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Madi Comfort, Duke Ellington's Original "Satin Doll"

"We all knew that he (Dr. George Hill Hodel) had done it. There was no doubt!" —Madi Comfort, June 2003

THE YEAR WAS 1942. The cigarette girl at the Hollywood Casino Club on the Sunset Strip was a knockout. Just eighteen, she had a perfect figure, satin-soft skin, and jet-black hair. Mattie Hodge (at Duke Ellington's suggestion, she would later change the spelling to "Madi") was the bar crowd's favorite. A few whispered complaints might have come from the chorus-line girls who knew they couldn't compete with Mattie's natural beauty.

From the contacts she made on The Strip, Mattie's public persona would go on to include: model, singer, film actress, and, later in life, she would school herself in painting and become an accomplished artist. Mattie also had a secret—a big one. A secret so big that all of Los Angeles wanted to know it. For fifty-five years, she kept it hidden and planned to take it with her to the grave. But in the last ten days before her death, fate or happenstance whispered in her ear, "Share it." She did. This is Madi's secret.

THE LEAD

I've been a detective all my adult life. Born and raised in Los Angeles, I am sixty-eight, and this is my forty-seventh year in conducting criminal investigations. Working LAPD's Hollywood Division Homicide in the 1970s, my hot leads came to me in one of three ways: (1) from a jailhouse snitch, (2) someone "dropping a dime" and calling me with information, or (3) a "walk-in" where the witness would come to the police station with a "Here's what I know..."

Detective work is much different today. Twenty-first century tips now generally come to me by email. That's how this one arrived. It was from Lynelle Lujan, the office manager at the Whittier Historical Society Museum. It read:

August 20, 2010

"Dear Mr. Hodel,

I don't know if you remember me. I sent you a *Whittier Daily News* article about 3 months ago. I'm writing you today for a different reason however. While lending my boss [Myra Hilliard, the Museum's Executive Director] your first book, she recognized Madi Comfort's name, whom she knew briefly before her death.

We have since made contact with Madi's longtime companion and mentioned your book and the connection of your father with Madi. His name is George and he is willing to meet with you. He remembers the time that your father died, and that Madi made several phone calls and seemed agitated.

If you would like to meet with George, we can offer the Whittier Museum as a private meeting place, perhaps before or after your October 12th speaking engagement at the Whittier Public Library.

Sincerely,
Lynelle Lujan

MADI COMFORT—HER BACKSTORY

Madi returned to her roots, Whittier, California, in 1970. The small town, just twelve miles southeast of Los Angeles, was originally a Quaker community and is now famous for its "urban forest," magnificent tree lined parkways providing a country lifestyle for its city dwellers.

Madi had been featured in a number of local articles over the years, and former Whittier Mayor Allan Zolnekoff proclaimed February 3, 2002, as Madi Comfort Day "...for the historical precedent set by her family of pioneering African-Americans to settle in Whittier and overcoming racial unwelcome; her achievements as an artist, her contributions to the Whittier Community, and her dedication to the arts and music in Whittier."

Sixteen months later, Madi suffered a heart attack and died in Whittier on June 20, 2003, at age seventy-nine.

She was born Mattie Hodge on November 19, 1923. Her mother, not wanting to raise her newborn daughter, allowed her to be adopted by Whittier's first black citizens, Mr. and Mrs. Mark Huff. But when

the time came to turn the child over, her mother changed her mind and decided to keep her daughter. She would, however, give the baby Mrs. Huff's given name, "Mattie."

Mattie's mother was abusive, and her childhood was difficult, compounded greatly by the hard times of the Great Depression.

As a young woman, Mattie's natural charm and exceptional beauty drew her west, from Whittier to Hollywood, where in 1942, at age eighteen, she was offered a job as a cigarette girl at a Sunset Strip nightclub. Her popularity at the club and regular contact with Hollywood celebrities won her modeling jobs, some singing gigs, and a few small movie parts.

Mattie met and fell in love with Joe Comfort, a young soldier who would become a well-known L.A. bassist who played with Lionel Hampton, Nat King Cole, and Frank Sinatra in the 1940s and '50s. Joe and Mattie married in Los Angeles on May 13, 1943. Just nineteen, Mattie soon found herself in an abusive relationship with Joe and ended the marriage several years later.



*Mattie and Joe Comfort, Wedding Day, May 1943
Dancing at the Plantation Club, 108th and Central, Watts*

**MADI AS EBONY MAGAZINE'S 1955 COVER GIRL—
*KISS ME DEADLY***

Mattie's most memorable film role was a small part in the 1955 film noir, *Kiss Me Deadly*, a Mickey Spillane-adapted classic. She plays a blues singer in an L.A. jazz club where hard-boiled P.I. Mike Hammer (played by actor Ralph Meeker) enjoys a few drinks as she sings, "*I'd Rather Have the Blues than What I've Got.*" In the film, Mattie lip-syncs the song by popular Central Avenue vocalist Kitty White, although the film's producer would reportedly later tell her, "If I'd known you sang as well as you do, I'd have had you sing the piece in our picture."



