

## DA Investigators Jemison &amp; Morgan



*Lt. Frank Jemison*

ONE OF THE FEW MEN IN THE BLACK DAHLIA INVESTIGATION who it can be said was actually wearing a white hat was Lt. Frank B. Jemison of the Los Angeles District Attorney's Bureau of Investigation.

From everything that I've seen, he did his job, solved the case, and was just about to make the arrest when the powers that be pulled his plug. We can speculate all day about why. The reasons are many and varied.

However, what is not in dispute is The Order. Lt. Jemison, in his final closing report, made it crystal clear that he had been removed from the case [later independently confirmed in a 2004 television interview of DA investigator Walter Morgan] and ordered to hand over his investigation, interviews, and all his evidence, which included the wire recordings and transcripts, directly to LAPD Chief Thad Brown.

As I said in an earlier chapter, Lt. Jemison's saving grace was to copy his original investigation, complete with the Hodel-Black Dahlia File, and secure it in the DA's vault, where it would remain hidden for the next fifty-three years until finally being opened and revealed.



*Los Angeles Hall of Justice  
210 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles*

The above photo taken by the author in 2008 shows the downtown Los Angeles Hall of Justice at the corner of Temple and Broadway Streets. The HoJ built in 1925, has a long, colorful, and macabre history. Most of L.A.'s famous trials were held in this courthouse. The building served as a jail detention facility for prisoners awaiting trial, as well as housing the L.A. County Sheriff's Department, Coroner and District Attorney, including Lt. Jemison's office in the Bureau of Investigation.

The HoJ was within easy walking distance of all three of Dr. George Hodel's medical facilities: Health Department in Chinatown, First Street VD Clinic at First and Central, and his private medical office at Seventh and Flower Street.

The building has direct connections to our investigation.

1) In the early 1940s, Dr. George Hill Hodel's Health Department office was inside this building [1938-1942];

2) In 1947, the autopsy on Elizabeth "Black Dahlia" Short was performed in the Coroner's morgue in the basement of the HoJ, and the inquest into her death was held in a courtroom of the building; and

3) In 1949, Dr. George Hodel was arrested and booked into the jail facility here and was later tried in Superior Court on the lower floors of the premise. On February 15, 1950, George Hodel was detained and questioned by Lt. Jemison here, while at the same time, LAPD and DA sound technicians and detectives broke into the Franklin house to install the microphones.

Dr. Hodel was free to go only after Lt. Jemison got the "all clear" call from detectives as they exited the Franklin house, having "wired it for sound."

Charles Manson and the rest of his "Family" were tried and convicted here. So were RFK assassin Sirhan Sirhan, mobsters Bugsy Siegel and Mickey Cohen, actor Robert Mitchum, as well as most of L.A.'s historic bad boys and *femme fatales*. In addition to Elizabeth Short, this was also the morgue where the autopsies on Marilyn Monroe and Robert Kennedy were performed.

The building was deemed "unsafe" after the 1994 Northridge earthquake and has been vacant for nearly two decades. With such a distinguished history, hopefully, it will be saved from the wrecking ball, updated to current codes and preserved.



Dr. George Hill Hodel's four downtown L.A. medical office locations:  
(1) Health Dept. Chinatown; (2) Health Dept., Hall of Justice [1938-1940  
(3) His privately owned, First Street VD Clinic; and (4) His private practice at Roosevelt Bldg.



*Upper Left: GHH Chinatown office; Upper Right: First Street Clinic  
Bottom: Dr. Hodel's private practice on 12<sup>th</sup> floor at Seventh and Flower*

## **A FAMILY SECRET**

“The Dahlia murder suspect was a doctor and we know who did it, but we couldn’t put him away.” —Lt. Frank Jemison Hall of Justice Summer, 1951

In mid-October 2006, I was contacted by a close surviving relative of District Attorney investigator, Lt. Frank B. Jemison. For privacy’s sake, I will simply use his initials, “J.F.” He advised me that he was Jemison’s nephew [Jemison’s sister’s son], a medical doctor, and a retired Air Force colonel. Here in his own words is his description of his Uncle Frank, and one very important meeting he remembers from 1951:

### **Family background:**

Frank was my mother’s brother, the only son of a Methodist minister. He seemed a little eccentric to me. Every two years, he and his wife would fly to Detroit, pick up a new Cadillac, and drive through Ohio unannounced to visit his three sisters. If they weren’t home—too bad, until two years later. He had not followed his father Dave’s advice and entered the ministry and after graduation from Ohio Wesleyan College, he took off for the west coast. I thought he had a Law degree. Family rumor has it that he earned a good bit of money in real estate and as a financial advisor prior to his career as a DA investigator.

