

## EPISODE 109 - THE BLACK DAHLIA

### TRANSCRIPT

#### SEGMENT 1

Announcer

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere on the iHeartRadio app.

Steve Gregory

On any given day in Southern California, hundreds of investigators are working more than 10,000 unsolved cases. That's 1000s of friends and families who have lost loved ones, 1000s of people who got away with a crime, and 1000s of murderers who still walked the streets, killers who may be your neighbor, go to your church, or could be dating a close friend. For the next two hours, we'll highlight cases that have gotten cold baffled investigators or just need that one witness to speak out. This is Unsolved with Steve Gregory.

Los Angeles Police Department case and Dr. Number 295771. The murder of Elizabeth Short, otherwise known as the Black Dahlia. In this episode of Unsolved, we welcome Steve Hodel, retired LAPD detective and author of eight books on this case, not only is he one of the best known authorities on the subject, he's also got a personal connection. I want to caution you there is some very graphic content in this episode.

Steve, thanks so much for joining us tonight. We really appreciate it. So I want you if you could start at the beginning, this is one of those cases where I've always known about it, it's been in the back of my head. But I don't really know a lot of the nuances. And I know there's been you know, movie versions and books and this and that and the other and you've authored at least eight books. And so, I mean, I'm just trying to figure out kind of what we're looking at here. When did this case come about and go back to that day in Leimert Park?

Steve Hodel

All right. So it's a cold, January 15, 1947. A cold morning, a young woman Betty Bersinger, is walking her daughter in a stroller to market. And she looks over at a vacant lot, which is in the 3800 block of South Portland, which is about four or five miles south of Hollywood. And she looks over and she sees first what she thought was a mannequin. And then she looks again, it says no, it couldn't be actually a body. So she's, she says to herself, oh my goodness, that's going to terrify the kids going to school. So she goes to go south about a block. Door knocks, nobody home. She goes a little bit further south and actually admitted, she uses the phone, calls the police and says I think there's a body in the vacant lot. LAPD patrol response. And sure enough, they find this horrific crime scene. They look over and the patrol officers initially get there. And it's a female. Apparently a young female Jane Doe. No identification, no clothing, no nothing, a nude body, cut in half. And carefully posed on his vacant lot just off the sidewalk,

all sorts of trauma to the body. And, of course, the patrol guys do their thing and call homicide. The homicide detectives get there and they're horrified. They've never seen anything quite like that trauma to the body. All sorts of cuttings. And from there goes on to become probably the most infamous crime and in Los Angeles is history.

Steve Gregory

So let's talk about would you say the body was posed? I mean, was there any significance to the pose that was done? How was it posed?

Yes. So basically, it was about 12 inches from the sidewalk. And this was this Leimert Park area - a newly developed area. It was just lots of space, very few homes and the body was placed the upper torso, the hands were placed above the shoulders in a surrender position. And the lower torso was posed just to the right maybe five inches, not thrown not dealt with but carefully posed and ultimately in my investigation now, that'll have some serious meaning but basically and then if you if you know the horrific cuttings, there were cuttings to the thigh, pieces of flesh are cut from the body and inserted in our privates, this would all eventually come out in the corners examination, of course, and the face was cut ear to ear as if a large smile. The lips were extended almost to the ears on both sides. And the body had been washed, clean, carefully washed clean, there was no blood. Clearly it was not the crime was not committed there, they knew immediately that it had to have been done elsewhere. And brought there and posed. There were large cement stacks and a band DB steer manure sack laying next to the body, which they determined were actually used to transport the body from wherever she was slain. Probably a private residence to the crime scene, and then they were just pulled off and he probably he or she probably put the body atop these large 50 pound sacks to transport so it would get blood in the car and stuff.

Okay, well, I just want to let me remind people that we are speaking with Steve Hodel. He's an author, also retired LAPD detective about the gruesome murder of Elizabeth Short. This week marks the 75th anniversary of this crime in Los Angeles in one of the longest unsolved cases to date, or is it we'll talk more about that little bit later. So um, I want to go ahead and let you finish your thought. And then after that, I want to get into a little bit about who Elizabeth was, but go ahead and finish about that day of the discovery.

Steve Hodel

So initially, they've got all they've got is a Jane Doe. They take her fingerprints. And they basically run them through the system. Back then, of course, they had to do a mailing of them to the FBI. And actually one of the local newspapers the examiner volunteered to do to run them through their machine. It was a fact like a fax machine. Or they could actually take photographs of the prints and send them via telephone. It was kind of an early fax,

Steve Gregory

we're speaking with Steve Hodel, retired LAPD detective about the case of Elizabeth Short, she was the woman brutally murdered back in 1947, 75 years ago, this week. So Steve, you were telling us a little bit about the scene that day and in you know, it's kind of interesting, you were talking about these big bags there on that in that vacant lot and kind of your theory as to how she was delivered over there.

