

# **TCM** THE PLOT THICKENS

## EPISODE SIX: DOROTHY

THIS EPISODE CONTAINS DISTURBING VIOLENCE. PLEASE TAKE CARE WHILE LISTENING.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The third time I interviewed Peter Bogdanovich was the hardest.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Thanks Peter.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Boy, that was exhausting.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** We talked about Dorothy Stratten that day, his relationship with her, how her murder changed his life. The recording took a lot longer than the two hours Peter and I had agreed to.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I thought we were to end at 5:00?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I didn't feel like it. I didn't want to come back to it, you know. I wanted to get you through it.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Thank you. That was tough boy.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** So much of this process is taking Peter into his memories, and this is the memory I knew we had to explore, and I wasn't looking forward to it.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I'm sorry Peter, I'm sorry for all...

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Don't be sorry.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Well I want joy in your world

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Well I have joy now.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I do think Peter has found joy, but I've come to believe joy is different for him now. That tragedy and grief changes the tenor of everything after it, for better or worse. What happened to Peter, there's no way to prepare for that.

**MONTAGE OF HEADLINES ABOUT DOROTHY STRATTEN'S MURDER**

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The story of how Dorothy Stratten was murdered by her husband, Paul Snider, has been told in documentaries and tabloids. There's a version written by a Pulitzer-prize winning journalist and a movie directed by Bob Fosse, *Star 80*.

**CLIP FROM STAR 80:** When the Editor at *Playboy* told me I won Playmate of the Year, the first thing out of my mouth was, are you sure?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter himself wrote a very personal book about it called *The Killing of the Unicorn*. But this isn't that. This is 80-year-old Peter Bogdanovich sitting across from me, with his bandana and his lemonade. With Dorothy's sister Louise watching from the control room, protecting him and he's protecting her. This is Peter telling me about the hardest moment of his life.

[THEME MUSIC]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** I'm Ben Mankiewicz and this is season one of *The Plot Thickens*, a new podcast from Turner Classic Movies. This is Episode 6: Dorothy.

[THEME MUSIC]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** It was 1978 and Peter was walking out the door of the Playboy Mansion when he saw Dorothy Stratten for the first time. As he was being introduced to her, he had one thought.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** This is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen was the first thing that crossed my mind. It was before her hair had been dyed, uh, platinum blonde, you know. She still had her natural golden hair. I was so struck by how beautiful she was.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Dorothy was just 18. Fresh-faced, blonde, blue-eyed. Tall and curvy. Shy and a little reserved. She had moved to Los Angeles from Vancouver, Canada just two months earlier with Paul Snider, her boyfriend. He'd met her at a Dairy Queen in Vancouver, where she'd worked since she was fourteen. Dorothy grew up in a rough area of the city with her mother Nelly and her younger brother John. This is Dorothy reflecting on her childhood.

**DOROTHY STRATTEN ARCHIVAL AUDIO:** My family is important to me, we were brought up through a lot of hard times and we stuck them out together. I've never had a father to support the family, so it's always been my mother.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Dorothy's father abandoned the family when she was three. Money was always tight, especially when Nelly's third child came along, Dorothy's half-sister Louise. Nelly, a Dutch immigrant, worked as a housekeeper and saved enough money to move the family to a nicer part of town. She got a job at a local hospital. Dorothy continued to work too, taking a long bus ride to the Dairy Queen every weekend.

**DOROTHY STRATTEN ARCHIVAL AUDIO:** Well, when I came from the town that I came from, I lived with my family still. I just graduated from high school. I worked in a Dairy Queen for four years wearing pigtails and no makeup.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** That's the Dorothy Paul Snider met when he strolled into Dairy Queen for a sundae. It was early in 1978 and Dorothy was graduating from high school in a few months. Snider was 26 and a low-level hustler. In the neighborhood, he was known as the Jewish pimp. He wore long leather coats, drove a corvette, and had a 70s-era mustache. He didn't sell drugs, but when he needed money, and that was often, he sold women.

