

## FAQ 64

(Dec. 23, 2007)

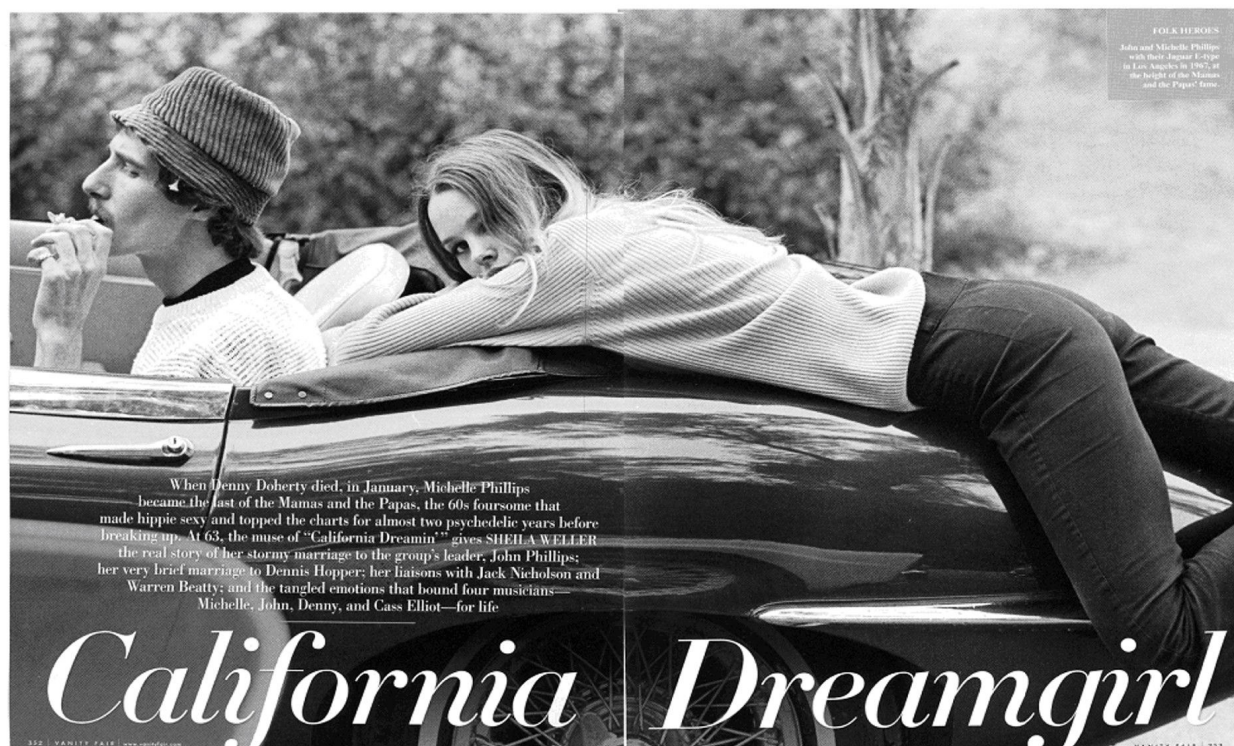
### 64.1

**December 2007 *Vanity Fair Magazine* --** Major article/interview with singer/actress, Michelle Phillips. In this thirteen-page interview with journalist, Shelia Weller, Michelle shares her personal life, describing the role and prominent influence, Tamar Hodel, her lifelong friend, played in “the early years.” Tamar is also interviewed for the piece. Below is an excerpt focusing on, “The Black Dahlia Heritage”. (SKH Note: The article mentions that Michelle met Tamar “through her brother, who was dating Michelle’s sister.” That was not me, but rather, my brother, Kelvin who as a teenager was dating Michelle’s sister, Rusty.)