Steve Hodel

Basically, this was LAPD determined this not not me, they came out and said that actually the body had been transported from some unknown, probable residence, where the crime occurred on these large 50 pound paper sacks of a newer sack and some insects. And there was a little bit of blood watery blood on the sack. So they knew that whoever brought it to the crime scene, use these stacks and just left them there, pull them away and pose the body and left them there. She was a Jane Doe. So the first you know, the first step is to let's, how are we going to get her identify, and she appeared to be 15 to 20 years of age initially. And so basically what they did was they took her fingerprints. And they, the examiner, one of the many newspapers in Los Angeles offered to fax them back in those days, they had a machine that they could actually use the telephone and take a photograph and send the fingerprints back to FBI. So they did that. And initially, she was a Jane Doe number one. And within literally within four or five hours, they got a hit. And it came back and her name was Elizabeth Short. She was 22 years of age. She was from Medford, Massachusetts, and had worked they caught her fingerprints. She had been arrested for a minor possession of alcohol back in 1943. And so they had a name and identification and from there they really began their investigation, starting with contacting for parents or mother actually in Medford and moving forward from there.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with Steve Hodel, retired LAPD homicide detective about the case of Elizabeth Short otherwise known as the "Black Dahlia". We're commemorating the 75th anniversary of the gruesome discovery in Leimert Park, but first this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

## **SEGMENT 2**

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. If you have a story idea or a tip on one of the cases highlighted on this program, simply dial #250 on your cell phone and say the keyword "unsolved" or email the team [unsolved@iheartmedia.com](mailto:unsolved@iheartmedia.com). That's [unsolved@iheartmedia.com](mailto:unsolved@iheartmedia.com).

Welcome back, we're talking with Steve Hodel, retired LAPD homicide detective about the case of Elizabeth Short, also known as "the Black Dahlia". 75 years ago this week, her body was found in a gruesome discovery in Leimert Park, January 15, 1947. So Steve, who was Elizabeth Short?

Steve Hodel

Well, Elizabeth Short was a 22 year old woman from Medford, Massachusetts. And basically, she was a sort of a lost soul, let's say she was she dropped out of high school, and was basically this was, of course, the wartime. And she was looking, looking to fall in love with Lieutenant right, get married and live happily ever after is really what she was all about. She came out, actually, her father had abandoned the family she was, she had four sisters, and the mother raised of five girls, and the father left in the 30s, through the Depression. And it was a kind of a strange situation where they found his car at a bridge, almost as if maybe he committed suicide or something, and was never heard from again. But then in the early 40s, '42, he writes and contacts them and says, I'm in, you know, I'm in Northern California. And Elizabeth decides she wants to go see her father. So she goes out, she comes out to California, hooks up with her dad for a very short time, they don't hit it off at all. He's looking for a maid and housekeeper. And she's looking to fall in love and live happily ever after. So that's short lived, she splits from him. And then she gets a job at a military camp, camp cook, just north of Santa Barbara. And she works there for a while at the PX Post Exchange. And she actually wins a beauty contest there as the "camp cutie" a very attractive woman. Full black hair, greenish blue eyes, very attractive, men lover, and she starts hanging out and dating, going out, and that sort of thing during the war and really looking to find a man and get married. Kind of a lost soul. She bounces around Los Angeles. She goes to Florida for a little bit and meets a military guy there. And he winds up in a air crash and dying just at the towards the end of the war. So she comes back to California. And it's kind of lost and wandering around. We don't have a lot of history on her. Other than it's not clear that she got any other jobs. She was staying with people that she would meet and stuff. But there's a lot of myth. That's totally untrue. Hack writers took this story and ran with it and basically turned her into a prostitute and you know, in back alleys and a drinker and an alcoholic and a loser and she was none of those things. She was simply, you know, a 22 year old young woman just looking to fall in love.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with Steve Hodel, retired LAPD homicide about the death of Elizabeth short, also known as "the Black Dahlia". So Steve, you know, how did those narratives get created? I mean, listen, I mean, the media business, and I know a simple misuse of a word or a cleverly placed word can completely change a narrative or someone's, you know, description or anything like that. So what was the what do you think the motive was for maligning her like that?

Steve Hodel

Well, I think it was basically to these hacker writers their attempts to add on and make it more in other words. For example, let's just take some you've got an attack and young woman coming out to Los

Angeles and you've got this horrific crime, or she's, and they've determined she wasn't just cut in half she was surgically bisected. It was a surgical operation was actually known as a handmade corporate ectomy, which is the only way you can divide the body without sawing through bone, you have to go between the second and third lumbar vertebrae. And this was actually what was performed a surgical operation. And then the name of course came along. The Black Dahlia was quickly added to the story. And actually, that was a name that was it was actually they called her that she, she used to go into a pharmacy in Long Beach, and hang out there with a lot of military guys. And there was a film that came out that summer called the Blue Dahlia which was a noir film. And this, they kind of gave her that name Black Dahlia, which was a spin off on a blue Dahlia. And so you've got this, this made Black Dahlia very mysterious, you've got this ultimate horrific crime, and a beautiful young woman. So they just added on to that, you know, these writers would step on that. And then a couple of films came out. And were kind of spin offs on it. And it all just kept going. And it's you know, there are a whole lot of myths about once I got into the weeds of it really starting to looking at it. You know, my biggest job was to separate fact from fiction, and get rid of a lot of these myths, which I was fortunately able to do.

Steve Gregory

So let's go back. I do want to go back to the crime scene that day, because there was a lot of, you know, now that you've established where the crime scene was, who it is, and a little bit of background on Elizabeth, when we come back, I would like to talk to you a little bit about the graphic nature of this in the way they were the way that Elizabeth's body was posed. There's a lot of stuff about this and I just want to find out a little bit about its significance. So I want to talk also about how LAPD operated back then sort of what was their their approach to homicides in the in the 40s like that, because I cover them so frequently now, but I can't even imagine back then how things would be without technology and stuff like that. So I'd like to talk to you a little bit about that. Okay. All right. Okay, we're starting with Steve Hodel, retired LAPD detective. He's also an author of numerous books about this very case Elizabeth Short, and the Black Dahlia. But first, this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

### **SEGMENT 3**

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640 heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. This is Unsolved. I'm Steve Gregory

we're speaking with Steve Hodel, he is retired LAPD homicide. We're talking about the Black Dahlia. The case of Elizabeth Short, the young woman found mutilated and literally severed in half in an area near Leimert Park back in 1947. In this, Steve described it early on, it was a cold January morning. And speaking of that scene, Steve, there was a lot to be made about this. I mean, it was an incredibly graphic scene, was it not?