Screen shots from the 1955 film noir, *Kiss Me Deadly* – Left: Mattie singing
Right: Mattie with star of film, Ralph Meeker and unidentified male

One of Mattie's major claims to fame was that she inspired the 1956 hit song "*Satin Doll*," by Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn and Johnny Mercer.

Ellington, who was once Mattie's boyfriend, called her his "satin doll" and suggested that she change the spelling of her name. "My Dear," Ellington told her, "you should really spell your name M A D I, because you really are the Mad One, you know." She followed his advice and Mattie became Madi.

This excerpt from a book about Charlie Mingus, another bass player, offers more insight into the Madi anecdote. ["Knepper" is Jimmy Knepper, who was Mingus' trombonist.]

From: *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus* by Gene Santoro (2001, Oxford University Press):

One night during the Hollywood gig, Mingus started riding Knepper onstage in front of women friends. One of them was one of Duke Ellington's girlfriends, Mattie Comfort, wife of Mingus' Watts friend and fellow bassist Joe Comfort. Mattie looked like Lena Horne, and was sitting with Pat Willard, a white Duke fan, in the front row.

Mattie called out, "Hey, Mingus, leave that white boy alone, he loves you." He rasped, "You're not black enough to talk to me like that." She said coolly, "You're lighter than I am, Mingus."

Mingus spotted Knepper with the women in the lobby. When Mattie left to get her car, he followed her into the parking lot, then took out a thick pen filled with a charge to shoot pepper. He had no pepper, just charges. He had taken to firing it off in the club during his shows, but now he shot it off in her face.

Mattie was still shaking when she picked up the other two. In the rearview mirror, she watched Mingus follow them up Sunset Boulevard in the Cadillac. She turned right on Vine, right on Hollywood, and headed for the police station. No cops, no cop cars, and Mingus was right behind them. So she made a right on N. Bronson and ran a red light at Sunset, where a police cruiser parked there stopped them.

To the puzzled cop, Mattie explained that Knepper worked for Charles Mingus, who was chasing them. When the cop looked up, the limo wheeled into a U-turn and sped off. The cop shrugged, and let Mattie off with a warning. Relieved, they drove to Pat Willard's house and listened to Ellington records.

THE DA SECRET FILES

Black Dahlia Avenger originally published in April 2003. Breathless and extensive media coverage of my story led to full hour episodes of *NBC's Dateline*, *CBS 48 Hours Mystery*, *A&E Court TV*, and Bill Kurtis' *Cold Case Files*. New interest in the Black Dahlia led Los Angeles District Attorney Steve Cooley to give *Los Angeles Times* columnist Steve Lopez an interview and access to some previously secret DA files that had been locked in the county vault, unexamined, for over fifty years.

In two back-to-back *L.A. Times* articles, Lopez revealed some of the contents of these never-seen DA files. To the absolute shock of both LAPD and Angelenos in general, the reports fully documented the DA's separate investigation into the original Black Dahlia murder and named Dr. George Hill Hodel as the prime suspect. This was huge news because it was a totally independent and external confirmation of my own findings.

A month later, in mid-May, I approached DA Steve Cooley and requested permission to view those secret files. He agreed and I spent a full day copying all the relevant Hodel-Black Dahlia documents, some 600 pages that hadn't been seen since 1950.

Over the next several months, I wrote two new chapters for the 2006 paperback edition of *Black Dahlia Avenger*.

Among the new material was proof of the DA's 1950 electronic surveillance and "bugging" of Dr. Hodel's Hollywood home.

It began on February 15, 1950, when DA Detective Lt. Frank Jemison and his partner arranged to interview my father at their office in the downtown Hall of Justice.

While they questioned him, officers from both the LAPD and the DA's sound lab broke into Dr. Hodel's private residence by shimmying the front door. They installed microphones inside the walls in the living room/home office and the master bedroom. A hard line was then run from the basement of our home, to Pacific Bell telephone lines that led straight to the basement listening post in the *Hollywood police station* two miles away. There, live conversations in the house were monitored and recorded by detectives around the clock. [It is important to understand that these microphones were picking up "live conversations" and were not simply phone bugs.]

A task force of eighteen detectives, including officers from both the DA's Office and LAPD, conducted the 24/7 stakeout for forty days. They collected over forty spools of wire tape recordings, including statements from my father admitting to killing the Black Dahlia.

