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Above: Dr. George Hodel bought the Mayan temple–styled house on Franklin Avenue in 1940. It was the scene of infamous parties, and, claims his son Steve Hodel, the place where the Black Dahlia was murdered. *Opposite:* Tamar Hodel, the doctor's daughter, in her twenties.

THE SINS OF THE FATHER

THE BLACK DAHLIA MURDER HORRIFIED HOLLYWOOD AND NEVER LOST ITS GRIP ON OUR IMAGINATION. HERE, THE STORY OF THE SUSPECT WHO GOT AWAY, THE POLICEMAN SON WHO PROVED HIS GUILT AND THE HIDDEN LEGACY OF HIS DAUGHTER, THE GIRL WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

WRITTEN BY **SHEILA WELLER**

Tamar Nais Hodel, the girl on the witness stand at Hollywood's criminal court, was 14 years old in December 1949, but she seemed older. Involuntarily worldly. A photo taken soon after reveals a kind of Beat Generation Marilyn Monroe: unsmiling, lush-featured, with a platinum blond beehive, big, red lips and a snug white cardigan. She was a smart girl, private school–educated, with rarefied tastes. But Tamar was, without a doubt, tormented. And the person who did the tormenting was her father.

George Hodel stared at his daughter from the defendant's table. He was charged with incest. A doctor with a genius IQ who specialized in venereal disease, Hodel was an admirer of the Marquis de Sade and a friend of movie, literary and art world libertines like John Huston, Man Ray, John Farrow and Henry Miller. Hodel hosted bacchanalian parties in his Mayan temple–styled home, built by Lloyd Wright on Franklin and Normandie, in the L.A. neighborhood now called Los Feliz. It was in that house, prosecutors said, he raped his daughter.

One of the lawyers for the defense, Robert Neeb, grilled Tamar on the stand that day. The defense team's strategy was to make the girl come across as unstable, a pathological liar. Neeb's effort to do just that would have unintended consequences that would reverberate for decades.

Two years before the Hodel trial, a savage murder shocked Hollywood. The mutilated body of 22-year-old Elizabeth Short, soon to be dubbed the "Black Dahlia," was found in a vacant lot. No arrest had ever been made. To show the Hodel jury how "crazy" Tamar was, Neeb asked the girl: "Isn't it a fact that you told a roomer in your mother's home in San Francisco that you knew your father had killed the Black Dahlia?"

"No," Tamar said.

But the terrified girl wasn't telling the truth. Tamar *did* believe it—and with reason. She lived in her father's house and heard the whispers, including his veiled warnings. "It's an evil place," said the art photographer Edmund Teske. "Women were tortured for sport there. Murders happened there."

Now, at the age of 80, Tamar is in a hospice in Hawaii. In fragile health, she wants the truth to come out. Not the bits and pieces glimpsed by the world up to now, but her whole harrowing story. I'm the only journalist who has ever interviewed her. Tamar describes an existence of abuse and violence, fear and guilt, all wrapped up in bohemian glamour. She was a stubborn idealist who lived a life following the principles of racial integration when you could be killed for doing so—and a desperate optimist who named her last three children (sons) Peace, Love and Joy. "She wanted so badly to be good," her older daughter, Fauna Hodel, says. "Wanted" is the sad key word.

Her daughters, Fauna (a gallerist and motivational speaker) and Fauna-Elizabeth (née Deborah) Simon (a photo editor), are true survivors, each from a different bad B movie. Also safely emerged from the mayhem is Tamar's half-brother Steve, who grew up in an astonishingly licentious household to become, of all things, a cop. Steve Hodel drew on all of his skills and training during a 15-year-long investigation to discover whether his own father murdered Elizabeth Short. He could not have done it without Tamar. At critical junctures, Tamar, and then one of her daughters, connected the dots. Dr. George Hodel as the Black Dahlia killer is a theory that more and more people support. But the victimization of Tamar Hodel is not theory. It is fact. And the details of her abuse—compounded by the tragic patterns created—defy belief.