Steve Hodel

It was it's one of the reasons why it's become one of the most infamous crimes in LAPD history. And basically, aside from what I've described earlier. There were cuttings to the private parts. There were there were cutting a crisscross pattern cuttings to the, to the right thigh, a section of her left arm, her actually her right breast was completely excised and removed. A small part of it, circular, and homicide detectives on that day, it was very different than the technology from today. Of course, sadly, the you know, there are photographs showing the reporters, there was a huge collection of reporters, they're taking films, they actually arrived before the place and they walked through the crime scene, of course, there was no real protection. So a lot of the area was trampled through and over. And very, it's far it was far from what we would expect to see today where you rope it off and keep everybody away. So there was a lot of contamination. And they had no, of course, no DNA back then or anything near that. And so it was basically take the photographs and put the body in the coroners van and take it to the coroner's office for examination. There was no real serious crime scene they did. They did have some of the academy recruits do a walkthrough of the vacant lot looking for potential evidence, nothing was really found of any value. But it was a far cry from what we would consider a crime scene today.

Steve Gregory

You know what I'm curious about it. You just said that the media were there before the police were there. How do you have any idea back then how the media were tipped off and things like this? I mean, how on earth would they know about it before the police?

Steve Hodel

Well, they had radio, they had radios in their cars. And they were tuned to the police, you know, frequencies. And they would hear you know, hey, there's a woman down in the vacant lot. 39th and North.

Steve Gregory

So even back then even back then we were listening in.

Steve Hodel

Yes, you were.

Steve Gregory

I do want to tell people that. You know, I have read the death certificate too. It has since been posted online and it's a actual the death certificate from the LA County Coroner's Office. You know, her actual cause of death was a cerebral hemorrhage is the way it's listed in the death certificate. But as you read the detail on in some of the printings that have been out about the condition of her body, this in you as

a detective, this was an incredibly targeted crime. And what about the sort of nature of this crime? Did it say to you? How did it speak to you when you first started digging into this, you saw pictures? You read about the detail? Who was the first person that pops in your mind? I mean, what's the type of person that pops in your mind?

Steve Hodel

Immediately, Of course, it has to be to my mind, it was a revenge killing. This wasn't a this wasn't just some random also, you know, of course though, she was sexually assaulted. She was sodomized, anally raped. They estimated that the torture, she was tied also. There were ligature marks to her feet and hands and neck. So she was tied bound and the experts estimated about probably a four to five hour extended torture. So this was somebody that had to really in for her. This wasn't just a one off, you know, off the street type of thing. This was basically to my mind, revenge or you know, came to mind immediately.

Steve Gregory

We're talking with Steve Hodel, about the death of Elizabeth Short, also known as the Black Dahlia. And Steve has written numerous books about this case, he's kind of made it his life's work after retiring from the LAPD. Steve, when you look at this, it was so notorious. No one had even seen anything like this back in the 40s. And late 40s, a crime like this, you say revenge killing? Was this a revenge against her or revenge against an entity or revenge against women? Was it a revenge against?

Steve Hodel

Well, I think it was. Personally my initial response was, it was personal. It was this, this there was some connection to her. The suspect had some connection, ex boyfriend, you know, something like that. But also, of course, you have to factor in misogyny, I mean, hatred of women, in general to was expressed. I mean, you don't see this kind of extended torture, very often, it's very rare. You know, it's an opposing, and it was, whoever did this was making some kind of a statement with with her. And so. And also, to my mind, you know, basically, this was not an individual that had a first this was not a first time killing for him. Immediately, I thought that the potential of a serial killer, although I wasn't aware at the time of any identical to this one, but it was, it was very advanced. And this was no amateur that committed this crime.

Steve Gregory

What, what on earth possessed you to take such a deep interest in this? I mean, what was the sort of pivotal moment for you to says, I need to dedicate the rest of my life to this case?

Steve Hodel

Well, to tell you the truth, Steve, this, this came to me, I didn't go to it. I had, you know, I had put my 24 years on LAPD, 17 in Hollywood Homicide. I had over 300 murder investigations. I had one of the highest clearance rates on the department, about 85% of my crimes were solved. I was long retired. I was retired for 15 years. And then certain things came, unfolded in my life separate from this, that pulled me into this. I mean, when I went through the academy in 1963, I saw a photo, you know, photographs of this crime because it was a famous unsolved, but that's the only contact. I didn't even know who her name was. I'm sure there was nothing. You know, I remembered it as a famous unsolved, but that was the first and the last time I had any thing to do with this crime. And then eventually, certain things in my life would unfold. That would pull me into my investigation.

