

## **FAQ 66**

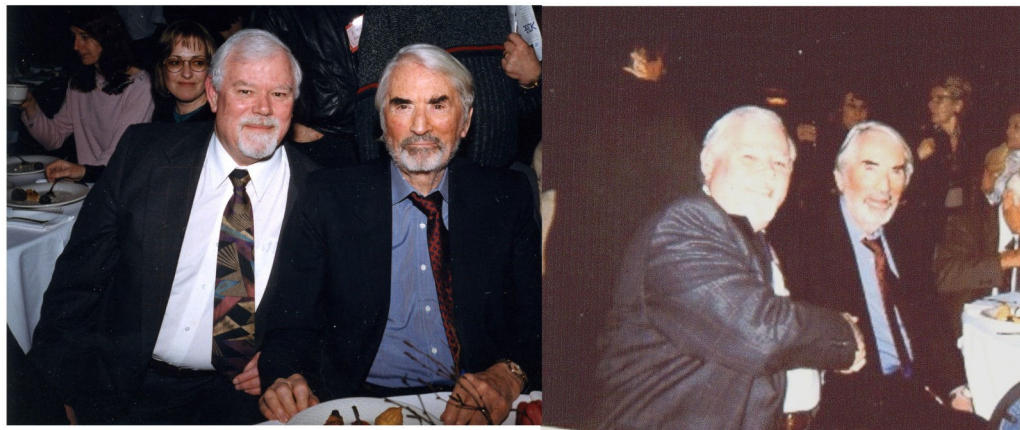
(February 14, 2008)

### **66.1**

**Q: One of my favorite anecdotes in your book is the part where you talk about how your mother sent you three brothers and your dog, KOKO to meet John Huston and actor Gregory Peck at their hotel. Was Gregory Peck a friend of your father's back then?**

While not absolutely positive, I seriously doubt that Gregory Peck ever met my father, or attended any parties at the Franklin House. Not his style!

Interestingly, in 2000, I had the opportunity of "reuniting" with Mr. Peck some fifty-years after the meeting I described in BDA. (See photos below) During our brief "reunion" I reminded him of the facts surrounding our ever so brief visit. Mr. Peck, always the gentleman, laughed loudly at my recalling of the facts and told me that "in those day's I dearly loved my Scotch whisky."



**Author at a 2000 event with actor Gregory Peck thanks him for a fifty-year-old "favor."**

Growing up, Gregory Peck was my personal hero. I, like many, identified the man and his life with his role as Atticus Finch in the 1962 classic, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Truly a great man and a total CLASS ACT. One of the finest actors our world has ever known, died on June 12, 2003, at the advanced age of 87.

#### **Peck as Atticus Finch in *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962)**



**HERE IS THE EXCERPT FROM BDA- CHAPTER 8 “GYPSIES” THAT DESCRIBES THAT 1951 MEETING:**

*Black Dahlia Avenger: A Genius for Murder Chapter 8 Gypsies pgs 104-106*

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By 1951 we had become gypsies, always on the move, because every time our mother went on binges she would lose her job, fall behind in the rent, and wind up with an eviction notice pasted on the door. Fortunately, when she did work it was for real estate offices, where she would jump on the rental listings before they became public. That gave her an inside advantage when cheap apartments came up. So we bounced around from town to town throughout Los Angeles County, moving on an average of every three months. In the early 1950s Mother was arrested several times for child neglect, when neighbors would discover her passed out after she was well into one of her two-week binges. On several occasions, the three of us were taken away from her by social services and placed in county homes, but somehow she would get us back. At which point we would move to another area, another town, and start over again.

Our nomadic existence lasted for two years before we finally wound up in Pasadena, where Mother managed to stay sober long enough to save some money and rent a large home on Los Robles Avenue on the west side of town. Just as we were allowing ourselves to relax and enjoy our new place, she started drinking again, and before long she lost her job and another “pay or quit” notice was stapled to our door. Desperate for money, having tapped out all her usual sources from her friends, and already having been advanced a month’s salary from her real estate manager, Mother chanced to see an article in the newspaper about John Huston’s return to Los Angeles for the Academy Awards.