The DA tapes also contained admissions by George Hodel to committing the 1945 barbiturate overdosing of his personal secretary, Ruth Spaulding. That crime, while originally listed as an undetermined death and possible "suicide," was actively investigated by LAPD as a suspected murder some eighteen months before the Dahlia crime. The Spaulding investigation was suspended when Dr. Hodel temporarily left the country in February 1946 to become chief medical officer in Hankow, China, while working for the United Nations. He would unexpectedly return to Los Angeles and resume his medical practice in September 1946, four months before Elizabeth Short's murder.

Several weeks into the surveillance, one of the bugs captured Dr. Hodel admitting to performing abortions at his privately owned venereal disease clinic in downtown Los Angeles. "This is the best payoff between law enforcement agencies that I've ever seen," he says to a confederate at one point, according to the transcripts. "You do not have the right connections made. I'd like to get a connection made in the DA's office."

Later he brags, "I'm the only person who knows how all these things fit into the picture."

Detectives who were listening to another live conversation reportedly overheard a crying woman attempting to dial a telephone operator. Then heard George and a second man walk downstairs to the basement. After the sound of a pipe striking an object, the woman cried out. More blows, and she cried out again. Then silence.

Detectives then heard a brief discussion about “not leaving a trace”—then only silence. Inexplicably, these two on-duty officers, listening to what might have been a serious felony assault or, worse, an actual murder in progress, were just two miles away and alerted nobody.

Much more is contained in the 146-page transcripts, which I have attached unaltered, and in their entirety, as an addendum to this book.

The stakeout ended in late March 1950, only because George Hodel had been informed by his ex-wife (and my mother) Dorothy that the detectives had some damning evidence and photographs, and she was sure that he was about to be arrested. Spooked by that information, my father immediately left town.

Sample page of DA Transcript of Surveillance Tapes (1 of 146 pages)

LAPD Hollywood Division Basement. Detectives are monitoring live conversation from the Hodel residence, 5121 Franklin Ave, Hollywood, California. DA investigators Hronek & McGrath on duty. Verbatim transcript of Spool #2:

February 18, 1950

7:35 pm- Conversation between two men. Recorded. Hodel and man with a German accent [sic] had a long conversation; reception was poor, and conversation was hard to understand. The following bits of conversation, however, were overhead.

Hodel to German:

“This is the best payoff I’ve seen between Law Enforcement Agencies. You do not have the right connections made. I’d like to get a connection made in the DA’s office.”

“Any imperfections will be found. They will have to be made perfect. Don’t confess ever. Two and two is not four.” Much laughter. “Were just a couple of smart boys.” More laughter.

Hodel to German:

“Supposin I did kill the Black Daliah. [sic] They couldn’t prove it now. They can’t talk to my Secretary anymore because she’s dead.”

MATTIE COMFORT—THE DA’S SECRET BLACK DAHLIA WITNESS

As I continued my careful review of the previously secret Hodel DA Files, a new name surfaced. A name that had never appeared in any police reports, newspaper account, or the volumes of lore and mythology—*Mattie Comfort*.

BACKGROUND

During the 1950 investigation and before installing any microphones at my father's Frank Lloyd Wright Jr.-built home in Hollywood, DA Lt. Frank Jemison and his partner, Lt. Sullivan, contacted a young ex-sailor named Joe Barrett.

They picked-up the twenty-five-year-old Navy veteran from his day job and brought him to their office for questioning. At the time of the interview, Barrett was a struggling artist. Since 1948, he'd been renting a room at the north end of our home. His space was large and open, with great lighting that served as both his apartment and art studio.

"Lt. Sullivan laid it on the line with me," Barrett told me in 1999. "He came right out and said, 'We think Dr. George Hodel killed the Black Dahlia. You live there and we need your help. We want you to be our eyes and ears.'" Simply put, they wanted Joe Barrett to be their mole, their informant. With his free, inside access he could be invaluable. He agreed to help.

With that as background, let's examine a scanned excerpt from the police report exactly as found in the DA files:

 Camarillo. Joe Barratt, a roomer at the Hodel residence cooperated as an informant. A photograph of the suspect in the nude with a nude identified colored model was secured from his personal effects. Under-signed identified this model as Mattie Comfort, 3423-1/2 South Arlington, Republic 4953. She said that she was with Doctor Hodel sometime prior to the murder and that she knew about his being associated with victim.

Actual scan of original DA documents referencing Mattie Comfort

Barrett eventually gave police several stolen photographs of Dr. Hodel. Not just ordinary portraits. In these, Dr. Hodel appeared completely naked in the company of a "nude colored model," later identified as Mattie Comfort.

Detectives later noted, "*She [Mattie Comfort] was with Doctor Hodel sometime prior to the murder and that she knew about his being associated with victim. [Elizabeth "Black Dahlia" Short.]*"

Had Mattie Comfort seen Dr. Hodel and Elizabeth Short together, as the report suggests?