I know he was proud of his fortune, which was, at least in 1951, over one million dollars. While there was some family friction with Uncle Frank, he was always described as a person of impeccable personal integrity. I surmise that this integrity plus the fact that he had already made his fortune made him an excellent choice as investigator in the midst of apparent corruption. At his wife’s death, the estate was left to Ohio Wesleyan.

### **The Black Dahlia Murder Case:**

When I was 12 years old in the summer of 1951, I accompanied my family to a medical convention in San Francisco and we stopped in L.A. for three days, my only extended contact with Uncle Frank. At dinner, he asked if my father, a family physician, and I would like to see where he worked. At that time, the Hall of Justice was one of the, if not the, tallest buildings in LA. My father and Uncle Frank sat in the front seat and I sat in back. As they drove, Dad turned and said, “You know your Uncle Frank was the

investigator for the Black Dahlia case.” I liked the name but it didn’t mean much to me. They explained that it was a famous murder case. I didn’t listen too hard to the conversation until they said the body was cut up. Then I was all ears. Uncle Frank described the cuts, etc., and asked Dad what he thought. My father said he thought it had to be the work of a surgeon. Uncle Frank agreed and said that “We know who did it but we didn’t have enough to put him away.” For some reason, my twelve year old mind couldn’t understand that. I wondered why, if they knew who did it they couldn’t arrest him. I never thought of that case from that time, but the name “Black Dahlia” remained stuck in my mind. Just thought this might be interesting to you as background information. Really have enjoyed your book!

Sincerely Yours,  
J.F. M.D. COL USAF (ret)

Dr. J.F.’s “background information” is much more than interesting. With what we already know, his family reflections are extremely illuminating, especially because of his certainty as to when Uncle Frank met with him and made these statements. It was the summer of 1951!

Let’s briefly review Lt. Jemison’s investigative chronology:

1) **October 1949**—Grand Jury appointed Lt. Frank Jemison to take over the Black Dahlia and other L.A. Lone Woman murder investigations. George Hill Hodel became DA Lt. Jemison’s prime Dahlia suspect.

2) **February 15-March 27, 1950**—Jemison established an eighteen-man task force assigned to twenty-four-hour electronic-surveillance of Dr. Hodel’s Franklin house.

3) **March 28, 1950**—George Hodel was tipped about surveillance. Realizing he was about to be arrested, he fled the residence. DA Lt. Jemison forced to remove surveillance equipment and shut down operation. After that, Lt. Jemison and police never again have contact with prime suspect, Dr. George Hill Hodel.

4) **February 1951**—Lt. Jemison ordered to close Dahlia case and turn all investigation and evidence and Hodel surveillance recordings and interviews over to LAPD. He complies, but locks away a “second set of investigative files” in the DA vault, where they remain untouched and unexamined until 2003.

5) **July 1951**—Lt. Jemison brought his vacationing brother-in-law, a medical doctor, and his twelve-year-old nephew, “J.F.” to his office at the downtown Los Angeles Hall of Justice and informed them that “the Dahlia murder suspect was a doctor and we know who did it, but we couldn’t put him away.”

On August 15, 1967, some seventeen years after solving the Black Dahlia murder and locking his secret away in the DA vault, Frank Jemison died in Beverly Hills, California. He was sixty-eight.

He died a rich man. His will gave some of it to his alma mater, Wesleyan College in Ohio. The rest of his assets, after his wife Jane’s death, were placed as a trust fund for the Los Angeles District Attorney’s Office.

In 1979, the Frank Jemison Award was established from his bequest for the purpose of selecting and acknowledging “excellence in public service.”

