

Bomb Victim First Gained



John Paul Spica
In 1963 Photo

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John Paul Spica was a young, small-time hoodlum before he gained sudden prominence in 1962.

That was the year that he was charged in connection with the sensational "hit-for-pay" killing of John J. Myszak, a St. Louis County real estate man.

Spica returned to the headlines last year when it was disclosed that he had served time in the state penitentiary with James Earl Ray, the killer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and that he may have acted as a contact between Ray and those who allegedly wanted the black civil rights leader killed.

Before that, Spica, born to a quiet, law-abiding local family, had been arrested numerous times, mostly on charges of burglary and auto theft. His father, Paul, worked with youths, was active in Democratic politics, and has served for many years as a clerk in the St. Louis County Magistrate Court.

But Spica's life became anything but quiet when he was arrested in the Myszak case.

Myszak was shot to death from an automobile June 8, 1962, as he stood in the driveway of a house on Bermuda Avenue in Normandy.

The dead man's wife was charged

with hiring Spica to kill her husband for an amount variously stated at \$3,000 to \$5,000, because she said she was "fed up" with repeated beatings by her husband.

Spica was convicted in May 1963 on a charge of conspiring to kill Myszak and was given a life sentence. He began serving the sentence July 1, 1963, after a series of appeals by his attorney, Norman London, failed.

Mrs. Myszak, who was the beneficiary of about \$165,000 on her husband's life insurance, was acquitted of murder in a separate trial in January 1964.

She admitted at Spica's trial that she had plotted the killing of her husband, but she said she told Spica three weeks before the slaying that the deal was off because she could not raise the amount of money that Spica wanted.

While serving his life sentence at the penitentiary at Jefferson City, Spica pleaded guilty to charges of second-degree burglary in connection with a Wellston jewelry store break-in in 1962 and stealing over \$50 by deceit in an automobile deal. He was sentenced two years in prison on each conviction, the sentences to run concurrently with the sentence in the Myszak case.

His acquaintance with Ray in the Missouri Penitentiary brought him new fame in 1978.

Notoriety In 'Hit-For-Pay' Killing

In 1973, the Federal Bureau of Investigation received information that Spica's brother-in-law, Russell G. Byers, a former auto parts dealer from Rock Hill, knew who "made the payoff of James Earl Ray" after the King assassination.

The allegations led investigators to speculate that Spica might have conveyed the word to Ray that a \$50,000 bounty had been placed on the black leader's life.

The allegations were contained in a 1973 memorandum that went unnoticed for several years because it had been placed in the wrong file in St. Louis.

Nevertheless, Spica acknowledged knowing Ray, but denied being involved in any way with the King assassination.

Spica was paroled in October 1973 after serving a little more than 10 years in the penitentiary. He then opened a small produce stand on the northeast corner of Shaw Boulevard and Vandeventer Avenue and appeared to live quietly while he served out his parole.

But police sources now say that Spica actively maintained many friendships in the St. Louis underworld and was part owner of a cigarette and amusement machine company based in Fairmont City whose principal owner is

Anthony Giordano, the reputed St. Louis mob boss.

Spica's share was said to be in the name of his girlfriend, Dina Bachelier,

outside whose house he was killed today. Spica reportedly shared the residence with the woman for about a year.