

walk away from his last semester and diploma.

"I knew I wanted to do music, and I didn't really feel like I needed to go to school."

It wasn't just that he learned he could survive without school, but he had an insatiable hunger to express himself through music and art, and fulfilling that calling became his primary objective.

Wayne recalled this outlook becoming the norm of his inner circle. "We had organized our lives around making and recording music. ... School just didn't matter."

Home mattered. It's where he had everything he needed to thrive: his records, his brothers, transportation, steady income and freedom.

While the success that followed was anything but ordinary, the circumstances Wayne endured along the way were typical for someone who wanted to make music and be a member of a rock band.

"Creative people will use anything they have. If you take away their paints, they'll use mud. If you take away their mud, they'll use their blood. If you take away their blood, they'll fucking just use dust. They will do anything they can to do their thing."

Most any job or source of income is acceptable as long as it achieves the desired means to an end, which in Wayne's case was making and recording music.

Enter Long John Silver's.

Wayne worked diligently for the fast-food chain from 1977 until the early '90s. He was the employee who could do the job of two or three and handle the busiest times of night with ease.

"I loved it. I didn't want it to be a full-time responsible job. I just wanted to put in enough time so I could get some money and do my music and art."

His decade-plus stint in the professional fish stick industry is best known for one night, when two men attempted to rob the restaurant at gunpoint.

"I was 16. These dudes came in, and they were so fucking jacked up and pissed off, and they've got these guns. They are just raging, and you feel like they're going to get the money and fucking kill you. I remember lying on the ground just thinking, 'This is how it ends.'

"And nothing can get you like that. You can't see a movie, hear a story; you can't even have a dream like that and know what it's like in real life. But they didn't kill us. And I think for a little while after that, whatever insecurities I had about making music, they just didn't matter anymore. The six months or so after the robbery, I really made this stride towards doing my own thing. It's what made me think I could write my own songs."

Citing his logic from those early days, he said, "I worked to make money. Then, I'd get to go do my music ... which didn't make any money."

Enter his secondary income stream: selling marijuana.

Unlike the stories of ruthless drug dealers viciously defending their turf or hopeless addicts abandoning all priorities, Wayne's foray into the illegal marijuana industry was merely an opportunistic business venture.

"I didn't smoke pot, but everybody was coming to my house and doing it with my brothers anyway," so selling pot offered a risky, yet easy, way to make a return to support his artistic ambitions.

Asked about avoiding the law during that time, Wayne conceded, "I was absolutely, absolutely lucky I didn't get caught because ... that would've been horrible and probably would've changed my whole life. It would not have been worth the risk. When you're 17, you don't really know what the risks are."

Wayne says many of his friends – who had paid their library fees and earned diplomas – landed better jobs and made more money (at least initially), "but all they did was work all the time. When you're young, it's easy to think I want to be a rock star, and then stuff happens and you're 40. I wanted to do music, not just have it as an idea or dream."

The Flaming Lips

"The first place we played (in Oklahoma City) was the Blue Note. The stage is still there, and it looks virtually the same today. Nobody else in town would even let us play. We played Minneapolis, San Francisco, Dallas and Austin before we were able to play any of the cool places here in OKC."

The Flaming Lips, with Wayne on guitar (and still employed by Long John Silver's), Michael Ivins on bass guitar and his brother Mark on lead vocals, released their first album in 1983, "The Flaming Lips." It would be the only Flaming Lips album without Wayne as frontman. The band went on to record three more albums in the 1980s before signing with Warner Brothers in 1991, ultimately closing the hushpuppies chapter of Wayne's working career.

Shortly thereafter, they bought the house he still lives in today near the Plaza District for \$20,000. When asked why they stayed in Oklahoma, Wayne replies, "We never planned to have a different life. ... I mean, we go all around the world and stay places anyway," so why wouldn't they just stay living here?

"I knew people from Oklahoma who would move to L.A. or whatever and work 10 jobs while living in an apartment the size of this couch we're sitting on. People in L.A. wouldn't even have a practice space. How you guys gonna be a band? And people in New York had it even worse. People would visit me in Oklahoma, and we had a house and dogs and a yard. ... I don't begrudge anyone for leaving. But I was here for my own. My family's from here. My brothers and sister all live nearby. I had my own reasons for living here."

