

2-8-69 L. A. Times
Sirhan Trial--Sidelights Get the Spotlight

BY DAVE SMITH
 Times Staff Writer

In five tedious weeks of legal preliminaries and jury selection in the murder trial of Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, it is the sidelights that occupy the spotlight.

The accused slayer of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy has moved to stage center only once—in eight minutes of routine testimony that was ruled irrelevant more than a week ago.

The grim cause of this cumbersome and expensive trial—the killing of Sen. Kennedy—still remains a reality whose point is blunted by abstractions and arguments. It will take the blunt impact of testimony—descriptions of the shooting last June 5—to drive home to a dulled courtroom what the trial is all about.

But until that day, there are other pictures, little ones:

Sirhan, who announced last week in an almost eager tone that he will be 25 next month, seems to have a mercurial temperament as jury selection drones on. At times he sits in a brooding silence, then breaks into amiable whispers with defense counsel, complete with broad smiles and pats on the back.

On Friday, he was in an unusually animated mood, even giggling at several whispered comments. He almost seemed not to appreciate the seriousness of his situation.

But perhaps, in a way, he does.

A pretty blonde reporter has attended almost every session of the trial, and Sirhan always notes her entrances and exits with an appreciative eye.

Sirhan, a Palestinian immigrant, has been in jail since June 5 and his mother, Mary, 55, is the only woman he has spoken to since then.

On Friday, the blonde reporter was wearing a fire-engine red dress, and Sirhan followed her with his eyes to her seat, then stared fixedly at her for much of the afternoon.

She usually tries to avoid his gaze, but at one point their eyes met briefly; he nodded slightly and gave her a faint, wistful smile.

She looked away, and his face went stony, eyes blank, and looked away also. A moment later, his eyes wandered back to her.

Sirhan never dated girls much before last June. Now, perhaps, he never will.

Please Turn to Back Page, Col. 4

SIRHAN

Continued from First Page

The slender, pale defendant is interested in the number of reporters who have come all this way just to cover his trial, and Friday was something of a landmark to him: Boris Orekhov, New York correspondent for the Soviet newspaper Pravda, was among the spectators.

It was for one day only—Orekhov is in California on another assignment—but still, it shows what wide interest Sirhan has created.

In the second row of spectators and journalists, a shabbily dressed older man was telling another enviously of what he'd heard about the handling

of jurors, who will be confined day and night through the two or three months the trial lasts.

"Those jurors," he said, "they got a real nice deal. They get \$5 a day and the best of eats. I'd like to get a deal like that."

Jurors actually draw \$10 a day for jury duty, and they'll be allowed \$8.50 a day for "eats"—\$1.50 for breakfast, \$2.50 for lunch and \$4.50 for dinner. They'll be kept at the Biltmore and will be out of contact with their families and friends, except for weekend visits from a spouse, at his or her expense.

As the trial preliminaries drag on, prospective jurors are excused, questioned, challenged, seated, dismissed—it is a process

that could end in the next five minutes if both sides would accept the six alternate jurors — or could stretch over another week.

Neither defense nor prosecution attorneys are telling precisely what they're looking for in an ideal juror, so the courtroom waits.

In one row, a correspondent for an Arab-language news agency follows the wearying proceedings.

Immediately behind him, writing in Hebrew, sits Roni Eschel, correspondent for the newspaper Maariv of Tel Aviv.

And immediately behind Eschel, sits a tiny, gray-haired woman who from time to time writes down her own thoughts, in Arabic, in a small blue notebook. She is Mary Sirhan.