Every year since then, the award has been given to two outstanding employees selected from the DA’s Office. One of the recipients is a DA investigator, and the other from the DA’s support staff. Each Jemison Award Winner receives \$5,000 cash.

## **DA INVESTIGATOR WALTER MORGAN—THE LAST COYOTE**

“I guess there’s not too many left in the hills in the city—least near where I live. So whenever I see one, I get this feeling that it might be the last one left out there. You know? The last coyote. And I guess that would bother me if it ever turned out to be true,

if I never saw one again.” —Detective Harry Bosch, from Michael Connelly’s *The Last Coyote*

The following is based on an obituary I wrote for DA Investigator Walter Morgan when he died in 2007.

September 8, 2007  
Los Angeles

**DA INVESTIGATOR WALTER MORGAN,  
BLACK DAHLIA MURDER’S LAST COYOTE DIES AT 92  
1915-2007**



Walter Morgan, the Los Angeles District Attorney’s Bureau of Investigation “old school” detective and the last surviving member of the 1950 Black Dahlia DA Task Force, in the final years before his passing, linked Dr. George Hill Hodel to the 1947 murder.

In a 2004 CBS *48 Hours* crimespecial, Morgan publicly acknowledged bugging the doctor’s private home. He also confirmed the existence of secret surveillance tapes and transcripts, and that the DA’s 1950 task force was unexpectedly and summarily shut down. In a surprisingly candid on-air response, Morgan acknowledged that he and his fellow officers suspected that the shutdown was the result of a payoff and cover-up.

For me, it ended as it began with this morning’s call from my half-sister, Tamar Hodel. “Steve, I just heard from my daughter, Fauna. Walter Morgan died this morning.”

In my book, *Black Dahlia Avenger: A Genius for Murder*, published in 2003, here is how I originally described my introduction and first meeting with Walter Morgan, then an eighty-seven-year-old retired L.A. district attorney investigator.

**Page 449:**

My INVESTIGATION HAD BEEN COMPLETED for some four months. I was working on the final editing of the manuscript when on April 24, 2002, my phone rang. It was my sister Tamar. “Steven,” she said, “I have the most amazing news. Fauna [her eldest daughter] has just spoken with a man named Walter Morgan.” (I immediately

recognized his name as a district attorney investigator, Lieutenant Jemison's partner from the 1950 investigation, and swallowed hard at hearing his name come from her lips.) "He was a private detective or something back in the 1940s," she said. "He was involved in investigating, guess who: *Dr. George Hodel!* He told Fauna that they put a bug in the Franklin House to listen in on Dad's conversations. Can you call Fauna and find out what this is all about?"

I assured Tamar I would check it out immediately. Contacting Fauna, whom I had not spoken to for ten years, I learned she was working in the San Fernando Valley and had been visited in her place of work by a casual acquaintance, Ethel. In her seventies, Ethel was with her boyfriend whom she introduced as Walter Morgan. Walter shook Fauna's hand and said, "'Hodel?' That's an unusual name. I once worked a murder case on a Dr. Hodel. Any relation?" Fauna and Walter compared notes, and quickly learned that Morgan's suspect and Fauna's grandfather were one and the same.

Two days later, on April 26, I called Walter Morgan and told him my name was Steven Hodel, the uncle of Fauna Hodel, and the son of Dr. George Hill Hodel, who had died in 1999 at the age of ninety-one. I also informed him that I had retired from LAPD after working most of my career as a homicide detective in Hollywood Division.

Morgan greeted me warmly, in that unspoken bond that exists cop to cop, and proceeded to reminisce about the Hodel story.

Morgan, now eighty-seven, said he had worked for the sheriff's department from 1939 to 1949 on radio car patrol, in vice, burglary, and in other details. Then he left LASD and became a DA investigator in 1949, where he remained until retirement in 1970. He worked homicide on temporary assignment for a few months back in 1950. He was sent over to help out Lieutenant Frank Jemison, who he said "had picked me to be his sidekick."

