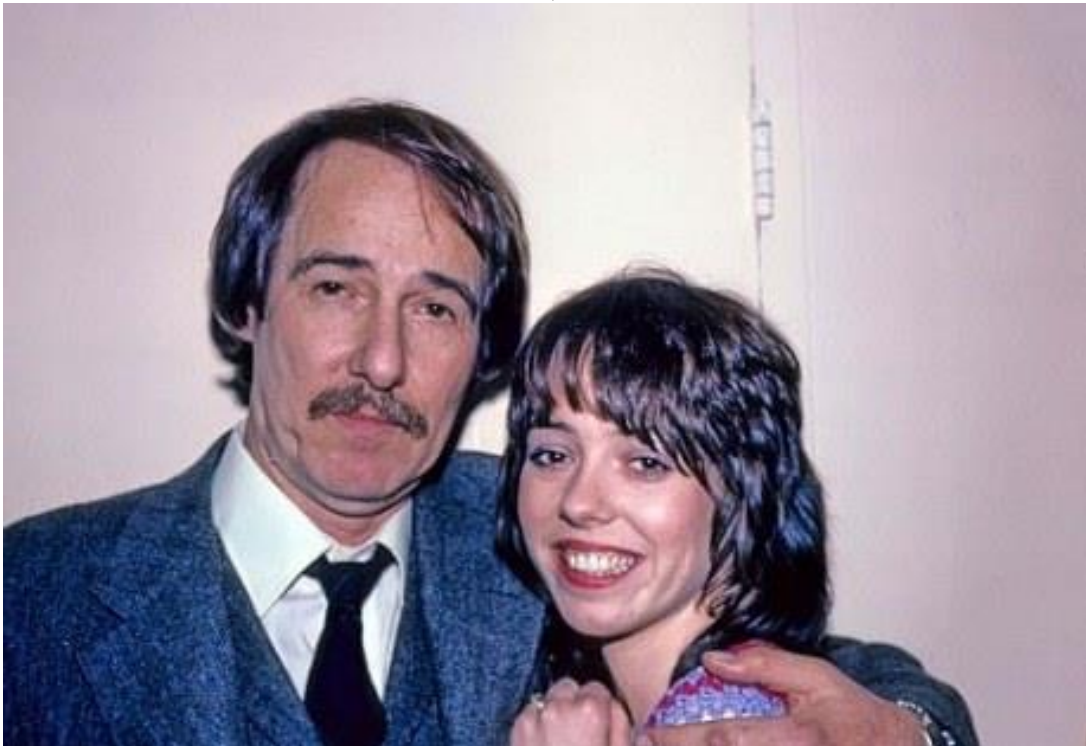


# Michelle Phillips and Friends Speak Out about Mackenzie's Incest Allegations

BY

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Two years ago I wrote a lengthy Vanity Fair profile of Michelle Phillips, who, along with her then husband John Phillips, Cass Elliott, and Denny Doherty, jump-started the sybaritic phase of the counterculture with their iconic group, The Mamas and the Papas. What struck me most, and what I tried to convey in the piece, was what a survivor Michelle has been. With pragmatism, wit, and a polished form of street smarts, she made it through the tumultuous years of sex, drugs, and rock-'n'-roll that battered or killed so many of her friends and partners—foremost among them John Phillips, whose destructiveness was too florid even for Keith Richards, who once kicked Phillips out of his house for being too out-of-control.

Incidentally, father-daughter incest played a role in my story. As a young teenager, Michelle's mentor had been an older girl, Tamar Hodel, who at age 16 had been raped by her father, a prominent (and extraordinarily decadent) doctor. Tamar had become pregnant, had an abortion, and testified at a notorious, headline-making, noir-era-L.A. incest trial; but somehow she, not her father, was the one who ended up being blamed and shamed. In meeting the beautiful young Michelle on the heels of her trauma and disgrace, Tamar had wanted, as I'd put it, "to rewrite her own hideous youth by guiding a protégée to a better one." It was through Tamar that Michelle met John Phillips. This week the headline-making news comes from John Phillips's 49-year old daughter, Mackenzie Phillips (whose mother is Susan Adams Phillips, John's first wife): in her new memoir and all over TV, she has said she was raped by her father at 19 and went on to have what she has sadly come to consider a "consensual" incestuous relationship with him for 10 years, ending it only when she became pregnant, feared the baby was his, and aborted it. Several times while I was reporting my story—for example, when I spoke to John Phillips's third wife, the still-fragile Genevieve Waite, about their years of intense drug-taking—I sensed that there were hidden traumas. Still, I couldn't have imagined this.

I applaud Mackenzie Phillips's crushingly difficult honesty. Even in our confessional culture, there are a few taboos that never stop shaming the confessor, and incest is one of those few. It is, simply put, a life-ruiner, and it's amazing that Mackenzie, addictions notwithstanding, survived as productively as she has. But what do the people in her family, and the Mamas and Papas family, think of her revelations? I made some inquiries.

One member of the inner circle of the original Mamas and Papas e-mailed me: “If I could pull John out of his crypt and beat the crap out of him I would. What a tragic, disgusting, and disturbing piece of news.” When I called Tamar Hodel in Hawaii, where she lives, she said, “I believe Mackenzie, and I agree with what she has said on TV: that there is much more incest out there than people are aware of. It’s hidden and it destroys lives. I look at Mackenzie and realize I was fortunate: I was raped only one time by my father.” Tamar recalled seeing Mackenzie in Hawaii a few years ago, when Mackenzie was performing in *The Vagina Monologues*. “She was onstage, talking about incest, and there was no doubt she was talking about herself.” As someone who was once in a position similar to Mackenzie’s, Tamar demurs only when discussing the immense publicity that has accompanied her revelation (Mackenzie has been on Oprah and the Today show, and her book, *High on Arrival*, is the No. 3 bestseller on Amazon). Tamar “went into hiding” after the long-ago incest trial, and she eventually managed to resume her life. But when, years later, her brother Steven Hodel wrote a bestselling book that detailed her ordeal, Tamar says, “I went into traumatic shock.”

When I called Michelle Phillips at her home in L.A. yesterday she was typically forthright. “I’m so embarrassed—and mad,” she said. “At Oprah, at the publisher, and at Mackenzie, who should be on a psychiatrist’s couch, not on TV.” Michelle is not quite ready to concede that her former husband and the father of her daughter, Chynna Phillips, could have committed such heinous acts. “Is this all true? We’ll never know, because she waited until John was dead,” she said, adding that she was worried about how the news will impact other members of the Phillips family. “If you’re going to make these accusations and they don’t hurt anyone living, that’s one thing. But Mackenzie has affected the lives of all her nieces and nephews, who are not going to school today and are staying home sobbing instead. And the book has come out just at the time that Chynna [a onetime member of the group Wilson Phillips] has to go out on the road with her new album [of Christian music], Chynna and Vaughan. She said, ‘Mom, what am I gonna do—not promote my album?’ So she’s going out today, head held high.” Like most of the women in her family, Chynna, too, is a survivor.

To read Sheila Weller’s article about Michelle Phillips, “California Dreamgirl,” [click here](#).

