

Irv Kupcinet

On the Trail of Puzzles in Dr. King Assassination

CHICAGO — Author William Bradford Huie, who probably has had more communication with James Earl Ray than any other person about the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., is as mystified about the possibility of a conspiracy as the rest of us.

Huie has had conversations with Ray, exchange of letters and the benefit of the information culled by Ray's attorneys, first Arthur Hanes and his son and later Percy Foreman. In addition, he paid Ray \$40,000 for information about the assassination of Dr. King. Ray kept none of that money — \$30,000 going to Hanes and \$10,000 as partial payment to Foreman.

"For three months, I never doubted that this was a conspiracy," Huie told us. "Now I'm not so sure. But my investigation will continue because of the many unanswered questions in this mysterious case."

Ray has indicated to Huie that he will continue to answer his questions posed in writing. "Ray, as an old jailbird, is too smart to answer any questions from the law authorities," Huie told us. "He knows that under the Supreme Court ruling he doesn't have to talk. He hasn't talked to anybody connected with the law, not even Fred Vinson Jr. of the Justice Department, who flew to London to interrogate him. But Ray will talk to me — for money."

★ ★ ★

HUIE, WHO is completing a book on Ray titled "He Slew the Dreamer" (from the Book of Genesis dealing with Joseph), says, "Ray has told me a great many details, but he studiously has avoided implicating others." Yet Huie won't rest until he finds the answers to these mysterious circumstances:

A witness testified that she saw a man much smaller than Ray run from the bathroom from which the fatal shot was fired. Later, when Ray's car was found, police discovered in the trunk clothing of a much smaller man.

Ray, according to witnesses, never visited the rooming house across from the motel in which Dr. King was staying. Yet he knew exactly what room to ask for so he would be in position to fire the fatal shot. Ray explained this by telling Huie, "I was told which room to ask for."

Ray didn't smoke. Yet the ashtrays in his car, when recovered by police, were filled with cigaret stubs and ashes.

Ray's escape from Memphis to London by way of Canada was much too complicated for his simple mind. Huie believes the route was arranged.

Huie also conjectures that Ray did not want to plead guilty, "but was talked into it."

According to the author, Ray is "wise enough to know that even if he were sentenced to death, he wouldn't die in the electric chair — nobody dies in the electric chair any more."

Huie believes the Memphis "Establishment," which includes Judge W. Preston Battle, pushed for the 99-year sentence to avert a trial, which, it was feared, would exacerbate the tense racial situation in Memphis.

★ ★ ★