Walter Morgan remembered well the day they had installed listening devices at the Franklin House, which he authoritatively informed me "was built by Frank Lloyd Wright." (As we know, the true architect was his son, Lloyd Wright.) Morgan continued:

"We had a good bug man, a guy that could install bugs anywhere and everywhere. He worked in the DA's crime lab. So the chief assigned me to take him over to the house on Franklin, and he was going to install a bug system at the Hodel residence. My chief at the DA's office had me take him over there and we met the LAPD at Dr. Hodel's house. It was during the daytime and nobody was home. I remember there were some ranking LAPD officers outside, and no one could figure out how to get in. I suggested, "Well, have any of you officers tried a card to see if it would open the door?" They laughed, so I pulled out my wallet, and took out some kind of a credit card or whatever card I had, slipped it through, and the front door popped right open! They couldn't believe it. Anyway, our man went in and installed some bugs there. That was our job, to get the bugs installed so we could listen in."

Based on Walter Morgan's confirmations that my father was the Black Dahlia suspect and our Franklin house was bugged and secret tapes obtained, I closed the chapter (written in 2002) by publicly asking the following questions:

**BDA page 454:**

Standard operating procedure would have been to make transcripts of these conversations, as well as investigative follow-up reports documenting the findings. ***Where are these transcripts? Where are these reports? What do they say?***

A month after publication (May 2003), those questions were answered.

Los Angeles District Attorney Steve Cooley granted me access to the locked and vaulted *Hodel-Black Dahlia Files*, which had remained unexamined for over fifty-years, and, as they say, “the rest is history.”

In June 2004, the five-decade-old surveillance transcripts and investigative reports, along with photographs and copies of the DA files, were released to the public by way of a new chapter, “Aftermath,” added to the BDA’s HarperCollins paperback edition.

## **DA LIEUTENANT WALTER MORGAN—BIOGRAPHY**

- 1939- Appointed a deputy with the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department. Highly skilled in firearms, became one of the sheriff’s department’s “crack shots” after qualifying as a “Distinguished Expert” marksman.
- 1940-1949- L.A. deputy sheriff for nine years. Assignments included: patrol car, vice, and detective bureau (Burglary Detail).
- 1949- Left the sheriff’s department and appointed a detective with the Los Angeles District Attorney’s Office, Bureau of Investigation.
- 1950- Selected by Lt. Frank Jemison to assist him in the Grand Jury ordered reinvestigation of the Black Dahlia case.
- February 15, 1950- Morgan, ordered by Lt. Jemison to coordinate a meeting between DA crime lab electronics’ expert and LAPD detectives for the specific purpose of surreptitiously installing microphones inside the Franklin house residence of Dr. George Hill Hodel. Morgan accompanied by “bug men” and “high ranking LAPD officers” proceeded to 5121 Franklin Avenue and personally “shimmed” the front door of Dr. Hodel’s residence. [To prevent him from walking in on them, the “installation” was coordinated and done at the same time George Hodel was being detained for questioning by DA investigators at the Hall of Justice.]
- March 1970- Morgan retired from the DA’s Office.
- April 2002- Interviewed by me about the Black Dahlia investigation and for the first time in fifty-two years, confirmed George Hodel as the prime suspect and the “bugging of the Hodel residence.”
- May 2004- Interviewed on CBS *48 Hours*, where he publicly acknowledged that he “shimmed the front door” of Dr. Hodel’s residence, and “electronic experts placed bugs in the walls.” Morgan confirmed that he and Lt. Jemison were unexpectedly removed from the case and it was returned back to LAPD for further investigation. In an on-camera statement, Morgan indicated that in 1950, “a cover-up and payoff was suspected.”
- September 8, 2007- Morgan fell ill and passed away in Los Angeles.

In several meetings with Walter Morgan after our introduction in 2002, I became acutely aware that he was a man of many moods and many secrets, most of them from a long time ago.

In his prime, Morgan lived and breathed *Chinatown* and *LA Confidential*. He was *L.A. noir*—only this gumshoe was no celluloid fiction—he was the real deal. As you will read below, he was Philip Marlowe (before Marlowe got fired from the DA’s Office for insubordination) and Dirty Harry rolled into one. And in 1944, a couple of street thugs would “make his day.”

In the mid-1940s, Morgan was close to the power that influenced and ran Los Angeles: gangster Mickey Cohen, Florentine Gardens’ owner Mark Hansen, and his “Mr. Show Business,” M.C. Nils Thor Granlund, better known as-“N.T.G.”