Hollywood has presented, on screen and in real life, many stories of decadence, melodrama and crime, some of the best originating in the glamorous noir 1940s. Most of these stories were invented or exaggerated.

This one isn't.

Born in 1907 to wealthy Russian Jewish parents, George Hodel was raised in Pasadena as an indulged prodigy. At nine, he played major piano concerts. Handsome in a brooding, romantic way, he entered the California Institute of Technology at 14 and soon had an affair with a professor's wife, who bore his baby. (Hodel would ultimately father 11 children by five women.)

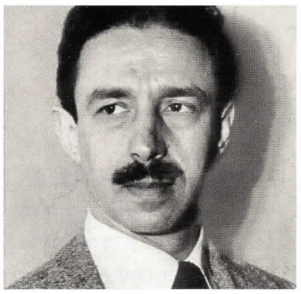
"SUPPOSIN' I DID KILL THE BLACK DAHLIA? THEY CAN'T PROVE IT NOW," SAID HODEL IN ONE OF THE SECRET TAPE RECORDINGS.

Hodel's teenage best friend was another rare bird, the talented and charismatic John Huston, son of Walter. Huston and Hodel sparred over a classmate, the delicate-faced and witty Dorothy Jeanne Harvey. She eloped with Huston, becoming the first of his five wives, and they ran off to Greenwich Village in 1925.

Meanwhile, Hodel—forced out of Caltech because of the impregnation of his professor's wife—started a literary magazine, became a photographer, attended the University of California Berkeley and went on to medical school. He began working for the Los Angeles Board of Health in 1938, pursuing his specialties—venereal disease and secret abortions. Desperate women

PREVIOUS PAGE: SNOWDEN HOUSE: MARVIN RAND. HOLLYWOOD: GETTY IMAGES. TAMAR: COURTESY OF FAUNA HODEL.





From left: Fauna Hodel, the child Tamar was forced to give away, with the father of her daughter; the LAPD's original case-evidence file, including Elizabeth Short's address book; teenage Tamar Hodel, third from right; Dr. George Hodel, at age 38.

sought him out, providing him with all sorts of ammunition. "He had a dossier on the cops and their prostitutes—he had something on the police department," Tamar told me.

When John and Dorothy Huston, now back in Los Angeles, divorced, Hodel romanced Dorothy and renamed her "Dorero," a combination of Dorothy and Eros. They married in 1940, and Hodel bought the Franklin house, designed by the son of Frank Lloyd Wright. The doctor began to indulge his fascination with Surrealist art. It was a passion with dark underpinnings.

Surrealism was started in Paris as an outgrowth of Dadaism. According to art historians Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss, in their book *Exquisite Corpse: Surrealism and the Black Dahlia Murder*, "an interplay of irrationality, eroticism and violence was at the heart of Surrealism."

Man Ray, a noted Surrealist painter and photographer, had become entranced with sadomasochism while living in Paris. When he moved to Los Angeles in 1940, the artist struck up a friendship with Hodel. The two became very close.

Los Angeles was, in the '40s and early '50s, a simmering stew of sophistication, desperation and veiled danger. Brilliantly talented people of urbane temperament commingled with Dustbowl beauties whose ambitions often stalled at the hatcheck-girl or diner-waitress stage; hardboiled cops braved police and city hall scandals, such as the one captured in the James Ellroy novel and subsequent film *L.A. Confidential*. At war's end, the cheerleading sunniness of the Big Band musicals was replaced by the dark themes of noir—lovers had a sexy avarice, a delicious untrustworthiness. The subtle violence and perversity of this L.A. moment were captured in classics such as *The Big Sleep* and *Out of the Past*.

In the house on Franklin Avenue, the lifestyle veered from the hedonistic to the Grand Guignol. And here is where a child made her unfortunate entrance. In 1935, another Dorothy—Dorothy Anthony, a San Francisco model—had given birth to Hodel's daughter. Hodel insisted on naming her Tamar for the protagonist of a poem by his friend, Big Sur poet Robinson Jeffers. "Tamar" was a tormented woman who had sex with her brother, reinterpreting a biblical story. "George brought my mother and me into his home," Tamar told me. It was like a harem: Dorothy, Dorero and, for a while, Hodel's common-law wife, Emilia—all with Hodel's children. "My father took avant-garde to the hilt, and the women went along with this," Tamar said. "But it was hidden."