Snider pursued Dorothy. Gave her gifts. She'd only had one other boyfriend, so the attention was overwhelming. Eventually, Snider convinced her to let him take a few nude photos. He sent them to *Playboy* magazine as part of the Great Playmate Hunt of 1978.

Paul Snider was a big *Playboy* fan and an admirer of Hugh Hefner. He wanted to get to Hollywood and the Playboy Mansion. He thought Dorothy was his best chance. He wasn't wrong. Just one day after seeing those nude photos of Dorothy, Hefner flew her to Los Angeles for test shots. Dorothy was immediately given a *Playboy* modeling contract. At first, she didn't tell Nelly what was happening. But a few months before she appeared in the pages of *Playboy*, Dorothy told her mother. Nelly talked about her reaction in an interview with *Playboy*.

**NELLY HOOGSTRATEN ARCHIVAL AUDIO:** At first I was really angry about the thing. I didn't believe it and I didn't want to believe it. I had never seen my daughter naked, only when she was a baby. And she was always very much conservative. But I talked to Dorothy and she says mummy I'm not selling my body, I'm selling my beauty, my looks. and I know my daughter well enough to what she says is the truth. She's an intelligent girl.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Dorothy moved to LA and Paul Snider soon followed. Eventually, they rented a two-story house in West Los Angeles, right next to the Santa Monica freeway.

Less than two years later, Hugh Hefner named Dorothy Stratten *Playboy's* Playmate of the Year.

**HUGH HEFNER ARCHIVAL AUDIO:** It's a pleasure to welcome you all here for our presentation of our 1980 Playmate of the Year and she's something special. They always are, but Dorothy is really quite unique.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Dorothy was featured on the cover of the magazine and invited to be on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson.

**JOHNNY CARSON:** Yesterday she was named Playmate of the Year, we thought we'd save the dessert until last, would you welcome Dorothy Stratten.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Dorothy came out wearing an expensive-looking white silk gown. There was a flower in her hair. She looked like a movie star, though you could still see traces of the pigtailed girl from Dairy Queen.

Johnny Carson asked Dorothy about the prizes she'd received for being Playmate of the Year.

**DOROTHY STRATTEN:** I got a \$65,000 Russian sable fur coat, and a 25,000 check.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** There's a moment in this interview where Dorothy turned the tables on Carson, which is hard to do when you have so little media experience. And when you're dealing with Johnny Carson, whose media savvy was unrivaled.

**JOHNNY CARSON:** What do you notice first about a man, walking down the street. What's the first thing you notice?

**DOROTHY STRATTEN:** Stand up. His chest, I notice a man's chest.

**JOHNNY CARSON:** I feel so self-conscious about my chest.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Just like that Dorothy took the power away from Carson in that moment: she made him stand up, he became the object. She gave him a little taste of what that feels like, all while making the audience laugh.

Based on Dorothy's demeanor in this interview, you'd never guess she was experiencing any inner turmoil. But she had to have been. At this point, she'd been married to Paul Snider for 11 months. They got married at the Silver Bell wedding chapel in Las Vegas. Hugh Hefner and Dorothy's new friends at the Mansion tried to talk her out of the marriage. They never trusted or liked Snider. But after a period of indecision, Dorothy married him anyway. She didn't tell her mother Nelly for over a month.

At the time of the Carson interview, her marriage was in trouble. Dorothy's star was rising, and as she rose, Snider grew more controlling. To make things even more complicated, Dorothy was in love with somebody else.

We'll be right back.

[BREAK]

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In October of 1979, months before Dorothy's *Tonight Show* interview with Jonny Carson, Peter was still reeling from the death of his mother and missing Cybill. She'd moved on and married a man from Memphis, her hometown.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I was unhappy at first. And, for the first time in my life I think, I played the field as they say. And I started of going with a bunch of different girls.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** But the brief affairs made him feel lonely.

Some things, however, were looking up. Peter had a new movie in the works. He even had a title: *They All Laughed*, from a George and Ira Gershwin song written for the 1937 movie *Shall We Dance*.