Take a closer look. I realized in 2003 that an unknown writer at an unknown date and time altered the report by inserting the word "nothing" in that sentence. This simple act was obviously an attempt to reverse the meaning of the statement, which now reads, "*She said that she was with Doctor Hodel sometime prior to the murder and that she knew **nothing** about his being associated with victim.*"

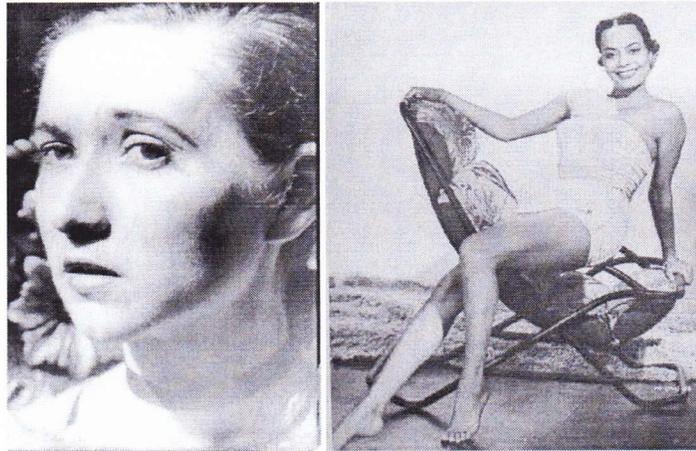
that she was with D
she knew about his be

Enlargement showing word "nothing" inserted by hand

Based on Lt. Jemison's report, what we know for sure is that Mattie Comfort and George Hodel were on intimate terms sometime in the 1940s.

Was this document deliberately altered years or possibly decades later? Clearly, Lt. Jemison would not have allowed his typed final investigative report to be filed away uncorrected. Who changed it and when? What was the truth of it?

LT. JEMISON INTERVIEWS DOROTHY HODEL—"ON THE RECORD"



Left: Dorothy Huston Hodel, 1946

Right: Later photo of Mattie Comfort, circa 1954

On March 22, 1950, while the stakeout and bugging continued at my father's home, Jemison and a DA stenographer went to my mother's private apartment on Santa Monica Pier and conducted a follow-up interview.

This six-page transcript was placed in the secret files and only came to light in 2003, some fifty-three years later. I should note that while my mother, my two brothers, and I continued to live on-and-off with my father at the Franklin house, well into 1950, my parents had been legally divorced in 1944.

While there is much of interest in the transcript, I will just include those portions about the separate photographs that Lt. Jemison showed to Dorothy Hodel. It should also be noted that at the time of this interview, Jemison had apparently not yet identified the "nude colored model" as Mattie Comfort. And it became clear that he was

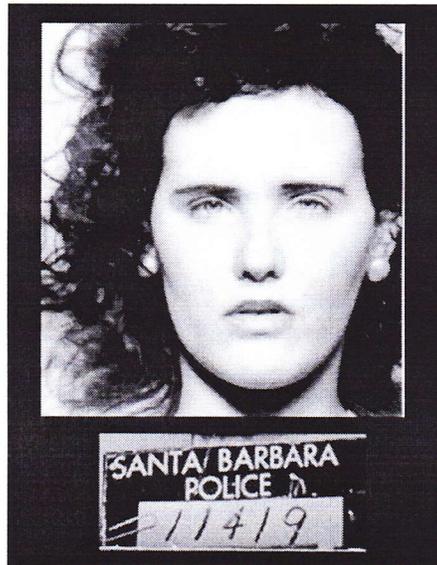
hoping Dorothy would be able to identify her. (I will attach the complete interview as addendum.)

Excerpts from Lt. Jemison/Dorothy Hodel 3.22.50 Interview transcripts:

Page 2:

Lt. Jemison: I will now show you a photograph of Beth Short, Santa Barbara No. 11419 and ask you whether or not you have ever seen that young lady in your life?

Dorothy: No, I never have.



Elizabeth Short "Black Dahlia" booking photo shown to Dorothy Hodel

Lt. Jemison: Did you have a conversation with Dr. Hodel about the murder of Beth Short?

Dorothy: No, unless we mentioned it when it was in the papers, but I don't like to read about things like that. I can't say for sure that I have never mentioned her name to him, but it may have been in passing.

Lt. Jemison: Did he ever tell you, "They can't pin that murder on me?"

Dorothy: No, to the best of my knowledge he didn't and doesn't know her.

Lt Jemison: On or about the date of her murder, January 15, 1947 do you remember being out until 4:00 in the morning with George

Hodel and coming in slightly intoxicated? Now, that's three years ago.

Dorothy: Well, I think I explained before we never went on drinking parties because I don't drink because of certain tendencies to drink too much and particularly if I were near him I would not drink because from a medical point of view he does not approve of my drinking and I don't know that I understood that question.

