

King Assassination Witness

Grace Walden Freed!

by Greg Roberts

Grace Walden Stephens, a witness who saw the slayer of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. flee from the Memphis rooming house from where he fired at King, has been freed from the various Memphis and Tennessee state mental wards where she has been confined without due process for nearly 10 years.

Mark Lane, the veteran JFK and King assassination truth digger and current lawyer for James Earl Ray and Grace Walden, freed Ms. Walden at her urging from a Memphis "boarding house" on Thursday, May 4, and subsequently flew Ms. Walden to Los Angeles, where she is presently staying.

Previously, Ms. Walden, a diabetic, had been kept at the State Hospital for so-called psychiatric patients in Bolivar, Tenn., for the balance of the past 10 years.

Dr. King was assassinated as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

Ms. Walden, then married to Charles Stephens, had been living at the nearby boarding house from where the shot was fired and observed a man fleeing the bathroom, which had been locked for hours, immediately after she heard a rifle shot.

After the assassination, Ms. Walden provided Memphis police and FBI agents with the details of a sketch of the man, which the FBI subsequently released and identified as Eric Starvo Galt, who did not look anything like accused King assassin James Earl Ray.

Interestingly, the man whom Grace Walden saw fleeing the locked bathroom does resemble one of the male "tramps" whom Dallas police had arrested in Dealey Plaza shortly after the JFK assassination there on November 22, 1963, and whom neither the Dallas police nor the FBI have ever identified.

As for Grace Walden, she began to run into problems with the Memphis police and the FBI between May and July, 1968, when she refused to identify James Earl Ray as the man whom she saw fleeing the rooming house bathroom.

After the Robert Kennedy assassination in Los Angeles on June 5, 1968, public opinion forced U.S. intelligence to come up with Dr. King's killers, so the FBI and CIA reluctantly produced James Earl Ray, the King death patsy, in London on June 8, 1968.

However, when British authorities demanded evidence from the FBI that Ray had really murdered King, the FBI office in Memphis tried to con Ms. Walden and her husband to assert that it was Ray whom she had seen.

"They told me that I would get the

NAACP's \$100,000 reward if I would say it was Ray, but I couldn't accept their money because I didn't see Ray," Ms. Walden has said many times.

According to Lane, what then inspired was the FBI's convincing of Charlie Stephens, a reputed Memphis alcoholic with a long police record, to state that he had also seen the man and that the killer was Ray.

Subsequently, Mr. Stephens applied for the NAACP reward.

However, as for Ms. Walden, on July 31, 1968, two Memphis detectives from the homicide squad came out to the boarding house and picked her up.

From Memphis police headquarters, where Ms. Walden once again refused to say it was Ray, she was handcuffed and taken to the mental ward of the John Gaston City Hospital, where she was swiftly declared "insane."

After spending the night at the hospital, Ms. Walden was then chained with the other psychiatric patients and carted off to the State Hospital in Bolivar.

In recent years, as Mark Lane began concentrating on the King murder — co-authoring a book on the subject with activist-comedian Dick Gregory, *Code Name Zorro* — he and Memphis private detective Renfro Hayes traced Ms. Walden to the Bolivar snakepit.

Needless to say, Lane subsequently launched an international campaign to free Grace Walden, where a great deal of pressure was brought to bear on the Tennessee establishment and on Bolivar chief Dr. Morris Cohen, who reportedly fed Ms. Walden frequent doses of potent drugs such as the dreaded prolixim, a severe tranquilizer.

Recently, Lane's "Free Grace Walden" campaign came to a climax when, on April 20, he and researcher April Ferguson dropped by the Russian Embassy in Paris, France.

With every major intelligence agency

in the world watching and listening, Lane reports that he "visited the Soviet Embassy there, and requested that Russian psychiatrists be assigned to examine Grace Walden in Tennessee.

"Since Dr. Cohen had refused to permit any psychiatrists, including Dr. Benjamin Bursten, the vice-chairman of the Psychiatry Department at the University of Tennessee, to examine Ms. Walden, I also called upon psychiatrists from various other nations to form an international brigade to come to Bolivar and examine her," Lane says.

Meanwhile, in Washington D.C., Associate FBI Director James Adams subsequently acknowledged to newly-appointed FBI Director William Webster, Attorney General Griffin Bell and CIA Director Stansfield Turner that Ms. Walden was really not insane, and Director Webster, through Adams, told the Memphis FBI office to pull strings to have Ms. Walden released.

Consequently, Tennessee authorities agreed to have Ms. Walden transferred to a boarding house in Memphis, where it was then only a matter of time before Lane was able to contact her.

Once contact was made and Ms. Walden explained to Mark Lane that she would like to take a trip to Los Angeles, they caught the next flight to L.A. from Memphis without further interference from the Memphis police or the FBI.

Subsequently, certain authorities in Tennessee are today heckling Mark Lane and threatening him with contempt, largely as a ploy for them to cover their tracks if and when the Justice Department gets around to prosecuting them.

Mark Lane, incidentally, replied to the Tennessee authorities that he will gladly meet them in court or anyplace else whenever they call.

And we all moved a day closer to a time when James Earl Ray receives a fair trial.