#### CLIP OF "THEY ALL LAUGHED" SONG

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Remember, this was the fall 1979. The rest of the country was dancing to Donna Summer and the Bee Gees, but not Peter. He was sticking to the old standards. And he was busy writing the script for *They All Laughed*, which focused on a couple of private detectives who follow married women to see if they were having affairs.

Ben Gazzara and John Ritter signed on to play the detectives. Gazzara had worked with Peter in Singapore on his last film, *Saint Jack*.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And Benny Gazzara and I talked a lot about our various relationships while we were in Singapore for 6 months. I thought, maybe I'll write a movie about that. About some of the relationships that we had, and the things we talked about and so on. And that's how *They All Laughed* started.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** John Ritter was a master of physical comedy. Starring on a hit TV show, *Three's Company*.

**THREE'S COMPANY CLIP:** Jack. You know my name! Am I dreaming because I do have dreams like this.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** He and Peter were friends.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** The character that John Ritter played which was sort of me younger, spent the entire script mooning over the loss of a girl he was in love with. And I was going to use Cybill's photograph in his room.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Audrey Hepburn agreed to play the female lead. Peter had never worked with Hepburn and couldn't believe his luck. She was a true Hollywood icon, known for *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *Funny Face*, but she hadn't done much acting over the last ten years. She was busy raising her sons. Peter hired Hepburn's son Sean to be his assistant, which helped convince her to take the role.

And, topping it all off, Peter planned to shoot *They All Laughed* in New York City, his hometown. It was all coming together.

Taking a break from writing one night, Peter asked a friend to take him over to the Playboy Mansion.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And, um, I said, just drop over to the Mansion, come back in 20 minutes and pick me up. I'm just going to stay there just to say hello to Hef. I haven't seen him for a long time. And so I went into the Mansion, and I was walking through the foyer and somebody yells out, Peter. And I turn around and I couldn't figure out who that was coming running toward me. And when she got closer, I realized it was Dorothy.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Last time they'd met, almost a year earlier, Peter had given Dorothy his number, said he was casting a movie and she should call him. She never called. This time though, Dorothy wanted to talk.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And we sat on the, I sat on some stairs somewhere in the, near the foyer. And Dorothy and I sat and talked for about an hour.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Dorothy told him she was doing some acting. She had a small role in the roller disco comedy *Skatetown, U.S.A.*

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And she mentioned in the conversation that she got married. I remember feeling kind of a jolt in my heart at that moment.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter asked Dorothy if she wanted to audition for a part in *They All Laughed*.

A month later, Dorothy Stratten walked into Peter's Bel Air home to talk about a role in his movie. She was 19 and wore a white dress, floppy hat and high heels. They had tea in his office and Peter told her about the part. At the time it was the role of a secretary. They read through a scene and it turned out Dorothy was good at line readings.

What happened next seems fairly typical of how Peter Bogdanovich might court a woman. He started reading her a scene from *Private Lives*, a play by the English writer Noel Coward. It's a comedy about a divorced couple who end up honeymooning in the same hotel with their new spouses. Afterwards, they smoked cigarettes and talked.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And she told me some rather intimate stories about her first boyfriend who she'd saved up for a year to buy him a special ring. And he got pissed off at her and took a hammer and destroyed the ring. And she was still upset about it. Anyway, um, we got to know each other and later on when we knew each other quite well. She was interested in me because I didn't make a pass at her. And everybody was making passes at her. You know, I once said to Howard Hawks, how come Howard in your pictures it's always the girl that makes the first move in a relationship? And Howard said, did you ever see anything sillier than a guy making a pass?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Dorothy and Peter didn't see each other for another six weeks but started talking on the phone. Dorothy told Peter she'd read *Private Lives* and loved it. He eventually cast her in *They All Laughed*.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** We started seeing each other more often. I mean always talking about doing the picture. and I just liked talking with her and she was so smart.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter rewrote Dorothy's part, expanding her role into one of the leads. She would play a young woman in a bad marriage who becomes John Ritter's love interest.

