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Assassin's love-starved wife says 'I'll stay faithful until doomsday'

HOLDING her portrait of husband James Earl Ray, artist Anna Sandhu swears she'll live up to her marriage vows even though they may never share physical love together. Ray is serving a 99-year sentence for killing Martin Luther King.

ARTIST Anna Sandhu, who remains devoted to her husband, assassin James Earl Ray, even though they may never make love, declares to a skeptical world: "I'm not a dingbat who just crawled out of the woodwork.

By PHILIP CHRISTOPHER

"I know exactly what I'm doing and I know James is innocent. It's a difficult situation, almost hopeless, but I still think there is a chance something good can happen."

Sandhu, 32, is fighting to win a new trial for Ray, whom, she says, was wrongly convicted of killing civil rights leader Martin Luther King.

"The only reason he is in prison is because he was railroaded into pleading guilty," claims Sandhu, who met Ray two years ago when a local TV station employed her to sketch him in court after his escape from Brushy Mountain Prison in Tennessee.

The couple wed in the prison in October, 1978. "I consider him handsome, but he isn't Robert Redford," Sandhu told GLOBE. "What really attracted me to him is his lack of hatred and bitterness for anyone.

"He's very intelligent and very optimistic. Something about him touched me very deeply. He's a good person and a very positive person.

"I suppose that's what kept his sanity for five years while he was in solitary confinement.

"What he's been through would have killed anyone else a long time ago."

Immediately after the wedding ceremony, Ray was returned to his cell. Sandhu visits him twice a week, but a guard is always watching.

"We don't get conjugal visits but it won't stop me living up to my marriage vows," she declared. "I'm a normal woman, with normal needs, but I don't have any boyfriends.

"A lot of people think I'm crazy, but I don't look at it at all as a sacrifice. James deserves someone to care about him.

"I feel very married to him and if I had to go on like this till doomsday, then I'd do it. I couldn't live with myself if I backed out."

As Ray is serving a 99-year sentence, Sandhu confesses that she might never have the chance to share physical love with her husband. "He's been in prison now for 12 years and he won't even be eligible for parole until 1989," she says. "I'm pretty strong, but I feel very depressed at times."

She is convinced of her husband's innocence. "There are many things that the public has not been made aware of involving this case," Sandhu insists.

"I have it from several reliable sources that James' plea of guilty was made under great coercion."

Anna, who has been working with attorneys in pressing for a new trial for her husband, revealed, "We can prove his innocence. We just want the chance to prove it."

She continues to work as an artist in Knoxville and has encouraged Ray to paint. An exhibition of his work was recently held in a nearby town.

As to the future, she confided, "I sometimes wonder where it will all end. I pray that James will be safe and I pray that I'll be safe and healthy enough to keep helping him. I read the Bible a lot. I think the Bible is the handbook of great battle strategy.

"My one wish is that I could have James home with me, free. I know that he would never be in trouble again. I don't intend to ever divorce him. I want to make him happy. That's all I want in the world."

HAROLD:

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Phil.