

Wayne from Oklahoma

BY T.O. BOWMAN | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Wayne Coyne's story isn't one of overnight fame and fortune. It isn't one of great inheritance or unwarranted social stardom. His story paints a psychedelic picture of independence, relentless expression and American Dream-esque success. The Flaming Lips frontman sat down to discuss furry friends, selling drugs, avoiding furniture-sized apartments, and growing up in the only city he's ever called home.

While he technically descended from his original mother ship in 1961 in Pittsburgh, Oklahoma City has always been Wayne Coyne's home. His parents, Thomas Coyne and Dolores Jackson, transplanted Wayne and his older siblings (Tommy, Kenny, Lynda and Marty) to a house with an enormous willow tree near Southwest 51st Street and Drexel in Oklahoma City not long after his birth.

Coyne's budding imagination blossomed early while he explored his neighborhood streets.

"When you're that young, it seems like a completely different place," he said of the area, which hasn't experienced drastic change in the past 50 years.

He recounted exploring a "giant, magical jungle" between some houses that his fantastic young mind had painted over an unkempt drainage ditch. Revisiting the place years later had a pronounced effect on his childhood memory.

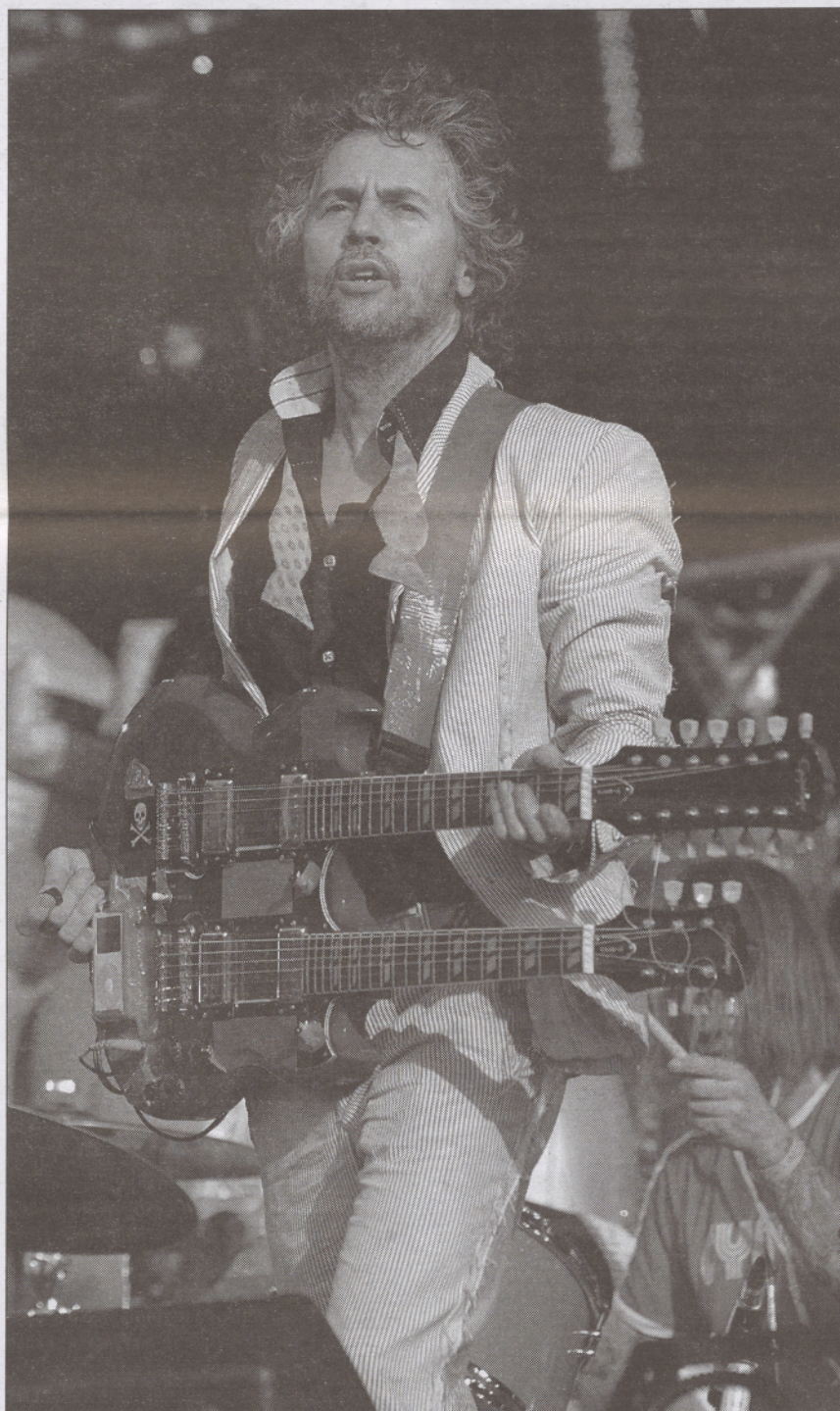
"I've destroyed something great of my past in my subconscious," he remembered. "If I had moved from there and was never able to visit, I would draw you pictures and tell you magical stories about it. But I can see it now, and it's nothing. It's just a little street, but imagination and mystery go into things when you're a child."

