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54/07/23 Youthful Voices Penetrate Grim Stillness at Inquest

Cleveland Plain Dealer

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Youthful Voices Penetrate Grim Stillness at Inquest

BY NATE SILVERMAN

You could hear the proverbial pin drop among the spectators, but the cries of children playing outside the shiny new schoolhouse almost drowned out the voices of Dr. Samuel H. Sheppard and Coroner Samuel R. Gerber.

While the crowd in the Normandy School auditorium in Bay Village had been restless at times as earlier witnesses testified at the coroner's inquest yesterday, it became dead silent and serious as the young osteopath began relating events the night his wife was killed.

All ears strained to hear the low-pitched voices as the former Cleveland Heights High School athlete and the coroner exchanged questions and answers. Some of those in the rear of the large, airy combination gymnasium and auditorium disdained chairs, preferring to stand to catch a better view of the handsome witness and his now-familiar therapeutic collar.

Some Carry Children

Most of the more than 100 in the audience were Bay Village housewives, eager to hear first hand of the slaying which shocked the quiet community early on July 4.

Some wore housedresses and carried children in their arms. Others wore sundresses and more dressy clothing. Mingling with them were a few adult males and teen-age children.

In the crowd, too, were some curious from other parts of the county, including some of the habitués of downtown criminal and divorce courtrooms.

Automobiles began arriving at the parking lot of the suburbs, new school at 26920 Normandy Road, long before the inquest was slated to start.

Parking Space Parked

When reporters arrived a few minutes before 9 a. m. they found the lot full and cars lined on both sides of the gravel street on which new homes have only recently sprung up.

Inside the gymnasium, whose stage does not yet have its full complement of curtains and equipment, spectators already were in their chairs waiting for the proceeding to start.

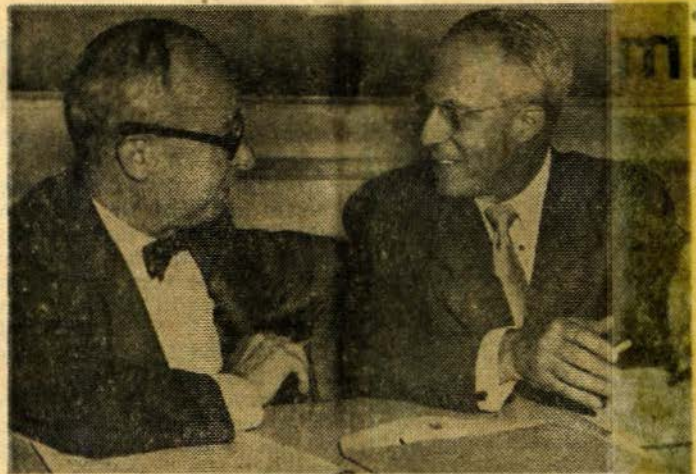
During the morning and most of the afternoon the quiet among the crowd was broken several times by spectators coming or going or by a baby's cry.

Sisters Argue Theories

But when the investigation's central figure was testifying, his almost-whispered statements were broken only by the occasional squeech of rubber-soled shoes as a reporter or police official left or entered the room.

And the crowd was almost silent, too, as it filed out and dispersed when the inquiry was recessed for the day. Within minutes only two maintenance men remained in the building.

Outside, the street was clear,



CHIEF QUIZZERS. Assistant County Prosecutor Saul S. Dancau (left) and Coroner Samuel R. Gerber confer before starting to question witnesses at the afternoon session of the coroner's hearing on the Sheppard murder.

except for a family watching in front of their home across the street and reporters listening to two West Side sisters arguing their opposite theories of the case.

Like many of the spectators, they said the hearing had not caused them to change their views.