Page 3:

Lt. Jemison: Well, the information that I have is that he was quite intoxicated himself and at that time on that occasion stated that they couldn't pin the Black Dahlia murder on him. [Note: In Lt. Jemison's follow-up investigation and final report prepared in 1951, he corrected George Hodel's quote to read, "They will never be able to prove I did that murder."] [Black Dahlia]

Dorothy: No. No, that isn't true.

Lt. Jemison: Do you remember ever telling Tamar that? [Note: Tamar was my then twelve-year-old half-sister and George Hodel's daughter by another woman.]

Dorothy: No.

Lt. Jemison: Did you ever tell Tamar that Dr. George Hodel was out the night before the murder with Beth Short at a party?

Dorothy: No, I was living at my brother's house at the time. We were not living at the same house. I wouldn't know what he was doing.

Page 5:

Lt. Jemison: Now in view of the fact that the District Attorney's office is interested in contacting all persons that might know something about whether or not Dr. Hodel had anything to do with this murder, I now show you a photograph of a nude girl and ask you if you recognize who that girl is. In other words, we want to know her name and where we can contact her?

Dorothy: There is something familiar about her face. I think she may have been some model or something.

Lt. Jemison: Would you say she is a colored girl or half Indian, do you know?

Dorothy: No.

Lt. Jemison: I show you another photograph of the same girl with a man. Do you recognize that man in that photograph?

Dorothy: I would say that was Dr. Hodel.

Lt. Jemison: Do you know the person who owns the cat that they are holding between them?

Dorothy: No, I don't.

Lt. Jemison: In other words, I am sincerely interested in contacting this girl for information.

Dorothy: No, I don't know her I have seen her face. I have seen photographs that George has of her.

Lt. Jemison: Would you have any idea where we could find her?

Dorothy: No.

Lt. Jemison: I show you the third picture. Dr. Hodel and the colored girl. You still can't place any person that might know where I can find her?

Dorothy: No, I don't know. I can't think.

Lt. Jemison: Let me advise you that we do have information that he [George Hodel] did associate with Beth Short... [Emphasis mine]

Entries by detectives in the surveillance transcripts reveal that my mother went directly to George's home the day after this interview and told him of being questioned by Jemison, and gave him all the questions she'd been asked. Most importantly, she said she'd been shown photographs of both Elizabeth Short and Mattie Comfort. While my parents' actual conversation was apparently out of microphone range and not recorded, we know that she told him everything based on the following conversation, which was recorded.

DA TRANSCRIPTS—FRANKLIN HOUSE

March 23- 7:45 pm- Hodel came in with Dorothy. (Phone rang, recorded) ...

March 25 11:10 pm

Hodel and Baron (man with accent) came in talking low (can't hear) ...Sounded like Hodel said something about Black Dahlia. Baron said something about F.B.I. Then talked about Tibet. Sounds like Hodel wants to get out of the country. Mentioned passport. Hodel giving Baron dope on how to write to Tibet. Hodel talking about Mexico. Going down and take pictures and write a story. Hodel seems afraid about something. Hodel says his Sanitarium, if he gets it started in Mexico would be "Safe."

March 26 12 a.m. (spool 39)

Spool ran out. Changing. Talking about woman. Hodel says "he wants money and power. "Talking about China. Talking about selling some of Hodel's paintings or something. Hodel talking about picture police have of him and some girl-thought he had destroyed them all- (wire quit at 50-new one going on) Not much talk.

This was the final night of the surveillance tapes. The next day, George Hodel left town, leaving the DA and LAPD detectives in a lurch, literally sitting there with their microphones up his walls. Jemison was forced to terminate the stakeout.

In the final hours before George Hodel left L.A., Dorothy Hodel has made him aware that the police now had photographs of Mattie Comfort ["I thought I had destroyed all of them"]. And despite Mother's best efforts at withholding her name, the cops were sure to discover it in short order. The stakeout detectives referenced that "Hodel seems afraid of something." Hodel mentioned the "Black Dahlia," "the FBI," and, the following day, he is in the wind.

Upon reading the Jemison/Dorothy Hodel transcript for the first time, I knew my mother was lying and stonewalling. I knew that Mattie Comfort was my mother's close friend. One night in the 1970s, my mother called to ask if I could give her a ride out to the Sunset Strip, where she wanted to attend a party being thrown by some friends. So I accompanied her to an apartment house. At the door, Mother briefly introduced me to a beautiful woman, simply saying, "Steven, this is Mattie, a good friend from the old days. Mattie, meet Steven." The beautiful "Satin Doll" smiled at me. We shook hands, and I left.

But Mattie Comfort's face is not a face one forgets.

THE WHITTIER MEETING

I asked Lynelle Lujan and Myra Hilliard to contact Madi's boyfriend, "George" to see if he was available to meet with us at their

office at the Whittier Historical Museum on September 11 2010 at 10 a.m. He was.

“George” is George Parkington, a gentle, intelligent carpenter with the look and manner of an artist.