She may have been drunk most of the time, but if there was an opportunity, Mother knew how to seize it and make her move. She called us into her room, where she dressed us up in wrinkled but clean shirts and pants, then quickly brushed and leashed our boxer dog, Koko. She hurriedly scribbled a note, folded it into an envelope, and pinned it to my shirt. She spoke to us in her accustomed slur, as

she dialed for a taxicab: "Now, boys, I want you to be on your best behavior. You're going to see John. Steven, you will give him this note from me, then after your visit come straight home."

The cab arrived and the driver looked at Mother. "I can't take the dog, lady," he said. She opened the back door of the taxi and motioned for all of us to get inside. "Yes you can. It's all right, take them to the Beverly Hills Hotel, and wait for them, then bring them back here." The cabbie's eyes lit up and he smiled, knowing that it was a twenty-five-mile drive each way.

The Beverly Hills Hotel, a stately pink-and-green landmark at the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Beverly Drive, is more like an elegant golf or country club than a hotel. In the middle 1950s, it was still one of the last bastions of the old Hollywood aristocracy. It was into this gentlemen's club lobby that I and my two brothers walked, feeling all eyes in the hotel staring at us, making our way to the front desk and holding Koko tightly on her leash. The dog, whose grandsire had been national champion and judged "Best of Show," knew how to perform on a leash. "Koko, sit," I ordered her once we reached the desk. And the dog obeyed. The desk clerk smiled. "Can I help you gentlemen?" I tried to hide my nervousness. "We would like to see John," I said. He suddenly became more guarded and looked down at me with peering eyes. He asked, "Who?"

My older brother Michael responded, "Mr. Huston. We are here to see John Huston." The clerk became more guarded now. "Who might I say is calling?" Michael answered again: "Tell him that it's the Hodels, Michael, Steven, and Kelvin. And Koko." Upon hearing her name the dog began wagging her tail furiously. The desk clerk placed a quick call on the house phone, looked surprised, nodded, and we were escorted to the elevator, which took us up to the penthouse suite. The elevator door opened and in we went.

We hadn't seen John Huston in over two years. We knew him from the Franklin House, where he and his father, Walter, had been regular social guests at many of the parties. Standing there now in the Beverly Hills Hotel, thin and tall, he looked to me to be a seven-foot tower as his booming voice greeted us. "Hello, boys. And who might this be?" Kelvin answered first: "She's our dog, Koko, she's a boxer." John instantly caught the nuance in her name and laughed

loudly. "Koko — is that for a double knockout? K.O.-K.O.?" Michael, who had named her, was impressed. "Yes, that's right. You're the only person that has ever figured it out. We always have to tell other people." John laughed even harder.

Excited by hearing her name called out so many times, Koko ran to the center of the suite, squatted on the plush white carpet as if it were high brush on a vacant lot, and took a dump. The three of us stood watching in disbelief, then a loud voice, roaring with laughter from the couch behind us, said, "I'll get it." The tall handsome dark-haired man, obviously in even better spirits than John, staggered to a bathroom and came back with a large roll of toilet paper. He dropped to his knees near where Koko had squatted and started to clean up the mess. John Huston said, "Boys, I want you to meet Greg Peck. When he's not cleaning up dogshit, he acts," and both roared with laughter. John took the envelope from my shirt, read its contents, walked over to a desk, wrote out a check and a note, placed them both back in the envelope, and returned it to me.

"Here, Steven, give this to your mother," he said. The big man with the big voice walked us back down to the lobby and out to the waiting taxi. Huston handed the driver some bills. "Here, cabbie, take them home." And in less than an hour we were standing before our mother, who had come out to meet us at the front door when she saw the taxi pull up. Before I could get out of the taxi, she grabbed the envelope from my hand, opened it, and smiled. "Five hundred dollars. We can pay the rent and we can get some food. You boys can go to the movies and I can buy a new coat." For us, this meant we could stay in Pasadena and not have to flee the sheriff in the middle of the night.

Over the next few months, Mother's drinking became even heavier, and her binges seemed to last longer. Instead of five-day drunks, they would extend to ten, but we had friends now and stayed overnight at their houses as much as we could. Our schoolmates' parents seemed to understand and often fed and housed us for a few days as family when they noticed we hadn't changed our clothes and hadn't eaten. But even that didn't help, because John Huston's money quickly ran out and we had to move again.

It was late one warm summer night in 1954, about midnight, when I entered our newly rented home on Lake Street. Mother had