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Sirhan Trial Scene 450 2 Takes Total 780

By GENE HANDSAKER

Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES AP - Sirhan Bishara Sirhan's murder trial is at the stage of racehorses parading to the post . . . a symphony conductor tapping his musicians to attention . . . house lights dimming before the curtain rises.

Selection of six alternate jurors will be completed sometime this week, attorneys agree. Then prosecution and defense will make opening statements to the jury of eight men and four women.

"We'll just talk about the facts," said Deputy Dist. Atty. David N. Fitts, tall and handsome, with gray hair and a calm manner.

For the defense the opening statement will be by Emile Zola Berman, 66, a bald, slim, red-complexioned Manhattan lawyer who so far during jury selection has mostly sat silent.

"I'll tell what kind of person Sirhan was at the time of the shooting," Berman said, "what made him the kind of person he was, and indicate he did not have the necessary mental capacity." First there will be the preliminaries.

Sirhan, 24, charged with murdering Sen. Robert F. Kennedy with a pistol last June, will be led in from a room at the rear of the courtroom by two sheriff's deputies.

Rugged-faced Willard Polhemus, 50, court bailiff, in a sheriff's deputy uniform, will time the last puffs on his roll-your-own cigarette almost precisely with the black-robed judge's appearance in the doorway. After all, he has been the same judge's bailiff for nine years.

"All rise," Polhemus will say loudly, and more than 100 people will stand. "Facing the flag of our country and recognizing the principles for which it stands, Department 107 of the Superior Court, in and for the County of Los Angeles, is now in session, the Honorable HONORABLE V. Walker presiding."

Judge Walker, a large man with a grave expression, spectacles, white temples and enormous white brows, will mount his bench.

"People versus Sirhan," he will recite automatically.

"Let the record show the parties' counsel are in court, the jury's in the jury box."

Then, finally, the testimony, more than a month after the trial began Jan. 7. The prosecution gave the defense a list of 80 possible state's witnesses but now says not all may be called.

IT MAY BE A MONTH, CHIEF DEFENSE ATTORNEY Grant B. Cooper told prospective jurors, before they hear the defense case.

Cooper is tall and handsome, with wavy iron-gray hair, the looks of an actor and the demeanor of a diplomat. He is easily, since Jerry Giesler's death, Los Angeles' No. 1 criminal lawyer.

Spectacled and pipe-smoking, Cooper is a hearty, confident, outgoing man who kisses newswomen in the corridor upon arriving in the morning and claps an arm around newsmen on walking out with them during recesses. He is always available and always ready with an answer, even if it is sometimes evasive.

Did he, in fact, ever consider becoming an actor? "Hell, no!" he roars with amusement, as though the idea were preposterous. He was born, he tells you, in New York, and in school went no farther than three months in high school.

He became a wiper on an ocean-going vessel, landed in Los ANGELES AND WENT TO WORK AS A CLERK IN HIS UNCLE'S LAW FIRM. Mornings he studied law at a downtown law school.

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Cooper's voice of average timbre but with subtle modulations, he stands with hands in pockets or caressing the back of his swivel chair while addressing jurors. Gestures eloquent, his language crystal clear, he inspires we're-all-just-folks confidence.

His voice falls as he winds up questioning each prospective juror with the same question:

"If someone very near and dear to you were so unfortunate as to be on trial on the same charge—murder—would you be willing to have that someone tried by 12 jurors in the same frame of mind with which you approach this case?"

The three defenders, legal acers all, are serving without fee because they feel a man is entitled to a fair trial even in an unpopular case. Besides Cooper and Berman there is Russell E. Parsons, 69, who has built a distinguished career as both prosecutor and defender.

For the people, the district attorney's office has arrayed three of its top prosecutors: Husky, pipe-smoking Lynn W. Compton, chief deputy district attorney; John E. Howard, beefy and gray-sprinkled, and Fitts.

So the spectator's right sit the jurors. Their attitude has been one of rapt attention. They include an attractive schoolteacher, a husky, swarthy plumber, and a computer operator who sits cross-legged, right ankle on left knee. He favors brilliant socks—blue, orange—and during intervals when Sirhan and lawyer

have been in the judge's chambers has sat reading books. 5

Bailiff Polhemus will have charge of transporting the jury in a sheriff's prisoner bus seven blocks to the Biltmore Hotel after every day's session. He and other deputies will stand guard through the night.

They draw \$60 a day for jury duty, plus \$1.50 for breakfast, \$2.50 for lunch, \$4.50 for dinner. Wives or husbands may share jurors' rooms over weekends by paying \$3.

Polhemus also will take the jurors on weekend outings in the bus. A typical trip in good weather is to the Los Angeles harbor, including an afternoon tour through the Wayfarer's Chapel, a church built of glass on the Palos Verdes Peninsula.

"At least then," said Polhemus, to whom such jury excursions are old stuff, "they can say they've been to church."

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