

JAMES EARL RAY

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW:

a candid conversation about conspiracy and escape with the man convicted of killing Dr. King (including a surprise talk with Ray's elusive brother)

On the evening of April 4, 1968, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., stepped from his room onto the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. He leaned over the rail to joke with his friends and followers below, asking them to sing a favorite song, "Take My Hand, Precious Lord," that night. Just then, at 6:01 P.M., came the shot. The .30'06 slug ripped into King's right jaw, careened to the spinal column, killing America's greatest civil rights leader almost instantly.

As Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson and others rushed to King, as they pointed across Mulberry Street toward the derelict rooming house from which the shot seemed to have come, the shock waves of King's murder began to ripple across America. Within hours, Attorney General Ramsey Clark announced that the assassin had dropped a bundle of incriminating physical evidence at the scene, that he'd soon be caught, that the evidence indicated that a single, crazed assassin was responsible. Simultaneously, more than 100 American cities erupted with racial rioting. Several major cities were brought to their knees by the looting and fire-bomb-

ing. And, in time, the agony of black America would join the Tet offensive, L.B.J.'s abdication, the Chicago Democratic Convention riot and the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy in marking 1968 as the nadir in recent American history.

On June 8, 1968, two months after the murder, the suspected assassin was arrested at London's Heathrow airport and turned out to be a 40-year-old, pale, nervous escaped convict from St. Louis with a long record of smalltime, unsuccessful crime. His name was James Earl Ray and as far as the authorities were concerned, there was no doubt about it: He and he alone had killed King.

Except, of course, there was doubt, and it wasn't going to go away. Each bit of the puzzle deepened the mystery. From the beginning, some major complications emerged. To list a few:

- Ray claimed he had been working with an accomplice named Raoul, who had hired him as a "mule," smuggling unspecified commodities across borders while Ray was at large from Missouri State Penitentiary for Men.

- Ray admitted buying the weapon found by the police. But, he said, he had bought it for Raoul as part of a gun-running scheme and had never fired it himself, even though his fingerprints were on it.

- During the 14 months he was out of the Missouri prison, Ray spent an estimated \$10,000 in his 20,000 miles of travel. He has never come up with a satisfactory explanation of where he got the money, saying only that it came from Raoul.

- His pattern of crime was armed robbery. He had never—as far as the record showed—shot anyone. And he was a marked loser: a smalltime crook and little-league con artist. Could he, then, have turned into a deadly one-shot sniper? And one so elusive that he could travel in four foreign countries and more than a dozen states, obtaining passports under aliases and avoiding the finest man hunters in the world?

- Even the murder weapon came under some question. Ballistics tests failed to tie the murder slug conclusively to the rifle.

- The state's one eyewitness was alleged to be an alcoholic (and some darkly



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARY NOEL

"I have doubts that people think I'm involved in these assassinations. I don't want to comment on Sirhan or Oswald. They've got their problems, I've got mine. Of course, Oswald don't have any."

"I'd like to get this resolved. Right now, the Government's got more information than I have. Everybody thinks I know everything and that I'm holding back. I think it's the other way around."

"When I escaped, I was thinking about possibly making some sort of arrangements to turn myself in in exchange for a trial. I wanted to force the Government to give me a trial."

suggested that he had been paid by the police for his testimony).

All in all, it presaged another nightmare of false leads and elaborate conspiracy theories. Some hoped that Ray's trial would answer those vexing questions. But there was no trial. Instead, nine months after his capture, a subdued Ray pleaded guilty and accepted a 99-year sentence, while his famous criminal lawyer, Percy Foreman, stood by as the State of Tennessee stipulated its evidence: the fingerprints, the eyewitness, the renting of a run-down room, Ray's white Mustang laden with physical evidence of his postassassination flight from Memphis to Atlanta. The sniper had even obligingly dropped in a doorway next to the rooming house a bundle containing the rifle, toilet articles, binoculars, cans of beer with Ray's fingerprints on them and even a radio with his prison number on it. The authorities could also trace Ray's movements. From prison in Missouri, he went to Chicago, St. Louis, Canada, Alabama, Mexico, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Alabama, Atlanta and finally to the Memphis rooming house opposite the Lorraine Motel. He fled to Atlanta and then back to Canada, then to England and Portugal—from where he supposedly tried to travel to a white-supremist country such as Rhodesia—and finally back to London to be captured. With all that against him, few wondered that he pleaded guilty.

But within a week, he applied for a new trial. And, following that, his long succession of attorneys took turns raising questions about his guilt, as the theories sprouted like thistles. Everyone from the Teamsters to the CIA, from the Cubans to militant blacks, from white racists to the FBI, was accused at one time or another. Each accusation had its own logic; for example, revelations about FBI blackmail and harassment of King made that agency a tempting target. And yet, ultimately, nothing was known except that Ray looked like a reasonable candidate for America's gallery of assassins.

Seeking an answer, the House of Representatives authorized and funded a select committee in September 1976 to investigate the murders of both John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Coincidentally, Ray agreed to talk with PLAYBOY for the first in-depth interview since 1969. James McKinley, who wrote "Playboy's History of Assassination in America," was dispatched to Brushy Mountain Penitentiary in the wild, wooded country of east Tennessee. A surprise interviewee turned out to be Jerry Ray, who walked in on McKinley and Ray as they talked in the visitors' room. Ray's younger brother, who has also been jailed in the past for smalltime criminal activities, is alleged to have played a role in the King case, according to one theory propounded in New Times magazine,

which suggested that he was the mysterious Raoul for whom Ray was covering up. Jerry, too, agreed to be questioned.

But when the interview was half completed, another drama intervened. Ray went over the wall in a show of bravado worthy of the early days of Hollywood. This brazen late-afternoon breakout threw conspiracy lovers and headline writers into an orgy of speculation and prompted the most concentrated man hunt Tennessee had ever seen. Fortunately, under the direction of the prison's young, coolheaded warden, Stonney Lane, Ray was caught and returned to the prison, filthy and hungry but unharmed. Not, however, before he had eluded hundreds of guards, police, FBI, National Guardsmen and bloodhounds for 54 and a half hours in some of the roughest mountain wilderness in this country.

Less than two days after he was returned to prison, Ray again sat down to complete the interview with McKinley, who was then joined by PLAYBOY Senior Editor Laurence Gonzales, who had edited "Playboy's History of Assassination." They report on this, the fullest interview Ray has ever granted, and the exclusive story of his bold escape:

"Ray looked fit after his mountain escapade, just as he had before—about six feet tall, tanned and strong-looking, with only a hint of the paunch a 49-year-old man might be expected to have, especially if he'd spent half of his adult life in prison. His handshake was tentative, a lifetime of wariness and shyness behind it. His slack-limbed shuffle was characteristic of people who move in small spaces, under constant, suspicious eyes. And what we first took for indolence turned out to be a keen patience, a brooding vigilance. We would notice through the long sessions that one of Ray's chief characteristics was that he never laughed. A remark that would make the rest of us break into nervous laughter—and there were several such moments—elicited from Ray no more than a crooked little smile. He joked, but it was difficult to distinguish his jokes from flat statements or from prevarications. He made few attempts to illuminate his often bloodless answers and seemed content with the puzzlement they frequently caused. His responses are intelligent but often tentative. Sometimes his answers appear to be in contradiction of the facts, but he is not afraid to confront issues directly, occasionally with disarming skill.

"If there is a strong element of camouflage in Ray's conversation, it is equally true of his appearance. His primary distinguishing feature is that he has no truly distinguishing features. As he turns his head, his appearance changes. The profile Ray is not the full-face Ray nor the three quarters Ray. At one angle, his face is thin and fine-featured. At another, it is full, broad and flat. As his brother Jerry once remarked, Ray can blend in any-

where. There is a tension around him that is almost visible, but it is a peculiarly controlled, glacial aura. In short, Ray is an elliptical man and thus often seems trapped in the twilight zone between truth and falsehood.

"There is no better proof of that than the fact that in pre-escape sessions, Ray seemed to be teasing us, even as we began the interview, with an oblique hint that he was planning to break out. What we thought was simply 'warm-up' small talk turned out to be quite telling a few days later."

APRIL-JUNE, 1977

PLAYBOY: Do they treat you well here in the Brushy Mountain Penitentiary?

RAY: Yes; since August 1975, I've been part of the regular prison population.

PLAYBOY: What's an average day like for you here?

RAY: You may not believe it, but this place keeps you very busy. Seven hours of work and you've got to exercise. I work in the laundry five days a week. Usually go to the yard for exercise in the afternoon and evening.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any hobbies?

RAY: I've got too many legal problems to be making purses.

PLAYBOY: Do you encounter a lot of homosexuality?

RAY: My views on this are known. I don't associate with them and they keep to themselves. I'm in a poor position to be passing judgment on anyone else. They're nothing to get excited about, though. I wouldn't want Anita Bryant up here or anything like that.

PLAYBOY: You've been sentenced to 99 years. Does that make you eligible for parole at any time?

RAY: In Tennessee, the only way you can get any relief is if the governor commutes your sentence. I think on 99 years you have to do 35 years to even be eligible for parole [the actual length of time is 30 years].

PLAYBOY: You escaped once from the Missouri State Penitentiary when you were doing time for armed robbery before the King killing. Then you attempted to escape from here. Will you try to escape again?

RAY: I would if a wall fell down or something.

PLAYBOY: You claim that you deserve a new trial. What do you think you would gain by that?

RAY: I think I'd be acquitted.

PLAYBOY: What would you do if you got out?

RAY: If I got out of the penitentiary, I think I'd go to some foreign country. Australia or somewhere. There's too much heat around here. I might go to Switzerland.

PLAYBOY: This country has an unfortunate gallery of political assassins. Do you belong in that gallery?

RAY: I don't believe so. I have serious doubts that people think I'm involved in these assassinations. I don't want to comment about Sirhan or Oswald. They've got their problems and I've got mine. Of course, Oswald don't have any. But most of these types are overzealous. They're trying to promote some political idea.

PLAYBOY: You've answered this question a hundred times. Did you kill Martin Luther King?

RAY: No.

PLAYBOY: Do you know who did?

RAY: No, I'm not positive. We've done a lot of investigation, but I don't know.

PLAYBOY: What's your best guess?

RAY: From what I've read and who I've talked to, the FBI made some kind of arrangements so that King wouldn't have any security or nothin' like that.

PLAYBOY: Who do you think pulled the trigger?

RAY: I couldn't say that. Until I got arrested, I never paid too much attention to how these intelligence agencies operate. Based on what I've read, it appears that no Government agency like the FBI or the CIA would shoot any one person. Their *modus operandi* in foreign countries seems to always be to have someone else do it. The Mafia or some foreign intelligence agency. I thought that, and I think the evidence would support it. But I don't think that anyone will ever know until you get the FBI files on King declassified.

