

The black dahlia essay



The 1947 murder of Elizabeth Short has remained one of Hollywood's most notorious unsolved cases in Los Angeles history. The cold case has been passed down from detective to detective searching answers or any clues to help put the case to rest. The Black Dahlia was actually Elizabeth Short: a young, aspiring actress from a small town in Massachusetts. Elizabeth or Beth, as known by many, was born July 29, 1924 in Hyde Park, Massachusetts. (Beth Short). Elizabeth was the daughter of Cleo and Phoebe Short. (Beth Short).

In 1929, Beth's father Cleo disappeared, and his truck was found near a bridge, convincing people that he had committed suicide. (Beth Short). Later, Cleo had sent a message to the family, apologizing for deserting them. (Beth Short). Beth's father was living in Vallejo, California. At age nineteen, Beth decided to move in with her father in order to pursue her dream of being a famous actress, and star in major motion pictures. (Beth Short). Cleo later demanded that Beth leave after she was arrested for underage drinking. (Beth Short).

Elizabeth Short moved out and made her way to Santa Barbara to continue her pursuit to stardom. (Beth Short) For the next six months, Short stayed in various places throughout the Los Angeles area, but never in one place for more than a week. (TruTv). It was mid-January, 1947, when Short was last seen alive at the Biltmore Hotel. (TruTv). It was reported that she was to meet a gentleman. After leaving the hotel, she was never again seen alive. (Black Dahlia Avenger). According to police reports, on December 8, 1946, she took a bus to San Diego to meet up with her friend Dorothy French. (TruTv). Beth stayed with the French's until January 8, 1947 when she was

asked to leave by the French family for unknown reasons. (Black Dahlia Avenger).

She was picked up by a salesman she had met just two weeks earlier named Robert Manley. (TruTv). According to Manley, Elizabeth tells him that she needs to check her luggage at the bus stop because she is moving to Berkeley with her sister. (TruTv). After Manley helped Short check her luggage, he claims he brought Short back to the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles where she was said to meet her sister at 6: 30 p. . on January 9, 1947. (TruTv). She reportedly left the lobby at approximately 10: 00 p. m. This was the last time she was seen alive. (TruTv). Six days later, on January 15, 1947, in Leimert Park, Los Angeles, her body was discovered. (Exquisite Corpse). A mother pushing her child in a stroller came upon what she thought was a broken mannequin. (Exquisite Corpse).

When she got closer she realized it was a mutilated body, and called the police department. Short was found sexually posed, on her back with her hands above her head, and her legs spread apart. (TruTv). The mutilated body had been severed at the waist with surgeon-like precision. The autopsy showed that she had died of shock from a concussion and loss of blood. (TruTv). Her mouth was also slashed from ear to ear, and due to the lack of blood near the crime scene, it was clear that Short had been nearly drained of her blood and washed clean before she was placed in the vacant lot. (Beth Short). The discovery of Elizabeth Short's body would begin the LAPD's most notorious investigation in years.

Shortly after her death, the Los Angeles Examiner received a package with a letter made from newspaper lettering much like the Zodiac Killer. (TruTv). One letter was titled, “ Here is Dahlia’s Belongings. ” (TruTv). Inside the package, were her social security card, birth certificate, a telegram, photographs, business cards, and claim checks for the suitcases she had left at the bus depot. (TruTv). Another item was an address book filled with over 70 names and addresses, but with several pages recently torn out. (TruTv). This indicated that maybe the killer knew Elizabeth, and removed himself from the book.

Many theories developed over time, and over fifty people had admitted to the murder, making it very difficult to solve. (Beth Short). All these people were just looking for a quick road to fame. The likely suspect was 25 year old Robert Manley, but his alibi checked out and he passed a polygraph test, so it couldn’t have been him. (TruTv). For awhile there were theories and speculation that the murder was related to the infamous Cleveland Torso Murders, but to me that was just too much distance away from The Black Dahlia case and it couldn’t have been the same person. (Exquisite Corpse).

There also was another weak theory that William Heirens murdered Beth Short. Heirens was a convicted murderer already for the dismembering of 6 year old Suzanne Degnan in Chicago, Illinois. (Beth Short). Many people believe that because Elizabeth Short was found just blocks away from a Degnan Boulevard that it has some relation, but that theory is just nonsense and way too farfetched to me. Another theory of who killed Elizabeth Short is that George Hodel killed Short. Hodel is a surgeon, so he was very capable of performing the surgeon-like dismemberment of the body. (Beth Short).

In 1949, Hodel was tried for the molestation of his own daughter, but was later acquitted of the charges. (Beth Short). This shows that George Hodel was not a normal person and was disturbed in the head. The real evidence comes from former LAPD detective and son of George Hodel; Steve Hodel. His son Steve says that he has found pictures with Beth Short, and that he has heard his father make comments in reference to the case. (TruTv). Many believe that George Hodel was only teasing police with his comments. I also believe he was teasing police; therefore, this is not the theory I believe.

Janice Knowlton is daughter of George Knowlton, and author of novel *Daddy Was The Black Dahlia Killer*. In the book, Janice discusses her father and her rough past with incest and brutality. (Beth Short). She talks about facts of the murder that only the LAPD knew about, and believes that her father killed Elizabeth Short. In 2004, Janice committed suicide for what doctors thought was due to psychological problems (Beth Short). Janice's sister later said that Janice simply confused her father with George Hodel. There is still no explanation for how Janice knew of the confidential information about the case.

This theory also comes off to me as having very weak evidence supporting this, therefore, I also do not believe in this theory. While every lead and every suspect checked out, nothing conclusive ever came from the investigation. However, LAPD Detective Brian Carr and LA Times Reporter Larry Harnisch believe that they have stumbled new evidence and a new lead in the case. (*Black Dahlia Avenger*). When Harnisch was doing a little personal research of his own, he came across a marriage document. The

document included an address only a block south of the lot where Elizabeth Short's body was found.

This theory states that Dr. Walter Bayley murdered Elizabeth Short. Dr. Bayley knew Elizabeth, because his daughter was friends of Elizabeth's older sister Victoria, and she was the matron of honor at her wedding. (Black Dahlia Avenger). Harnisch claims that Dr. Bayley had begun acting erratically due to a brain disorder in which the brain shrinks. (TruTv). In my opinion, all the signs point to Dr. Walter Bayley as being the murderer. Since the doctor lived only a block away from the crime scene, he was within a small distance and knew the area very well.

Since his daughter was friends with the Short family, he was a personal link to Elizabeth, and this might explain why the pages were torn out of address book, because his name was in there. Dr. Walter Bayley also was a well known surgeon so he was very much capable of performing the surgical-like murder. Another fact supporting that Bayley could have done it is the fact that he had a mental condition in which could very easily make him violent. Another interesting piece of information is the fact that Dr. Walter Bayley passed his estate onto his mistress instead of his wife. (Black Dahlia Avenger).

This caught my eye because who would not give their wife the estate, and it is said that his wife believed that Dr. Bayley was always acting odd around the mistress as if she was blackmailing him with a deep dark secret. (Black Dahlia Avenger). In conclusion, the puzzling circumstances surrounding Elizabeth Short's brutal death have mystified and intrigued the citizens of

Los Angeles and others around the world for over fifty years, and we can only hope that a new generation of young detectives and greater technology can help put the Black Dahlia case to an end.