Steve Gregory

Let's talk about some of those when we come back. This is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

#### **SEGMENT 4**

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. To learn more about this case and others go to our web page at [KFIAM640.com](http://KFIAM640.com), keyword "unsolved". And don't forget to subscribe to our podcast on the iHeartRadio app, Spotify, Apple or wherever you get your podcasts. We're talking with Steve Hodel. He is retired LAPD and he's talking to us about the death of Elizabeth Short, January 15, 1947, 75 years ago this week, she was discovered in an area of Leimert Park and Steve before the break, you were kind of giving us a background about not only your career and your your high solve rate as a homicide detective. But you were telling me kind of how you got into this case. And as you say, the case came to you. And I guess it all changed with a late night phone call.

Steve Hodel

That's right, Steve. I was 14 years retired. I was working as a private investigator doing criminal defense, the 24 years with the prosecution. Now I was doing criminal defense in Bellingham, Washington. And I had retired, brought my two sons up, started them through middle school, and was working as a PI. And I got a 2am phone call. And it was June, my father's wife and my father and June had relocated after a long absence, they had relocated back to San Francisco, and in the last 10 years of his life. So he died at 91. And June was in a panic and she said the paramedics are here, they just pronounced your father dead. And in that last 10 years, when he relocated back to San Francisco, I became very close to him. He had been estranged. And I got to know him in that last 10 years, and he would come up and visit me. And I've become quite close and had tremendous respect for my father. So I flew down immediately within hours and did all the things you have to do in the passing of a father. And I was sitting there with June, and a couple of days later and she came out and she handed me a small five by five inch photo album. She says I think your father would want you to have this. And she handed me this book and photo book. I had family members and all sorts of photographs. But there was a there was a photograph of a dark haired woman reclining nude, semi reclining, and I looked at June and I said who is this? She



says, I don't know somebody your father knew from a long time ago. And an attractive young woman dark hair early 20s. And I thought why does this look so familiar to me? And to this day, Steve, I can't tell you. But Black Dahlia comes to mind, but it kind of came and went I didn't think much of it. It may have been they had a movie come out in 1975 called "Who is the Black Dahlia" starring Lucie Arnaz. And and may have been that because it looks so much like her. But it kind of came and went. Another day later, I'm on the phone to my half sister Tamar, who's in Hawaii. And we're talking about the great man's passing and what a remarkable life he had. And she says to me, Well, you know, he was a suspect in the Black Dahlia murder. And I said, Tamara, what the hell are you talking about? Where the hell is this coming from? She says, Well, he didn't do it. But he says, you know, during the trial for incest when we had our trial back then, the LAPD cops told me when they're taking me to court, that they think he was a suspect that they believe he killed the Black Dahlia. And I, you know, well, Tamara and I had maybe 20 minutes of conversation in 50 years. You know, she kind of went her way and I went my way. But she was the victim of incest and dad was actually charged back in 49, two years after he was charged and tried for incest. He was acquitted after a three week jury trial. Yeah, Jerry Geisler, who was like, the Johnnie Cochran of his day and beat the case. And then he left him left the country. But anyway, you know, so there's no way absolutely you know, I know dad had his problems and I yeah, I believe the incest charges, but a brutal murder killing like this. Absolutely. No way. So that's really what got me and at that point, I was divorced. was from my wife, my kids were off to college. But basically, I relocated back to LA and said, Well, I'll be able to show you had nothing to do with this and, you know, five, five days. And that started me on my pursuit. And you know, I was going to establish the clearly have nothing to do with it. Well, my investigation

Steve Gregory

Okay, so just to recap here just unclear. So when you're going through these personal belongings of your father's after he passes, you discover the picture you start to ask some questions and then you realize that not only was he the defendant in an incest trial, but then the LAPD tells the family that he was a suspect in the Black Dahlia Murder?

Steve Hodel

That's right, tells tells tells Tamara, who was the victim of the incident. She was 14 years old at the time. And there was it was a big trial. And you know, one of the things Steve, you have to understand is, you really have to understand, I spent the first third of my first book "Black Dahlia Avenger", on bio graphics on my father, and you really need to know. And to hear those bio graphics to understand where this is going.

Steve Gregory

What is it your dad did for a living?

Steve Hodel

He was a physician, who was a surgeon. He was a medical doctor.

Steve Gregory

So obviously, and I know the story is out there. But now you're you're kind of starting to put the dots together here. So and you've already said that Elizabeth's body was surgically altered, cut in half. And it had to be done by someone who knew what they were doing so so at this point, now, are you putting this together in your head is like, Oh, crap, my father may have really done it?

Steve Hodel

No, at that point, starting I'm starting out saying he didn't. I was convinced he didn't.

Steve Gregory

So you started out on the mission to prove that your father did not have any connection to this case.

Steve Hodel

I was gonna I was gonna prove that. And also the other factor is he was a very mysterious man. He was kind of like a man behind the Iron Mask. You know. And I also wanted as a son, I wanted to know more about my father and discover what I could about him as well as so it was a it was two paths. It was the train detective, gonna follow the evidence, and then it was this son who cared about his father wanting to learn more about this mysterious man.

Steve Gregory

Wow, fascinating. Okay, Steve, hang right there because we want to obviously pick it back up. This is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640. Time now for news update.

## **SEGMENT 5**

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. Caution: There is very graphic content in this episode.

We're talking with Steve Hodel. He is a retired LAPD detective, he was with homicide division back in the day. And he's discussing the death of Elizabeth Short also known as "the Black Dahlia". 75 years ago this week, she was found in an area near Leimert Park completely, just severed in half, very gruesome scene.

Before the break, Steve was telling us that out of nowhere, the case came to him because he set out to prove that his father was not the killer of Elizabeth Short, but it took some twists and turns. So since now that you've brought your father into the conversation, why don't you tell us a little bit more about him?