I told the House committee that I'd take a lie-detector test or anything they want if they would get the Government materials declassified. But it's going to have to be a *quid pro quo*. I'm not going to go through all these tests and then they're going to say, "Well, we're not going to come up with anything."

PLAYBOY: Will you take a lie-detector test for us?

RAY: I wouldn't have no objection to it.

[The results of this polygraph test, taken June 22, 1977, appear at right.]

PLAYBOY: What is the single most important fact that you think proves your innocence?

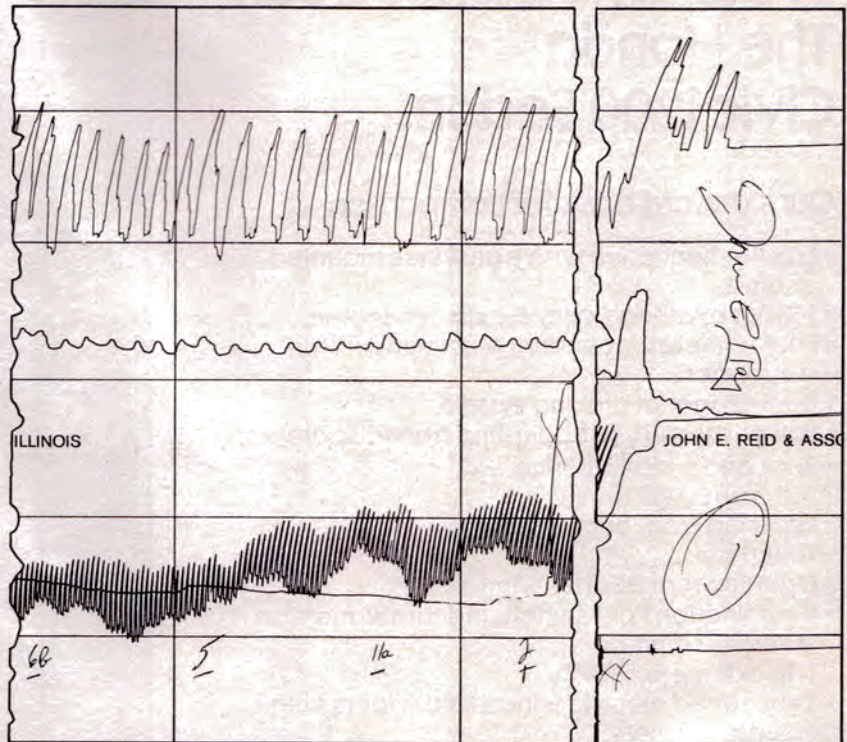
RAY: The single most important fact is the suppression of all the evidence by the Government.

PLAYBOY: Do you mean to say that the single most important point is not that you are simply innocent of the crime?

RAY: See, there's something about always playing on your innocence. Even something that I could prove as being impossible for me to commit—say, killing Jesus Christ—I don't like to keep saying I'm innocent of the charge, because even though I am, it's just some kind of psychological thing. It seems like you're crying.

PLAYBOY: Are you capable of standing up and saying, "I did not pull the trigger"?

JAMES EARL RAY'S LIE-DETECTOR TEST



The polygraph examiner asked Ray, "Did you kill Martin Luther King, Jr.?" Ray answered, "No," at the point marked 5 above. For about 20 seconds following his reply, the graph shows, according to examiners, "significant emotional disturbances indicative of deception." Right, Ray's signature on the graph paper.

For the first time since the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., James Earl Ray agreed to take a lie-detector test, at PLAYBOY's request. The editors hired Douglas Wicklander, a polygraph expert with John E. Reid & Associates, to administer the test to Ray—with his lawyer's permission—at Brushy Mountain Penitentiary on June 22, 1977. Following are the significant questions and answers:

Q.: Did you kill Martin Luther King, Jr.?

RAY: No.

Q.: Did you fire the shot that killed Martin Luther King, Jr.?

RAY: No.

Q.: Do you know for sure who killed Martin Luther King, Jr.?

RAY: No.

Wicklander, Reid and director Joseph P. Buckley gave PLAYBOY the following opinion:

"It is the opinion of the examiner, based on this subject's polygraph records, that he is not telling the truth on the previously listed questions."

To explore the subject of a possible conspiracy, we asked the polygraph examiner to conduct a second test. Following are the questions and answers:

Q.: Did anyone ask you to kill Martin Luther King, Jr.?

RAY: No.

Q.: Did you arrange with anyone to kill Martin Luther King, Jr.?

RAY: No.

Q.: Did anyone give you any money to kill Martin Luther King, Jr.?

RAY: No.

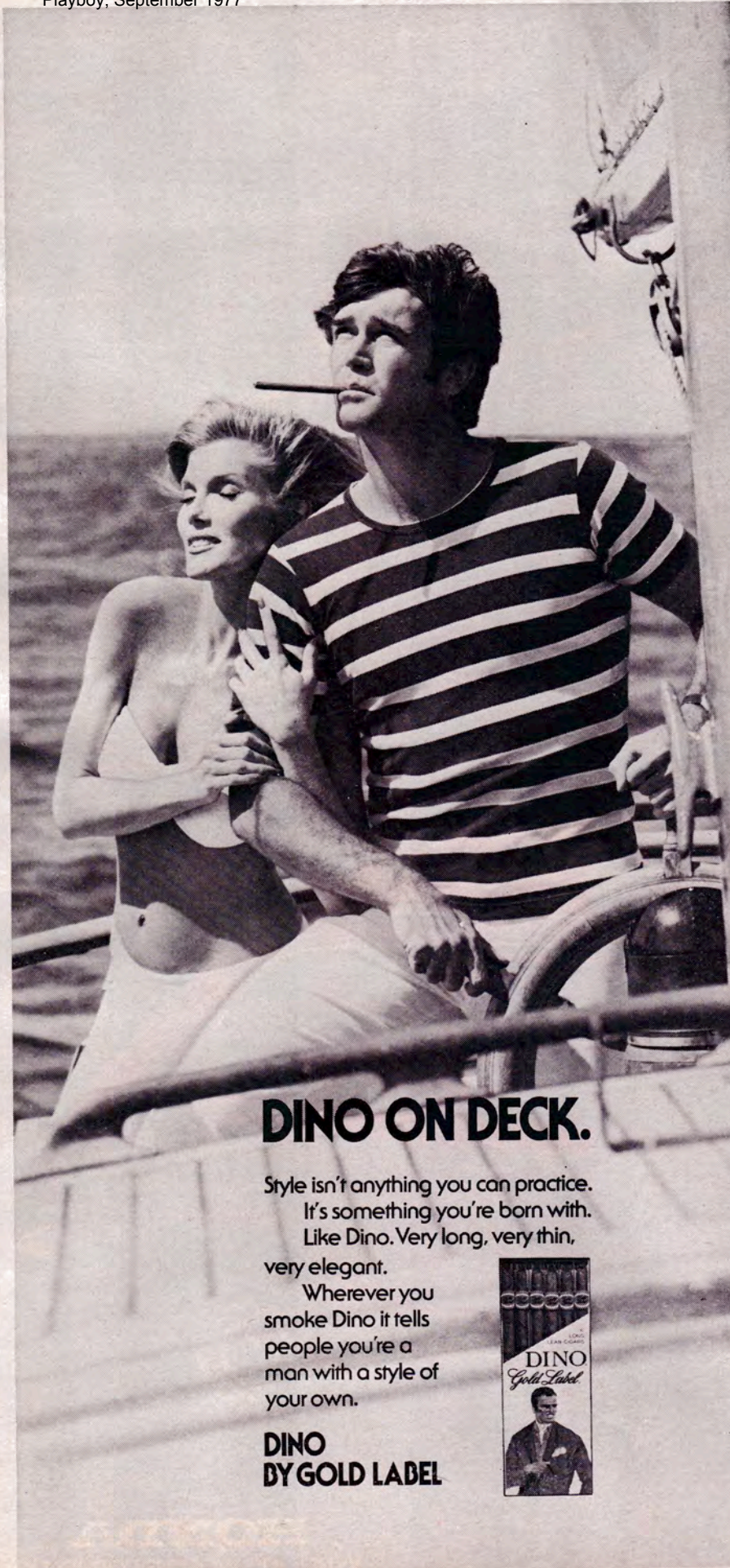
The examiners gave PLAYBOY their opinion on those answers:

"It is the opinion of the examiner, based on this subject's polygraph records, that he is telling the truth on the above listed questions."

To summarize, the polygraph tests indicate that Ray did, in fact, kill Martin Luther King, Jr., and that he did so alone. (Ray's response to the news that the test results were negative appears on page 176.)

The tests were conducted with all the controls standard to such procedures. John E. Reid & Associates is among the oldest polygraph-examination firms in the country and one of the most respected. Wicklander has personally administered over 2500 tests and Reid is the author of a text used by polygraph trainees and the designer of the "control question" technique used throughout the field.

When PLAYBOY asked officials of the firm if there were any doubt whatsoever about their conclusions, the answer was, "None."



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RAY: Oh, there wouldn't be no question about that.

PLAYBOY: Say it.

RAY: Well, I did not pull the trigger, but I really don't see much significance [in saying that].

PLAYBOY: If you didn't pull the trigger, why did you plead guilty? Haven't you testified that your lawyer, Percy Foreman, made you do it?

RAY: I think maneuvered would be a better word. Now, I thought the state had a circumstantial case, but the FBI was making numerous threats against my family. Plus Foreman visited them in St. Louis, they said, to persuade them to get me to plead guilty, the gist being that if the plea were not forthcoming, the FBI might have one or both of my brothers indicted for complicity in the King homicide. The most vicious threat was that they'd arrest and re jail my father at Fort Madison, Iowa, where he'd escaped some 40 years earlier.

PLAYBOY: What were you trying to say when you stood up after your guilty plea and said you didn't agree with Foreman, Attorney General Ramsey Clark and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that there had been no conspiracy? Were you saying you thought there *was* one?

RAY: Well, yes, I was just telling them more or less just that.

PLAYBOY: Well, then, is it your guess that some Government agency is involved in such a conspiracy?

RAY: Possibly in collusion with some foreign intelligence agency. I've read articles about the CIA where they give these foreign intelligence agencies millions of dollars. I think they give some shah several million dollars every year. Well, they don't give money like that unless you get favors in return.

PLAYBOY: Which foreign government do you think was involved?

RAY: I wouldn't want to speculate on that. I think you have to develop that in some way with the House select committee on assassinations. I don't want to keep harping on this classification question, but everything's been classified on this case, so you really don't know nothing.

