



James Earl Ray
can't draw reality

Ray Turns To Painting In Prison

The Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — If assassin James Earl Ray paints pictures of what his wife calls "places he would like to be and things he would like to be doing," Attorney General William Leech says he can keep any profits.

But if the fledgling prison artist paints places he has been and crimes that put him behind bars — like the Memphis murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 — the profit goes to a state fund to compensate crime victims.

Leech's opinion Wednesday was requested by Sen. Victor Ashe (R-Knoxville), and applies to all state prisoners.

Ray, who pleaded guilty in 1969 to the murder of King, has been trying almost ever

since to have his 99-year prison term overturned. He escaped from Brushy Mountain State Prison for more than 50 hours in 1977 and was married a year later to Anna Sandhu, an artist, who has encouraged her husband to paint.

In a telephone interview from Knoxville, Mrs. Ray said she and Ray had a joint art show and sale at an Oak Ridge museum in March.

"James had four paintings," she said. "We still have two of them." Ray gave away one as a gift and the fourth was sold. Without giving the price, Mrs. Ray said, "He did very well."

She said she tried to give the proceeds to a children's home but was turned down without explanation.

"I'd like him to have charity shows for different people," she said. Mrs. Ray said the most important point is that the state Parole Board, if it ever considers Ray's case, will want to know if he can support himself.

"This has proven that James ... would have no problem surviving on what he makes as an artist," she said.

Mrs. Ray says her husband favors blues, greens and yellows and prefers landscapes, usually showing fishing poles or other implements — but no people.

"He paints places he would like to be and things he would like to be doing," she said.

Leech's opinion did not mention Ray but the state law preventing a prisoner from profiting from a book or other work about the crimes for which he has been convicted was enacted with Ray in mind.

It requires "all proceeds derived from the sale of movies, books, magazine articles, radio and television presentations or from the expression of a person's thoughts, feelings, opinions or motions regarding a crime" go to a state fund to compensate victims of crime.

Leech said the law is "broad enough to encompass pictorial renderings of the circumstances of a criminal act."

"On the other hand, if such works deal with subjects unrelated to the criminal activity of the artist, then the proceeds from the sale of these works seem to belong to him or her."