When asked how he managed the newfound fame, Wayne shrugged with humility. "We weren't FAMOUS famous. People just knew us because we made music. It's not like one day you're making 10K and the next you're making a million. We got our money little by little."

He described the gradual climb to wealth in the most pragmatic way a rock star can: "Little by little, I would be making more money than my brothers. Then little by little, a lot more. Then little by little, a fuck lot more."

But making a fortune wasn't ever the goal for this frontman.

"It didn't matter what we did to make money. At the core of who we were, we'd do our music. But when you're lucky enough to have financial stability, that's when you really get to do great shit," he said emphatically. "When my mother got cancer, that is when I knew what I had worked so hard for. All that



PHOTO COURTESY WAYNE COYNE

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WAYNE COYNE
(PICTURED AS A CHILD)

medical shit costs so much money and is so stressful. Not having to worry about what to do, to me that is a luxury."

Homeless animals and careless pet owners cause major issues across the country, and for all the beauty Coyne sees in Oklahoma City, this problem does more than tug on his heartstrings; it rips them out and shakes them violently.

He recounted the time he was driving Coldplay vocalist Chris Martin around Oklahoma City for a quick tour before a show about 10 years ago. The duo passed several dogs that had been run over and left in the streets.

"To someone who's not used to that, it seems like something appalling is going on here," he said, both ashamed and perplexed.

"I am hopeful that this won't be a problem here in the future. And when a dog gets hit in the street, we will stop and care about it, not just act like it's a nuisance on the way to something more important."

Coyne is taking action to help make a better future for animals in his community. A portion of the proceeds from The Flaming Lips' 14th album, released in October 2014, are going to the Bella Foundation, which supports homeless pet adoption and provides assistance to low-income pet owners in Oklahoma City.

"Dogs don't want to be out on a farm with thousands of other dogs. They want to be sleeping in your bed watching Netflix."

"I'm lucky that enough people like our music that I can do all this other stuff." You know, "other stuff" like creating a controversial art gallery in Automobile Alley or leading thousands of torch-wielding skeletons down Broadway in that infamous hamster ball, or getting matching tats with pop stars. That stuff.

Home

So how does such an eclectic, opinionated personality cope with the comically conservative contrast his home state provides?

"I don't begrudge the way Oklahoma is. And the way I live would be impossible for most people. I just do whatever the fuck I want. ... I text with the governor in

Denver. I was there when weed became legal. It's just one state away, but it's a different world there. Oklahoma is mostly just these rural, little towns, and they all vote and they all go to church. We're really living in their world. There's no reason we should just be able to change this little part of the world and make everyone be like us," he said, lifting his extraterrestrial mask and revealing a pragmatic appreciation for the conservative way.

"There is a portion of OKC that is young and progressive. But a lot of people talk the fuckin' talk, but they don't vote. We are run by the people that vote. And if you don't vote, how is anything going to change?"

There are areas of the state that might be a bit more wary of such an assertive, free-spirited lifestyle, but Wayne's not from there. This one is his. This one is home.

When he realized the kids in his neighborhood had only one or two houses to visit for trick-or-treating during Halloween, he decided to make his neighborhood a better place and demonstrate just how powerful a positive example can be. He set up big decorations in the front yard and hosted parties for the 20 or 30 kids from the neighborhood.

He knew their plight.

"Their parents wouldn't take them out. They didn't even have costumes! There was nothing in my neighborhood for them."

Recognizing the cyclical nature of neighborhoods like his, it was increasingly important to him that the kids knew, even for those few moments on Halloween, that someone was on their side.

Wayne still doesn't quite understand people's shock in knowing he lives in Oklahoma.

"People know that I'm from Oklahoma. The Beatles are from Liverpool; The Grateful Dead is from San Francisco. Where you come from says something about your identity. ... You have to be from somewhere, and I was already Wayne from Oklahoma. It's a story, and I either allow it to be a story, or I go against it."

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