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Editorial Pages

CC/Part II

Fishermen in a Hostile Sea

Cab Drivers Honor Slain Comrade

By ERIC MALINIC, Times Staff Writer

"A lot of them call it fishing," Eddie Nakasaki said as he gestured toward the throng of taxi drivers.

"They call the city their ocean," he said. "The cabs are their boats, the fares their fish. They are the fishermen—the pescadores."

"Cris was a pescador, a good one, and he caught a lot of fish. But the last one was a shark, and it cost him his life."

Nakasaki and other drivers—more than 200 of them—gathered at the Immaculate Conception Church at 1452 W. 9th St. on Monday morning for the funeral of Cristobal Duarte, one of their own.

Duarte, 36, was shot to death by a fare last Tuesday night in front of Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital, a suspect arrested moments later has been charged with murder.

After the funeral Mass, a total of 250 vehicles—about 200 of them taxis—joined in an hour-long procession to Holy Cross Cemetery in the Baldwin Hills area.

Police said it was one of the longest funeral corteges in the city's history.

Dangerous Job

John Cripps, secretary of the Independent Taxi Owners Assn., said in a statement to which Duarte belonged, said the drivers had turned out en masse to honor Duarte and to remind the city that it was a dangerous job taxi-driving is.

David Shapiro, president of the companion United Independent Taxi Drivers Inc., was on hand with many of his members, and he shared Cripps' sentiments.

"Being a cab driver is scary as hell," he said.

"You find yourself looking for a bulge in a guy's clothing, or a bag in his hand,

You find yourself worrying about what he's carrying in his briefcase."

But Nakasaki said that being a cabbie "can be a lot of fun, too—a chance to meet a lot of interesting characters."

"There's the freedom of nobody telling you what to do," he said, "the freedom of never having to punch a time clock."

"Cris knew about the danger—he'd been robbed five times before. But he still went back out on the streets—he loved it."

Duarte, a native of Guatemala, came to this country five years ago "with just about nothing," Nakasaki said.

"He started out like most of us, work-

'Cris knew about the danger—he'd been robbed five times before.'

ing for Yellow (the Yellow Cab Co.), Nakasaki continued. "Then, a few years ago, when the independents opened up, he got one of the early slots."

Nakasaki explained that the slot—one of the city's approximately 1,400 licensed permits to operate a cab—probably cost Duarte about \$10,000, the going rate then for the freely marketed permits. With hard work, his efforts said, Duarte was later able to buy a second permit.

"He was proud of what he had accomplished," Nakasaki said. "He was proud of being a Guatemalan, and he was proud of his permanent residency status."

Duarte, who left a pregnant wife, several children and other dependent relatives when he died, "had been looking

out for a lot of people," Nakasaki said.

"You see all those cabs here today?" the cab driver asked. "That's his family. He fed a lot of mouths."

Cripps said that Duarte had been behind the wheel for about three hours last Tuesday night when he picked up a man on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood shortly before midnight.

"The guy apparently had him drive down DeLongpre (Avenue), Cripps said. "They stopped right beside the hospital."

Charged With Murder

Shapiro said three guards at the hospital heard several shots, two of which struck Duarte in the head.

"The guards saw the suspect running from the cab," Shapiro said. "They gave chase and captured him."

Ismar Ahmed, 30, was booked on suspicion of murder. Police said he apparently was trying to rob Duarte when he opened fire.

"For someone to try a robbery like that is insane," Shapiro said.

"Taxi drivers don't carry that much money," he said. "To risk the gas chamber or spending a significant part of your life in jail for practically nothing is an absurdity on its face."

But the drivers questioned Monday agreed that while it may be absurd, it is not all that uncommon.

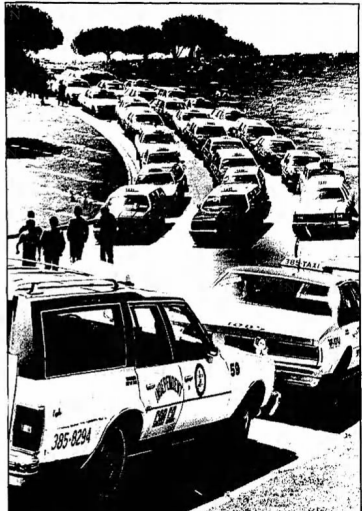
"There must be four or five robberies a month," Cripps said.

Nakasaki agreed.

"That's the way it is out there," he said.

"You're like a pinball in a machine, bouncing around, gathering as many points as you can."

"You've just gotta make sure you don't end up in the wrong slot."



Taxis lined up at Holy Cross Cemetery for funeral of slain Cristobal Duarte.

Bradley Opens Drive to Limit City Fire and Police Pensions

By VICTOR MERRIN, Times Staff Writer

Mayor Tom Bradley, kicking off a campaign to limit retirement benefits for Los Angeles police and firefighters, warned Monday of cuts in police and fire service and the loss of 1,000 city jobs unless the pension system is revised.

