

Martin Luther King killer James jail as wife



James Earl Ray: Simple wedding ceremony in stark prison room.



Anna Ray: Knitting baby clothes as she plans a test tube birth.

IN A small home in Knoxville, Tenn., Mrs. Anna Ray sits knitting baby clothes for the child she and her husband, convicted Martin Luther King assassin James Early Ray, so desperately want.

Married this month in the simple visitors' room of the stark Brushy Mountain State Prison in East Tennessee, they are arranging their long-distance child through various modern artificial techni-

Earl Ray weds in plans test tube baby

By JOHN LATTA

ques because their prison meetings allow them no privacy.

Finding out details of the medical necessities and seeking the approval of various authorities are Anna's main objectives now.

This week the quietly-spoken blonde freelance artist told THE STAR about the James Earl Ray she believes she alone has come to know and about their lives, their hopes, their dreams.

"We met when I was sketching him for a television channel because they could not use cameras in the courthouse," she said.

"They were asking him all sorts of silly questions because it was just after he had escaped. Someone said: 'Do you intend to escape again, how would you do it, and where would you go?'"

"We looked at each other and our eyes met. We both knew that we were laughing at the question."

A month later Anna drove to the prison to meet the convicted gunman.

"I wanted to see what he was really like, because all I had read about him was garbage," she said.

"As a courtroom artist I have to be able to look into people to try to show what they really are. I didn't think he was like so many people portrayed him."

For nearly a year now, shy and petite Anna has followed a tough schedule two days a week — the same schedule which will dominate her married life.

She leaves Knoxville early in the morning and drives her aging Oldsmobile for over an hour to the prison.

Each time she must walk through an airport-type metal security detector and is then personally frisked before she goes to the visitors' room.

She has never been behind "The Wall" — women are not allowed into the main jail area — so she will never see her husband's tiny cell.

The visitors' room is stark, with only tables and chairs and a Coke machine. It was next to that machine that the Rev. James Lawson stood to marry Anna and Ray.

"There is always a guard outside, but we can hold hands and we can kiss, or we just talk. I'm there for about four hours, and we nearly

always talk all the time," she said.

Ray's proposal came as they sat alone in that room.

"I had brought up the subject of marriage, just to see what his feelings on the subject were, and we had talked about it for a few days," she recalled.

"We were kissing and James suddenly stopped and said: 'Will you marry me?' And I just said: 'Yes' straight back to him.

"We were kind of shocked for a moment, then he stopped kissing me and we laughed."

After their long hours of talking together, Anna said that she had discovered Ray was a man of deep religious conviction.

"He has a very strong faith, but he doesn't talk very much about it. He doesn't like hypocrites or people who always talk about their faith but don't really believe strongly," she said.

"His own faith sustains him and he finds strength in it."

"He also has a tremendous sense of humor, and sometimes he keeps me in stitches for hours.

"When we were talking about children's names he laughed and said: 'Well, we could always call him one of my aliases'. He is always bright and funny like that."

Anna said her husband had developed a sensitivity and understanding of what he had done wrong in the past.

"Once, when we were talking about some of the small crimes he had committed in the past, I said: 'James, have you ever considered work?' And he went very red and was hurt," she recalled.

"I said I was sorry for asking, and I was, but I was glad I had seen that he had a conscience that really affected him."

Anna married Ray only little more than a week after he proposed. And her friends and family rallied around as her name burst into the limelight.

Anna's previous marriage to an Indian student ended after five years in 1974.

"It was a disaster. We were worlds apart," she explained.

But she believes she can now deal with the problems of not having her husband at home.

"Ours will be a very strong marriage. When you have spent a year with a person and have only been able to talk — that's what real love is all about," she said.