Sometimes Dorothy would visit Peter and talk openly about her struggles with her husband.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** At some point we were sitting on the couch in my living room. I remember she just put head on my shoulder. And she was sad about something.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And for a long time, that's how their relationship evolved, in a very chaste way. Dorothy would share a little more of herself, and Peter would fall a little more in love.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I said, let's go down to the beach and go for a walk. We were walking in the sand for quite a while and suddenly we both just, turned, turned to each other and we kissed each other. And it was just like. It blew me away. And that was the beginning. And we, we talked about doing anything else, and she said, I can't because I have to go back to my husband, and I can't do anything but this. Meaning kiss. So that's all we did for about a month.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter flew to New York where pre-production had started on *They All Laughed*.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And, um, she wrote me, she sent me a card from L.A. to New York of a girl. And she's jumping for joy by the ocean. It was perfect. And inside she had written "one day since yesterday."

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** "One day since yesterday" would appear on future cards and gifts from Dorothy. But at that moment, seeing those words for the first time, Peter was inspired to write a song. He enlisted Earl Poole Ball to help. Ball was a well-known musician and played a pianist in *They All Laughed*. Their song would be performed by actress Colleen Camp in the movie.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** What can you do to stop a feeling. Can you just crush it in your hand? And I was thinking that, you know? This girl is married. And I'm madly in love with her. And she's in love with me. What are we gonna do?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter spent most weekdays in New York prepping the movie. On weekends, he flew back to L.A. to see Dorothy.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** She wasn't at all like any of the girls I'd met at the Mansion. There was something different about her. And she was very smart and very intuitive and just very dear. And had a great sense of humor. Oh boy.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter started calling Dorothy DR, her first initial and R for Ruth, her middle name. He gave her a unicorn pin and, for Valentine's Day, a copy of *The Arabian Nights*. Peter wrote a code within its pages that spelled "PB loves DR." Dorothy wrote poetry about Peter and anguished at her situation. They hadn't slept together, but they were falling in love.

In March of 1980, Peter went to New York's Kennedy airport to pick up Dorothy. She was flying in to shoot *They All Laughed*.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** She was the last person off the plane. I thought she hadn't made the plane. 'Cause everybody was out, and they're all gone. And then she came out and she was carrying like four suitcases. She says, I packed everything. She said I brought all this stuff and I felt like I was moving out.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** It was Dorothy's first time in New York. After checking into her hotel, they went to an old-school Italian restaurant called Nicola's and then took one of those horse-drawn carriage rides through Central Park.

Not long after, Dorothy moved into Peter's room at the Plaza Hotel. New York felt a world away from Hollywood and the Playboy Mansion. Peter and Dorothy would go for long midnight walks.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** In those days there were book shops, book stores. And there was a Doubleday about two blocks from the Plaza. And, um, we used to go there a lot. And she wanted to see a play on Broadway. She'd never even seen a play on Broadway. she just went to see *The Elephant Man*, uh, on Broadway. And, and we were in this book shop and she was looking through this book about the elephant man. The real elephant man. There were pictures in there, and she was looking at them carefully. I couldn't look at them for more than a sec. I said, you want this? She says, yeah. So I bought it for her, I realized what it was about. Which is that great beauty or great ugliness sets you apart. And I remember walking down the street with her and everybody turned around to look at her, everybody. The dogs did. I'm not kidding. I saw a little dog looking after her. And I said, everybody is looking at you. She said, no they're looking at you, and I said, if they're looking me, they're just looking to see who you are with. I said, how does that make you feel? And she said, I don't like it. Why? I don't know, I feel like I have ice cream on my dress or something. So it, that being an outsider looking that good or looking that ugly sets you apart. And that's why she identified with the elephant man. Isn't that weird?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** When shooting began for *They All Laughed*, Peter and Dorothy kept their relationship quiet. Dorothy did a TV interview during this time.

**DORTHY STRATTEN INTERVIEW:** I'm in the middle of another movie right now that I'm shooting in New York *They All Laughed* with Peter Bogdanovich directing. Audrey Hepburn and Ben Gazzara are starring.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you have any talking parts?