Tamar and her mother moved out and back to San Francisco, but when Tamar approached pubescence, Hodel sent for her. His domination was extreme. "My father used to stand at the mantel and read poetry to everyone and inform us this was God speaking," she said. She was sexualized. "Man Ray took nude pictures of me," Tamar said. "I knew he was a great artist, but I didn't feel comfortable. He felt like a dirty old man." She was pressured to sunbathe nude. Her father gave her erotic books to read, determined "to make me a sex goddess." When Tamar was 11, Hodel forced her to perform fellatio on him. "I gagged! I was scared! I was embarrassed!"

The year before, in May 1945, Ruth Spaulding, the secretary at Hodel's venereal-disease clinic (and thus the keeper of many secrets), was found dead of an overdose. Police suspected it was forced but couldn't prove it. Her death was ruled "suicide."

Among the women who passed in and out of Hodel's clinic was Elizabeth Short, a brunette from Massachusetts. Short possessed an arrest record for underage drinking, a habit of talking to men in hotel bars and the usual naive dreams that brought pretty girls with Depression-era childhoods to Los Angeles.

During the last six months of 1946, Short lived in five different apartments in Hollywood. She was vulnerable. Eight people, including one who would later become a police detective, asserted that they knew, firsthand, that Hodel had some kind of relationship with Short. The last time friends saw her was on the evening of January 9, in the Biltmore Hotel.

On the morning of January 15, the severely mutilated body of a young woman was found in L.A.'s Leimert Park. The woman who first sighted the body thought it was a mannequin—it had been bisected expertly at the waist; there were signs of torture. The presentation of the corpse indicated that the murder occurred at another location; she was moved to the field to be viewed. These were the remains of Elizabeth Short.

Some who've studied the crime see clues in certain photos and

"MY FATHER TOOK AVANT-GARDE TO THE HILT, AND THE WOMEN WENT ALONG WITH ALL OF THIS, BUT IT WAS HIDDEN," SAID TAMAR.

paintings. The art historians Nelson and Bayliss note (and photographs show) how strikingly Short's posed upper body resembled one of Man Ray's photos of his wife, Juliet. The body's pronounced bisection (the top half was placed a foot away from the bottom) could be seen as a nod to a Man Ray painting, *Le Beau Temps*. In addition, a man calling himself "The Black Dahlia Avenger" wrote letters to the LAPD and newspapers claiming responsibility, in one letter drawing a picture of a face in a stocking mask, like one of Ray's of Juliet. Most stunningly, L.A. artist William Copley did a painting in 1961, showing a doctor with torture-inflicting tools and a dead nude woman on the floor. A hard-to-escape conclusion: The Surrealists were winking at the murder of the Black Dahlia.

Hundreds of police officers investigated Short's death; more than 50 people "confessed" but were cleared. During the months and then years of fruitless investigation, Tamar's young life was unraveling on Franklin Avenue. She worshipped her father and she feared him. "The pharaohs had sex with their daughters," he'd rave. She fled to her mother, who made her feel as if she, not Hodel, was the "bad one." She returned and became pregnant by Hodel after he raped her in the summer of 1949, and she had an abortion. Afterward, her father, jealous of boys she knew in school, "hit me with a gun and screamed and yelled and went insane." Her stepmother, Dorero, urged her to " 'run away right now,' " Tamar said. "She told me my father had committed a murder [of his secretary]." Tamar went into hiding with a friend's family. When the police tracked her down, "the officers said, 'We know all about your father.' "

But on December 23, 1949, despite two eyewitnesses who testified that they'd seen Hodel forcing sex on Tamar, he was acquitted. (It was later found that other witnesses were given payoffs of $10,000 to $15,000 to commit perjury.) Tamar—publicly branded a slut and a liar at 14—was remanded to a juvenile detention home.

