



Dexter King, son of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., says goodbye Thursday to James Earl Ray after their meeting in a Nashville prison. Ray confessed to King's 1968 slaying but later recanted. AP/EARL WARREN

King to Ray: 'My family believes you'

Civil rights leader's son accepts convict's denial

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn.— A gaunt, frail James Earl Ray looked the son of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in the eyes Thursday and said: "I had nothing to do with shooting your father."

Dexter King responded, "I believe you."

The extraordinary meeting in a state prison hospital was the first ever between the men and also marked the first time the King family has publicly backed Ray's claim of innocence.

Ray, 69, was brought to the meeting room in a wheelchair, and at times mumbled and rambled. King, 36, sat three feet away, listening patiently and speaking softly to a man dying of liver disease.

"My family believes you," said King, who was 7 when his father

was assassinated in 1968. "We are going to do everything in our power to try and make sure that justice will prevail."

The family had already joined the call for a trial for Ray, saying that's the only way they'll know the truth about King's death.

King was shot on a hotel balcony in Memphis, where he had arrived to help direct a sanitation workers' strike. Ray pleaded guilty to the slaying a year later and was sentenced to 99 years in prison, avoiding a possible death sentence. He recanted a few days later and has proclaimed his innocence ever since.

Ray got up from his wheelchair to shake hands for the meeting before a roomful of reporters. The moment was made more eerie by King's striking resemblance to his late father.

After 25 minutes, the reporters were ushered out and the two continued to talk privately.

"There's something about looking another person in the

eyes and asking them a question, spiritually speaking, to get a feel first hand," King said.

The question: "Did you kill my father?" Ray's answer: "No, no, I didn't. No."

Ray said the case has been clouded with misinformation and "the only thing that should be relevant is the facts of the case."

King told reporters his family had always felt the truth of the civil rights leader's assassination was being suppressed, but didn't want to deal with it. Ray's deteriorating health and the urging of the inmate's family persuaded King to look into evidence collected by Ray's attorney.

Ray contends the rifle found at the murder scene with his fingerprints on it was put there by conspirators. Ray said he brought the rifle to Memphis on instructions from a gun runner he knew only as Raoul. Authorities have never established Raoul existed.