Bradley made the fire predictions at a news conference that inaugurated the campaign in favor of a June 8 city ballot measure, Charter amendment H, that would place a 3% per year cap on cost-of-living increases in police and firefighter pensions.

"We've reached a point where we have to make a choice," Bradley said. "Either we permit this pension system to run out of control and thus destroy the fiscal integrity of this city or we do something about it."

Bradley said the city Charter amendment is a "drastic action" needed to control a pension system that "has simply grown to be too high."

The mayor's remarks were immediately challenged by representatives of police and firefighter unions.

"This is a manufactured crisis. It exists only on paper with inflated figures that are used to justify an unwarranted attack on fire and police pensions," said Lyle Hall, president of the United Firefighters of Los Angeles.

Rick Helms of the Police Protective League labeled the Charter amendment, which was placed on the ballot by the City Council, a "breach of faith" that severed a contract between the city and its police and firefighters. And he said that if approved by the voters, the amendment would be challenged in court.

The ballot measure would affect pensions of active duty police officers and firefighters hired before December 1980. Current rules set their retirement pay increases to the annual rise in the consumer price index. The amendment would impose a 3% ceiling on the annual increase for all pension benefits earned after the date of the election. Those already drawing pensions would not be affected.

A Charter amendment adopted by voters in 1980 placed a similar 3% cap on pension increases for police and firefighters hired after December 1980.

In launching what is expected to be a \$400,000 campaign to adopt the pension limits, Bradley told reporters that the city's pension costs this year jumped \$56 million and as a result, 2,000 city jobs were eliminated because they could not be funded.

\$126,430 Welfare Fraud Reported Woman Accused of Having Computer Send Phony Checks

By BILL FARR, Times Staff Writer

A former Los Angeles County welfare worker was accused Monday of programming her computer to send out \$69 fraudulent checks, totaling \$126,430, over a five-month period last year.

Vicki Lynn Gray got some help, according to Deputy Dist. Atty. Robert Kuhnt, from another department of Public Social Services employee.

Kuhnt said authorities caught on to the alleged scheme last December, when a postal worker became suspicious upon discovering more than 30 welfare warrants addressed to a single residence.

Investigators theorize that Gray, a computer terminal operator at the Department of Public Social Services' office in South Los Angeles, was assisted in covering up the fraudulent checks by Diane Bettine Harrison, supervisor of quality control in the same office.

Gray and Harrison were charged with stealing public funds and grand theft.

Gray was fired in January, and Harrison resigned the

same month after she was informed of the investigation.

The fraudulent checks were made out, Kuhnt said, to several real people and some fictitious names. Two people who allegedly cashed some of the checks, Jean Myers Suarez and Lavetta Mae Dowd, also were charged with grand theft and forgery.

The suspects successfully cashed \$53,160 worth of the fraudulent checks, Kuhnt said. District attorney's welfare fraud investigators Dwayne Barrett and Robert Tucka have recovered \$50,852 in uncashed warrants.

Gray, 21, of Los Angeles surrendered in Los Angeles Municipal Court Monday, but her arraignment was delayed for two weeks. Harrison, 33, of Hawthorne, Suarez, 30, Inglewood, and Dowd, 38, Los Angeles were arraigned and had their preliminary hearings set for May 28.

Kuhnt said six other people are suspected of taking part in the scheme.

Nuclear War Evacuation Plan Challenged Prove Sincerity by Building Out-of-State Shelters, Hahn Tells U.S.

By JOHN KENDALL, Times Staff Writer

Supervisor Kenneth Hahn challenged federal officials Monday to start building underground relocation centers in four nearby states if they are sincere about protecting Californians from nuclear attack.

The veteran Los Angeles County official told a press conference that it is "almost axiomatic" to suggest to local officials that they prepare for a nuclear assault.

"If (the nuclear threat) dwarfs every other subject that we can discuss in our everyday lives," he said, "The supervisor, who was deeply involved in civil defense planning against atomic war in the 1950s, said the federal government's civil defense plan for California has 'several weaknesses.'"

Hahn received copies of an August, 1977, document entitled, "A Feasibility Study of Crisis Relocation Planning for California," from federal officials in Washington, D.C. about three weeks ago.

He said the plan proposes the evacuation of California, principally to "host" communities in the Central Valley.

Hahn suggested that if civil defense planners are sincere, they should construct and supply centers for mass evacuation in Utah, Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico.

Even then, Hahn said, there would be a severe problem of how to evacuate California's millions to out-of-state complexes.

He recalled another press conference last January, when county Road Commissioner T. A. Tidemann reported, at Hahn's request, that it would take from 3 to 5 1/2 days to evacuate 7.2 million residents from Los Angeles County.

Hahn said then, and repeated Monday in a proposed motion to be presented to the Board of Supervisors today, that it would be "virtually impossible" to evacuate the county's residents.

Hahn said that at today's board meeting, he will call for the county's chief administrative officer and department heads to study and report on the 1977 federal plan.