Steve Hodel

Okay. And to understand this crime are these crimes you have to understand the man so George Hodel was born in Los Angeles, at Fifth and Olive in 1907. He was a child prodigy, an only child. He played the he was played piano concerts at the Shrine Auditorium at the age of nine, highly gifted. His piano teacher Vernon Spencer was the top teacher in Los Angeles said he had a promising that he would go far and as a pianist. He was also highly gifted, intelligent, he tested 186 IQ one point above Einstein, incidentally, that skips a generation but my boys are in good shape. He went to South Pasadena High School and at the age of 14 graduated and went to Caltech. You know, one of our most famous universities here at 14, had an not only was he mentally highly gifted and a product musical prodigy, but he also was sexually precocious. He has an affair with a professor's wife at Caltech. She gets pregnant breaks up her marriage. She goes back East. He's now 15 or 16. He follows her back. Says "I Love You, I want to marry you" and the professor's wife says "George, you're a child yourself. Get out of my life. I never want to see you again". So he comes back to Los Angeles gets a job as a cub reporter with The LA Record which was one of the largest newspapers as a crime reporter. starts riding around with LAPD vise during Prohibition kicking doors with a vise guys. Here's the judge with a young woman and writing these tabloid stories in the crop in the record. He then graduates and starts riding around with LAPD homicide, guys, again, writing these tabloid stories, the bloody Ace of Spades next in the body, that sort of thing. He then is double dating with a man by the name of John Houston, who at that time, what, who will eventually become the famous film director. But at that time was just the son of Walter Euston, who was his father was a famous actor. So they're double dating. George and John are double dating, and George is dating a woman by the name of Dorothy and John is dating a woman by the name of Emilia and some, some months afterwards, they switch and Dorothy and John fall in love, they go off and get married. And Emilia, and George look at each other. And he says, I guess it's you and me beg. She gets pregnant. They go north to Berkeley, where he goes to pre med at UC Berkeley. He gets a job with the San Francisco Chronicle as a reporter. He does that while he's going through med school graduates from pre med goes across the bay to UC San Francisco, gets his medical degree has another affair. And so, Duncan is born with Emelia and 28 and he has another affair with another Dorothy not the not the earlier Dorothy. She gets pregnant. And Tamar is born in 35. Who, my half sister, he then decides he needs more space. He splits from the women. He goes and becomes a surgeon in a logging camp in New Mexico, Arizona, and does that for a few years. comes back to Los Angeles. By this time, Dorothy who was married to Houston breaks up with. After seven years with John Houston comes back hooks up with George. They get married. My older brother Mike comes along and 39 on board and 41. My younger brother, Kelvin is born and 42 dad hires on with the LA County Health Department quickly rises to the top becomes the VD czar of Los Angeles. He's the head of social hygiene medicine. He's treating, you know, the rich and famous and he's basically does that for a number of years. And

then buys a house. he buys Frank Lloyd Wright Jr. Home in Hollywood. Many of your listeners may be familiar with it. It's called "the Sowden house". And it's looks like a Mayan temple. And it's at Franklin in Normandy. 5121 Franklin. With three kids, three sons are running around with a little princess. Dad's the king, mom's the Queen and he's having these Hollywood parties with all kinds of interesting people. And everything's going swimmingly. And then in 1949 There's this knock at the door, LAPD Dr. Hodel. Yes, we are under arrest for incest. So he's arrested for incest, having had sex with Tamara, his 14 year old daughter, who was down visiting with us as the trial, he gets Jerry Geisler, this comp attorney and beat the case. And basically he leaves the country and 1950 goes on to kawaii and from there to Asia, has marries a wealthy Filipina has four more children. As a amazing life over there in the Philippines, eventually divorces her after four or five years, comes back to San Francisco in 1990. I hook up back with him then and spend the last 10 years of his life. Seeing him becoming he wasn't he was never a warm and fuzzy person. But, you know, basically he tried and we became quite close at that time, and then he died. So that's a quick bio on George. You can see why. He was also highly gifted and there was a Stanford study by Lawrence Terman. And of the highly gifted George was one of his turbans termites they were called all of these high IQ individuals.

Steve Gregory

It sounded more and more like he was Hannibal Lecter.

Steve Hodel

You nailed it. You nailed it.

Steve Gregory

That's the first that's the first character popped my head but listen, you got to hold on to that thought for a second. We're gonna have to take a break when we come back more with Steve Hodel about this fascinating twists and turns with his father George Hodel. We'll talk more about that. But first this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

## **SEGMENT 6**

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. Talking with Steve Hotel, author and former LAPD homicide detective retired, he solved more than 300 cases over his career, he had an 85% solve rate, which is very high in this industry. And before the break, he was telling us this twisted and sordid tale of his father, George Hodel, but you set out to prove that your father was not the killer of Elizabeth Short. But what did you actually discover?

Steve Hodel

So, basically, I started out by familiar, you know, getting myself familiar with the case itself, which I knew nothing about. I didn't even know her name. And obviously, I didn't have access. I was a fuzz that was, so I didn't have access to the police reports. So basically, my best source was the newspapers from the article that six newspapers, hundreds, hundreds and hundreds of articles from all of them, so I started there. And what did I find out? I discovered that, as we mentioned that the killer, they were absolutely certain that he had to be skilled in surgery, and it was, had to be a skilled surgeon. So that limits your suspect pool right there. And that was, you know, I was concerned that was a surgeon in his early doctoring. But still, I said to myself, There's no way well, what the killer did in "the Black Dahlia" was he started taunting the newspapers and the police in the press, and he was sending in, he sent in more than a dozen pontic notes. And these were like cut and paste from like ransom notes. Most of the handwriting was disguised. But there was one letter that he sent in, that was not disguised handwriting was actually his legitimate handwriting. That said, turning myself in on January 29, had my fun at the police. Signed "The Black Dahlia Avenger". And I looked at this, and it's my father's handwriting.

