me in this book was about the typewriter.*

**A.D.:** Well, we were not aware the local police authorities and the Federal Bureau of Investigation would infiltrate the organization. We just recently found out the FBI had a program, called Ghetto Informant Program, where they were recruiting people in the community to be informants. So when we opened our office up, we took over 300 applications from people who came to join the Party. Some of those people were police informants.

While we were trying to get our office together, we were in need of a typewriter. Someone says, "Oh, Aaron, so and so says that he's gonna give us a typewriter down by Model City. All we have to do is come down there after 5. The door will be open." I said, "OK, good." So we went up there after 5; I carried it out, and I carried it into the office. I didn't know that there were some detectives a block away that were observing me. Probably about two months later, they issued a warrant for my arrest for stealing a typewriter, and in the process they raided our office and began to carry out files and different things out of our office.

**R.R.:** *How did it resolve?*

**A.D.:** First of all, it led to the only major riot that Seattle's ever had. When word spread to the community that I'd been arrested, we organized a rally at Garfield Park. The rally turned into a rebellion. Rebellions had been taking place all across the country: Detroit, Chicago, everywhere. Now this was the time for that explosion in Seattle. The riot lasted three days. Helicopters were shot at, police cars were overturned and a lot of buildings were firebombed. Young people were out there just going crazy. It ignited a war between the Black Panther Party and the Seattle Police Department. And it lasted all through the summer of '68. I mean, if you would read a blotter page of things around the country, you would've sworn that the revolution had started. Finally by wintertime, things had subsided. I went to trial in December, and William Dwyer, considered the best lawyer in the state, he came down to our office and offered to take my case. It boiled down to the secret witness that the prosecution had (that) they

said was gonna seal the deal for them. I was facing seven to 10 years.

**R.R.:** *For stealing a typewriter?*

**A.D.:** Yeah. Larceny is what they call it. (Laughs.) The secret witness never showed up, so I was found not guilty.

**R.R.:** *You mentioned earlier that if you would've looked at the paper in '68, you would've sworn that the revolution was happening. Well, here we are, it's 2013. What happened to the revolution?*

**A.D.:** A lot of things. One was a program called COINTELPRO (or Counter Intelligence Program) that the FBI had put together not only to destroy the Black Panther Party, but other organizations, because there were a lot of organizations: The Brown Berets (Chicano nationalist and Mexican-American group), you had the Red Guards (radical Chinese-American group), you had AIM, American Indian Movement, you had SDS (Students for a Democratic Society, a radical left student group), you had the Weathermen (radical left group), you had Patriot Party, which was white leftist hillbillies, the Women's Movement, the Gay Rights Movement. It was just really powerful and really beautiful to see so many people coming together. We were able to create a lot of change. The Gay Rights Movement was one we supported. And you had the anti-war movement, which was probably one of the most powerful with 200,000 - 300,000 students all over the country that were protesting against this war.

But the repression against that was pretty heavy, particularly against the Black Panther Party. We didn't know until recently that they had planned to have us killed by 1969.

Fred Hampton, he was going to be the next great leader in America, if not the world. He was just the most phenomenal person. At 19 years old, he starts the Chicago chapter. December 1969 he was assassinated, and of course the Chicago chapter never rebounded from his assassination.

Then the whole leadership of the New York chapter is arrested and charged with conspiracy to blow up buildings. Afeni Shakur, (rapper) Tupac's mom, was among them. All across the country offices were being raided and attacked, and leaders were being killed.

You got people from those cities that I just named that are still in prison to this day because of the organizing that we were doing with the Black Panther Party. So they were hitting us really hard and heavy.

We had orders that we had to fortify our offices. We had double sandbags all the way

up to the ceiling. We had steel plates on the door, we had gas masks. Party people had to be on security two hours a night, all through the night. People got kidnapped, people were mysteriously killed. (The FBI) even contacted the Hell's Angels to participate in trying to wipe out the Black Panther Party. So we were under a tremendous assault.

We had The Black Panther Newspaper, which was one of the most powerful alternative newspapers ever created. At its height we had a circulation worldwide at 250,000, and these papers came out every single week. It was the voice of the people. And the FBI, they burned the papers. A lot of times different chapters and branches would go get the papers from the airport: They're burned, they'd been soaked with water, they disappeared. It was just a constant battle.

The L.A. chapter was the most military minded of all the chapters: They had machine gun nests inside the roof. (The FBI) used helicopters and armored vehicles in this assault on the Panther headquarters, and they had a shootout that lasted for eight hours. Two or three days later the (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives) leave, and they come to Seattle. They try to conduct the same type of raid in Seattle, but Mayor Wes Uhlman refuses to give them support from the Seattle Police Department. Because Mayor Wes Uhlman, he saw what happened in Chicago and LA, and he didn't want to have that blood on his hands. Seattle was a smaller city, and we were much entrenched in the community.

In the summer of '68, the Seattle Police Department had put a \$25,000 contract on my head to end the firebombing because they couldn't stop it. They figured the only way to stop it was to have me killed. So some informants in the Seattle chapter tried to set me up with the police in a shootout, and it didn't work.

In 1971, I went out to the gun range with another Panther member to make sure all our weapons were working, and the last weapon we fired was a shotgun. I was gonna fire from my shoulder. A voice told me, No. I fired it from my waist. And the shotgun blew up. My arm was hanging off. I made it to the hospital, and they were going to have to amputate it, and my mother told them, "No." We had the shotgun shells tested and find out that gunpowder had been taken out and high explosives had been put in its place.

