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After 3 years, Sirhan's

By Alice Yarish

Silently, intensely, with tears spilling from his eyes, Sirhan B. Sirhan embraced his gentle, grey-haired mother for the first time in nearly three and a half years.

Although the convicted killer of Robert Kennedy had been a model prisoner in San Quentin in the seven years of his confinement there, his mother had not been allowed to see him, except through a heavy glass, never allowed to hold his hand, never to hug or to kiss him.

He had been held in maximum security for his own safety, and therefore had been subject to the severe restrictions imposed on such prisoners.

A week ago Thursday, when she visited her son, they were ushered into the usual grim visiting cell, divided by a glass partition. About half an hour later, two correctional officers escorted them out of the cell into the main visiting room where other inmates were meeting with their friends and relatives.

Almost incredulous, they hugged and held each other for a long time before taking seats at the visiting tables.

"I was so thankful to the people for letting me hug my son," Mary Sirhan said later. "God has a little mercy for us every day. If we did not have God, Sirhan and I could not live through all this.

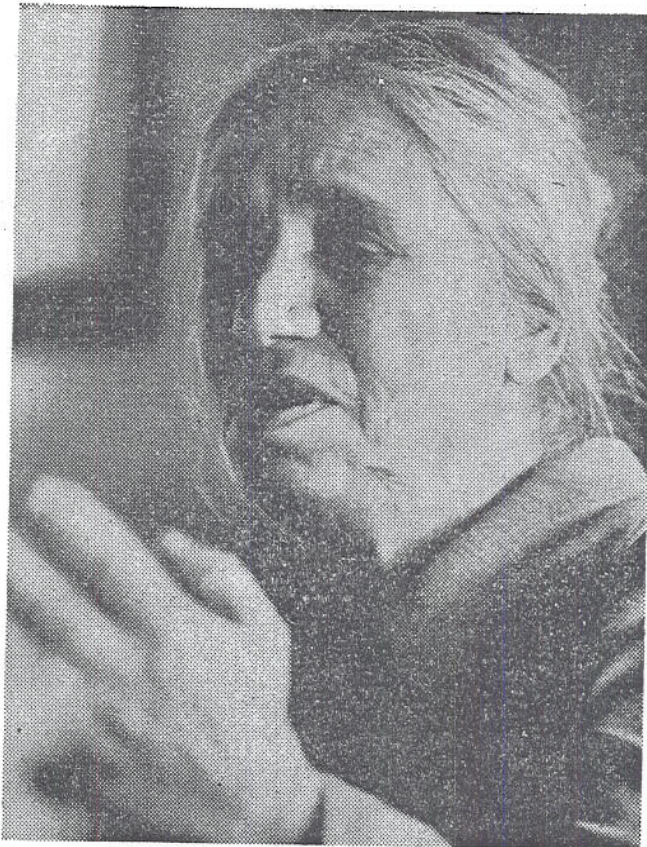
"It was the first time he had been able to look out a window and see trees and the clouds for many years. He couldn't pay attention to the papers I had laid out on the table. He just kept looking out the window and saying, 'Oh, Mom, you don't know how good it is to see the trees.'"

Wiping a tear from her eye, she said, "It is not good for the nature of man to be caged indoors all the time. It's not right to treat a man like an animal. An animal would go mad if he were caged all the time."

A prison spokesman later explained that Sirhan was allowed a contact visit with his mother because of new prison rules.

Ironically, the first contact visit came only a few days before Sirhan's situation changed radically.

He was given a parole date — 1986 — to look forward to, and was trans-



MRS. MARY SIRHAN, MOTHER OF SIRHAN SIRHAN
"It's not good for man to be caged indoors all the time"
—Pacific Sun Photo by Don Stanney

ferred to the relatively lesser security of Soledad Correctional Training Facility.

His new "home" is also about 100 miles closer to his mother's home in Pasadena.

Mrs. Sirhan had been taking an overnight bus to the Bay Area every four to six weeks to visit her 30-year-old son. Ever since that night at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, June 4, 1968, when Kennedy was assassinated, she has borne her son's burden as if it were her own. She is convinced the bullet that killed Kennedy did not come from Sirhan's gun, that he was set up by someone.

Yesterday she said, "There is a growing movement all over the country to reopen the investigation because the bullets in Sirhan's gun could not have killed Kennedy. My son was not well defended in his trial," she continued, struggling un- surely with her English pronunciation, "but the Los Angeles authorities fight every effort to have the case reopened."

In February, the State Supreme Court without comment denied a defense motion to order a new trial on the basis of new evidence.

Mrs. Sirhan reached into her tote bag and pulled out a copy of the yellow bound petitions on which the court had ruled negatively.

According to the petitions

— habaes corpus and coram nobis — Sirhan was wrongly convicted on false ballistics testimony that has since been corrected. The petitions contained testimony of a noted criminologist and ballistics expert, Herbert MacDonnell, delivered at a seminar on the Kennedy assassination last October at the University of Arizona medical school.

MacDonnell declared that his examination of the ballistics evidence showed conclusively: "The bullet from Sirhan Bishara Sirhan's gun did not kill Kennedy. The course of the bullet shows it could not have been fired by Sirhan . . . there were five grooves on the bullet that killed Kennedy. Sirhan's gun had six . . ."

Also in the petition was the statement of another forensic expert, Lowell Radford, who said there is difference in the cannelures of the bullets that hit Kennedy and William Weisel TV cameraman. He said Sirhan's gun should be fired to study this point, but this has not been allowed.

In a deposition in April 1974, Thomas Naguchi, Los Angeles County coroner, said he had reexamined the grooves on the Kennedy bullet. "Now it appears there were six grooves, not five," as he had previously testified. Naguchi now says the fatal bullet was fired from not more than two inches away, yet no eyewitness

mother hugs her son again

places Sirhan that close to Lowenstein, former con- those demanding a reopen- lives she will keep up her evidence will reveal that
Kennedy. gressman from New York, ing of the investigation. effort to obtain a new trial someone else killed Robert
Mrs. Sirhan said Allard has joined the throng of As long as Mary Sirhan for her son in the hope new Kennedy.