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Sirhan bjt 500, 2 Takes, 750 Total

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LOS ANGELES AP — In the traumatic moment after Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was shot, a young busboy cradled the senator's bloody head in his arms, whispered encouragement and placed a rosary in his hands.

"I said the first thing that came to my mind," Juan Romero said Friday to the jury that is trying Sirhan Bishara Sirhan for Kennedy's death. "I said, 'Come on Senator, you can make it.' Then his head dropped back."

Emile Zola Berman, one of Sirhan's three defenders, said in his opening statement that "there is no doubt . . . that he Sirhan did, in fact, fire the shot that killed Sen. Kennedy." But, Berman said, the defense will present psychiatric testimony that "at the actual moment of the shooting he was out of contact with reality, in a trance."

The state is trying to prove Sirhan killed Kennedy, June 5, 1968 with malice and premeditation—the elements of first degree murder. The defense hopes to show the killing was impulsive, without premeditation or malice. As Berman put it: "totally a product of a sick, obsessed mind and personality."

The pale, 24-year-old Jordanian rose from his chair in protest as Berman described him thus. He was obviously agitated, murmuring "No, no." A court inspector leaned over the chair of defense investigator Michael McCowan and said, "Talk to him, Mike."

McCowan pushed Sirhan back into his chair and whispered to him for several minutes. There were no further incidents and Sirhan smiled broadly a number of times during the day.

The first day's testimony also revealed that a last minute change in plans brought Kennedy to his deadly encounter with Sirhan—in a pantry off the Ambassador Hotel ballroom where the senator had just claimed victory in California's presidential primary.

Romero had gone to the ballroom to hear Kennedy speak and preceded him to the pantry area. Shortly after midnight Romero saw someone coming toward Kennedy.

"I thought it was a person who couldn't wait to shake his hand," Romero said with his heavy Spanish accent. "I seen the guy put a hand at the senator's head. And then I saw a gun."

"Then I saw Sen. Kennedy stretched out in front of me. I leaned down and picked up his head."

Romero said he talked to Kennedy when "somebody, a priest or somebody," gave a rosary to him and I put it in his hand."

At this point, state's attorneys produced a picture showing Romero with the senator. The picture was passed to the jurors who studied it intently, some of them frowning.

On cross-examination, defense attorney Russell E. Parsons asked if Kennedy—who died 25 hours later—said anything.

"He said, 'Is everybody all right? Is everybody okay?'" Romero answered.

A. He was either smiling or . . .

Q. Some sort of expression on his face?

A. Yes.

Q. Smiling like you are at me?

A. Yes.

Romero was asked if the man who did the shooting was in the room. He shook his head.

Sirhan was asked to stand.

"I don't believe that's him," Romero said.

Even Sirhan smiled.

Karl Decker, assistant maitre d' at the hotel, said he had been told to escort Kennedy to a second ballroom, a floor below, to address party faithful who couldn't get into the crowded embassy ballroom.

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LTS ANGELES, Sirhan Bjt. A004 Take 4: ballroom.

Q. When the senator finished his speech tell us what occurred?

A. I was going to make a left turn to go to the Ambassador ballroom but someone said, 'No, he's going to the press room' I said, 'this way, senator, and took him to the right.'

Edward Minasian of the hotel's catering department testified he heard the plans were changed to accommodate newsmen from the eastern time zone who had to make deadlines.

Uecker said that in the pantry he heard something like a firecracker.

"I looked and saw a man with a gun in his hand. I grabbed for the gun . . . I was trying to push the gun away from the senator . . . the man kept shooting. I don't know how many shots. I bent him over the steam table as far as I could."

Vincent Thomas Dipierro, a student and part time waiter, said he saw someone standing by a tray-stracker when Kennedy entered the pantry and that he saw the flash of the first shot.

"I hears a scam and people started falling," Dipierro said.

"Mr. Schrade Paul Schrade, a Kennedy friend who was one of five others wounded in the shooting fray fell into my arms. Mr. Ira Goldstein fell to the other side of me."

He described the expression on Sirhan's face as a subsmile—a semismile.

"People were trying to grab him, trying to hit him . . . everyone was screaming and cursing. It was completely pandemonium."

Dipierro will be cross-examined Monday when the trial resumes.

MC14aas Feb. 15