Experiences aren't always as remembered, but young Wayne would learn the important thing is that we embrace the feelings life extracts from us and celebrate the opportunity to experience.

Just a few years before the old Interstate 40 corridor became the stark north/south boundary in Oklahoma City, the Coyne family made a move to a quaint, suburban neighborhood in the Putnam School district, near Northwest 50th and MacArthur Boulevard. The household quickly earned a wild, yet welcoming, reputation with friends and neighborhood dogs alike.

"Our house was always full of freaks and dogs," Coyne recalled. "I had a lot of older brothers and an older sister. ... They would listen to music, ride motorcycles, go to jail, get in fights, and do all kinds of crazy shit — ALL THE TIME. There was a lot going on. But I didn't really care. I was just a little kid amongst a bunch of freaks, and I got to draw and listen to music and do whatever I wanted anyway."

Wayne's father was tolerant of the tumultuous behavior of his offspring but discovered that he didn't care much for the



Wayne Coyne of The Flaming Lips performs in June 2006 at the O2 Wireless Festival in Hyde Park, London. The Flaming Lips, formed in 1983 in Oklahoma City, recently released "With a Little Help From My Friends," a psychedelic reimagining of the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" album.

suburban lifestyle and absolutely dreaded socializing with other dads on the block. As Wayne puts it, "He didn't like living in white-people suburbia. It just was not his trip." As you can imagine, the constant ruckus and stream of visitors probably didn't mesh well with the local establishment anyway. Just picture an early '80s CBGB just outside June Cleaver's kitchen window.

The Coynes moved again in 1974. This time closer to downtown in the neighborhood where Wayne still resides today, near what would later become Oklahoma City's most charming "hipstrip" known as the Plaza District. The "freakiness" began to subside with his brothers living elsewhere, but Wayne remained loyal to his passion for expression, and his parents provided ample support for him.

"I'd play my guitar in my room at 2 o'clock in the morning, and the police would come, and my mother would always say, (in his best angry mom voice) 'Leave him alone! There's people out there that are breaking into houses!'"

The Coynes were never wealthy, but they were a determined, tight-knit clan who worked hard for the things they had and could always count on their friends. The early '80s oil crisis dramatically transformed the neighborhood. Grocery stores and gas stations closed, popular hangout corners were abandoned, and Thomas Coyne's business went bankrupt. While the area grew impoverished and would not soon recover, poverty was something the Coynes never experienced.

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Wayne never really loved attending school, and his interest began to wane more rapidly than the average teenager because he was "in a hurry to be grown up." By 17, he was living with a woman, had a motorcycle and maintained diverse income streams — he had actually developed more stability than many adults in the neighborhood, and he knew it.

Despite this groundswell of indifference for education, Wayne made it to the second half of his senior year at Classen High School (now Classen School of Advanced Studies) before administrators threatened to hold his diploma due to unpaid library fees. Never one to worry, Wayne decided to

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