

Sirhan Testifies for First Time, Tells of Poverty

His Mother Also Takes
Stand, Expresses Thanks
to U.S. for Food, Home

BY DAVE SMITH
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Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, on trial for the murder of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, eagerly took the witness stand for the first time Tuesday to testify that he was an impoverished youth in this country.

After his brief appearance, his mother, Mary, testifying with head bowed and voice subdued, captured the interest of courtroom spectators.

Just after she had testified to her own poverty and after she was excused from the witness stand, the 55-year old woman stood—she isn't quite 5 feet tall—and told the courtroom in a clear voice:

"I thank God that He gave me the strength, and I also thank the United States, that I never got hungry and I have a roof over my head."

'It Just Came Out'

Mrs. Sirhan told reporters later that her outburst was unplanned and that "it just came out. I was so glad to have a home to raise my children."

The testimony of mother and son was to support the defense contention that Sirhan was indicted by grand jurors who came from a much wealthier, older and better-educated class than he.

Chief defense attorney Grant B. Cooper sought to quash the indictment against the admitted slayer of Sen. Kennedy on grounds that the grand jury selection system is unconstitutional because it doesn't represent a broad cross section of the population.

Superior Judge Herbert V. Walker denied the motion on two grounds, 1, that it was irrelevant to the proceedings, and 2, on its merits.

The trial was adjourned until this morning, when the 12 accepted

jurors are to be sworn in and when selection of six alternate jurors is to begin.

Opening statements in the trial proper are expected next Monday or Tuesday.

The short, slim defendant strode quickly to the stand about 11 a.m. and said "I do," when asked to tell "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God."

Confirms Net Earnings

Under Cooper's questioning, Sirhan was called upon merely to confirm that income tax withholding forms were indeed his and that his net earnings from 1964 through 1968 totaled only \$5,817.70 or an average of \$1,163.54 for each of five years.

Chief Dep. Dist. Atty. Lynn D. Compton questioned Sirhan only briefly, asking his age—to which Sirhan smiled, hunched forward and said eagerly, "I'll be 25 next month"—and whether he gave some of his earnings to his mother.

Sirhan said he gave money to her when he could and admitted that he got most of his withholding taxes back from the government because of his low earnings.

In his eight minutes on the stand, Sirhan spoke more than he has publicly since he was indicted last June for killing the New York senator.

Mrs. Sirhan followed her son to the stand, blinking rapidly as Cooper gave a rundown of her earnings since the family immigrated to Pasadena from Jerusalem in 1957.

Cooper revealed that her net earnings as a housekeeper at West-

minster Presbyterian Church nursery school in Pasadena ranged from a minimum of \$1,471.40 in 1958 to a maximum of \$1,772.56 in 1966.

Mrs. Sirhan was employed throughout 1968, even after the assassination, but was terminated last month when attendance at her son's trial interfered with her work.

Mrs. Sirhan also testified that two other sons who lived at home, Adel, 30, and Munir, 21, sometimes gave her money "if I needed it" but that, she said, was "very little."

Munir earned an average annual net of \$1,510.05 from 1966 through 1968, and Adel earned an average net of \$3,899.70 from 1957 through 1967.

Mrs. Sirhan said she

bought the family home at 696 E. Howard St. in Pasadena in 1963 for \$12,000. She and her daughter

Ayda, who died in 1965, each contributed \$1,000 toward the down payment and the mortgage cost \$70 a month, she said.

Then Cooper asked, "Well, how do you keep up the payments? I mean, do you have a car of your own? How do you get to work?"

"Walking," said Mrs. Sirhan.

"Do you economize in other ways?" Cooper went on. "Do you bake your own bread, for example?"

"Yes, I do."

Cooper had no more questions and Judge Walker had excused Mrs. Sirhan when she suddenly paused and startled the courtroom with her impromptu statement.

Judge Walker smiled as she spoke, and Cooper, at the noon recess, gave Mrs. Sirhan a big hug and told her. "You did fine, mother."