

Elder Sirhan: Arab Feelings Endure

By Elizur Yuval
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TAIBEH. Occupied Jordan, June 8.—The father of the accused assassin of Robert F. Kennedy said today the Senator "should have had more justice in his speeches. You cannot kill Arab feelings deep inside."

"Justice is above everything," Bishara Salameh Sirhan said repeatedly in an interview.

Two days ago, the father of Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, who is under indictment in Los Angeles for Sen. Kennedy's murder, expressed his admiration for the Kennedy family, including the Senator as well as the late President John F. Kennedy. He said at that time that he could not understand how his son could be driven to such an act of violence.

Today, he explained that at first he could see no possible connection between his son and Robert Kennedy. But since he first received the news he has learned about the Senator's sympathies for Israel, he continued, and now he understands things more clearly. The elder Sirhan repeatedly asked the following

question of his interviewers: "Tell me, do you think it possible to kill the good feelings you have for your country?"

A short, slight man who lives in this village 20 miles northeast of Jerusalem, Sirhan appeared more relaxed today than he has on some previous occasions since the shooting. Information here has revealed him to be given to fits of temper and sudden changes of mood. Neighbors remember that he used to beat his children. He has by turns been most cooperative with reporters and then refused to see them. On Friday, he bodily ejected from his house a reporter for the West German television network.

Today he was eager to talk about everything, especially his youngest son, Sirhan, whom he has not seen for more than eight years. His English is fluent, although from time to time he stops in order to search for a word. He also does not hesitate to stop interviewers from time to time when he does not understand a word. Sirhan was meticulously dressed in a dark gray woolen suit despite the al-

most 90-degree heat. He wore a white shirt with thin blue stripes and a gray and blue tie. He also wore an Arab headdress. His dark, thin face was clean-shaven.

There was much less traffic into Taibeh today. Everybody in the clean, mostly Christian village—which lies in the foothills of the mountains of Judea just before the desert and the Jordan Valley begin—is eager to help you find the celebrity among them. One elderly gentleman in Arab headdress offered to direct us. Addressing us in fairly good Yiddish, he said: "Have you ever seen an Arab who speaks Yiddish? I also speak Turkish, French, English and Hebrew."

No Israeli soldiers or policemen were to be seen in the village. From the veranda of Sirhan's new white stone house one gets a beautiful view of the Dead Sea, 15 miles away and about 2000 feet below Taibeh. As we came in, a delivery boy brought cold beer and part drinks which Sirhan apparently had ordered from the nearby grocery store.

On the doorbell it said "Bishara" in English and Arabic.

Talking about his son Sirhan's experiences with Israelis, Sirhan admitted that his son had actually never seen any Israeli soldiers. He was less than four years old when the family moved from their house in St. Paul's Street in the Musrara quarter to the walled Old City of Jerusalem. They had moved out at the advice of the British mandate authorities who feared that they might be hurt in the battle that was raging near the Musrara quarter.

"For two days before that we did not go out of the house," Sirhan recalled. "The Jews were bombing us all the time. Cannon and mortar shells fell everywhere. All the time little Sirhan was leaning against the wall, afraid."

"Later he often said to me: 'Father, do you remember when there was shelling and we were in the house and could not go out?'" The boy also kept remembering the toys he left behind in

their Musrara apartment, the father told us.

"Jewish families who had lived next to us ran away earlier when the Arabs were in control of Musrara," Sirhan added. The father said he kept up with his family in America through his second son, Saidallah, with whom he corresponds regularly.

He had not had any mail from young Sirhan for many years and did not write to him. He heard about him through the letters of Saidallah. Sirhan refused to answer questions about his family's reported association with the Jehovah Witnesses sect and said that this was only gossip of the people in the village. He refused to answer questions about his relationship with his wife and the divorce proceedings he had started against her. "These are confidential matters," he said with some irritation.

In reply to another question, he said that he might go to the United States. He had discussed this and other matters with U.S. consular officials who had visited him.