PLAYBOY: Do you consider yourself a dupe?

RAY: I think that I was just a worker and that I just happened to be on the scene. I was arrested for it. I don't know if dupe is the right word, though.

PLAYBOY: Are you claiming you were set up to take the fall?

RAY: I think that is very possible. I don't think that anyone had any malicious intent toward me personally. Naturally, in a case like this, someone had to go to jail for it. And I think I'm really kind of the ideal candidate for it, because certain classes in this country don't have

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no political influence. The working-class whites are one.

PLAYBOY: Do you consider yourself a member of that class?

RAY: Yes. Like the Black Muslims, there's someone always on their case. The Indians have been taken advantage of. Also the Cubans.

PLAYBOY: You mentioned the Black Muslims. How do you feel about black people?

RAY: Well, they're just here and I'm here. I don't really have no really strong feelings one way or the other. I guess they're looking out for their interests as everyone else is. And, of course, I'm trying to look out for mine. But I don't see no conflict there.

PLAYBOY: That sounds like a very pat, rehearsed answer. Did you work it out in advance?

RAY: I'd thought about how you answer that. It's a question they keep asking you and it's a tricky question in certain ways. There is a certain prevailing attitude, in other words. You have to have one opinion.

PLAYBOY: It's a simple question: Are you racially prejudiced?

RAY: I don't think that people are prejudiced against a certain race. I think there are certain cultural differences—like music or something like that. I can't see Hirohito, the emperor of Japan, doing the watusi. They just don't mix. But I don't think that's grounds to shoot the emperor. There's just a difference.

PLAYBOY: Then to what cultural group do you find yourself least attracted?

RAY: My association with different groups has been somewhat limited except in prison. The one that I find myself mostly attracted to are the Latins. They're easy-going. They're not too bothered by rules and regulations.

PLAYBOY: Didn't you refuse to live in an integrated dormitory when you were in Leavenworth for forging postal money orders?

RAY: I did refuse to be transferred to the farm and the supposedly integrated dormitories. But the overriding reason was a prison policy of handing out extra time for marijuana possession—possession being anything found in your immediate area in the dormitory.

PLAYBOY: You mean you felt the blacks smoked dope and that you would be punished for it?

RAY: Maybe.

PLAYBOY: When you attempted to run to South Africa or Rhodesia after the death of King, wasn't that because of the racial policies in those countries?

RAY: I tried to go to ten or twelve countries. Brazil, Colombia in South America, Australia, Canada—and I did try to go to Rhodesia once. I was in Puerto Val-

larta, Mexico, once and saw an ad in the *U. S. News & World Report* wanting immigrants to Rhodesia. So I wrote them a letter. I never did get no answer. And after I got to Portugal in May 1968, before I was arrested in England, I did try to catch a ship. I wanted to get to any country in the southern part of Africa.

PLAYBOY: Why did those countries appeal to you?

RAY: They were close to Europe from where I was at. You can go to countries like Canada and South Africa, where they have large immigrant populations, and if you're English-speaking, you can just blend in with the population.

PLAYBOY: You still haven't answered the question: Are you a racist?

RAY: Well, there's a certain instinct that makes people want to associate with

“There are certain cultural differences. I can't see the emperor of Japan doing the watusi. They just don't mix. But I don't think that's grounds to shoot the emperor.”

their own race. But the problem is answering these questions. People are all uptight about answering. A lot of middle-class people want to be on the right side of everything.

The difference is between committing violence on someone and maybe not wanting to associate with someone. Some newspapers might describe one person as a racist and another as a nationalist. It all depends on how they perceive you and if they think you're hostile toward them.

PLAYBOY: Let's try it another way: You're very careful to use the word black with us. Wasn't nigger a part of your vocabulary before you were arrested for killing King?

RAY: I don't use that term much. Of course, I probably have used it. But not usually. Well, in here, the blacks call one another that. But I didn't pay too much attention to these words before I got arrested.

PLAYBOY: Why do you pay attention to them now?

RAY: I wouldn't have, except that I was charged with killing King. I'm not as free to say anything as I was then because of how it will be interpreted and how it will be printed in the press. You can say something and it could be twisted

around. So it's not so much what you say, it's what you're quoted as saying.

PLAYBOY: Most press accounts say there's ample evidence that you hated King. How do you answer that charge?

RAY: I really don't have any thoughts one way or the other about him. I felt about him the same way I feel about Gerald Ford or President Carter. It's necessary for these people to have a certain amount of hypocrisy—Carter talking about human rights or others talking about poor people. That gets on my nerves once in a while. I know it's difficult to believe, but I didn't really know too much about King before he was shot. When I was in Missouri, I was in virtual isolation. There's no television or radio. I was in solitary for two years, and in universal isolation, you're not even allowed a newspaper. You could be at war and not know it. [According to prison officials, Ray had access to newspapers.]

PLAYBOY: What do you think of Carter?

RAY: Well, I don't think much of him. He's just a carbon copy of Ford or past ones.

PLAYBOY: Your brother Jerry, whose role in the King assassination has been speculated upon, gave us a colorful description of Carter. He referred to him as “that smiling jackass in the White House.”

RAY: See, that type of statement is foolish. My brother's never even voted. He's never been involved in politics. And so they [Jeff Cohen and David S. Lifton in *“New Times”*] wrote an article charging that he might have been involved with the King murder and now he starts making political statements. It's just foolish to do stuff like that. I wouldn't make any adverse comments against the President, because, in the first place, it would be foolish and, in the second place, it wouldn't be any need for it, because they're really all the same.

PLAYBOY: In maintaining that you did not kill King, you have consistently said that there was another individual—whom you call Raoul—and, in naming him, you imply that he was involved in the murder. You have said that the two of you had a rendezvous at a rooming house in Memphis and that you and he were involved in a gun-smuggling scheme. It was from that rooming house that the shot was fired that killed King. Do you think Raoul murdered King?

RAY: I don't know.

PLAYBOY: What is your alibi? Where were you at 6:01 p.m., when King was shot down?

RAY: Most likely, I was several blocks away, leaving or having just left a service station. I was asking about getting a tire fixed. I think I was there at between five minutes to six and six minutes after. Wouldn't be no way to get it down pat just what time it was. I left the rooming

house at about 5:30 and went to a tavern about two and a half blocks north. I had a sandwich and a beer there, sat there probably 15 minutes and then returned to get the car and went to the filling station.

PLAYBOY: Did you then go back to the rooming house and see the police who had surrounded the area?

RAY: Yeah. That's when I circled the area and took off.

PLAYBOY: Did you contact anyone after you fled from Memphis?

RAY: After that, I didn't have no contact with anyone. That includes family members.

PLAYBOY: How did you manage to get the passports you used to fly from Canada to England and Portugal?

RAY: Well, I looked in back newspaper files for the names to apply for Canadian passports. I selected three persons whose age corresponded with mine. Since the population of Toronto is mostly of English extraction, a resemblance to me wouldn't seem unusual.

PLAYBOY: Going back to the scene of the crime, you've said you were fleeing the Memphis area in your white Mustang when you heard on the radio that King had been killed. What went through your mind at the time?

RAY: Nothing went through my mind too much right then. I was concerned when I heard they were looking for a Mustang. I think they mentioned a white man. And I thought when I first saw the police around the rooming house that possibly the police had raided the place and found a bunch of guns up there.

PLAYBOY: You mean the guns you claim were part of your gunrunning plan?

RAY: Yes. And I did intend to make a phone call and find out what was going on, because that's the standard procedure whenever you get an arrest. You call the police station or have someone else call up and find out if so-and-so has been in jail or something.

PLAYBOY: Whom were you going to call?

RAY: New Orleans.

PLAYBOY: Who in New Orleans?

RAY: I would just have called a number. 'Course, I wouldn't have asked for Raoul. I would have just told them that there's been a disturbance in the rooming house and I'd ask them if they could find out what it was or if they wanted me to call the police station or something.

PLAYBOY: Who would have answered the telephone?

RAY: They had an answering service. I don't know who he was. Just an individual.

PLAYBOY: Did you call?

RAY: No, I didn't call. I didn't know of any phone in the area. That was in between when I was leaving the area and I think after King had been

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reported shot, but before there was any report of a Mustang.

PLAYBOY: That's hard to believe—you couldn't find a phone booth, but if you had, you were going to call the police?

RAY: Well, either have the other party call the police—

PLAYBOY: What other party?

RAY: The one in New Orleans. That's the standard procedure you use when you get involved in situations like that.

PLAYBOY: You mean the standard procedure that criminals use?

RAY: Yes.

PLAYBOY: So you would call or have someone in New Orleans call the police. To find out what?

RAY: To try to find out what's going on. If anybody's going to jail. You can always palm yourself off as a lawyer or something. I'd find out what happened, whether the police had raided the place or whether this was an accident or what.

PLAYBOY: You mentioned that the police may have found guns at the rooming house. Of course, they found your Remington .30-'06 rifle, which the FBI says killed King. Do you still hold to your story that you gave that weapon to Raoul?

RAY: Yes.

PLAYBOY: And that you gave it to him in the rooming house just before the killing?

RAY: Yes.

PLAYBOY: How did you meet Raoul?

RAY: I first met him in 1967, after I escaped from Missouri. We met in The Neptune Tavern in Montreal. I was there trying to get merchant seaman's papers to get out of the country. Possibly roll a merchant seaman and take his papers.

PLAYBOY: What did Raoul look like?

RAY: Average height, looked like a Latin, sandy-colored hair.

PLAYBOY: Latins don't generally have light hair, do they?

RAY: He could've dyed it.

PLAYBOY: How did he dress?

RAY: Just a dark suit, shirt. I never saw him wear a tie.

PLAYBOY: R-A-O-U-L is the French spelling of that name and you met in Montreal. Yet you maintain he was Latin. Did your Raoul speak Spanish?

RAY: Yes, I think so.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever hear him speak Spanish?

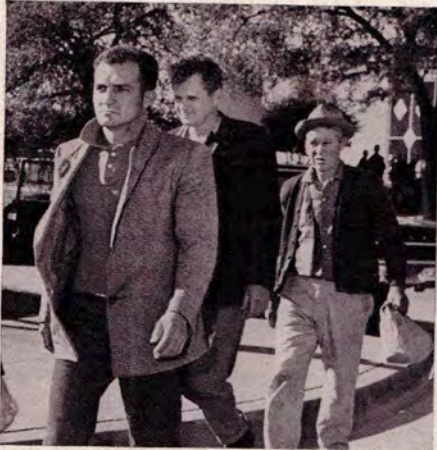
RAY: No, but I could tell by his accent. One time I asked him about some Spanish word and he was noncommittal. But from my association with various Mexicans and having lived with them, I could tell a Spanish accent. His wasn't too strong. But once you get an accent from birth, it's hard to get rid of it.