**DORTHY STRATTEN INTERVIEW:** Oh, I have a costarring role.

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh, good, good.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** She doesn't even seem to let the interviewer get her down, the one who condescendingly asks if she had any talking parts.

In the movie, John Ritter's detective follows Dorothy's character, Dolores, and falls in love with her.

**THEY ALL LAUGHED CLIP:** What do you do Charles? You never told me/ Uh Travel Agent.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Ben Gazzara is a detective who falls in love with the woman he's following, played by Audrey Hepburn. They have a brief, bittersweet affair, which was extra poignant because they had once had an affair in real life.

**THEY ALL LAUGHED CLIP:** Well I must say you have very good taste in women. Which is more than can be said about my taste in men. Where does that leave me? Dangling miserably, I hope.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** For the most part, the shoot for *They All Laughed* was a blast for Peter. The best man at his wedding to Polly, George Morforgen, was producing. And the cast was made up of mostly Peter's friends. Some were former girlfriends. It was becoming a pattern in Peter's life. The women he dated would often become his friends after the breakup. When he was "playing the field," he dated Colleen Camp, who plays a country singer in the movie. He also had a short affair with Patti Hanson, who would later become guitarist Keith Richards' wife. Hanson plays a streetwise cab driver. In the movie, Ben Gazzara's character gives her the nickname Sam when he gets in her cab.

**THEY ALL LAUGHED CLIP:** Keep it right here Sam. Sam Who? Well What's your name? My name is Deborah. That's why I called you Sam.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** They shot most of the film on the busy streets of New York. They worked quickly in small, mobile crews, stealing shots where they could. As a result, the movie has real energy to it. It seems Peter was channeling some of what Orson Welles told him when they were recording interviews for Peter's book on Orson.

**ORSON WELLES:** I make a master plan and then throw it away. But I make it.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** But you have to be very flexible.

**ORSON WELLES:** Yes, and so it's a, it's a basic part of my, uh, the way I work with a group of people is that I always move. But not because I'm impatient, but because of what I think will happen to the picture if we don't.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And you keep the energy of the picture up all the time.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Keeping this in mind, Peter took a loose approach with the script.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And, uh, it kept changing. And I kept rewriting it. While I was shooting we rewrote a lot of it. And I'd make up a scene just before we'd shoot it. And, uh, it gave the picture a certain freshness which I, I like.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Peter also cast his two young daughters in *They All Laughed*. Sashy and Antonia had been living in L.A. with Polly since the divorce, so they flew to New York during their school's spring break. In this scene, they're walking down a Manhattan street with Ben Gazzara, who plays their dad in the movie. A lot of the dialogue in that scene is stuff Peter's daughters actually said to him during his bachelor days.

**THEY ALL LAUGHED CLIP:** Got a date tonight? What about the cab Driver? Good I don't like when you are alone.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I don't like when you're alone. My daughter said that to me once.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** As all of this was happening, Dorothy was getting to know Peter's daughters.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Dorothy really got down on the floor and colored with them. And I just thought that was so sweet. And she really enjoyed them. And on Easter she hid Easter eggs everywhere. And, oh, God, she was so, she made it so much fun. And she wasn't doing it to make me happy she just really got into the kids and the kids were different with her. I remember Antonia said she's the best one, Dad. She's the best one.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Throughout the days and weeks of shooting, Peter became more resolute. He wanted to be with Dorothy.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** We were very much in love. I wanted to marry her.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In June, two months after her arrival in New York, Dorothy sent an official letter to her husband, Paul Snider, letting him know they were separated. It was drafted by a lawyer Peter recommended. The process of leaving Snider had begun.

When Peter and Dorothy talked about how Snider might take the news, Dorothy assured him of one thing: Snider would never hurt her.

After the shoot wrapped, Peter and Dorothy flew to London for ten days. They saw plays by Harold Pinter and Dario Fo. They saw Oscar Peterson and Ella Fitzgerald perform. Dorothy had never been to a museum, so they went to the National Gallery. It was, for Peter, and I assume Dorothy, a kind of honeymoon. On the flight back to Los Angeles, Dorothy cried. It was the last flight they would take together.

