

# Sirhan's Lonely Father

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TAIYIBEH (Israel-occupied Jordan) — His is a lonely vigil.

Alone in this simple mountain village, Beshaca Salameh Sirhan awaits the judgment that eventually will come from an American courtroom.

He knows the alternatives: life or death for his 24-year-old son, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan.

Gone is the serenity that an almost mystical degree of religious belief had once etched on his face.

It has been transformed by worry over his son's plight far away in Los Angeles.

## REFUGE IN FAITH

More than ever, his refuge is religion — the Greek Orthodoxy of an Arab born and schooled in the Holy Land.

His inspiration stems from the Old and New Testaments and from the Koran, whose ancient volumes never leave his spartan study overlooking the even more ancient Dead Sea.

His recollections of the modern history of Palestine, which left a tragic imprint on

his own and his family's lives, seem buried deep within him, shielded by consoling layers of religious concepts.

It is not easy to elicit them from him.

He spoke of the fateful day 20 years ago when war between Arabs and Jews raged in Jerusalem.

## LEFT HOME IN WAR

"I never thought the Jews would attack us as hard as they did in 1948," he said.

"That was when we had to leave our homes. I left my house, my furniture, my books. I left Sirhan's clothes, his toys."

The thought of a 4-year-old leaving his playthings — his world — evoked notions of psychological trauma that may never have been overcome as if by way of confirmation he added:

"Sirhan used to ask about his toys."

He remembered the family's trip to America eight years later. "When we went to the United States," he continued, "Sirhan said to me, 'Daddy, I hope we will finish now with war and bombs.'"

## FAMILIAR LAMENT

The elder Sirhan recalled the events that shaped his



**BESHACA SIRHAN HAS A WORRIED FACE**  
His son is far away, on trial for murder

own and the lives of his fellow Palestinian Arabs. This was not a detached, rational review of history. But it was typical of the way his countrymen think of their present-day predicament. The most critical time, in

# Defends Son's Actions

his view, was the twilight of Britain's 28-year mandate over Palestine.

"The Jews intended to take over the country. The Arabs were against this," he began.

"One went to destroy the other. But the Arabs were not ready. They lacked equipment. The Jews were ready. They had been preparing. Therefore they could fight to conquer the land that became Israel in 1948.

Then followed a familiar lament:

"Until then we lived like brothers — I had many Jewish neighbors. They used to come to my house. We would drink coffee together."

His criticism of Jewish conduct in Palestine did not end with 1948 or 1967 for that matter.

He was bitter about Israel occupation policies too, especially that of blowing up the homes of suspected terrorists

or of persons suspected of having sheltered terrorists.

"Besides," he said, "look at the life we lead here now. There is no work. It cannot continue this way.

"The Jews must go back to the territory they had before the war. Then they can negotiate with us — the Palestinian Arabs — not with the Arab states.

The conversation turned to his son's alleged crime.

"How this happened to Sirhan Sirhan I don't know," he sighed. "I taught him Christianity. He was especially religious.

## CONDEMNS RFK

"According to what I read in the newspapers, the late Sen. Kennedy declared in his Los Angeles speech that he favored sending war materials to Israel.

"This would worsen the situation. It would become the reason for more refugees —

for killing more people and for making more suffering for them.

"I think we have suffered enough — more than enough in this life.

"This is what pushed Sir-

han against Sen. Kennedy. I think he did good by stopping the Senator.

"In the end more Jews would have been killed than Arabs."

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