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Ray's Brother Believes He Was Framed, Slain

Jerry Says He Doubts James Assassinated Dr. King but He Might Have Been Fall Guy

BY RICHARD T. COOPER

Times Staff Writer

CHICAGO — Gerald (Jerry) Ray believed his brother, James Earl Ray, sought to be assassinated by the Martin Luther King, was suspicious in some way with an elaborate plot and that James may have been the fall guy for the killer.

James Ray may have been killed, framed and framed by the FBI, who actually wanted to kill Jerry Ray and James is an innocent victim of the Times.

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Clears Two Associates

Jerry, who left the Chicago area and his job for St. Louis Friday afternoon, said he and his other brother, John, both have been cleared by the FBI.

John Ray, whose whereabouts have been unknown, has been located by the FBI and has been found to have no connection with the slaying, according to Jerry, who said FBI agents told him of John's clearance. The agents did not tell him where John had been found, Jerry Ray said.

He said he has had no contact with John since January when John was working as a bartender in

New York City and called him on the telephone.

Jerry said his last contact with James was a letter James wrote him about a week before escaping from the Missouri State Penitentiary at Jefferson City April 23, 1967.

"He won't contact anybody in the family. I'm positive of that," Jerry said, because James will know the FBI is watching all his relatives.

Often in Jail

Between the ages of 14 and 20, Jerry, now 32, was out of jail only one year, but he has not been in trouble since. For the last four years, he has worked as a maintenance man at a public country club near Chicago. He is regarded as a quiet, pleasant man by his employers and by the few people who know him in the town near the club.

The club's owners had not known of Jerry's police record, but when the news broke, instead of firing him—as Ray says most employers would—they attempted to shield him from publicity and helped him in other ways.

Jerry said he was not working with the FBI, but acknowledged he has been in frequent contact with the bureau since agents took him to their Chicago office for questioning the night of April 19, when Eric Starvo Galt was identified by the FBI as James

Earl Ray. Two days earlier, Galt had been charged with conspiracy in the assassination.

Although he continues to express doubt that James was the assassin, Jerry says there is "some kind of connection" between his brother and the murder. The large amounts of money James reportedly spent just before the killing could not have come from earlier crimes, his brother said.

James's History

James never before he went to the Missouri prison, were not larger enough to hold such a number of prisoners.

James Ray was in the Missouri State Penitentiary at Jefferson City April 23, 1967.

He says his hope that James is still alive on the fact that his body has not been found. If he had been killed and framed, Jerry reasons, the murderers would want the body discovered "to draw the heat off of them."

If the persons involved in the plot checked James' record, his brother said, they would have found that he could be trusted because he has never testified for the police against his "rap partners" in other crimes.

James was sentenced to 20 years in Missouri because he refused to give information to the police, Jerry Ray said, and he himself once took a five-year sentence rather than talk. "That runs in the family, that stuff," he said.

This leads him to hope

The conspirators arranged for his brother to take sanctuary in a country that does not have an extradition treaty with the United States. The FBI told him it has never kidnaped a wanted man from another country, Jerry said.

He described James as a quiet person who makes few friends, "doesn't mix it," and has "a strong attitude."

"Everything he did he thought he did the best and he always figured he'd never get caught. Otherwise he wouldn't have done it," Jerry said.

Jerry said his brother never acted violently in connection with any of his crimes. "He just used a gun as a thing you'd need if you were going to commit an armed robbery," he said.

James was not a racist, as many armed robbers are — committing their

crimes for the opportunity they offer to strike or shoot people as well as for the money, Jerry said.

He said his brother did not express anti-Negro feelings in the letters they exchanged or during the visits Jerry paid to James in Jefferson City. "The truth is he didn't have much feeling toward them one way or another," Jerry said.

"He didn't associate with them and neither do I," he added, adding that facilities in the Missouri prison were segregated.

"If he did shoot that man (Dr. King), it was not because of any race hatred. It was something else," Jerry said.

He said his brother was a quiet prisoner who had few friends and did not get into trouble. "He was an avid reader" of nonfiction, Jerry Ray said, particularly True, Argosy, and various detective magazines.

"He liked big steaks. He wanted me to smuggle blondes and steaks in down there (in Jefferson City), but I couldn't get either one in," he said.

Jerry's acquaintance with his brother was in some ways limited, however. They have been outside of prison at the same time only once in the last 16 years.

Indeed the habit of ex-

changing letters and visits marks Jerry and James as unusually close in the Ray family, which became fragmented when they were children. Jerry said he had not seen a sister who lives near Chicago since 1964, when both attended the funeral of a younger brother.

As for his own future, Jerry said he had no job waiting in St. Louis and no plans. What he does will depend on what happens, on how soon he can move back into the shadows of anonymity.

The country club job had occupied him several

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times as long as any other. He had planned to spend his life at it and apparently would like to return. Meanwhile, the less he

hears about his brother James, the more hopeful he feels he can be. To Jerry Ray, almost any news will be bad news.