The trial set something else in motion: The LAPD was now hot on Hodel's trail for the Black Dahlia murder. When lawyer Neeb made his bombshell accusation, he had no idea that his client ever knew Elizabeth Short. Nor did he realize that George Hodel *was* an early suspect, because of a drunken, guilty-sounding muttering of Hodel's at a nightclub (reported to the district attorney, though the lead went nowhere). Now detectives planted recording devices inside the walls of the Franklin house, and 18 officers listened in around the clock. They heard Hodel tell a friend, "Supposin' I did kill the Black Dahlia? They can't prove it now, because my secretary is dead," and remark that his plan was "Never confess."

If the police planned to arrest Hodel, it never happened. In March 1950, Hodel fled Los Angeles, settling in the Philippines and marrying an aristocratic Filipino. After they divorced, he took yet another wife in San Francisco, lived in a penthouse and died at age 91 in 1999.

Hodel managed to elude arrest for any crime. The police tapes containing his conversations about Short and Spaulding were "lost." But they were not gone.

AFTER THE POLICE FOUND THE TERRIFIED GIRL HIDING WITH FRIENDS, THEY SAID, "WE KNOW ALL ABOUT YOUR FATHER."

For much of her life Tamar Hodel struggled to recover from abuse and condemnation. Released from juvenile detention to her mother's house, she got pregnant again after a boy in the neighborhood raped her. Tamar had the baby girl at a hospital in San Francisco. Even though the infant's father was white, she told her family and hospital staff he was black because "I was shocked by the way whites treated blacks in the juvenile hall. I was embarrassed to be white." Her heroes were Marian Anderson, Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson and Josh White. She watched a nun take the baby, at her parents' orders.

George Hodel was never not in control of Tamar's life. He named the baby Fauna, for another incest-tinged poem by Jeffers. But he didn't want her raised by the Hodels. He ordered Tamar's mother to drive to Reno to find a black woman willing to be given a baby under his terms: She would not be officially adopted and she must keep her name, Fauna Hodel. A ladies' room attendant at a casino, a woman named Jimmie Lee, agreed. When, at the hospital, Jimmie Lee balked—this baby was white!—Hodel assured her, "One day she'll darken."

For the next 15 years, Fauna lived with Jimmie Lee, who became an alcoholic prostitute. Fauna experienced the full discrimination of being in a black family, but, since she never did "darken," she was also made to feel like an alien in her community. A saving grace for Fauna was Jimmie Lee's live-in boyfriend, a shoeshine man who, Fauna says, "instilled kindness in me." Another saving grace: staring at her birth certificate and dreaming of meeting her birth mother.

As for Tamar, she remained artistic, precocious—and wounded. At 16, she married a black artist in Mexico, then left him after he beat her so badly she attempted suicide. In San Francisco, she married a second time. He was Stan Wilson, a black folksinger and activist. She became a people-connecting socialite in the interracial avant-garde, spending evenings at the Hungry i with Harry Belafonte, Maya Angelou, Lenny Bruce and Bruce's stripper wife, Honey. She had a daughter with Wilson and named her Deborah. Though Tamar was, this now-adult daughter says, "very brave" in confronting the hate of being married to a black man in the early 1950s, her parenting almost helplessly followed the sick route etched by her sadistic father and her own enabling mother: She introduced Deborah to sex at age 10—the girl's eve-

Right: Alfre Woodard was the star of the unreleased film *Pretty Hattie's Baby*, based on Fauna Hodel's memoir, *One Day She'll Darken*.

nings with men paid the rent after Tamar's divorce. And Tamar did not protect her from the family's psychopath patriarch. When Deborah was 12, Hodel took the girl to a fancy lunch, slipped a drug in her drink "and I woke up hours later spread-eagled and undressed" in her half-clad grandfather's presence.

While raising Deborah, Tamar became a big-sister figure to her beautiful 12-year-old neighbor, Michelle Gilliam. She was later to become the singer Michelle Phillips. "Tamar was so exotic, she was instantly my idol," Phillips says today. But "she didn't have a friend in the world." And, even as a tween, Phillips knew there was something wrong with Tamar's insisting, as if to rationalize her life, that it was a good thing to have sex with your father. Years later, when Michelle dated Jack Nicholson, she told him the tales she'd learned of Tamar, and they ended up in the screenplay for *Chinatown*. Of all people, John Huston, Hodel's former best friend, played the powerful father who raped his daughter and forced her to have the baby.