## VANITY FAIR MAGAZINE DECEMBER 2007

By Shelia Weller

\*Shelia Weller is a senior contributing editor at *Glamour*





Tamar Hodel age 25

(VF excerpted pages 3 & 4 "The Black Dahlia Heritage")

California Dreamgirl: Entertainment &amp; Culture: vanityfair.com

Page 3 of 13

bookkeeper, dropped dead of a brain aneurysm when Michelle was five. Gil took the girls to Mexico for several years, then back to L.A. There, as a county probation officer who smoked pot and never made a secret of his love affairs (he would eventually marry five more times), he seemed to model the axiom "Hedonism requires discipline." "My father had very few rules, but with those he was *steadfast*. 'Clean up your messes.' 'Be a good citizen.'" (The code stuck. "I have never been late for work a day in my life, I refused to ask John for alimony, I have never been in rehab," she enumerates proudly.) But young Michelle needed more than a *male* guide. "In retrospect, I see that I was looking for a girlfriend/mother figure." In 1958 she found, through her sister's boyfriend, a 23-year-old who had an unsurpassable store of harrowingly acquired female survival skills to impart.

### The Black Dahlia Heritage

Tamar Hodel was one of six children—by three different women—of the most pathologically decadent man in Los Angeles: Dr. George Hodel, the city's venereal-disease czar and a fixture in its A-list demimonde. She'd grown up in her father's Hollywood house, which resembled a Mayan temple, was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright's son, and was the site of wild parties, in which Hodel was sometimes joined by director John Huston and photographer Man Ray.

George Hodel shared with Man Ray a love for the work of the Marquis de Sade and the belief that the pursuit of personal liberty was worth everything—possibly even, for Hodel, gratuitous murder. What has recently come to light, by way of two startling investigative books (2003's *Black Dahlia Avenger*, by Hodel's ex-L.A.P.D. homicide-detective son, Steve Hodel, and—building upon it—*Exquisite Corpse*, 2006, by art writers Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss), is that George Hodel was a prime suspect in the notorious Black Dahlia murder. (According to *Black Dahlia Avenger*, Hodel was the killer, and the Los Angeles District Attorney's office conducted extensive surveillance of him. There were numerous arrests, but no one was ever charged with the murder.) A striking, graphic array of evidence in the two books strongly suggests that it was Hodel who, on January 15, 1947, killed actress Elizabeth Short, then surgically cut her in two and transported the halved, nude, exsanguinated corpse—the internal organs kept painstakingly intact—to a vacant lot, where he laid the pieces out as if in imitation of certain Surrealist artworks by Man Ray.

Without knowing any of this, 13-year-old Michelle Gilliam walked through Tamar Hodel's porch into a room decorated *all* in lavender and beheld a sultry Kim Novak look-alike. "Tamar was the epitome of glamour," Michelle recalls. "She was someone who never got out of bed until two p.m., and she looked it. It was late afternoon, and she was dressed in a beautiful lavender suit with her hair in a beehive. I took one look and said, *New best friend!*" With Tamar was her cocoa-skinned daughter, Debbie, five; folksinger Stan Wilson, an African-American, was Tamar's current husband. (She'd married her first—who was also black—at 16, in 1951.) "Tamar was so exotic! She was instantly my idol."

Tamar's sophistication had a grotesque basis. In her father's home—where she had often "uncomfortably" posed nude, she recalls, for "dirty-old-man" Man Ray and had once wriggled free from a predatory John Huston—George Hodel had committed incest with her. "When I was 11, my father taught me to perform oral sex on him. I was terrified, I was gagging, and I was embarrassed that I had 'failed' him," Tamar says, telling her version of her long-misreported adolescence. George plied her with erotic books, grooming her for what he touted as their transcendent union. (Tamar says that she told her mother what George had done, and that, when confronted, George denied it.) He had intercourse with Tamar when she was 14. To the girl's horror, she became pregnant; to her greater horror, she says, "my father wanted me to *have* his baby." After a friend took her to get an abortion, an angry George—jealous, Tamar says, of some boys who'd come to see her—struck her on the head with his pistol. Her stepmother, Dorero (who was John Huston's ex-wife), rushed her into hiding.

George Hodel was arrested, and the tabloid flashbulbs popped during the sensational 1949 incest trial. Hodel's



lawyers, Jerry Geisler and Robert Neeb, painted Tamar as a “troubled” girl who had “fantasies.” Tamar’s treatment by the defense and the press during that time wounds her to this day. George was acquitted.

