

0. WHO WAS SHE? - Story Preface

1. WHO WAS SHE?

2. LOS ANGELES in the 40s

3. DEATH OF A DREAM

4. LAST SEEN AT THE BILTMORE

5. ELIZABETH'S BODY IS FOUND

6. POLICE and PRESS COOPERATE

7. THE SUSPECTS

8. A COLD CASE

Elizabeth Short was known by various names: "Betty" (or "Bette"), "Beth" and, at least to some of her friends, "The Black Dahlia."

Raised in Medford, Massachusetts - a town near Boston made famous by *Paul Revere's Ride* (see the tenth verse) and Tufts University - she had asthma and lung problems which especially bothered her during cold months. In 1940, she dropped out of Medford High School to spend winters in a warmer climate.

Her vicious murder has overshadowed who Elizabeth was as a daughter, a sister, a friend. How do the people who knew her in life describe her?

Bette a porcelain China doll with beautiful eyes -- think of them as blue, but sometimes would change depending on color she wore, and became greenish. Anna Dougherty, Medford Classmate

Mrs. Short was very strict with her girls. They moved in to the triple-decker next to the Visiting Nurse's Association about 1937, but Bette wasn't with them when they moved in. She was at a summer camp for kids who had TB. Eleanor Kurz, Medford neighbor and friend

(S)he was always friendly, never at a loss for words. And it wasn't just that she was so pretty. There are lots of pretty girls. There was something different. She was someone you liked to watch, the kind of girl boys might sneak looks at but would get tongue-tied if she spoke to you. And that walk of hers. It wasn't put on. She always walked that way, even in junior high. I always thought that if she had a glass of water on her head she wouldn't spill a drop. Bob Pacios, Medford neighbor and classmate

Bette was good, sweet, funny, not stuck up, always stopped and chatted, made you feel at ease. And what a walk. The truck drivers and men would stare when she walked down the street. It was a wonder there weren't more truck accidents when she walked down Salem Street . . . She just looked so graceful, but eye-catching, something to look at. Dorothy Hernon, Medford neighbor

Dottie [Elizabeth's sister], Bette and I were going to be movie stars. We were all entranced with movie stars, star struck. Spent hours talking about movie stars, about going to Hollywood. We performed using the Short's front porch as a stage. Every Friday as soon as the song sheets came out, we'd pool our money, get the latest sheets, and spend hours singing. Bette imitated Deanna Durbin. Walked like her, talked like her, and in my eyes sang like her. Eleanor Kurz, Medford neighbor and friend

Her hair was very dark, black. She liked to be admired . . . No one had bad thoughts about her. I just liked her . . . Once you saw Bette Short, you couldn't forget her." Emma Pacios, Medford neighbor and friend

Elizabeth wasn't afraid to walk home alone:

I was a Lieutenant in the '40s. Made Captain in 1955, became Medford Chief of Police 1961-1970. Remember seeing Bette in Medford Cafe, around 1945, 1946. Bette worked in Cambridge, would come in the Cafe late around 1:10 AM; leave around 1:30 AM. She'd always walk home alone . . . We'd kibbitz. She was stunning, like a model. I used to wonder why she picked me to talk to . . . Then I figured maybe I was protection against some of the guys that were ogling her. Lt. Charles Donovan, Medford Police Department

According to people who knew her, Elizabeth Short wanted to be a model. Before long, she looked the part:

A few months before the war broke out I was visiting in Medford and saw Bette in the restaurant directly across from our house on Salem Street . . . what Bette said she really hoped to do was break into modeling. . . I was sure she could do it. I told her she looked like she just stepped out of a magazine. Eleanor Kurz, Medford neighbor and friend

When she moved to California, however, the goals and aspirations of this would-be model and movie starlet changed. Los Angeles, after the war, sometimes had a way of destroying - as well as fulfilling - childhood dreams.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/WHO-WAS-SHE-Black-Dahlia>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/WHO-WAS-SHE-Black-Dahlia>

Media Stream

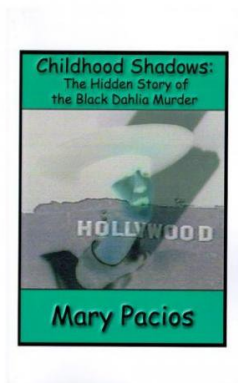


Medford Massachusetts - Map

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Childhood Shadows - by Mary Pacios

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