

What drew the author to the case?

In January of 1947 I was 13 years old. I loved riddles and murder mysteries. I regularly listened to radio programs like: Suspense, The Whistler, Lights Out, and Inner Sanctum. And I was impressionable. On 1/16/47, I read, "Fiend Tortures, Kills Girl; Leaves Body in L.A. Lot," in the morning LA Examiner headlines. The front-page article said that the girl was nude and bisected at the waist. A sanitized photo showed she was posed in plain sight just off a sidewalk. Subsequent text in this Examiner edition indicated she was a Jane Doe, and referred to the weedy lot as the "death area." A bold caption said: "Black Sedan Hunted in L.A. as Death Car" . . . "Fiend," "death area," "black sedan," "Death Car" . . . Creepy wordage. For me, it imparted an eeriness to the macabre horror evoked by the crime itself. Soon there would be icy "coincidence" . . . The 1/16/47 Examiner included a street map of the display locale. And I found what I presumed to be gallows humor of the Ex' artist who drew the map: he/she labeled what looked to be a southerly extension of Norton, "Degnan." I figured he remembered the '46 Degnan dismemberment murder as I did. And surely she was kidding. A cut-in-half nude girl ending up "on" Degnan? No. Too big a coincidence, too ironic. It had to be a joke. But I got to thinking . . . and bike'd to a not-far-away gas station, got an LA street map . . . and there was a Degnan Boulevard, where the Ex' artist had labeled it. Since the Degnan thing wasn't a joke, it was an ironic, but pure, coincidence. So I thought, in mid-January 1947 . . . On 1/17/47, I saw two more coincidences. January Jane Duo was Elizabeth Short. I thought this was darkly ironic for the young woman who wound up as two short pieces. Witchy! And the service station where I got the street map was Walt Short's Shell Korner. This Short stuff was simple coincidence, and a harbinger of Short-case weirdities to come. In the 1/30/47 Examiner, I found a brain-blower: Elizabeth Short had been obsessed with the Suzanne Degnan murder! So was the Degnan Blvd. locality of the outdoor crime scene purely coincidental? By 1/30/47, I wasn't so sure . . . Ponder this one . . . In 1946, the "crime of the century" Degnan dismemberment murder was radio, magazine-cover, and front-page news all over the USA. In 1947, a bisected nude woman was conspicuously displayed in a Degnan Boulevard lovers' lane in LA. Even as non-evidentiary irony, the connection was seemingly lost on an entire LA news media, academic community and utterly general public. THIS would explain why no public citizen decrypted the Dahlia killer's messages before Solution . . . Folks haven't seen far enough into the murder to even know that there were cryptograms to decrypt! . . . After a newfest opening, the Dahlia case remained a salient news item for over a month. In my mind, the case then faded to back-burner dormancy, and the years flew by, fast . . . Certain news items and Jack Webb's 1958 The Badge had me thinking about the Dahlia, but the case was essentially off my mental radar for three and a-half decades: from 1947 'til the

1980s. In '82, I saw a film that was loosely based on the Dahlia case, and I was thinking about the Dahlia again. After a while, I connected dots . . . From what I had read in San Diego dailies, I felt like I had a "quasi-kinship" with Betty Short. Just before her murder, she'd spent a month in San Diego, with a family who lived in the Bayview Terraces project in Pacific Beach. I was familiar with this Navy housing project. I was familiar with Sheldon's Cafe, Betty's daytime San Diego hangout; it faced old Hwy 101, just south of Rose Canyon; I'd rolled by Sheldon's many times, on trips between Los Angeles and San Diego. I'd seen one "double-feature" in the Aztec Theatre, where Betty made her San Diego housing connection. In 1946, Betty had lived in Long Beach and Hollywood. I was familiar with Long Beach: several of my Mother's-side relatives lived there. And I had lived in Hollywood, in the 1930s. What drew me to the Black Dahlia case? All of the above: maybe you can sort it out better than I can.