When Michelle appeared on Tamar’s porch, Tamar saw in her “a gorgeous little Brigitte Bardot” and sensed that she could rewrite her own hideous youth by guiding a protégée through a better one. “Meeting Michelle felt destined, as if we’d known each other in another life,” says Tamar. “I wanted to champion her, because no one had championed me.” Michelle says, “I moved in with Tamar; she ‘adopted’ me right away. Then *everything* started.”

Tamar took the lower-middle-class bohemian’s daughter and polished her. She bought her the clothes Gil couldn’t afford, enrolled her in modeling school, taught her how to drive her lavender Nash Rambler, and provided her with a fake ID and amphetamines, Michelle says, “so I could make it through a day of eighth grade after staying up all night with her. Tamar introduced me to *real* music—Bessie Smith and Paul Robeson and Josh White and Leon Bibb. And I, who’d been listening to the Kingston Trio, was just entranced.” To keep Gil from being bent out of shape by the fact that his daughter had been spirited away, Michelle says, “Tamar put on perfect airs around my dad, and when it became necessary she would sleep with him.” One day Tamar’s husband, Stan, made the mistake of crawling into Michelle’s bed. Michelle shoved him out, and Tamar ended the marriage, leaving the two young blonde beauties on their own, with sometimes a third one visiting them, Michelle’s fresh-faced teen-model friend Sue Lyon. “Sue was innocent and naïve, not like us,” Tamar says. Sue’s mother bawled Michelle out for sneaking her daughter a copy of *Lolita*. Tamar says she had to explain the famous masturbation scene to the sheltered ingénue. (A few years later, Sue was cast in the title role in the 1962 Stanley Kubrick film of the novel—a role Tamar insisted should have been played by Michelle.)

In early 1961, Tamar and her teenage sidekick moved to San Francisco. They painted their apartment lavender, and, like two Holly Golightlys on uppers, they did the town, watching Lenny Bruce and Mort Sahl spew their subversive humor at the hungry i and the Purple Onion. They got to know the cool guys on the scene; Michelle fell for singer Travis Edmonson, of the folk duo Bud and Travis, and Tamar fell for activist comedian Dick Gregory.

Both girls thought that Scott McKenzie (original name: Phil Blondheim), the wavy-haired lead singer in a folk group called the Journeymen, was, as Michelle puts it, “very, very cute.” Tamar won his heart. She took Scott back to the apartment to listen to *La Bohème*, and, as Michelle remembers it, with a laugh, they never left the bed. The Journeymen’s leader, whose name was John Phillips, appeared at the door every night, annoyed to have to yank his tenor out of Tamar’s arms to get him to the club by showtime. A native of Alexandria, Virginia, Phillips was tall and lean and exotically handsome: his mother was Cherokee; his secret actual father (whom he never knew) was Jewish, though he’d been raised thinking that the square-jawed Marine captain his mother had married was his father. From the moment Michelle saw him in the hungry i phone booth—long legs stretched out, ankles propped on his guitar case—she knew two things: one, he was married (“You could tell he was making The Call Home”), and, two, she had to have him. “I fell in love with his talent, his poise, his ability to be leader of the pack.”

Michelle “stepped out of a dream,” John Phillips would rhapsodize in his 1986 autobiography, *Papa John*. She was “the quintessential California girl. She could look innocent, pouty, girlish, aloof, firey.” Michelle says, “John was 25, married with two children, from an East Coast Catholic military family. He had gone to Annapolis, he performed in a suit and tie—he had *never met* anyone like me!” Her uniqueness in John’s eyes was no small thing, since he was a habitual trend surfer (“a charismatic snake-oil salesman” is how Marshall Brickman puts it). He’d started a doo-wop group when doo-wop was in, then switched to ballads with his group the Smoothies—just in time for *American Bandstand*’s body-grinding slow-dancers—then jumped on the folk bandwagon. To John, Tamar Hodel’s protégée was a fascinating hybrid just over the *Zeitgeist*’s horizon: a street girl, to be sure

<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2007/12/phillips200712?printable=true&curre...> 11/23/2007

(“She would have fit into the Ronettes or the Shangri-Las perfectly,” he’d later say), yet seasoned in high culture and political idealism—and with that angelic face. John used to tell Michelle she was the first flower child he had ever met.

**For complete 13 page article go to --**

**<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2007/12/phillips200712>**