PLAYBOY: What did you do for Raoul when you were working with him?

RAY: I'd take packages across the border,

from Canada to here, later from the United States to Mexico.

PLAYBOY: We understand this picture looks like Raoul. Is that correct?



RAY: Oh, that would be this one here [points].

PLAYBOY: The one on the left?

RAY: Yeah. Percy Foreman showed me that the first time. It's a picture that I found out the Rockefeller Commission had classified.

PLAYBOY: This isn't classified.

RAY: It isn't?

PLAYBOY: It's been published often—this is a picture of some so-called tramps in Dealey Plaza just after John F. Kennedy was killed.

RAY: Well, the name's classified.

PLAYBOY: We don't think *anybody* knows his name. Who does that look like?

RAY: Well, I've seen all these pictures, I've looked at a hundred of them. That's the first one Percy Foreman showed me. See, Foreman at one time wanted to have this individual arrested. I'm pretty sure that was the individual. Then bring him to Memphis, then I was going to identify him and he was going to use that in the defense. I didn't want to do it, because I wasn't 100 percent sure of this picture. [Foreman remembers showing photographs to Ray but denies wanting to arrest anyone. He said: "There was no Raoul. Ray told me he invented him to feed conspiracy theories."]

PLAYBOY: What does a picture linked to John Kennedy's assassination have to do with your case?

RAY: All I said was he had a striking resemblance to this Raoul.

PLAYBOY: What is that supposed to mean?

RAY: Just that it has a striking resemblance. Of course, I never made a 100-percent-positive identification. I'd say there was a really strong resemblance. We'll still look at other pictures, but I'm not going to be no state witness against anyone.

PLAYBOY: You're the one who linked the two killings; here's a question out of the blue. Were you involved in the Kennedy assassination?

RAY: I was in jail at the time.

PLAYBOY: Back to Raoul. Are you certain you didn't make up the story about him?

RAY: Oh, no, I never made it up. Of course, these names like Eric Starvo Galt [one of Ray's aliases] don't mean anything. They're all aliases. See, that picture was shown to me a dozen times, it and about a hundred others. They always emphasize that one, though, because there was a composite drawing done right after King was shot and it had a striking resemblance to that picture. Of course, a person can change his features a little bit.

PLAYBOY: Richard Sprague, the investigator who recently resigned from the House select committee on assassinations, was quoted as saying, "There was no Raoul as previously claimed by Ray." How do you respond to that?

RAY: I think Sprague was probably misquoted. I didn't tell him that. I may have commented that a lot of these names were aliases.

PLAYBOY: Is there anything that might prove the existence of another person involved in this murder, whether or not he was called Raoul?

RAY: Well, a lot of it was mentioned in a PLAYBOY article in June 1976 [Part VI of the "History of Assassination" series]. One thing is part of a phone number, plus some address I came across when I crossed

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the book from Panama into the United States. I'll explain it to you. I shook down my car, which is my practice. I found a pack of cigarettes in a cigarette case dropped down between the bucket seats in the Mustang. There was a business card in there. I think on one side it had this person's name, crossed out, and what looked like the name of a city. Had two parts, like New Orleans. And it had LEAA on it, that Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. And on the other side, it had some name wrote down in longhand, I think it was Randolph Rosen-something. Anyway, years later, we had them investigated and come to find out, it wasn't really Rosen, it was Rosenson and he lived in Miami.

PLAYBOY: How might this Rosenson fit into the murder case?

RAY: We found out he had a criminal record, yes, for narcotics.

[PLAYBOY located the criminal record of a Randolph Erwin Rosenson—in New Orleans. Rosenson has a long criminal record for narcotics and Customs violations. Unfortunately for Ray's story of finding the LEAA card, this agency was not created until August of 1968—almost a year after Ray crossed into Mexico.]

PLAYBOY: Could Raoul have been involved with a group of white-racist businessmen, as some investigators have claimed?

RAY: I don't know what the legal argument would be. The FBI may have just let someone or some group shoot King. The only thing the big businessmen are interested in, though, is profit. I can't see them getting involved in shooting someone, unless he was interfering with their profit.

PLAYBOY: Did Raoul ever mention any big businessmen who were involved with his various operations, such as gunrunning or smuggling?

RAY: No, no. There was no Mr. Big or anything.

PLAYBOY: Did anything Raoul say make you believe he was in the employ of a white-racist group?

RAY: I don't believe so.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any plausible ideas for a motive for the killing of King?

RAY: I suspect you'd have to depose some of King's associates—Andrew Young and people like that. From what I've read, King made a decision in March 1967 for radical changes in his organization. He was going to get off the integration thing and start making economic demands. He was against the Vietnam war. If he was going to make radical changes in his policy—emphasizing economics and foreign policy instead of civil rights—then that may have been a motive. But, again, I think that people within his organization can answer that a lot better than me—Young and people like that.

PLAYBOY: Do you believe the FBI is now involved in a cover-up?

RAY: Not necessarily. Rather, I believe it is the Department of Justice. Like the department's task force recommended in their recent reinvestigation that Congress pass a special law authorizing the destruction or sealing of big portions of the FBI investigation files.

PLAYBOY: That bill concerned King's personal life. They would seal it only to protect his memory.

RAY: I'm concerned that they'd put everything in there, rather than just King's personal life. This might just be a smoke screen to destroy things. I don't think we'll ever clear up this case until we get the FBI to declassify that material.

PLAYBOY: And how would that help clear things up?

RAY: I'd like to get this resolved one way or another. I'm not exactly interested in filing suits until I'm 90 years old. There has been considerable material filed with the courts. But I think PLAYBOY is the only place it got published. Right now, the Government's got

*“The FBI may have just let
someone or some group
shoot King... I can't see any
big businessmen involved
in shooting someone,
unless he was interfering
with their profit.”*

more information than I have. Everybody thinks I know everything and that I'm holding back. I think it's the other way around.

PLAYBOY: Your case never went to trial, because you pleaded guilty. You agreed to 55 stipulations of guilt, but the question of how strong the government's case is has never been answered or tested in the adversary system of a public trial. How do you characterize its case against you?

RAY: Circumstantial and weak.

PLAYBOY: Let's run down a few of the major points that would have come up in a trial. Did you buy the .30-'06 Remington rifle in Birmingham less than a week before King was shot?

RAY: Yes.

PLAYBOY: For Raoul?

RAY: That's correct.

PLAYBOY: At first, you bought a .243-caliber rifle. Then you exchanged it for the .30-'06. Why?

RAY: I think what happened when I went back the second time is they give me a catalog and Raoul pointed out what kind to get. I don't recall that he mentioned .30-'06. There was a mention

of a deer rifle. The first time I told the clerk the brand name and I wanted a deer rifle. I took it back to Raoul and it was the wrong kind. Then I came back the second time and we started talking about this deer rifle again. The salesman said, “Oh, I thought you were talking about an Alabama deer versus a Wisconsin deer.”

PLAYBOY: It has been reported that it was the other way around, that you were the one talking about deer.

RAY: I don't recall.

PLAYBOY: Didn't you tell the clerk you were going deer hunting in Wisconsin with your brother?

RAY: Yes.

PLAYBOY: Do you see any significance in the fact that you mentioned your brother several times before King's murder?

RAY: No, I don't see any. You wouldn't go in and say, “My criminal accomplice,” or something like that.

PLAYBOY: It's been alleged that your brother Jerry was involved with you in a plot to kill King. Was he?

RAY: I've never known Jerry's interest to be far removed from a six-pack. I know he's not involved in anything like this. That'd be too big a coincidence.

PLAYBOY: What would you say if someone told you it was Jerry in that rooming house with that rifle?

RAY: It would depend on who that anyone was. If it was a Government official, I would sue Jerry for false incarceration.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever fire the rifle you bought?

RAY: No.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever see anybody fire it?

RAY: No.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever used rifles, except for your stint in the Army?

RAY: No. Oh, .22s, but that was years ago.

PLAYBOY: Do you expect people to believe you didn't fire the gun when your fingerprints are all over it?

RAY: Well, the FBI found all my prints, and yet they didn't put my identification out over the wire right away. They didn't say whose they were until two weeks later. It seems to me that if they have your prints, they can identify you within a matter of hours.

PLAYBOY: Are you suggesting your prints weren't there?

RAY: I don't know. Possibly after they found out who I was, they transferred my prints to some objects so they could use that as evidence.

PLAYBOY: That seems like a paranoid fantasy. Do you consider yourself paranoid?

RAY: No. I think a lot of times you get that way, you get suspicious, especially being locked up. I call it cautious. You know, there's different degrees of paranoid.

PLAYBOY: To which objects do you think the FBI may have transferred prints?

RAY: The beer cans are the only thing I




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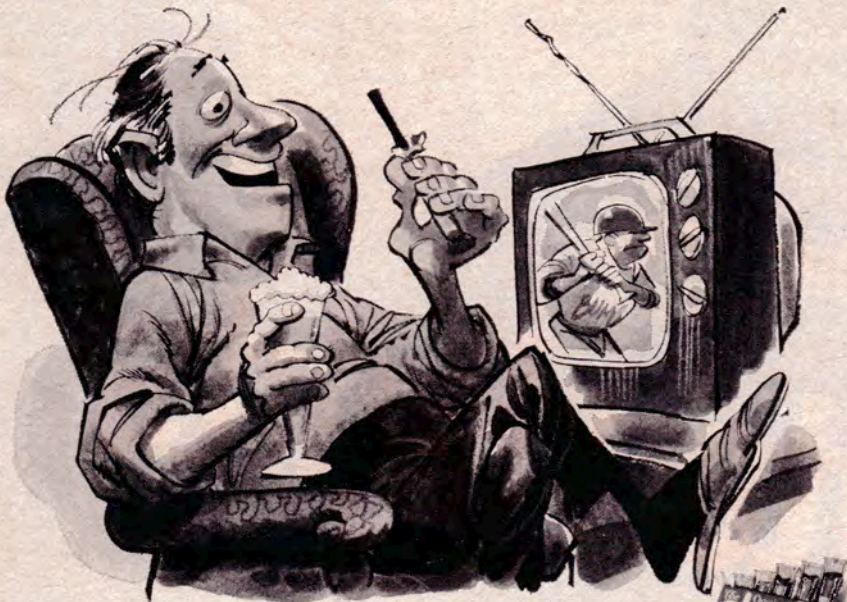
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can think of. I believe my prints would have been on the gun. I sell beer. I never buy it. I would buy whiskey.

