

ams minister

By James D. White

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SAN FRANCISCO (AP)- A Southern California evangelist claims he almost sold a horse to the accused assassin of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and now as a result is hiding out in fear of his life.

The Los Angeles police, who he says have his story, decline comment.

The Orange County Baptist minister, who does not want his real name used and who will be called Jones, was interviewed at a remote hideout less than 100 miles from San Francisco. Present were two of his long-time friends. They are Oakland private detective Ben Hardister and San Francisco criminal attorney George T. Davis. Both say they have advised Jones to stay out of sight and are seeking protection for him and his family. He says he has had two threatening telephone calls.

Here is the gist of his long story:

He picked up two hitchhikers in Los Angeles on Monday, June 3, the day before the California Democratic primary which Kennedy won.

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One of the youths was Sirhan Beshara Sirhan, the Jordanian accused of killing Kennedy. The other was taller, but seemed to Jones to be the same nationality.

Since Jones is a horseman by avocation and buys and sells horses and shetland ponies, they talked of horses.

Sirhan wanted to buy a "lead pony" to exercise race horses so he could get a job at a race track. Jones had one that suited, and Sirhan was anxious to buy it but daid he would not, have the agreed price, \$300, until late that night.

Sirhan asked to be let off near the Ambassador Hotel "to see a friend in the kitchen." That night, Sirhan produced a \$100 bill, but said he wouldn't have the rest until 8 a.m. Tuesday morning.

When that time came, Sirhan did not show up. Instead there was an older man who looked like the same nationality who said "Joe couldn't make it." But he said Sirhan really wanted the horse and could pay for it Tuesday night at 11 p.m. if Jones would deliver it at the same spot near the Ambassador Hotel where Jones had let him out to see the friend in the kitchen. The Ambassador was where Kennedy was shot.

Jones said he was preaching out of town and wouldn't be able to make it. He gave the older man, whom he described as about 35 and expensively dressed, his business card with his unlisted telephone number, just in case they wanted to close the deal the next day.

On Wednesday Jones did not hear that Kennedy had been shot, until he was having lunch with friends. A picture of the still-unidentified suspect was flashed on a television show, and Jones recognized the youth who had wanted to buy the horse.

The next day, Thursday, he got the first threatening telephone call, from a voice he never heard before but which had no accent. Three days later came another. He told police about the calls, during a visit at their request, and at which time he picked Sirhan's picture out of 30 shown him as the youth who had ridden with him.

Last Wednesday he came north, looked up his old friend Hardister and told him his story. Hardister advised him to go into hiding and to consult Davis, another old friend.

"What worries me is that the only man -- besides the police -- to whom I gave my unlisted phone number

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is that older man who told me 'Joe couldn't make it' and tried to get me to deliver the horse near the Ambassador Hotel Tuesday night," says Jones.

Davis says he and Hardister are insisting that Jones ~~xx~~ stay hidden until he gets some protection, preferably from the Los Angeles police.

And They're not talking.

---jdw/there/454ppd-- June 30-

San Francisco, Minister first add: talking.

Jones says he want to police in the first place only because he felt he should and friends advised him to. He describes not only Sirhan and his youthful companion and the older man, but another apparent Jordanian man and a girl whom he saw Sirhan talk to during one of their stops and later saw with the older man who came to tell him Tuesday morning that "Joe couldn't make it." He describes the girl as "a dirty blonde....an American."

Another thing that worried him, he said, was a call from a man identifying himself as a Lt. Sandlin or Sandelin of the Los Angeles police last Wednesday. Sandlin told him he was in charge of investigating the Sirhan case and wanted to talk to him. Jones explained he was coming north on a ~~pre~~ preaching trip and could not do it right away. Sandlin said he, too, was coming north, and would contact him here. Jones says he gave him the names and addresses of his brother in a San Francisco suburb and of Davis, the attorney.

When he got to Oakland, his wife called to say Sandlin had telephoned to say Jones should meet him before/ noon

~~Sunday~~ Saturday in Palo Alto.

While he was riding around Oakland with Hardister, says Jones, he saw a newspaper story about the disappearance of witnesses in the Martin Luther King case. He recalled other such cases, ~~she~~ he said, and only then did he tell Hardister his story and about the threats. Hardister advised him ~~to~~ not to keep the appointment with Sandlin because he "might be walking into something." They contacted Davis, and checks were launched ~~which~~ which finally, late Saturday night, brought confirmation from the Los Angeles police that they did have a man by that name, but that his plans had been changed about coming north.

"I'm still wondering why he didn't let me know," says Jones, "I had left him all the names and phone numbers I could think of so he could contact me."

Is he still worried ?

"Yes, but what can you do ? If there are others connected with this case, they don't want the finger put on ~~them~~ them."

Jones describes Sirhan as perfectly normal, "a bright kid," speaking excellent English. ~~He asked~~

He asked Sirhan if he was Mexican, and Sirhan replied that he was Jordanian and told him how long he had been in this country.

While they were planning to meet later on the horse deal, Jones mentioned that he would kill some time at a club he ~~knows~~ belongs to. It is well known that the club has some Jewish members, and Sirhan quickly asked him if he were Jewish.

~~XXXXXX~~ "No, I'm Welch."

"I have no use for those Hebes," said Sirhan, using his own nickname for ~~Hebrews~~ Hebrews.

Other than this, says Jones, the conversation was entirely ~~entirely~~ commonplace and all about horses because Sirhan had seen a chrome horse on Jones' radiator.

Jones does not understand, he says, why the older man wanted him to deliver the horse at 11 p.m. Tuesday night near an entrance to the Ambassador.

Hardister suggested it could have provided a highly innocent getaway for Sirhan, assuming he could have escaped from the hotel in ~~in~~ all the confusion, "but that's just theorizing," he said.

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Jges, Hardister and Davis all three are fully aware of the ~~xxxxxxxx~~ contention by Los Angeles officials that Sirhan acted alone and that there is no evidence of a conspiracy.

"They've got a simple case," said Davis. "They want to keep it that ~~way~~ way."

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