**R.R.:** *(In) this book you described yourself as someone with a shy, inward nature. So how does that jibe with starting a chapter of the Black Panther Party?*

**A.D.:** I'm sure it surprised a lot of people, because I was a pretty shy and quiet guy, but I was also a very serious person. My elders

used to tell me all the time, "Oh, you take things too serious." So I guess that's what the tradeoff was. I was a serious person. Once I committed to something, I stuck to it.

**R.R.:** *At the beginning of this book, you said that in '89, when Huey Newton (the other co-founder of the Black Panther Party) was gunned down, there was a memorial service. Someone approached you and said you should write a book about your experiences. And it took two decades. Why did it take you that long?*

**A.D.:** Because I was going through what many Black Panther Party members were going through. We didn't know that we had some form of post-traumatic stress (disorder). We were trying to find our footing in this new dynamic, nonrevolutionary environment, trying to make sense of what had happened and all the deaths and all the people that had been killed. I became a single parent. My kids' mother had got addicted to crack cocaine, and, you know, the whole crack cocaine thing, it was just really devastating to the black community.

**R.R.:** *Yeah, it got my brother.*

**A.D.:** That's what my second book is gonna be focused on.

So not only did I end up raising my kids, but I was raising other people's kids. Then I became a gang counselor, working with at-risk youth. I went back to school at Seattle U. full time and worked full time. I had too many other things going on in my life. But you know, even though I had so many other things, it was always in my mind that I was gonna get this book completed.

**R.R.:** *How does it feel to be a part of history?*

**A.D.:** Like I said, it was a very hard, serious time. It left us with a lot of scars and wounds, things that will always be with us. Stories that will always be with us. But, on the other hand, we made a tremendous contribution, not only to this country but to humanity as a whole. A lot of our programs that we started are embedded in our society now, like the medical clinics, the free legal aid programs. The whole memory of the Black Panther Party is something that will always last forever, not just in this country but in the world. People revere the Black Panther Party so much. It was a special time; it was a very special time. I still feel privileged to have been a part of it.

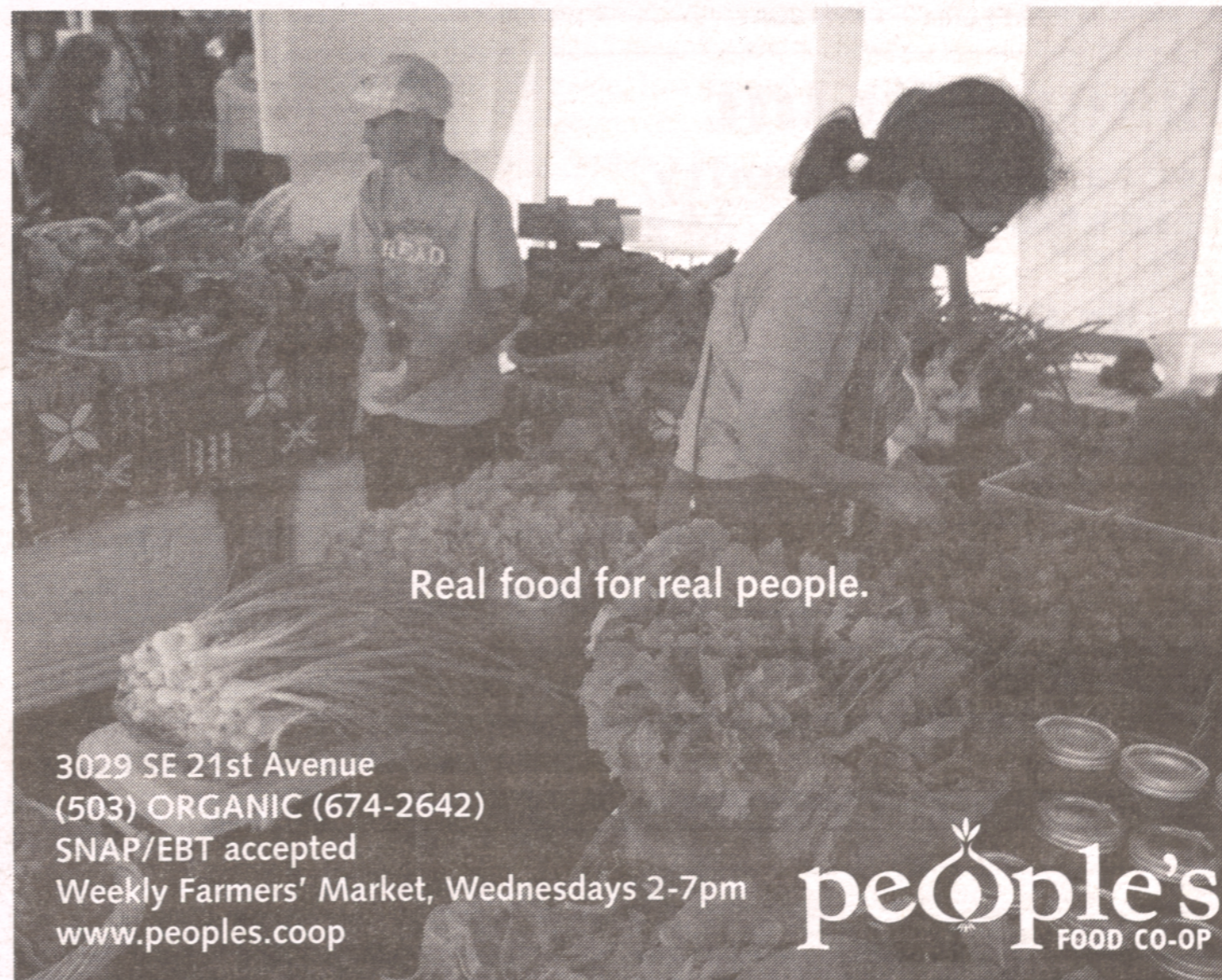
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