... 30 middle-aged broods playing kazoo!" Don't let THEM hear you say that, Jack.

Where Will It All End? Even the YMCA permits nude swimming in its downtown facility. (However, membership is limited to men there.)

Croix de Bou-Wow: In recognition of the volunteer work they've performed for the Orange County Animal Control Shelter, the Explorer Scouts of Post 338 will be awarded 72,900 surplus dog license tags. No ceremonies are planned, though. The scouts will sell the tags for scrap.

Topical Fare: The Easter menu at the Belle-Vue French restaurant in Santa Monica included lapin (rabbit). But, of course.

Alleged Outing for Convicted Killer Probed

By ERIC MALINIC, Times Staff Writer

An investigation is under way into allegations that officials at the California Institution for Men at Chino allowed a convicted double murderer to leave the grounds several months ago for a shopping trip in Beverly Hills.

One of the officials—Alvord Price, the prison's chief disciplinary officer—resigned last week "under prejudice," according to Phil Guthrie, a spokesman for the state Department of Corrections.

Guthrie declined to disclose what other officials are subjects of the investigation, which has been under way for about three months.

The prisoner who visited Beverly Hills to buy clothes for a scheduled court appearance is Enrique Jaime Sandoval, 52.

Convicted in 1971

In 1971, a Superior Court jury in San Francisco convicted him of murdering a San Francisco couple who had hired him as a houseboy after he served a two-year prison term for molesting two Millbrae boys.

He originally was sentenced to die in the San Quentin gas chamber, but high court decisions reduced that sentence to life imprisonment. He served time in state prisons at Vacaville, Solano and San Luis Obispo before his transfer to Chino in 1980.

Guthrie said it is "not unusual" to have a murderer who is deemed trustworthy "incarcerated at the Chino facility."

The main part of the institution—where Sandoval is

Sandoval has a reputation for 'ingratiating himself' with the staff.

housed—is classified as minimum-security.

Guthrie said Sandoval has been employed in clerical jobs at Chino and is regarded as "a good worker."

But prison sources who asked not to be named said Sandoval has a reputation as a "weasel," the "sort of prisoner who is notorious for ingratiating himself" with members of the staff.

Guthrie declined to reveal any further details of the investigation, saying only that it "involves the removal of an inmate from the institution contrary to departmental rules."

"You don't take a guy out of the institution unless there's a good and legitimate reason, like a funeral," Guthrie said.

Investigators "have not uncovered anything" to substantiate published allegations that Price was prompted to help Sandoval by an \$8,000 loan from the murderer's girlfriend, Guthrie said.

"So far, we have not uncovered anything criminal in nature," he says later.

1960 Notoriety

Sandoval first gained notoriety in 1960 when police accused him of killing Mr. and Mrs. Donald Douglas of Millbrae out of about \$30,000.

The wife went to Puerto Rico, dying in San Juan a short time later. Sandoval told police she had fallen from a cliff and drowned. Her husband committed suicide a few days later.

Sandoval was convicted of molesting the Douglas children. After his parole in 1968, Edelmira Heras, 63, and Carmen Acosta, 36, took him into their home in Inglewood.

In his trial for their murders, prosecutors said he shot the couple and dumped the bodies off a cliff on the San Mateo coast after they decided to evict him.

Around the Southland

Space Life Has Possibilities, but the Commute's a Little Long

By STEVE HARVEY, Times Staff Writer

Tired of the real estate crunch? So are members of the L-5 Society, who plan to be living in outer space by the year 2000, with or without rent control.

The group's 1,000 earthlings try to drum up excitement for accelerated space development through such events as their recent national convention at the Airport Hyatt Hotel. The sound of jet engines passing overhead was inspiring to all, as was the address by science fiction author Robert Heinlein.

L-5, by the way, refers to a gravity-stable point (and theoretical settlement location) in the moon's orbit, about 250,000 miles from Earth.

L-5 has a local chapter, called OASIS (Organization for Advancement of Space Industrialization and Settlement), which holds BYOT (bring your own Thing) potluck dinners and sponsors lectures on topics like the mapping of Saturn's moons (still ripe for subvention).

"The space shuttle showed we're talking about things that are possible in the near future," says OASIS President Terry Savage, a 27-year-old TRW employee. "I

intend to retire to a space colony."

So why was Marty Ferguson struggling in Ventura ocean waters, 70 feet offshore, with a cocktail standing on his head? Well, Ferguson had been taking the bird for a walk, he told police, when it flew into the water. He chased it and the tide pulled them out. Ferguson can't swim, but a passer-by, Michael Rausen, jumped in and pulled the pair to safety. A good thing. Otherwise, Ferguson might have had to ask the bird to trade positions with him.

A press release from the Arleta Chamber of Commerce announces that a "30-member contingent of community members" will don trash bags and perform "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" on kazoo during Sunday's benefit for the city's Little Leaguers. In an accompanying note to The Times, Chamber of Commerce President Jack Sheffield writes: "How can you resist