PLAYBOY: So the other pieces of evidence found in the doorway near the rooming house—beer cans and so on—should not have had your prints on them?

RAY: No.

PLAYBOY: We're told that the ballistics tests failed to prove that your rifle, to the exclusion of all others, killed King. Do you consider that a major point in your favor?

RAY: It wouldn't mean too much to me either way how the tests come out, even if they were negative.

PLAYBOY: Because you didn't fire the rifle?

RAY: Yes.

PLAYBOY: Another question that comes up often is where you got the roughly \$9500 it would have taken to cover your expenses while you were at large. You traveled extensively, bought a \$2000 Mustang, camera equipment, a rifle and new clothes and lived pretty well. Where did you get all that money?

RAY: I had worked in a restaurant in a suburb of Chicago for about two months immediately after escaping from the Missouri prison [in 1967]. I made about \$800. I brought a small amount out of prison, too.

PLAYBOY: You claim the rest came from Raoul?

RAY: Yes. He was giving me money to take these packages across the border and he promised me a passport. He didn't come up with the passport, although I did get the money out of him. Gave me money in Birmingham for the car. The first time, I crossed the border from Canada, it was Detroit, it wasn't more than \$1500. Another time he give me money in New Orleans. I met him in a bar called, I think, The Rabbit's Foot. He gave me \$500.

PLAYBOY: It has been reported that you made a substantial amount of money from dope peddling in prison, that you sent that money out to your brother Jerry and then got it back from him after you escaped. Is that true?

RAY: Jerry never gave me any money. See, when you're in prison that long, there's a lot of letters from convict informers telling officials what kind of operations you're running. The Missouri Corrections Director examined my record thoroughly and there was nothing indicating that type of activity. I've never been any type of big operator in drugs in Missouri.

PLAYBOY: The FBI thinks you may have staged some robberies during 1967 to finance your escapades. Did you?

RAY: Except for holding up a warehouse and a gambling establishment in Montreal in July 1967, I staged no robberies in Canada or England. [According to Scotland Yard, Ray robbed a savings

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and loan bank in England during this period.]

PLAYBOY: Another reason authorities claim you must have been preparing for some sort of major criminal act is that during your escape from Missouri, you did some unusual things, such as learning to be a locksmith and having plastic surgery done on your nose.

RAY: The plastic surgery was just to make my features more difficult to identify in pictures. I was gonna, in fact, get more surgery done on my ear. Locksmithing I was just interested in.

PLAYBOY: You also were supposed to have visited a hypnotist in California. What was that about?

RAY: I got interested in that in prison. It helps pass the time, especially if you're in solitary.

PLAYBOY: The hypnotist later said you went to him because you said you were trying to build up your self-confidence. Were you trying to get enough confidence to kill a major political figure?

RAY: That's false, completely false.

PLAYBOY: Moving ahead to the day of the King killing: Charles Stephens is an eyewitness who claims he saw you running down the hall of the rooming house just after King was shot. What would your defense have been against his testimony?

RAY: Right after the offense, CBS interviewed this Stephens and he said the man didn't look like me at all. They showed him a sketch.

PLAYBOY: He said it was a "sharp-nosed man." Isn't that you?

RAY: He said he identified me by a sharp pointed nose, but at that time, the FBI didn't know I'd had plastic surgery on my nose in Los Angeles. The FBI got to him.

PLAYBOY: Stephens' wife, Grace Walden, gave a different description of the running man, saying he was stocky, plaid-shirted, balding. Did Raoul look like that?

RAY: No.

PLAYBOY: Actually, doesn't the description fit your brother Jerry?

RAY: Uh—

[Jerry Ray walked into the room at that point in the interview. Physically, he is shorter and stockier than his brother and is balding.]

PLAYBOY: Well, speak of the Devil. Here is Jerry Ray himself. We were just talking about you. Jerry, there has been a lot of speculation about your role in the King assassination. Why don't you take this opportunity to respond? For instance, is it true that just after your brother James got out of Missouri, he said, as has been reported, that he was going to kill the "big boy, King Coon"?

JERRY RAY: No, that's crazy.

PLAYBOY: Did James tell you that he wanted to establish residence in Birming-

ham, so that when he killed Martin Luther King he could get a pardon from Alabama governor George Wallace?

JERRY RAY: That's crazy. In the few times we met during that period, I think three or four times, King's name was never mentioned. Never brought up. I've taken an oath on this, a sworn statement.

PLAYBOY: Isn't it true that you met with James in Chicago shortly after the Missouri escape?

JERRY RAY: Yeah, in Northbrook, Illinois. We met, and we'd drink, and we'd go into Chicago sometimes together. Maybe three or four times.

PLAYBOY: Another allegation is that you, Jerry, were the money man for that murder; that you got money from J. B. Stoner's right-wing, racist National States Rights Party and then said, "OK, I've got a guy who will kill King for you—my brother James."

JERRY RAY: It's all crazy.

PLAYBOY: Isn't it true that Jerry contacted Stoner to act as your attorney, James?

JAMES RAY: After the guilty plea, I had Jerry contact two attorneys—Stoner was

"The plastic surgery was to make my features more difficult to identify in pictures. Locksmithing I was just interested in."

one—in an effort to rescind Foreman's plea.

PLAYBOY: Why Stoner?

JAMES RAY: First time I heard of him, well, an organization wrote me a letter in England and offered me free legal services. And said Stoner was their lawyer. Later on, when I got to Memphis, I recalled his name.

PLAYBOY: Was the organization that wrote to you Stoner's group?

JAMES RAY: I don't know. That was the extent of it.

PLAYBOY: Is it true that Jerry once worked for J. B. Stoner?

JAMES RAY: Fact is, I was the one that told Jerry to go down there, you see, because the FBI was harassing him.

PLAYBOY: You told your brother to join Stoner? Why?

JAMES RAY: Around a lawyer, with a witness around, it'd be hard for the FBI to frame or harass him.

PLAYBOY: But with Stoner's reputation as a racist, wouldn't it have looked pretty bad for you—especially if he gave Jerry money for you?

JAMES RAY: He never gave me a nickel; I believe he paid you, Jerry, when you worked down there doing postal work.

JERRY RAY: Yeah, I got a salary when I worked for him.

PLAYBOY: Was that before or after King's assassination?

JERRY RAY: I never even heard of Stoner before Martin Luther King's death.

PLAYBOY: So both of you maintain this killing was not a brother operation?

JAMES RAY: Yes.

JERRY RAY: Yes.

[At that point, the interview was recessed. Arrangements were made for another meeting with Ray the following week, June 13. However, some days later, on Friday evening, June 10, the news broke: Ray had done the impossible—he had gone over the wall of an "escape-proof" prison. While national attention was focused on the woods around Petros, Tennessee, where the penitentiary is located, the interviewers traveled to Lake Zurich, Illinois. There, in a ramshackle structure just off the main highway, Jerry Ray agreed to continue his part of the conversation from a bar stool in a pizza parlor. Some highlights of the conversation follow.]

JUNE 11, 1977

PLAYBOY: How do you think James will get along on the loose?

JERRY RAY: Only thing that bothers me, it's just like Mark Lane said: The FBI keeps coming in on it. The FBI has no business in this. They came out here last night around three o'clock. I said, "You got an arrest warrant?" They said, "No," so I wouldn't talk to 'em. I said, "Why are you out here? He's on a state charge, a murder charge in Tennessee, not a Federal charge." They said, "Well, he might have crossed state lines." I said, "Well, if he can walk across that damn state line so fast, then he shouldn't be in prison at all."

PLAYBOY: Did you have any advance word that James might try to escape?

JERRY RAY: No. See, that's one reason nothin' comes out on him. Nobody knows what he's thinkin' or nothin', because he don't tell nobody nothin'.

PLAYBOY: What do you suppose James will do for money while he's out?

JERRY RAY: Well, he's been broken out before and he always managed to get some. He might even go look Hefner up and try to get some off him.

PLAYBOY: The press—and a lot of the public as well—is speculating that it was a setup, that James was kidnapped out of the prison.

JERRY RAY: Well, there weren't but six guys. It'd be hard for six guys to force him over the wall.

PLAYBOY: There's also been some talk that he might be shot while he's out there.

JERRY RAY: I don't know. I haven't thought about it too much.

PLAYBOY: Do you think he'll survive? It's pretty wild in those mountains.

Playboy, September 1977

JERRY RAY: He can eat a few rattlesnakes.

PLAYBOY: Do you think he'll hold anyone up to get money?

JERRY RAY: Well, that's his livelihood. That's his trademark, robbing people. He ain't gonna go out and apply for welfare. He'd have to paint himself black to draw welfare.

PLAYBOY: The racist in you seems to be coming out. You are one, aren't you?

JERRY RAY: No. Hell . . . the people I'd get on are Mexicans, takin' jobs from Americans. I'd like to get on that nigger and spick station in Chicago, Channel 26, and tell 'em that. But, listen, I went on a promotion tour with Mark Lane and Dick Gregory for their book. Lane's a Jew and Gregory's black. That's proof I ain't a racist.

PLAYBOY: Did you have anything to do with your brother's escape?

JERRY RAY: The FBI'd have me outside punchin' on me for that.

PLAYBOY: One final point, because it was difficult to believe James's answer when we asked him: What do you think he felt about Martin Luther King?

JERRY RAY: James didn't like him or dislike him. Same as me. Even if James had disliked him, well, if you went out and shot everybody you disliked, you'd have one hell of a record.

[At 4:30 A.M., June 13, the interviewers were told that James Earl Ray had just been captured. They returned to Tennessee and word was sent to them that Ray would complete the interview. They met Ray in a small room stacked high with dirty foam-rubber mattresses. Ray ambled in with a characteristic half-smile, looking to the interviewers both sheepish and somewhat proud of himself. His hands and arms were scratched and he had a few days' growth of beard. His brief recess from prison life—the first in nine years—seemed to have raised his spirits.]

PLAYBOY: How are you feeling?

RAY: All right. I've got poison ivy on my legs. It itches, but it's not very bad.

PLAYBOY: Were you trying to tell us something before you escaped? Were you thinking about the escape when you said you might go out if a wall fell down?

RAY: Yeah. Things like that go through your mind constantly, sometimes pretty strong and sometimes dormant. I suspect that everyone in here has it in the back of his mind. The only thing is whether they got the fortitude to go through with it. Some of them talk about it all the time. Of course, there's some who just want to stay and run the penitentiary.

PLAYBOY: You were out running for 54 and a half hours. Had you trained for the escape?

RAY: Not really. Most people in prison are fairly well conditioned. They run around the yard. That's about all there is to do.

PLAYBOY: What did you want to do after going over the wall?

