

IF THE COUPLE HAD DONE SO, WOULD THEY PROCLAIM IT? AN UNLIKELY STORY.

New light on RFK

MR. AND MS. T. JACK AL

"I believe there were two other persons besides Sirhan B. Sirhan who may have murdered Senator Robert F. Kennedy," retired LAPD Sergeant Paul Shraga said softly. His new information adds powerful fuel to the controversy now brewing over the Kennedy investigation.

Shraga gesticulated with the first finger of his left hand as he charged. "I was there at the Ambassador Hotel within three minutes and suddenly an elderly Jewish couple rushed up and began to tell me that the Senator had been shot and a young couple had come rushing through the doors of the Embassy Room, smiling and gleefully shouting. We killed him. We killed him. Kennedy. We've shot him."

Shraga is a feisty, outspoken man, the kind of person you'd want testifying for you in a trial. He has never painted himself as a Robin Hood and readily admits his younger "booze and broads" days and his teenage membership in the Mayfield Heights gang in Ohio.

Why has he come forward now to tell KMPC newsman Art Kevin his story of the polka-dot-dress lady and a young man other than Sirhan? Why is a retired family man joining the ranks of the original questioners and Supervisor Baxter Ward, former New York Congressman Allard Lowenstein, and ex-union chief Paul Schrade, who now are all demanding a reopening of the investigation. Meanwhile, Sirhan, the Jordanian immigrant convicted in 1968 for assassinating Robert F. Kennedy, sits on Death Row and waits.

"Maybe it's age or maybe it's maturity," the 47-year-old

Shraga smiled. "But as time goes on, things seem less grey and more black and white all the time."

And Shraga concluded that something just wasn't right. Although he had learned long ago that his original reports to superiors had somehow disappeared, the ex-sergeant paid little attention. He never followed the original inquiry closely as he was working night shift.

But later, with the publication of the book, *S.U.S.*, Shraga leafed through a copy and was puzzled to see no mention of the older couple or the bragging young couple who had claimed to have shot Kennedy, as they escaped from the Embassy Room area.

On June 5, 1968, Shraga was assigned to Rampart Division, LAPD, when the ambulance-shooting call came from the Ambassador Hotel. One of the first officers on the scene, he was unaware at first of the second Kennedy tragedy within a decade. As Sergeant Shraga raced toward the hotel entrance to secure the area, an elderly couple ran toward him in the confusion. Although he says he did not have his notebook out yet, he remembers their names as being "something like Bernstein." He describes the woman as about 5-ft., 2-in., and stocky, with the man about 5-ft., 5-in., with balding grey hair. He said both were about 50 or 60 years old and in high stages of excitement but not hysterical.

The older couple told Shraga they had just talked to a young man and a woman who were laughing and smiling as they pushed past the "Bernsteins" to make their exit.

When asked what had happened, the "Bernsteins"

reported to Sergeant Shraga that the young couple said, "We killed him. We killed him."

"Who did you kill?" the "Bernsteins" asked.

"Kennedy," the young couple answered, "We killed him."

Both the girl and the man were said to be in their early 20s and the young woman wore a polka-dot dress. Shraga is now certain that the young man could not possibly have been Sirhan, as Sirhan was apprehended inside the pantry while this couple was already outside of the reception area, heading out of the hotel.

Spontaneous Truths

No one else talked to the "Bernsteins," but Shraga commented saltily, "I spent 20 years on the force and due to the spontaneity of their comments, there's no question in my mind that they were telling the truth about that younger couple." He added, "I'm sure that older couple was Jewish, too."

Why? Shraga quipped, "Because when you're born a Jew like I am, there's something instinctive when you meet another one and you automatically notice certain traits and things even if there's no accent."

The chaos was unbelievable but Shraga set up his field command post behind the hotel on the upper level parking lot and relayed the description information to police control.

For the next two hours, the alert was dutifully broadcast, describing both of the young people until Shraga's then-senior officer, Deputy Chief Powers, told him to stop because, "We've got THE suspect. Let's not make a federal case out of this."

At that time Shraga assumed

Sirhan was the male suspect referred to by the older couple as he did not have all the details. But he did ask radio control to continue broadcasting a want for the young female despite the fact that his superior officer "made light of it and alluded to the fact that Sirhan was the lone suspect."

When Shraga finally closed his command post and secured the area, he wearily made his way to Rampart Division Police Station, where Captain Floyd Phillips' secretary took verbal dictation of his report for some nine hours or more. Captain Phillips wandered in and out of the room during the reporting session and the final typed report was then filed with his captain. Multiple copies were made but Shraga said he held on to his personal notes and one copy which he stored in a safe place.

Somehow, all but Shraga's copies of his initial report disappeared within the next few weeks. He discovered this when he went searching for a copy for reference when he was asked to make a full report to the special LAPD unit, Special Unit Senator, probing the Kennedy murder.

Shraga then made a second report and hand-delivered his copies to S.U.S. at night and left extra copies around his station house for reference. Those, too, were missing a few weeks later when the Sergeant checked and even S.U.S. no longer had copies.

Shraga paid little attention to news of the massive investigation because he was working the night shift. After retiring honorably in July, 1969, Shraga was surprised to read the book supposed to recap all S.U.S. activities because there was no mention of any of his reports or any mention of the older couple.

Unsolved Mystery

At Sirhan B. Sirhan's trial, controversy swirled about possible links between Sirhan and the polka-dot-dress lady. Los Angeles radio newsman Booker Griffin recalled he'd seen Sirhan chatting chummily with her shortly before the assassination.

Another observer, Sandy Serrano, stated she'd seen a polka-dot-dress lady running through the hallways shouting, "We killed him...we shot Kennedy."

But at the trial, the prosecution produced a woman they identified as the polka-dot-

dress lady and established that the woman in court so identified had absolutely no relationship with or to Sirhan. And the intriguing mystery was dropped with the statements by the two witnesses discounted.

Dropped, that is, until Paul Shraga, a man who likes country music, Paul Harvey and Tom Bradley, has now come forth. Shraga explained his motives by saying, "There's no compromise for honesty and integrity."

His story adds to new speculation over whether or not to reopen the Sirhan case for further investigation and adds to questions raised about possible insufficiency of ballistic tests of the murder weapon. Basically, the gun allegedly used by Sirhan was an Iver Johnson .22 with markings that are mentioned by some authorities as not matching the bullet extracted from the belly of ABC producer William Wiesel, also injured in the incident.

Shraga leaned forward and the smile wrinkles around his dark eyes disappeared as he mentioned, "There's one other point about that night that never made sense to me. Maybe somebody has an explanation.

"We had a blackout on our radio communications on all three frequencies — control one, tach one and tach two — about four to five hours after the incident and it seemed to last an eternity. That's never happened to me before in all those years of police work. I tried the radio in all three police cars I had with me and I couldn't even raise the monitor. The other officers inside the hotel were having the same problem."

Shraga scratched his brow and asked quietly, "I sure do wonder what that was all about." □

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