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Sirhan Takes Up Magic to Kill Time

By Bob Rise

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Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, nearing his second anniversary on San Quentin's Death Row, has taken up magic to pass the time.

"He was sleeping 18 hours a day — you know, an anxiety sleep and that was no good for him," says Luke McKissack, his appeals attorney. "Magic is my hobby, so I started teaching him some magic tricks."

"Now he's in the best spirits I've seen him since he was sent up here."

Sirhan was removed to San Quentin May 23, 1969, after being convicted of the June 5, 1968, assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in a kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles the night of Kennedy's primary victory over Sen. Eugene McCarthy.

Reply to Appeal

Only last week the California Attorney General's Office filed a 291-page answer to Sirhan's appeals for a new trial or a reduced sentence.

McKissack said he will file a reply in 60 to 75 days, expects to have a decision by Thanksgiving. If he must

take his appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, a final decision on the case might not come for another 6 to 18 months.

Meanwhile, Sirhan will remain at "home" in Cell 33, South Side Condemned unit 1.

Strange Twist

Sirhan's turning to magic for recreation in his Death Row cell is just the latest strange twist in the weird case. His original trial lawyers contended it was his fascination with the occult that got him into trouble in the first place.

Sirhan himself testified that he could make candles snuff out just by willing it. A psychiatrist said Sirhan had practiced self-hypnosis in a mirror so often that when he passed a set of mirrors at the Ambassador he snapped into a trance and then killed Kennedy unconsciously.

Sirhan told the jury that was baloney. He said he killed Kennedy, a supporter of the Israeli cause, out of patriotism. He said he wanted the death penalty.

The jury agreed.