In 1945, Morgan married the Florentine’s lead showgirl, Tanya “Sugar” Geise. Best man at his wedding was no less a luminary, than L.A. County’s top-cop, Sheriff Eugene

Biscailuz. Tanya was good friends with Lavonne Cohen, Mickey Cohen's wife, who also attended the wedding. Mickey Cohen was Bugsy Siegel's lieutenant who, in two short years, would take over as L.A.'s *Numero Uno* gangster after his boss was gunned down in Beverly Hills.

Below I've included just a few press clippings from Morgan's Feisty Forties, to give a sense of the man in his time.

In 1944, while still a deputy sheriff, Morgan was parked in a car with his fiancée Sugar Geise on the Sunset Strip. The couple was approached by two armed robbers.

Excerpt from L.A. *Times* article on September 30, 1944:

### Dead-Shot Deputy Foils Two Asserted Bandits

... Suddenly one of them (Gallentine) shoved a pistol through a partly open window, rapped on the glass, and said, "O.K., give us the dough and the jewels"

### Let "Jewels" Go

"I (Morgan) stepped out and said, "O.K., here are your jewels—and let go eight 'little jewels' from my automatic."



**SHARPSHOOTER**—Deputy Walter Morgan, skilled department champion shot, shows Dancer "Sugar" Geise gun with which he shot two bandit holdup suspects.

### Dead-Shot Deputy Foils Two Asserted Bandits



**ARRAIGNED**—Marvel Rabin, left, and Joseph Gallentine, charged with attempting to hold up deputy sheriff and fiancée Sept. 28, shown of their arraignment.

### Men Who Picked on Deputy as 'Soft Touch' Arraigned



Florentine Gardens singer/dance Sugar Geise with mother

*Florentine Gardens Showgirl Tanya "Sugar" Geise*

June 8, 1945 Los Angeles Times

## Sugar Geise Wed to Deputy Sheriff

Dep. Sheriff Walter Morgan and Tanya (Sugar) Geise, Florentine Gardens night-club singer, whom he once saved from two bandits, yesterday were married in Superior Judge Edward R. Brand's court chambers.

Best man at the double-ring ceremony was Sheriff Biscailuz, with Mrs. Sam Katzman, wife of the R.K.O. producer, acting as matron of honor.

The couple met two years ago while Miss Geise was the star attraction at the Florentine Gardens. Last September, while Morgan was escorting her home, two bandits attempted to hold them up. Morgan leaped from the automobile and wounded both men in a blazing gun battle. Later they were convicted of robbery and sentenced to San Quentin.

"That convinced me I had met the right guy," Sugar declared yesterday after the wedding. She gave her age as 24 and Morgan admitted to being 30.

Other attendants at the wedding were Sugar's father, Harry (Pop) Geise, Lt. John Law, Morgan's immediate superior officer,



**THREE'S A CROWD**—Dep. Sheriff Walter Morgan, about to kiss his bride, Tanya (Sugar) Geise, night club singer, following wedding ceremony yesterday, apparently intends to push Sheriff Biscailuz, best man, out of picture.

and Mrs. Tillman Cohen and Miss Pauline Davis, friends of the bride.

Immediately after the ceremony the couple left for a honeymoon trip which will include San Francisco and Reno.

*Walter Morgan weds Sugar Geise in June 1945  
Sheriff Biscailuz "Best Man"*



*2004- 48 Hours Black Dahlia Confidential  
CBS investigative reporter Erin Moriarty questions Walter Morgan  
regarding the Black Dahlia case being closed down and turned back to LAPD*

Morgan: The only thing I can think is that some money must have transpired between people.

Moriarty: It sounds like you think it may have been a cover-up of some sort?

Morgan: Well, everybody thought that.



*Dr. George Hill Hodel Surveillance Transcripts 40 days--(146 pages)*

To DA investigators Frank Jemison and Walter Morgan: I want to personally thank both of you for your service to the City of Angels and its people. Thank you for your honesty and integrity. You did what others could not. One of you preserved the truth and the other told it.

May you both rest in peace.



*DA investigator Walter Morgan in 1952 walking across the street from his office at the Hall of Justice. [Federal Court in background.]*