RAY: Actually, my intention in escaping wasn't too much the getting away. The extreme difficulty is staying away permanently. I was thinking about possibly escaping and making some sort of arrangements to turn myself in in exchange for a trial. I know that don't work, but the only way that that would be successful is if the Attorney General entered into some type of friend-of-the-court arrangement with my lawyer. So I had it in the back of my mind to make some arrangements—public relations or something—to try to force the government to give me a trial. I figured if I could possibly make a deal, then maybe I could get Griffin Bell to come in. He's indicated that he wants a full airing of the situation. You know, I don't think the state has that much of a case against me.

"After escaping, I figured if I could possibly make a deal, then maybe I could get [Attorney General] Griffin Bell to come in. He's indicated that he wants a full airing."

I believe I'd have a good chance of getting acquitted.

PLAYBOY: But how would you have gotten word to Bell?

RAY: When I was arrested, they found two pieces of paper on me. One was a map of Tennessee and the other was the address of Nancy Becker [a newscaster from ABC-TV in Chicago who had spoken to Ray once before]. I would have made some kind of arrangement to contact Bell indirectly, through her.

PLAYBOY: Well, until you could get to her house, what would you have done if you had got through the dragnet and out of the area?

RAY: I would have done the same thing that I had done in Missouri. Go to one of these Goodwill places or a run-down place where you don't look too conspicuous going in there tattered up. Get some secondhand clothes and then go from there. I probably would have laid low for three or four days. Usually, the heat gets off after seven or eight days. Something else will happen and they can't concentrate on you. Then you can go ahead and get out.

PLAYBOY: How would you have lain low?

RAY: You would have to disguise your appearance and then go into some run-down neighborhood and rent a room.

Lay under a bridge, if you have to. Try to blend into the neighborhood. If it's a run-down neighborhood, I'd have a run-down appearance, which is probably where I would have went.

PLAYBOY: When did you start planning the escape?

RAY: After various adverse court decisions on my case. I'd say I had it in mind two, three months.

PLAYBOY: Why did you pick that particular time to escape?

RAY: I just picked this weekend. I thought that would be best. Things are less organized on the weekends. People are on vacations.

PLAYBOY: Is there less security?

RAY: Yeah, I suppose.

PLAYBOY: When did you make the final decision to go?

RAY: Friday. The same day. I thought that that was the time. I'd been thinking about it and that was the opportune time. So I just picked that day. It ended up that I did it on my own, but of course there were other people involved. You can't do anything in here alone. I'm talking about when you actually start the escape. For instance, when I was on the yard, 15, 20 people come around and they see me putting the ladder against the wall, so some of them followed me.

PLAYBOY: It wasn't organized?

RAY: They didn't know anything about it. They just seen a ladder and just instinctively started going over. About seven went over.

PLAYBOY: We know you used a ladder constructed from plumbing pipe and lightning conduit. But how exactly did you do it?

RAY: I gave it a little thought. Then I got the various things together. It was kind of simple. I just carried the pipe out on the yard. Usually, they check when you come outdoors. I got behind another convict to carry the materials on the yard. And, coincidentally, two, three fights started on the yard. They do that almost every night, fighting over ball games and things.

PLAYBOY: Come on. Was the fight really just a coincidence?

RAY: Yes.

PLAYBOY: What materials did you use in the escape?

RAY: I used a one-and-a-half-inch black pipe I got from the laundry. They put a lot of new equipment in and there were excess pipes and things. I just used what I needed.

PLAYBOY: Did you design the ladder yourself?

RAY: Yeah.

PLAYBOY: And you got all the pieces from the prison laundry?

RAY: Most of them.

PLAYBOY: Where did you get the others?

RAY: Oh, I don't know where I got all the nuts and bolts and things like that. Just

picked them up. [There were no nuts and bolts. The escape was made with a ladder constructed entirely from pipe.]

PLAYBOY: So you're going to stick to the story that this escape was yours from beginning to end?

RAY: Of course, my escape's mine. I mean, now all these other guys—the six or seven or whatever—who escaped, they were all on their own, I guess. Somebody told me a guard was reading a PLAYBOY magazine and that's why he didn't see them. [After the interviewers' last session with Ray, prison authorities announced that a guard had been fired for reportedly "reading on duty or looking the other way."]

PLAYBOY: Did you discuss the escape with anyone?

RAY: No. If I'd discussed it with a lot of guys, I'd probably have been shot going over the wall. I don't want to go too far in discussing this, but all those people ran off on their own. It was on the spur of the moment. There was no plotting with me or coercion or anything.

PLAYBOY: If there were, you wouldn't tell us, anyway, right?

RAY: That'd probably be right. But it didn't happen that way. If I had entered into even the vaguest conspiracy, I couldn't tell the press. I think the evidence now indicates that every one of the escapees was on their own. Most of them I didn't know, and the rest of them I just knew casually. The only individual I knew was my cellmate, Earl Hill, and, of course, he was always close by. The others, they were all around. They knew what was going on. There's one guy that worked in the kitchen, a black guy. He was looking out the window and he saw what was going on. He runs all the time for exercise. So he got the guards to let him out of the kitchen and ran around the yard and went over the wall. So it couldn't have been any conspiracy, 'cause he didn't know what was going on. He just happened to look out the kitchen window. It could just as easily have been a guard looking out the window.

PLAYBOY: Aren't you lying to us when you say you didn't work with someone on this escape?

RAY: No. I wouldn't want to go into too many details, but I'm not lying. But I don't want to take total responsibility or anything.

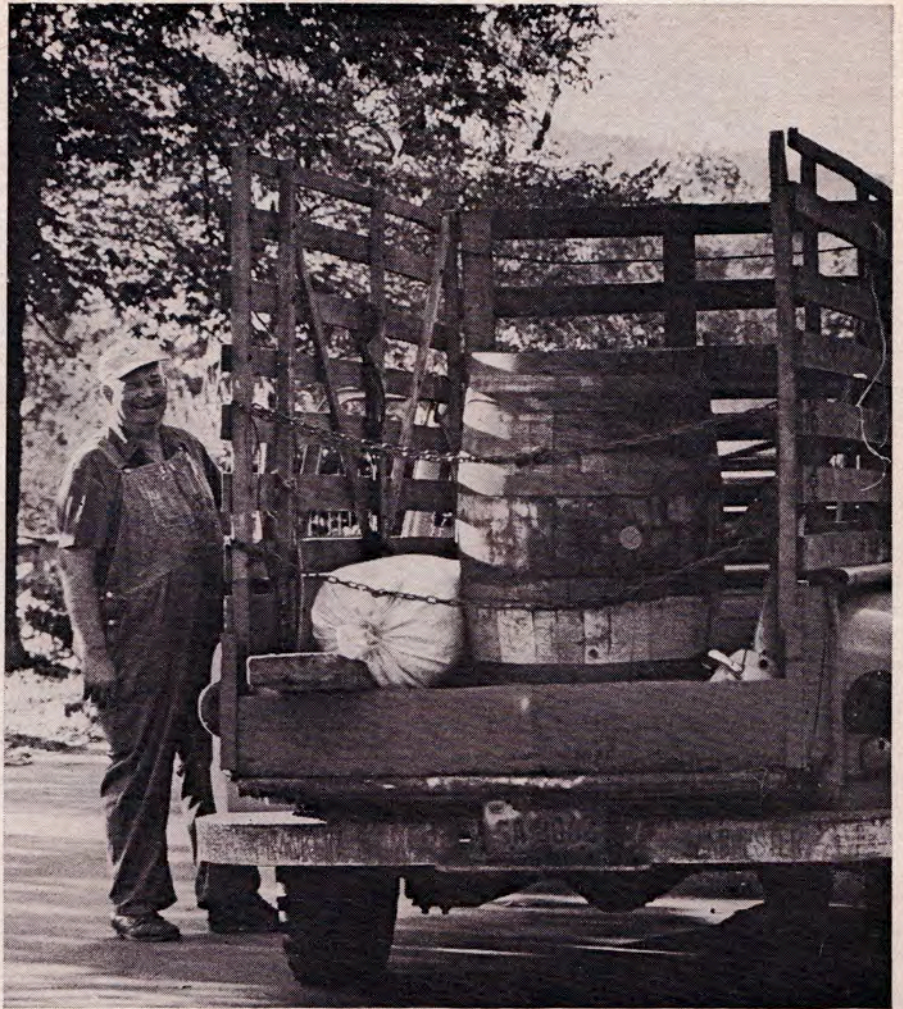
PLAYBOY: Anyway, you know you're a liar.

RAY: Yes, I know that.

PLAYBOY: How long did it take you to plan it?

RAY: Oh, it didn't take too long for that, two or three months. See, you have that stuff in the back of your mind. When you come to the penitentiary, you check out various escape routes, file them away and, if the opportunity arises, well, you can go ahead.

PLAYBOY: Did you have a pipe-threading
(continued on page 94)



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PLAYBOY INTERVIEW *(continued from page 87)*

machine to join the lengths of pipe or did you just happen to find the pipe threaded at both ends?

RAY: No, I didn't have no machine. You can accumulate that stuff over a certain length of time.

PLAYBOY: Where did you hide it?

RAY: I didn't hide it. I just left it where it was at. When you get ready, just take it.

PLAYBOY: And you put the pieces of pipe in your pants legs?

RAY: Yes, that's one of the methods—that's how I carried them to the yard, but I'm not sure we should go into all the details. Trade secrets and all that.

PLAYBOY: You couldn't possibly have carried it all by yourself that way.

RAY: I wouldn't want to comment on that.

PLAYBOY: How long did it take you to put it together once you were in the yard?

RAY: Oh, it didn't take long at all once I got started on it. Ten or fifteen minutes.

PLAYBOY: You mean you were out in the yard for 15 minutes putting the ladder together? And no guards noticed?

RAY: Yeah. Well, it was coincidental that a fight broke out. They were breaking the fights up. It wasn't a laxity of the guards or anything, the only thing was that this coincidence happened that we—that I—got a few breaks when the fight started.

PLAYBOY: Did you wait until the fight started before assembling?

RAY: Soon as the fight started, I started right then, because that was just the break I got. They were trying to keep the fight controlled.

PLAYBOY: People are going to find it difficult to believe the fight was coincidental.

RAY: I think so. Well, they tried a guy today. He fights all the time. They give him 15 days, established that he didn't know anything about the escape. I told him I would testify if it was necessary, but he said they didn't charge him. The fight was a good distraction, but it just happened that way. There was no large conspiracy.

PLAYBOY: Uh-huh. Not even a small one?

RAY: Not even a small fistfight.

PLAYBOY: Were you worried about getting shot as you climbed over the wall?