George had met Madi in 1997. The two of them became very close and spent the last six years together before her death in 2003.

As the four of us sat down to talk, George spoke first:

I want to say something to you right away. When your book came out, there was a big article and photos of you in *People Magazine*. Madi always read *People*. And as soon as she read the piece, she called me. She was so excited. I couldn't believe it. Madi said, “George, you've got to come home right now.” I drove home immediately, and she was ecstatic...thrilled because this [the Black Dahlia connection] was a secret she'd always held inside her. And now it was in the open.

In the week after my book published, *People Magazine* interviewed me and on June 2, 2003, ran a feature story complete with photos. It was entitled, “*Accusing His Father: An ex-L.A. cop uncovers a painful answer to the notorious 1947 Black Dahlia slaying.*” Madi Comfort never got to read my book as she died from a sudden heart attack eighteen days later, on June 20, 2003.

My first question to George was the obvious one. “Did Madi ever discuss with you what she knew about the Black Dahlia murder? Did she ever provide any specifics?”

George responded:

Here's what I will tell you. Madi told me that she and everybody else were sure that it was your father that killed the Black Dahlia. They had no doubt. She told me, “We all knew that he had done it.” Now, who the “we” was I'm not sure, but there are some people still around from way back then. I'll try and dig on that a little bit and see if there is someone you can speak with. Most of the people I know were more like from the fifties, so I'm not sure there is anybody I can locate from that exact era.

As we listened to George share his memories of Madi, it was obvious that the man had been deeply devoted to her. When he spoke her name, his words were filled with a deep love and a great sense of loss.

A half-hour into our talk, George reached into his briefcase and removed a stack of papers. Handing them to me he explained:

Madi has written a book. It's in rough form and unpublished and runs about twelve-hundred pages. It's her autobiography. The title

is: *Madi Comfort: The Original Satin Doll*. I think Madi started writing it sometime in the seventies or maybe later. In it she mentions and writes about both your father and mother. What Madi writes about them is explicit, but I thought you would want to have everything about them. There may be other references because her writings are scattered, and she jumps back and forth in time. But, for now, I wanted you to have these pages that talk about your parents.

I reached for the papers and asked, "Had Madi mentioned Elizabeth Short in her book?"

George replied:

I don't think so. I don't think, even all of these years later, that she wrote about that. That is why she was so excited when your book came out. My sense of it was that she was still protecting people she cared about even though they were dead. She would have been like your mother. She would have protected anybody she cared about. She would have protected even somebody that she didn't care about.

Our meeting lasted nearly two hours. It ended with a handshake and the assurance that the four of us would keep in touch. George and I exchanged phone numbers with the hope and promise to together try and search deeper into the mystery of Madi and how she was further connected to my father, Dr. George Hill Hodel, now known and identified as the "Black Dahlia Avenger."

DOROTHY HUSTON HODEL—"DORERO"

George Parkington had warned me that Madi's writings about my parents were "explicit." He was right.

Before opening Madi's manuscript, a little background on my mother is in order:

Dorothy Jean Harvey was born in New York (Central Park West) on April 15, 1906. Her parents moved to Los Angeles sometime in the teens with two children, Dorothy and her younger brother, Eugene. Dorothy was exceptionally precocious, as well as strikingly beautiful—a dangerous combination. Ever the free spirit, she was named Elysian Park's, "Queen of the May" in 1917. As a teen in high school, she dabbled in acting and began dating. Dorothy dated a teenager named George Hodel who, though only fifteen had a stratospheric IQ (186) and was enrolled in Pasadena's prestigious California Institute of Technology. (Caltech) Another couple who dated with them included a beautiful young woman named Emilia Lawson, who worked at the newly opened Los Angeles Public Library, and her lean, lanky

boyfriend John Huston, the son of one of Hollywood's brightest film stars, Walter Huston.

At some point in their double-dating, John and George switched partners. John and Dorothy discovered that they were in love. In about 1926, the two teenagers found a Justice of the Peace who married them.

They eloped to New York and decided to play house in Greenwich Village. There they began socializing with a very Bohemian crowd of artists, actors, and musicians—free spirits all. John and Dorothy partied with George and Ira Gershwin and many of the Algonquin Round Table types. Lots of drinking, lots of lovemaking. It was the Roaring '20s, and they were in full roar.



Left: Stage and screen star, Walter Huston, meeting his son, John and new bride Dorothy at L.A. train station, circa 1926.

Right: Dorothy Harvey Huston, age eighteen, circa 1924.

John and Dorothy returned to Los Angeles and both became screenwriters for the film studios. They traded Bohemian New York's red wine for Hollywood's martinis—very dry.

By 1934, after seven years of a very bumpy marriage, John and Dorothy had become serious alcoholics and both were freely sleeping around.

