

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

Ray's Brother Insists: 'He's Not a Murderer'

By LARRY FIELDS
Globe-Democrat Staff Writer

James Earl Ray, imprisoned for the slaying of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, "may have been a thief but he's not a murderer," a brother of Ray declared Thursday.

Sitting in his two-room apartment in a dilapidated area of South St. Louis, Jerry Ray, 33, said he believed an implication that King's murder resulted from a conspiracy.

He was referring to James Ray's statement Monday while pleading guilty to assassinating King, in which Ray told a Memphis court that he didn't agree there was no conspiracy.

"I NEVER discussed the essentials of the case with my brother," Jerry said. Then he reiterated that he doubted whether James pulled the trigger for the rifle shot that ended King's life last April 4 in Memphis.

Jerry, a slender, brown-eyed man with thinning hair, now is working as a security guard for a St. Louis machinery firm.

He makes \$120 a week. That's a \$40-a-week drop from what he earned as a guard at a country club in a Chicago suburb until three months ago.

Although he didn't spell it out in so many words, it was obvious to a Globe-Democrat reporter who interviewed him in his dreary apartment that Jerry left his club job because of his brother's notoriety.

Asked whether James had a grudge against Negroes, Jerry shook his head in denial.

"He wasn't a hater. He was interested in money, not hatred."

JERRY LOOKED down at his pet, a 3-month-old German shepherd, Professor, which was frisking around his feet. Then he said bitterly that he couldn't understand why authorities have said James robbed a bank in London and perhaps a couple in Montreal before his arrest in the King slaying.

"As far as I know," he added in a surge of anger, "my brother was just a small-time thief who never scored more than a few hundred dollars on any robbery."

What did James Ray mean when, according to reports, he said he wasn't going to serve out his 99-year sentence or even 30 years of it?

"I understand this to mean, not that he intends to commit suicide or try to escape," Jerry replied. "You know, while he was in Missouri state prison at Jefferson City, his reading was in law books — I think he feels that he'll be able to free himself legally before he pulls the minimum time for parole."

Jerry, who visited James last Friday and again after the sentencing Monday, said James seemed "confused and kind of shaken after the sentence."

THEN JERRY tossed off an indignant reference to former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, who, he said, had "railroaded my brother."

Jerry didn't elaborate on this.



JERRY RAY

Another brother, John Larry Ray, 35, who manages a rooming house in South St. Louis, also visited James in Memphis last week. John wasn't around for an interview Thursday.

But a friend of the Ray family revealed to a Globe-Democrat reporter that he had spent some time in a drinking session with John after the Memphis visit, and John hinted that a "deal" had been arranged to keep James from serving too many years.

The friend said John waved

his hand and declared, "He won't serve less than this," extending three fingers, "and not more than this," extending five fingers. There was no explanation of what John meant.

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Ray Case Far From Closed

The verdict is in on James Earl Ray, but this case appears far from closed.

Although Ray has been sentenced to 99 years in prison on a plea of guilty to the sniper slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the question of whether he was part of a conspiracy to assassinate the civil rights leader last April 4 remains open.

The abbreviated version of what was expected to be a long and involved trial actually heightens the speculation of conspiracy.

Ray, who wasn't scheduled to go on trial until April 7, agreed to change his innocent plea to one of guilty and accept a 99-year term rather than face the possibility of a death sentence if convicted.

Even Judge W. Preston Battle, in passing

sentence on Ray in Memphis, said that while there was "not conclusive proof that there was no conspiracy," there was no indictable evidence of a plot.

The key words seem to be "indictable evidence," or information which might have come out of the extensive court trial which certainly would have taken place had Ray maintained his plea of innocent.

Many questions about Dr. King's assassination remain unanswered. Many loose ends are still dangling. In the absence of a court trial to serve as a forum, a thorough official investigation of the circumstances of Dr. King's death should be made to determine conclusively whether a conspiracy did exist.

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