

Sirhan Trial Hears 'Polka Dot Girl'

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LOS ANGELES, Feb. 18 — The mysterious "Girl in the Polka Dot Dress" turned out to be a trim campaign worker who saw little and knew less of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's assassination.

Tall, straw blonde Valerie Schulte, 22, said she was hobbling around on a crutch several yards behind the New York Senator when he was fatally wounded in the Ambassador Hotel last June.

From that modest beginning grew a spate of rumors, fed by the claims of several imaginative "witnesses," that Kennedy might have been the victim of a conspiracy involving a flirtatious, fast-moving "Girl in the Polka Dot Dress."

The rumors were fairly well demolished on the witness stand today.

Miss Schulte made plain that she had never seen Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, who is accused of murdering the Senator, before or since that fleeting glimpse.

Displays Polka Dot Dress

For the edification of judge and jury, Miss Schulte even brought her polka dot dress with her, wrapped neatly in an orange handbag. She unfurled it on cue from prosecutor David N. Fitts.

It was green with huge yellow dots.

Sandy Serrano, a Kennedy campaign worker, claimed after the assassination that she had seen a dark-haired girl in a white polka dot dress run off after the shooting, shouting "We shot him, we shot him."

Another witness, Vincent Di-

pietro, subsequently maintained that he saw a brunette in the same kind of dress apparently chatting or flirting with Sirhan moments before the shooting. But yesterday, Di Pietro took a look at photographs of Miss Schulte and allowed that she was probably the girl he had in mind after all.

Her polka dots could not have been yellow. Her hair was indubitably blonde. And, it was clear, she couldn't have run anywhere.

Sliding Accident

Testifying in a sleeveless, cream-colored dress with a bright kerchief hanging from it, Miss Schulte said she had been using a crutch because of a skiing accident several years ago. She was wearing a leg brace when she showed up in court today.

On the night of the assassination, she said, she was at Kennedy's victory party in the Ambassador Hotel as manager of the Senator's headquarters near the University of California-Santa Barbara, where she was a sociology major until graduation last summer.

After hearing Kennedy's statement celebrating his victory in California's Democratic primary, Miss Schulte said, she walked backstage, chatted with the Senator's brother-in-law Steve Smith, then followed the Senator and his party into the pantry where he was shot down.

"I saw an arm extending with a gun," she said. "It was approximately five yards from me, and approximately three yards from the Senator" when she first noticed it.

But that, she said, was about that. She told the court she couldn't even identify Sirhan definitely now as the man who pulled the trigger.

Testimony Interrupted

Her testimony was interrupted briefly by a sudden security check that prompted Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker to clear the courtroom, but it was a false alarm. Deputies were said to have heard a suspicious clicking on the courtroom's "hot line" telephone and they suspected a tap. It reportedly turned out to be from employees of Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co. who were working on another line.

The late Sen. Kennedy's official bodyguard, Bill Barry, was the next to be called by the prosecution.

With an occasional choke in his voice, he told of opening a path for Kennedy after his victory speech in the Ambassador's Embassy Ballroom, only to find him leaving the stage by another exit, led by assistant maitre d' Karle Uecker.

Barry scrambled to catch up, but the crowd was too thick. By the time he got to the doors of the pantry, he said, Kennedy had already gone through.

"I heard something like fire-crackers," Barry said painfully. He looked through the doors. "The Senator was falling."

Sirhan's defense attorney again tried to stress the last-minute change in plans that brought Kennedy through the

pantry rather than downstairs; plans and shot him without premeditation.

Barry's testimony made plain, however, that the Senator would have come through the pantry sooner or later. Had he gone by a back passage downstairs to the second ballroom, the burly ex-FBI agent said, he would still have had to come back up for the press conference.

"He would have gone through the pantry anyway," chief defense counsel Grant B. Cooper agreed in an aside to newsmen. "It's just a question of timing."



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Miss Schulte, "Girl in the Polka Dot Dress," after testifying at Sirhan trial.