RAY: I thought about it later, but I didn't think about it too much as I was going over.

PLAYBOY: You never feared for your life?

RAY: Well, I wouldn't want to get killed going over the wall, but I think the escape was worth the effort. I was scared at one point. The pipe that I had was too short and it wouldn't reach the top of the wall where there was a break in the electric fence, so I moved it over to where the wall was about two feet lower. It touched the fence and the electric shock knocked me off the ladder. It must have

knocked the circuits out, because when I hit the fence again, the electricity wasn't going.

PLAYBOY: Did someone in the prison turn off the power for you?

RAY: Oh, no. No one else was involved. In fact, I didn't know anything about the other guys until I got up on the hill and I heard somebody run up beside me, so I figured someone may have been following me. Then I heard a bunch of shots and I heard cheering.

PLAYBOY: Cheering?

RAY: Yeah. Later on, I found out what it was. They shot the last guy to escape and he fell down. When he got up, the prisoners watching started cheering. Then they shot him again.

PLAYBOY: They shot him a second time?

RAY: Shot him in the head the second time. It just grazed him and knocked him out.

PLAYBOY: Did you hear anything else as you went away?

RAY: No. I heard them talking once or twice; sound carries quite a way in the mountains. I just kept going. Finally, the

"I carried the pieces of the ladder into the yard inside my pants legs, but I'm not sure we should go into all the details. Trade secrets and all that."

talk died out and that's the last that I heard. That's wilderness out there. I must have been places up there that no person's ever been, way back up in some of those gullies. There's heavy brush up there and things like that.

PLAYBOY: What was it like out there?

RAY: The mountains are pretty good. You hear a lot of rumors that there's all these snakes. I didn't see no snakes. All I saw was two squirrels and a ground hog. He was about two feet high and about five foot long. He ran before I did.

PLAYBOY: Did you feel free?

RAY: Yes; I'd rather be out there than in here.

PLAYBOY: What were you thinking about?

RAY: Usually, a food problem is what you have out there.

PLAYBOY: Did you take any provisions?

RAY: Just wheat germ. Mostly, I thought about food, that's the problem when you get out there. This time of year, there's nothing up there except green berries.

PLAYBOY: It would seem that after nine years in prison, the fact that you were out in the woods on your own would make you absolutely ecstatic.

RAY: Well, effectively, I was glad. Of course, you feel better than in jail, but, like I said, you don't have any food or anything. There is physical discomfort. But I think that the mental makes up for the physical. I can't describe all this. I felt fairly well mentally. I've been through this before, you know. If I had got out of the area, it might have been different. But ecstatic? I think that might be exaggerating a little bit.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any memories of your 54 and a half hours of freedom that stand out—were there any high points for you?

RAY: I was on one particular mountain one time—that must have been the highest point out there. You could see various towns and you could see a long ways off. That's a nice sight from up there. Something like California, like looking over Los Angeles; I was there once. I understand that a lot of people go up into these mountains to get away from it all, to be up that high. It's kind of a solitary feeling up there. I never did hear any dogs. These mountains are a big range. . . . The planes were flying over and they'd come back every ten or fifteen minutes, so they really didn't know where I was.

PLAYBOY: Could you hear the guards tracking you?

RAY: No. Later I heard they couldn't find the guard in charge of the dogs, but it would have been difficult to find me, anyway, because there were seven or eight men running in different directions and the dogs couldn't pick up all the trails. The reason that I got caught was more or less an accident. When it rains, the dogs can pick up a scent easier. I think it rained at six o'clock and I got arrested sometime later on that morning.

PLAYBOY: How did you react when those dogs came sniffing around you?

RAY: Actually, I didn't know the dogs were around. I thought they would bark. They used to have a lead dog here that would bark all the time, but they got rid of him and they got these new ones that are silent. They get up on you before you know it. Well, I looked up and they wasn't more than 20 feet away from me. They had five or six police with them. I lay on my back and just threw a few leaves over me, but it didn't do any good, because the dogs had my scent. And I didn't think nothin'. They just got me. That was it. They told me to get up. I just thought if they had me, I couldn't have got away if they was that close. They just handcuffed me and that was that. They asked me if anyone else was around

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and I said no. Shook me down and brought me back in.

PLAYBOY: What was the first thing they said to you?

RAY: They said not to move or they'd shoot me. 'Course, that wasn't inappropriate.

PLAYBOY: How did you feel when you were caught? Like crying?

RAY: I wouldn't want to give them the satisfaction of crying. Of course, there's no point in crying, anyway. It's disappointing being caught, but it's not the end of the world. There's tomorrow.

PLAYBOY: You mean you might be going out again?

RAY: There's always something that comes along later on. Naturally, I wasn't happy about being run down. But the hunger really kind of dulls your emotions in some ways.

PLAYBOY: There were some people who wanted to go out and use bullhorns, asking you to give up. Your attorney, for example. What would you have done if you had heard your lawyer calling down at you from a helicopter?

RAY: Ask him to throw down his I.D.

PLAYBOY: Were you able to sleep out there?

RAY: Yes, an hour or two at a time. I slept in the daytime and traveled at night. I never saw any caves up there, but there are a lot of cliffs with ledges on them. You can sit under the ledges. There are coal mines up there, but it would be foolish getting into one of those things. That's usually what they shake down first.

PLAYBOY: Were your cellmate, Earl Hill, or your friend Larry Hacker running with you?

RAY: No; Hill and Hacker and all of them got very close to the same area, but Hacker got arrested by some FBI men in a church. They spread-eagled him. Some FBI men were looking for me and Hacker said they knocked him in the head with a pistol. They were trying to find out where I was, but I was arrested by the prison authorities.

PLAYBOY: Why did those FBI men hit Hacker in the head?

RAY: They were trying to make him tell them where I was.

PLAYBOY: Are you saying they used brutality to get it out of him?

RAY: Yeah. I think the reason the FBI didn't beat him up more was because they had two Anderson County deputy sheriffs with them. And they drove him down the road by a food store or something and he said the FBI was trying to get the sheriffs away from him. I suppose so they could beat him some more. They thought he knew where I was at. Actually, I probably only spoke to Hacker two or three times on the volleyball court in

prison. He wouldn't have known where I was at, anyways.

PLAYBOY: But you were arrested by the prison authorities, right?

RAY: Yeah. The FBI arrested two or three of the prisoners. They were looking for me. When I was brought back, the prison official that arrested me, Warden Stonney Lane, he kept me away from them and took me right on in. And he told me later that I wouldn't be in contact with the Federals. See, they didn't have any jurisdiction and Governor Blanton told them he didn't want them down here. The only thing he wanted was for the FBI to watch the Tennessee borders, but they barged right on in.

PLAYBOY: What if you'd been shot? Have you ever felt that you'd rather be dead than spend the rest of your life in prison?

RAY: Well, I've never looked at this as a long-term thing. There's no way of knowing what's going to happen tomorrow, so I'll take it on that basis. As for being

"I don't consider myself a professional criminal any longer, because I was retired—if that's the right word for it—in 1967."

shot, I think I'd be doing something of a favor to the Government, or something. I'd rather be alive than dead.

PLAYBOY: You'd rather stay alive and take your chances that something will come along?

RAY: Well, yes, for something worth while.

PLAYBOY: Such as getting over the wall again?

RAY: Yeah, like getting over the wall. Ah, I didn't have to say that.

PLAYBOY: Let's go back to your early days and talk about how you got started. Why did you become a thief?

RAY: I don't know; that's very difficult to explain. I guess to supplement my income. It started in 1951, 1952. I held up a few liquor stores, smalltime stuff. I recall one time I robbed one with a sawed-off shotgun. When I ran out the door, through the back of the place, I tripped on a wire and shot myself in the foot.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever kill anyone?

RAY: No.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever shoot anyone?

RAY: No.

PLAYBOY: Stab anyone?

RAY: I can't remember ever stabbin' any-

one. Of course, I've been in a few fights.

PLAYBOY: Would you have any qualms about killing someone?

RAY: Yes, sir.

PLAYBOY: Would you kill to escape?

RAY: I can't see myself killing anyone to get out of the penitentiary both for moral and for legal reasons.

PLAYBOY: Would you ever shoot your way out?

RAY: No, I'd get out in a surreptitious manner.

PLAYBOY: Ever think of any crimes besides robbery? There was a report recently that you and your brother John discussed kidnaping someone for ransom after you escaped from Missouri.

RAY: That's completely false. I can think of a long line of offenses, maybe even including homicide, but kidnaping would be the last thing I would ever enter into. Chances of success are just nil, you might say.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel there's much chance for success in liquor-store robberies?

RAY: That type of robbery is nonsense. You don't get any money, plus you get just as much time as if you rob something substantial.

PLAYBOY: What do you consider substantial?

RAY: Well, a supermarket. That's really a corporation's money and they're probably gougin' it out of somebody else, anyway. Better to rob them than an individual.

PLAYBOY: So you have a set of principles?

RAY: See, you have to understand that when I got out of the Missouri penitentiary in 1967, I was in my late 30s. Crime isn't worth while then. So I had no intention of committing a crime again. My intention was to escape, not to go back out and start a series of petty robberies. I just can't think of any crime you could commit and get away with—well, who's this guy who jumped out of the plane with \$200,000—D. B. Cooper? Now, *then* you could quit and go about your business.

PLAYBOY: Did you consider that an ideal crime?

RAY: Tolerable.

PLAYBOY: Do you consider yourself a professional criminal?

RAY: I don't consider myself a professional criminal any longer, because I was retired—if that's the right word, for it—in 1967. I'd done enough time. Let someone else take over from there on.

PLAYBOY: It sounds as if you're making a moral argument and you mentioned a moral argument against killing. Do you have your own set of rights and wrongs?

RAY: I think you have to live with some type of code—or right or wrong, or whatever it is—in order to succeed in what you're trying to do. I don't know

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PLAYBOY INTERVIEW (continued from page 134)

about morals. That's just a personal feeling. I don't have any fixed ideas on what's right and wrong. If I did, I would probably be writing editorials in newspapers.

PLAYBOY: Is it wrong that you're in prison for killing King?

RAY: I believe that's wrong, but, on the other hand, I can't just sit here dwelling on the fact I'm innocent. I'm here, they got me framed. I look at it a different way. I had my opportunity when I escaped from Missouri. I should have stayed in Canada. It's difficult for me to explain all these things. I'm just looking at it this way: They've got me in here and it's up to me to get out. Guilt or innocence is inconsequential. Of course, from your point of view and the public's point of view, that's the wrong way to look at it. But they got me in here, either rightly or wrongly, and it's up to me to get out—rightly or wrongly. I've read some of these philosophy books, like the *History of Philosophy*, and in one of them I read that a handful of might is a bagful of right. I go along with that. I may have the right, but that doesn't mean anything. See, there's something about always saying you're innocent; I don't like to keep saying I'm innocent. That seems like you're crying or something.