Steve Gregory

And really, no, really, how did you know that so quickly?

Steve Hodel

Well, he's got a very unusual block printing. And I mean, you know, your parents handwriting your listeners know, their parents handwriting.

Steve Gregory

Good point.

Steve Hodel

And I looked at my father's handwriting, while still. So this can't be I said, they're easy, pretending to be the suspect what the hell's going on here. So but but it was definitely a major concern to me. And so basically, I hadn't had writing expert, I concealed the crime itself. So so the the expert wouldn't know the crime. And I had her examined it. And independently of me, of course, and with samples, many I had many samples in my father's handwriting. So she comes back with about eight positive. Makes sense. It's definitely the same person writing these notes on the handwriting. So you've got the surgeon, you've got the handwriting. And then basically, I started getting into witness interviews and stuff. And wanted to get more details on on the actual crime itself. And one of the major witnesses that I talked to was a retired police woman by the name of Merle McBride. And she was long retired, she was living in San Diego. I went down and basically interviewed her. And she had let me put it this way. There are three, one of my biggest problems was there were three major myths to this crime. Okay. And basically, those three major myths were, there was a so called missing week. As the story goes, as the myth goes, Elizabeth short walked out of the Biltmore Hotel into the fog on January 9, and was not seen again until

the body was found on January 15. So, that's the one big myth, I was able to establish and locate 14 witnesses that actually saw her every day of that so called "missing week". And we're independent interviewed back at the time and stuff so and seven of those 14 knew her personally so they couldn't be mistaken. And they accounted for each day. Well, the last day on the 14th of January, Merlin Dried was the last person to see Elizabeth Short. She was working a foot beat. MCBRIDE was officer McBride was working on foot beat downtown. And this, Elizabeth comes running up to her and says there's a man he's threatening to kill me. So Greg goes into the bar with her and Amanda's gone, they get her purse. And she says, okay, I'm okay now. And then a few hours later, she sees McBride and McBride sees her walk out of another bar with two men and a woman. When she says, she goes up to her, and she says, Are you all right? She says, Well, yeah, I'm going to see my father at the bus station. And that's literally hours before she was murdered probably eight or 10 hours. And it's my contention. And I come up with a whole bunch of reasons why it was probably George Hodell and a friend of his name, Sexton and the unknown female. But so the other myths, the other myth is that it was a standalone murder none before and after. Absolutely. False. There were a whole series of lone wolf, as I getting into my investigation down there, I discovered there's a whole series of what I call the lone woman murders. They began in 43. And they stopped in 50, when my dad fled the country. And they were all in the Los Angeles in a very tight geographical area between Hollywood and Downtown, all unsolved. And you got to understand also the LA was a very different time back then. It was a real life LA Confidential, lot of corruption back in those days and stuff. And basically, the Grand Jury, the 1949, grand jury got so upset with these being unsolved that they actually they took the Black Dahlia Murder away from LAPD and had the DHS office investigate it. And the DEA started to get into it, and actually put a case together.

And we wouldn't know all that what they did, except, finally, I had my case. And I went to in secret to Steve Kay, who was a highly respected Head Deputy District Attorney. He he was with Bugliosi on Manson. And he actually prosecuted all of the Manson family by himself. And highly respected. I went to him and said, Hey, here's my case, take a look at it. and review it. He took about two months and said, There's enough here for me to file against your father. And basically, with that, I went to Steve Lopez, who's a top reporter in Los Angeles, I'm sure you know, the LA Times columnist, the LA Times, exactly. I went to Steve and I said, Hey, here's my book that's about to come out in three weeks. Take a look at it and you know, take it from there. So he does it basically he goes to LAPD and says, Hey, there's this retired hotel guy says daddy's Black Dahlia killer, you know, and LAPD says go away. We don't talk about active unsolved cases.

Steve Gregory

Let's leave it right there for a second because we do have to take a break. When we come back. We'll talk more about how close Steve Hodel is getting to connecting the murder of "The Black Dahlia" with his father, but first this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.

## **SEGMENT 7**

Steve Gregory

KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory and this is Unsolved. Speaking with Steve Hodel, retired LAPD homicide detective about the death of Elizabeth Short, "The Black Dahlia". And he's been telling us this absolute fascinating story, in connection with his father and how it accidentally fell into his lap. And so now by this time, you've given Steve Lopez at the LA Times your your book on what you found out so far, including the information about your father. You've also talked about the fact that LAPD is not well you know how they are. They're not really big on talking about stuff like this. But so where does it go from there?