Tamar moved with Deborah to Hawaii. Hearing the beautiful name of the sister she never expected to meet, Deborah legally changed her name to Fauna-Elizabeth. Tamar had three sons and was often stoned on psychedelics as a way to blunt her pain. Deborah-turned-Fauna-Elizabeth tended her little brothers.

In 1972, the family dynamic changed dramatically. The original Fauna had tracked Tamar down. "I almost died when I found out I wasn't part black," Fauna says. "Being black was so important to me." Meeting the decadent sophisticate took Fauna aback. "I thought she would be like Doris Day!" But mother and daughter forged a bond, as did the half-sisters. They shared something with their mother: Fauna and Fauna-Elizabeth had had babies at 15. But they were determined to make something of their lives. Fauna wrote a memoir, *One Day She'll Darken*. In 1991, it was made into a movie, *Pretty Hattie's Baby*, starring and produced by Alfre Woodard. It was scrapped just after the rough cut was screened, leading to suspicions that Hodel, still alive, used what power he still had to get it shelved.

But eight years later, his influence was gone, and some of his darkest secrets emerged.

"Steve, the paramedics are here," said the voice on the phone in the middle of the night. "They just pronounced your father dead."

The fourth wife of Hodel had reached out to his favorite child, Steve, by then a retired police officer. Steve made his way to San Francisco and, while going through his father's effects, found a curious thing: a photo of Lucie Arnaz as the Black Dahlia in a 1975 TV movie. Short's horrific unsolved murder still held people in thrall, the subject of books and movies.

When he made a call to his half-sister Tamar, she said, "You know our father was a suspect in the Black Dahlia murder." Horrified, Steve moved to L.A. and "followed the evidence" piece by piece. He compared his father's letters to the handwriting in the anonymous ones written to newspapers ("That was my father's handwriting, no doubt") and interviewed dozens of people he knew from childhood. He found a receipt for his father's purchase of cement bags the day after Short disappeared; identical empty bags were found near the corpse.

Steve Hodel published a book, *Black Dahlia Avenger*, making the case that his father was the killer. It was a best seller, but he still didn't have the whispered-about secret-evidence file containing the bugging of the Franklin house.

"I ALMOST DIED WHEN I FOUND OUT I WASN'T PART BLACK," SAID FAUNA HODEL. "BEING BLACK WAS SO IMPORTANT TO ME."

A chance meeting changed everything. In 2002, Fauna Hodel introduced herself to an elderly man at her L.A. gallery who said, "Hodel? That's an unusual name. I bugged a home on Franklin Avenue of a Dr. George Hodel. Murder case of Elizabeth Short." He was retired cop Walter Morgan, and his confirmation of the tapes' existence gave the search new life. In 2003, *L.A. Times* reporter Steve Lopez located the transcripts of the tapes, which had been hidden by the case's 1950 DA investigator. Steve Hodel wrote three follow-up books, all with new evidence. The latest one was published in 2014.

The results of Steve Hodel's investigation have been deemed conclusive by four LAPD officials. While the public position of the LAPD is that Short's murder is unsolved, a former head of detectives, James McMurray, has said, "Go ahead and clear the Black Dahlia case."

For Tamar and her children, closure hasn't been as clear cut, but in the last few years, Fauna-Elizabeth Simon says triumphantly, "We broke the chain." Tamar is finally able to understand the cruelty done to her at every level. At the end of her life, she has four grandchildren, all emotionally healthy and enjoying careers. "I love and forgive my mother," says Fauna-Elizabeth, the daughter she raised. The other Fauna, the one given away, says, "Tamar is the most fascinating woman I know—and the most troubled—but did she want to save the world? Yes, she did." By shattering the Hodel curse, her daughters helped save her. ●

COURTESY OF FAUNA HODEL