In about 1936 Dorothy, with her beautiful actress-lover, Greta Nissen in arm took a cruise to Europe where she continued to drink and play. (In his well-researched 1989 book, *The Hustons*, author Lawrence Grobel gave a fine account of how John went to England, rescued Dorothy from an almost certain death from alcoholism, and brought her back to the U.S., where she made a full, albeit temporary, recovery.)

Dorothy was very open about her bisexuality. She was proud of what she called her "paganism" and wore it on her sleeve in defiance of conventionality.

Around 1938, Dorothy reunited with her former boyfriend, George Hodel, who had graduated from medical school. After completing his internship at San Francisco General Hospital, he was hired as a logging camp surgeon in Arizona and then took a temporary appointment as a U.S. Health Department public-health doctor in the Southwest, treating Hopi and Navajo Indians on the reservation.

George and Dorothy fell back in love. George returned to L.A. and Dorothy immediately got pregnant. My older brother, Michael, was born in July 1939. They married in Mexico in 1940 and my twin "John" and I were born in 1941, followed by my younger brother Kelvin just eleven months later.

Our father was hired by the L.A. County Health Department to treat venereal disease and he was quickly promoted to chief VD officer for all of Los Angeles County.

Father, a believer in the importance and symbolism of names, christened his new wife, "Dorero," replacing her given name of "Dorothy." To all who would listen, he explained that his inspiration came from combining two words: "Dor," meaning "a gift of" and "Eros," the God of sexual desire. Hence, to him, "Dorero" was a gift of sexual desire.

This quick overview brings us to about the point in time when, according to Madi's manuscript, she met my parents. So, I will let her take over the narrative from here with her own very unique perspective. With the exception of some minor spelling corrections, Madi Comfort's writing and words are presented here exactly as they appear in her manuscript. I have changed nothing. These are her verbatim descriptions, written some twenty or thirty years past.

I have, however, inserted in bold my own comments to help the reader understand or to clarify a specific person, place, etc.

SKH Note- One further explanation is needed. What we are reading here are Madi's personal reflections as dictated directly into a tape recorder and then transcribed to paper. So, they are not actually her "writings" so much as they are a conversational storytelling of her life, which was then transcribed into a 1,200-page rough draft manuscript. The following excerpted pages, which directly relate to Madi's association and memories of my parents, George and Dorero Hodel, were provided to me by her boyfriend, George Parkington.

MADI COMFORT: THE ORIGINAL SATIN DOLL— (ROUGH DRAFT)

Page 28 (bottom):

Well, I was introduced to Dr. George and Dorero [Dorothy] Hodel by Suzette Harbin, who was one of the chorus girls in the show. Dorothy posed for the great photographer Man [The artist, Man Ray, a close personal friend of my parents and our family photographer] with Suzette. What a beautiful photograph! Dorero's white delicate face profile together with Suzette's rich beautiful brown skin was such a beautiful contrast, yet there was such a oneness.

Page 29:

George and Dorero lived in this tremendous mansion in Pasadena. Once entering the driveway one would wind, in this case I would wind with George and Dorero in their ... [in their car up the driveway]...last to be made after or before the war. It was a gorgeous black Lincoln Continental convertible with a wheel on the back. It was pure gorgeous. Round and round and up and down for what seemed like blocks to this four-story mansion. The top floor was a ballroom; the third floor was a nursery for their three gorgeous children. The second was their bedroom quarters. I guess I should say playground because that's where we played. They were both completely sensuous. George a very handsome polished tall lean born rich man indulged and adored by his father. George had beautiful black hair with a sophisticated wave in front, a classic nose with a perfectly trimmed mustache and very nice lips.

George would smile at a person with such charm and sweetness as well as elegance in his perfect clothes with such sincerity. George could turn around and be as cold as ice, yet complete composure in his superior authoritative voice, become this strange distant in charge person. He was a doctor.

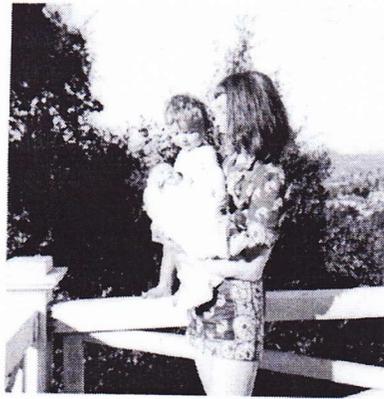
George and Dorero led me gracefully and pleurably, into sharing their joys in many exciting ways of the art of making love. It was all done so tastefully and made us very close friends. We liked very much bringing such joy and pleasures to one another's life, yet we all maintained our dignity and self-respect.

Dorero's first husband had been John Huston. Her father-in-law, Walter Huston. Dorero had been a writer. She once told me that John and George and she were good friends. George stole her away from John. Dorero was so soft and lovely as well as feminine. I loved the way she pronounced words. Her father told me she had once been a schoolteacher. Her father also told me her name was Dorothy. She certainly had her own style.