Steve Hodel

Okay, so, Steve goes to Lopez goes to LAPD that say go away. We don't we don't talk about cases. So he then goes to the DA Cooley, Steve Cooley. And he says, Hey, there's this Hodel, you know, the Black Dahlia. He says his father did it, blah, blah, blah. And coolly says, Well, I'm not spending a dime of taxpayers money on a back then it was a 50 year old case. 55 year old case. He says, But you know, there is a file on the Black Dahlia. In the vaults downstairs to like to see that. He met Lopez. Yeah. So they go down to the vault. The DA, opens it up, gives him this box and the Black Dahlia, Lopez walks upstairs, goes into a room, opens it up, opens up the file out falls a picture of Dr. George Hill Hodel. He goes, whoa, he was a suspect, I guess. So he does. And he goes through and reviews a quick and dirty. You know, there are hundreds and hundreds of pages. He just does a quick thing. And he does two articles back to back, and basically says well, he was a he was a suspect in the Black Dahlia. And he basically, you know, but they apparently they cleared him or something. And he did a two articles. And that left it at that. So I go to Cooley and I say hey, you know, can I take a look at the pages of the information and stuff on my dad says, Well, I let him I guess I have to let you and I spend the entire day copying hundreds and hundreds of pages. And what do I find? And I spend the next three or four months going through them page by page in detail. But the big the big shocker is that LAPD and the DA's office worked together as a team. 18 Detectives, 24/7 staked out our Franklin home. This Mayan temple. They picked up. My father took him down for questioning at the Hall of Justice. While he was there, they broke into our home. They put live microphones in the walls, in the bedroom in the living room. And basically ran a wire from our home two and a half miles to the LAPD Hollywood police station where I worked my career in the basement and monitored live recordings, 24/7. And basically, this went on for six weeks, 24/7 And they got some very damning statements and confessions from from George listening in. And I'll just read you a few of them. This is from the actual transcripts that are typed and it was 146 page transcript. And here's some quotes from from that. Surveillance. This is dad talking, quote, "this is the best payoff I'm seeing between law enforcement agencies. You don't have the right connections made the DA's office don't confess ever suppose and I did kill the Black Dahlia. I couldn't prove it now. They can't talk to my secretary anymore because she's dead. Well, his secretary they investigated in two years earlier for this vicious murder of his secretary and overdose. The FBI were over to see me three weeks ago. Well, anyway, she hasn't said she committed incest or killed a Black Dahlia. Don't say anything on the phone. It's tapped. I have your phone. I'll have to go out and call you". So he thought that he was suspected that phone was tapped. He had no idea that the house was wired for sound. "They're probably watching me. Do you think we could hire some girls to find out what they're doing? I'm in trouble. Oh, then he says I put a pillow over her head, covered her with a blanket got a taxi called Georgia Street receiving, expired at 12:39. They thought there was something fishy. Anyway, now they may have figured it out. Killed her. Maybe I didn't kill my secretary". Now he's referring to that. Crime

two years earlier on that, and one of the final statements is I'm in trouble -Black Dahlia, passport. Police have my picture in that girl. I thought I destroyed all of them. So, of course these these were mind boggling to say the least. Sure, and other other reports clearly say that George Hodell and Elizabeth Short were dating in the years prior, that they were acquainted boyfriend girlfriend, and that they had dated.

And then so this is basically most of the transcripts or, you know, pretty much covering all of this. These are just summaries these are not the actual what happened was the everything related to George Hodell disappeared from LAPD files. Today's LAPD had no clue that these even existed.

Steve Gregory

Then for what purpose? You think?

Steve Hodel

Okay, so So but the big thing was, there was actually what happened was on the third day of the stakeout, I'm reading it, and I don't have this printed out, but I'll just paraphrase it. In the transcripts, it says Hodel and a second man a, who I later identified as a Barren Moringa walked down to the basement blowed a blows or heard a Woman screams more blows, a woman screams again. And then it goes silent. And I'm reading this and I'm thinking, What the hell, why aren't they out out the door and over there, they're five minutes away. And they do nothing. So this was either a so this woman in the basement that was being beaten, was either it was either a serious felony assault or more likely, and I'm convinced it was a murder. And and they do nothing. So, you know, basically, you know, all I can assume is that is the third day of the stakeout these cops are thinking of what do we do? Should we call our boss or to call Lieutenant Jemison? You know, we don't want to blow our cover. It's all quiet. Now. He's into kinky sex, you know, and they just let it go? Well, basically, and you got to understand the timing of everything. During this time. Parker, who's our most famous, Bill Parker, most famous police chief was literally weeks away from assuming command as the new chief. He wanted to clean up dodge, get rid of all the corruption that was there. And he knew if this came out, that there was actually a murder, you know, if this was actually released, and it would not allow him to take power? It would you know, DA's office would, you know, it would set them back. So I think they kind of made a Machiavellian decision and said, Look, why don't we let's let's lock this away for now. We'll come back to it in the future. But for now, let's take command and do what we have to do and clean up the city. And because it was a real live LA Confidential back then and had been for 20s through the 20s and 30s.

Steve Gregory

So let me pause there when we come back. We'll wrap up our final segment with Steve Hodel. But first this is Unsolved with Steve Gregory on KFI AM 640. Time now for our news update.

## **SEGMENT 8**

Steve Gregory



KFI AM 640, heard everywhere live on the iHeartRadio app. I'm Steve Gregory. And this is Unsolved. Speaking with Steve Hodel, retired LAPD homicide detective, and he's been giving this amazing overview of not only the Elizabeth Short case, but how all of a sudden out of nowhere, the story falls into his lap that his father is most likely to killer. And before the break, we were talking about all the politics behind the scenes of you trying to get either access or a conviction, or at least anybody to open up the case and take this seriously. But as you know, as a detective Steve, where's your physical evidence?