PLAYBOY: Are you religious? Do you believe in God?

RAY: I don't disbelieve in Him, but I really don't give too much thought to the other side. I was christened a Catholic. I went to church when I was living in Illinois. My grandmother was Irish and was hooked on the Catholic religion. My mother was Catholic.

PLAYBOY: What kind of man was your father?

RAY: That's hard to describe; I don't like to be making judgments on others. I've always gotten along with him fine.

PLAYBOY: Did he treat you well?

RAY: Yeah, I can't complain. Of course, that was during the Depression. Everyone wasn't doing well. I'd say about 90 percent wasn't working. He had various jobs, mostly labor jobs.

PLAYBOY: And what did you do?

RAY: Other than going to school, I went to work when I was 15 and went into the Army when I was 17. I went to work in a shoe company in Hartford, Illinois; that's where my maternal grandparents lived. That's a suburb of St. Louis.

PLAYBOY: What was your dad in prison for?

RAY: It had something to do with money. I think it was for grand larceny, I believe.

PLAYBOY: Your father was a thief and both of your brothers have done time. In fact, one—John—is in prison now for bank robbery. It kind of runs in the family, doesn't it?

RAY: The relatives on my mother's side were immigrants from Ireland and none of them had any criminal records, except one. But on my father's side, there was this outlaw stuff. I think Jimmy Carter said one of his ancestors was a horse thief. It's no big deal.

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about your brother Jerry? He obviously feels a great deal for you?

RAY: Well, Jerry's all right. I like him and I assume he likes me, too. I just don't like to get too expressive, these terms love and all that stuff.

PLAYBOY: Why not?

RAY: There are just certain terms that I don't care about using, because they sound mushy or something. Your mother might use that term or something, but I don't think that a man sits around talking about love and so on. It sounds sort of odd to me.

PLAYBOY: Were your family ties close?

RAY: Yes, I think they always were. When I was ten or twelve years old, I used to

"They got me in here, either rightly or wrongly, and it's up to me to get out—rightly or wrongly... I don't like to keep saying I'm innocent. That seems like you're crying or something."

spend most of my time in Quincy, Illinois. My grandfather used to run a tavern and I used to hang around there quite a bit.

PLAYBOY: Were you always a loner?

RAY: There are degrees between being an introvert and an extrovert. You can't just associate with everyone that comes along. But most people, whether they're man, woman or in between, don't want to get associated with me in any manner. I can understand that.

PLAYBOY: Do you have a girlfriend on the outside?

RAY: No, most of my associates are in jail.

PLAYBOY: Do you have some good friends in prison?

RAY: Yes, but I don't like to mention any names. I have some people I associate with more closely than others. You have something in common with them.

PLAYBOY: You've expressed yourself very coldly throughout this interview. Do you have any strong emotions? Can you get angry or love someone?

RAY: No, I can't explain about the emotions. I understand certain types of

individuals, say the Latins, are more expressive than others. But I can't compare myself to someone else, to how emotional they get. For instance, women—they'll break down and cry and all that stuff.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever cried?

RAY: Not for a long time, since I was 12 or 14.

PLAYBOY: Were you more expressive then than you are now?

RAY: I don't believe so. I don't think I've changed too much between now and when I was 12 or 13. You may look at things in a different perspective, where you get more critical of things. I think that a person can be emotional and still be cold and hardhearted; the emotions don't have to be on the surface.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever been in love with a woman?

RAY: I've never been married or anything like that. I lived with them a few times.

PLAYBOY: Did you love those women?

RAY: I doubt that very much, because I never had a long period of association. I mean, usually just two or three months with most of them. I respect them and think they're probably more of a higher human than the man is. They seem more independent than the man is. I'm not saying anything about women's lib. I don't agree with that. You know, women were more concerned with appearances than men 20 years ago. Now it seems things have been reversed. I'm just basing this on observing them professionally. For instance, Dan Rather interviewed me once. He gave me the impression that he was concerned with what the producers wanted. On the other hand, I was interviewed by Nancy Becker and she was less concerned about what the producers wanted.

PLAYBOY: When you lived with a woman, was it just an arrangement of convenience?

RAY: I think it was instinctive to be involved with the opposite sex.

PLAYBOY: Did you feel affection for any of them?

RAY: Yes.

PLAYBOY: What ended the relationships?

RAY: I'm usually moving quite a bit when I'm outside.

PLAYBOY: Did you feel sad leaving those women?

RAY: Not particularly; but when you leave any place, if someone was there, you get kind of an emotional feeling about leaving, because you know you won't be back.

PLAYBOY: You said you liked Latins. Is that because of your trip to Puerto Vallarta?

RAY: In Mexico, they have a different culture, but I don't have any objections. I kind of like Mexico and Mexicans. I been down there two or three times. It's an earthy place.

PLAYBOY: Was the living good down there?

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RAY: Fairly good, yes. You know, you get used to living with what you're unaccustomed to, I guess.

PLAYBOY: It's been reported that you had serious girlfriends down there, even proposed marriage to one.

RAY: No. Oh, I was in and out of various red-light establishments, but down there they're different from the United States, more acceptable.

PLAYBOY: Throughout this interview, you've claimed to be innocent of King's assassination. You've just escaped and been caught again. Your legal options seem almost exhausted. What chance do you think you have of ever getting out?

RAY: I don't think that I'll have too much of a chance getting out legally unless the FBI information is declassified. If all this material would be declassified in some kind of proceeding, I'd be willing to forget the whole thing.

PLAYBOY: You mean if everything were declassified and you saw that there was nothing that would clear you, you'd give up attempts for a new trial?

RAY: Yes.

PLAYBOY: Do you really think the FBI has material that would clear you?

RAY: I'm positive. I told the House committee the only thing I wanted was to get this material declassified in the Justice Department. Judge John Lewis Smith, Jr., in Washington sealed a lot of the material. Get him to unseal it. That's the only thing I want. I don't want any type of immunity or any type of favors. Only thing I want is to get this material made public. See, we've never been able to get a scrap of evidence in eight years, so I wrote them a letter and told them that I didn't think I would testify fully before the committee until we got some assurances from General Bell and this Judge Smith that they would make all these records public. That's the only thing I care about.

Course, I'm not even sure the files would help me. I believe they would, because if they wouldn't, they wouldn't make such an effort to suppress them.

PLAYBOY: Did anyone ever tell you anything or show you anything that would lead you to believe there is material in those files that would help your case?

RAY: Fact is, when I was jailed in Memphis, I had two policemen guarding me all the time. A couple of times, they told me they'd investigated the case and a lot of them had been right on the scene of the crime. They told me the government's case wasn't like that being published in the newspapers. For instance, one time they told me that every policeman in Memphis within four miles of King when he was shot was required to make a sworn statement of just what the policemen were doing at that particular time—because

there was some concern that the Memphis authorities might be blamed for the shooting. They said those statements didn't support the government.

PLAYBOY: You sound indomitable, despite your situation. And you've spent more years in solitary than many inmates ever spend in prison. How do you survive?

RAY: In Nashville, I was in solitary for five years [*prison officials say it was four years*]. Corrections Commissioner Harry Avery told me there was a possibility I'd get out of solitary if I didn't make any efforts to get the case overturned. He said he was speaking for the highest authority, which I assumed was the governor. The only way solitary affected me is my concentration. For example, normally if I read a book, I just read it straight through. In segregation, though, you can only read 30 or 40 pages at a time and then you have to stop. Of course, it runs you down physically, but when you're out two or three months, you get recuperated.

"I'm gonna fight a transfer to a Federal prison. They're going to have to use physical force to get me out of here. The FBI has agents in these prisons. An individual could kill you."

PLAYBOY: That sort of isolation didn't affect you mentally?

RAY: I don't know if it did or not. I may have gotten funny in the head.

PLAYBOY: You've come off as a very tough character. Is anybody going to get the best of James Earl Ray?

RAY: I don't know. Legally they have, I know that.

PLAYBOY: As of this moment, the Tennessee governor is asking that you be put in Federal prison. How do you feel about that?

RAY: Oh, I'm gonna fight that. They're going to have to use physical force to get me out of here. See, the FBI has agents in residence in all these different prisons. An individual could kill you.

PLAYBOY: Do you mean that if you were in a Federal penitentiary, you think the FBI would have someone kill you?

RAY: Yeah, I think it might be similar to the King operation. They'd get the security off or they might put you on one of those drug projects or something. They tried to transfer me once to the Springfield, Missouri, behavior-modification program, a mental program where they give

you drugs. This was at Nashville. The deputy warden called me down and said they was sending me there. I told him he had no such authority and he said he was going to do it anyway. So I sued. In the end, nothing happened.

PLAYBOY: Let's ask this once again: What would you say is the single most important fact that proves your innocence?

RAY: As I said, the suppression of all the evidence by the Government.

PLAYBOY: Not that you didn't pull the trigger to kill King?

RAY: Well, yes, but not from a legal point.

[*The prison guards entered the room to take Ray back to his cell. As Ray began to walk away, there was a final, hurried exchange.*]

PLAYBOY: You're sure, James, that you didn't kill Martin Luther King?

RAY: Well, I'm not sure until I get the evidence out of the Justice Department.

PLAYBOY: What? You have to know if you did it.

RAY: I'm really serious. I don't think anything will be resolved until we get that. I'll just be making denials and the Justice Department will be saying I'm guilty and that'll be it. This is an unusual case.

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PLAYBOY: You've just heard that the results of the polygraph test you took at our request show you were not telling the truth. If the test is reliable, it means you did kill King and you did it alone. What's your reaction?

RAY: Well, I don't know if there's anything accurate about these lie-detector tests. Senator Sam Ervin, I think, called it a medieval contraption or something. See, when I took the test, I had a headache all day. I took a bunch of aspirin. I don't know if that would affect the test or not. They also asked me a series of [*control*] questions about other robberies—a lot of those questions can cause certain anxiety if you've been accused of them.

Another time, I was given a psychological-stress test that showed the opposite. [*The psychological-stress evaluation, or P.S.E., is a test in which a tape of the subject's voice is analyzed for stress. Although neither polygraph nor P.S.E. results are generally admissible in court, the P.S.E. is widely considered to be the more controversial.*] I think you could get someone to argue that this one's false and the P.S.E. is correct. It was done without me being there, so I wouldn't have worried one way or the other. I think it's best to answer questions when you're not hooked up and all that stuff—machines. But I'm still more concerned about the Justice Department files and this Rosen business than I am with this test.

