

As Hurting Patient

By CARROLL BRUMFIELD

From The Commercial Appeal
Jackson, Tenn., Bureau

BOLIVAR, Tenn. — Release of a 62-year-old mental patient, Grace Walden, who claims to have seen the murderer of Dr. Martin Luther King moments after his 1968 assassination, may be "impeded" by renewed publicity, Dr. Morris Cohen, superintendent at Western Mental Health Institute, said Wednesday.

Cohen said Mrs. Walden has been in a community preparation unit for nine months, but that Memphis boarding homes may be reluctant to take her now that she is once again a center of publicity.

Religious leaders from Los Angeles to Washington, commemorating the 10th anniversary of King's death Tuesday, called for Mrs. Walden's release as part of a move to reopen an investigation into the slaying of the Nobel Prize-winning civil rights leader.

Cohen said the state has been planning for months to release Mrs. Walden, but has not completed arrangements for doing so.

"She has no friends that she can identify. She has no family that she can identify. So we have contacted the UT (University of Tennessee) Mental Health Center in Memphis to see if they can help us find a place for her to live in Memphis."

Cohen said that he must ask the court to remove him as her legal guardian so that she can receive supplemental Social Security income upon her release.

Mrs. Walden was among witnesses interviewed last year by a congressional committee probing the King assassination. That investigation followed unsuccessful attempts by the convicted assassin of King, James Earl Ray, to win a new trial.

Mrs. Walden's description of a man she saw running down the hall of a Memphis boarding house carrying a shotgun does not coincide with that of Ray. The shot that felled King as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel was fired from a boarding house where Mrs. Walden was living in 1968.

Cohen said she was admitted to the state hospital July 31, 1968, about four months after King was killed. He said she was transferred to Western Mental Health Institute from the psychiatric unit at John Gaston Hospital in Memphis, where she had been a patient since July 1, 1968.

He said her current diagnosis is "chronic brain syndrome due to alcoholism," which he said is manifested by "brain impairments such as in a person who has senility."

She is taking psychiatric drugs and a drug for treatment of diabetes.

Cohen said Mrs. Walden was visited Sunday by Mark Lane, the latest of Ray's string of attorneys.

Cohen said Mrs. Walden "signed some papers" during Lane's visit, but that she did not understand what the papers were.

"I understand from him that they were papers authorizing him to act as her attorney. But he can't do that, because since I am her legal guardian, he must have my consent to be her attorney," Cohen said.

18 ***** The Commercial Appeal & Memphis Daily News, Thursday, August 1, 1968