Steve Hodel

Okay, so basically, the book comes out. And really what this is, there are eight books, it's all one ongoing investigation, okay. And it just keeps going. And in my second and third books, I'm actually able to come up with hard physical evidence connecting from the crime scene, which is Sowden house, our family home residence on Franklin Avenue, to the actual crime scene, and how that comes together as this. Basically, I discovered that Frank Lloyd Wright Jr, who built our home, UCLA has his files. So I go there to go through them. And I'm going through his files, and lo and behold, here's a file on Georgia Hodel. And I open it up, and I'm going through it and here are original receipts for work done at the Franklin house back in the 40s. And I look at it and there's a receipt for some 50 pound bags of cement and, and manure steer manure, dated three days before the body is found. On January, well, actually five days January 10. These receipts for these the work that was done at the Franklin house. And these 50 pound bags are identical to the 50 pound bags used to transport from the private from the emergency which was unsafe as the Franklin house to the actual crime scene. And basically, the other thing that we didn't mention was that during the torture they were they she was forced fed feces, she was forced to eat feces. And of course, to my mind, that's the manure, that's the steer manure which they found because it was called fertile light. And that had in the stuff in her stomach, they found green particles and manure or feces. And so basically, that ties these cement bags, bag of manure and to use the transporter. I'm sure she was forced fed from that bag during that the torture. So you've got that you've got the physical evidence there, the bags from placed at the crime scene three days before the murder through the taken to Leimert Park. Also, about five years, six years ago, I had the opportunity to have a cadaver dog do a search of the Franklin house. And it was for a program that unrelated to me, but they wanted me there to give the history of the story. It was a paranormal show they did I forget the name of it right now. But anyway, they had hired this retired Police Sergeant from Northern California and his dog Buster. And I met them there and Buster was out front with me and that Sergeant Paul dosti. And he lets he lets Buster go and Buster immediately runs to a corner of the house and alerts. And it's it's the way the house is set up. It's so he was actually alerting at the basement. So we go in to the basement and the alerts at four different locations. We recover soil from those, those soil samples are sent to Dr. Arpadvos at the body farm and they come back positive for human remains. Now they don't, dogs don't alert cadaver dogs alert on dead rats and dead animals only human remains. And this is confirmed from the soil analysis. You know and basically we know from the transcripts that the the VAs office we're investigating the possibility of graves in the basement. There's actually a report there and there are they called in a club Or instead, you did work here. Did you see any graves? So they were clearly alerted to the possibility of bodies bury in the basement. I put this all together and send it to send it to LAPD and of course crickets, nothing, no response, nothing. And so again, more hard physical evidence. And basically, you know, both of those are powerful independent. I've been trying to get them to do DNA. No DNA has been done, no comparisons

not just to this, but also to the the other lone woman murders that he's good for. And there's a whole new other crime signature that we haven't even talked about. And it's just too involved to try and compare here. Well, it's murder is a fine art

Steve Gregory

Yeah, and you've talked about a couple of things here. And this does warrant another follow up show with you, Steve, because you just you've got so much to say, and we have such limited time. So I want to go back to two things real quickly as we wrap up in our last couple minutes here. You first of all, I'm just flat out asked you you believe your father killed Elizabeth Short?

Steve Hodel

Well, not only do I believe it, but here's the other huge kicker. The case was solved. That's that's the third myth because the case was never solved. The case was solved. And I've got the highest officials on LAPD, and the DA's office. Quotes from them saying it was solved. And if I can if we got time for me to read there.

Steve Gregory

If you got a couple of a couple of coats. Sure. Okay. Chief Parker,

Steve Hodel

quote, "we identified the Black Dahlia suspect he was a doctor. Chief of Detectives, LAPD chief effects of Stan Brown "the Black Dahlia case was solved. He was a doctor who lived on Franklin Avenue in Hollywood." Lieutenant Jemison from the DA's office, "we know who the Black Dahlia killer was he was a doctor, but we didn't have enough to put him away". Yeah, they did, actually. And then the Undersheriff James Downey back then "The Black Dahlia case was solved. It'll never come out. The suspect was a doctor. They all knew in Hollywood involved in abortions". So you've got and here's, you know, the I really have a problem when I hear this unsolved case because LAPD before I ever came along, and Steve Hodel ever heard of these four high ranking officers all said the case was solved. So there's a difference between solved and cleared. So the case is solved. And according and if LAPD wants to argue with their top command officers, they can, but they all independently at separate times that it was solved. Well, yeah. It hasn't been clear. That's the difference.

Steve Gregory

Well, good. Listen, we gotta wrap this up. Steve, thank you so much. And real quickly. You also alluded to the fact you think your father is responsible for other murders. Right. So we'll have to come back and revisit that so so that we clear this up today unsolved with Steve Gregory. This is a this is a solved case, but it's not a clear case. And that's, that's what you say your evidence and your investigation has proven. So, Steve, this has been absolutely fascinating. I can't thank you enough for your time. And good luck on all your books. And good luck on all the rest of your research.

Steve Hodel

Thanks a lot, Steve. Take care.

Steve Gregory

Unsolved with Steve Gregory is a production of the KFI news department for iHeartMedia Los Angeles Robin Bertolucci, program director Chris Little, news director. Their program is produced by Steve Gregory and Jacob Gonzalez. The digital producer is Andro Mammo. The field engineer is Tony Sorrentino, and the technical director is David Callaway. A special thanks tonight to Steve Hodel. Coming up next it's Coast to Coast but first this is KFI AM 640. Time now for a news update.