George and Dorero had me over to their home for dinner quite often. They would take me out, come all the way to Willowbrook to pick me up. ... Dorero was having guests for dinner who had arrived

from New York. They had both been put under contract. Their names were Van Heflin and Vincent Price. Actually we were having hors d'oeuvres and cocktails at their [the Hodels] home first then we were going to Chinatown for dinner afterwards. Chinatown was fairly new (remodeled) then and quite fancy and intriguing. It was a fun evening. Van and Vincent were both very charming and witty and they talked about New York and the theater. I just mostly remember what nice down-to-earth gentlemen they were.

One morning around ten a.m. or so I was lying in bed and I hear this crash and Dorero crying. I ran into the bathroom. Dorero was in the bathtub, crying. George cool as you please explains to me Dorero is an alcoholic and has "sneaked a drink." He was reprimanding her for her own good. I'm protesting. "You could break her neck! George I cannot stand to see you knocking poor Dorero around like this. Please don't treat her like this." Meanwhile, I'm busy trying to pull Dorero out of the tub. We were all stark naked.



*Left: Dorero Hodel, 1942
Right: George Hodel, circa 1950*

The photo on left was taken in October/November 1942. It shows Mother holding her newborn son, my younger brother, Kelvin, as I look on while standing on the fencepost. Based on the timing, this photo would have been taken at the hilltop "tremendous mansion" described earlier by Madi. (I have no memory of this location, but my half-sister, Tamar, recalls the home, and specifically remembers seeing our father "physically abusing Dorero by pulling her around by her hair in the large open driveway."

Page 31:

I truly enjoyed my job, and loved walking around meeting people, being constantly complimented. I shared the dressing room when I changed with the chorus girls. ... Here comes Joe Comfort on his

first furlough from Camp Rucker, Alabama. What a thrill. ...Joe proposed marriage. I naturally said, "Yes." There was a problem.

One had to wait three days after getting your license at City Hall plus the blood test. Well, Dr. George Hodel solved that problem for me. He pulled strings at City Hall and we got our marriage license in one day. Off we went with my sister, and Joseph's sister, Laura, as witnesses, to the preacher.

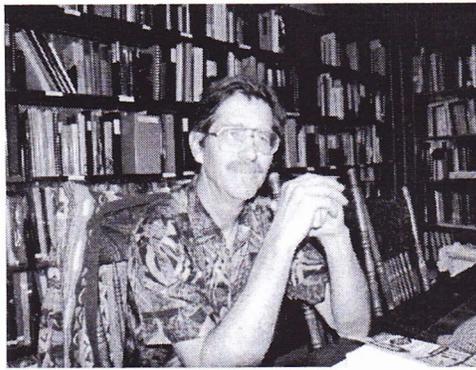
Page 39:

I married him [**Joe Comfort**] on May 13, 1943. I missed him so much when he left and went back to Alabama. I couldn't sleep. I cried most of the time. They said, "You can't go to the South with all its prejudices." ...George and Dorero Hodel bought me a ticket and put me on the train. Dorero gave me some advice about pleasing my new husband. She suggested that I should before kissing and sucking Joe's penis, I should gargle or drink some very hot water so my mouth would be steaming hot. She said that would drive Joe crazy. She said, better yet for me to chew some of those red, dried chili peppers and that would really send Joe into pure ecstasy. ...When I tried to kiss Joe's penis he had a pure fit. He snatched his penis out of my mouth and asked, 'Where did you learn that?' I told him Dorero had told me about it, and Dorero had said, 'you'd be in pure heaven.' 'Well, I'm not in pure heaven. I don't want my wife doing things like that.'

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Madi's unpublished manuscript with its candid and highly explicit narrative is a remarkable historical find. Because it surfaced posthumously, there is no breach of Madi's personal code of silence, only confirmation. Madi's excited call to her boyfriend, George, came on June 2, 2003—the very day the *People Magazine* article informed the world that George Hodel was the Black Dahlia killer. The day and the time it became public knowledge, permitted her—in Madi's mind—to reveal her fifty-six-year-old secret to George Parkington. She could now finally, in good conscience, relieve herself of a terrible burden and tell her closest friend her darkest secret., "We all knew that he had done it," she said.

Two weeks later, she was gone. But look at what she has left us. Madi's memoir, written decades ago, just like the DA's secret files, have now presented us with new evidence and new confirmation into what the DA and the LAPD knew back then.



Madi Comfort's boyfriend, George Parkington at a 2010 meeting with author at Whittier Museum



Whittier Daily News, September 27, 2010, announcing Madi Comfort's connection to the Black Dahlia

Madi passed away in Whittier, California on June 20, 2003, just two weeks after revealing her fifty-six-year-old secret to her boyfriend, George Parkington.



*Left: Madi Comfort
Right: Self-portrait done in acrylic*