When they returned to Los Angeles, Dorothy went to see her estranged husband. Afterwards, she told Peter about it.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** He played her some songs on his guitar. He had a girl there named Patty, whom he was gonna take to the Mansion to try to introduce her there. And she came back and she said everything was fine. He was, he was sad, but okay, he was fine.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Hugh Hefner was glad Peter and Dorothy were back in LA. He wanted his Playmate of the Year back at the Mansion parties.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** There's a thing that they have, uh, that they had every year called the Midsummer Night's Dream Party. In which you came in pajamas and it was a Midsummer Night's Dream party. And we were invited to go. And neither Dorothy nor I felt like it. So we didn't go.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Hefner was disappointed. So, in order to encourage the couple to attend future parties, Hefner made Peter an offer.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** He said you didn't come to the party and I said no we didn't. He said would it help you to come to the party if I told the husband that he can't come here except with Dorothy?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In other words, Paul Snider would not be allowed at the Playboy Mansion unless he came with Dorothy, who'd just officially separated from him.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And this is where I made a big mistake. I said yeah, I guess it would help. I thought to myself, she doesn't want to come here, and I don't come here either. But I guess what am I gonna say, no, it wouldn't help? So I said, yeah, I guess it would help. And then he banned him from the Mansion.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** By many accounts, this would have been devastating to Snider, who modeled himself on Hefner and believed all his plans for fame and fortune were to be found in the *Playboy* universe. Peter told Dorothy what Hefner planned.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And when I told Dorothy that he was planning to do that, it was on a staircase. It's considered bad luck to exchange important information on a staircase I found out later. And I said to her he wants to ban him from the Mansion unless you're there. And she hesitated. I remember she paused before she took the next step. And she should have told me not to do, tell him not to do that. But she didn't. She just didn't know what to do I think.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** It sounds to me like for basically 40 years you've been replaying whether conversations had happened at a different time in a different way, whether they had been a little more forthcomingness, that things might have been different?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yes. It would have been. It would have been different. Yeah. It would have been different if I said no, don't, don't do, don't, don't, don't do that.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** On August 14, 1980, ten months after Dorothy and Peter began their relationship, Dorothy went to meet Snider at their old house. He was now living there with Patty and a new girlfriend. Dorothy and Snider were going to discuss how to split her financial assets.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** She didn't tell me she was going to see him that day.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Dorothy's 12-year-old sister Louise was visiting at the time. She was staying at the Bel Air house with Dorothy and Peter and Peter's daughters.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** She told Louise, but she said, don't tell anybody.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** So only Louise knew where Dorothy was going that day, and as Peter said, Dorothy swore her little sister to secrecy. After a while, Peter started to worry.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Well, she said she'd be back around 2:00. And when it got to be, uh, 4:00 we were kind of worried. And we suffered through that day because Louise knew where she had gone and didn't tell me that until it was 6:00. And I thought shit.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Part of Peter worried that Snider had somehow convinced Dorothy not to go through with the divorce. So, he had his secretary call Snider's house but there was no answer.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And, um, we just got more and more worried. Didn't know what to do about it. And finally around 11:00 the phone rings. And I answer it. It was Hefner. Hi, Hef, how you doing? Haven't you heard? Heard what? Oh, God, he said. This is hardest moment in my life. He said two words: Dorothy's dead.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The phone fell from Peter's hands and he cried out. He fell to the floor.

The horrible details came out later. Paul Snider shot and killed Dorothy Stratten that afternoon. Shot her in the face, in their former bedroom. Then he turned the gun on himself.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Um, I kind of fell apart.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Did you want to go to the house?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** No. I wanted to go for a drive and drive off a canyon or something. They wouldn't let me get in the car. And they gave me two valium. I didn't speak to anybody. I was, I was a complete basket case. I couldn't deal with anything. I couldn't even see my kids. I didn't see my kids, my sister, nobody. I just lay on the bed and, hitting my hand against the wall for two days.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Did you, did, uh, I mean, it's natural. Did you blame yourself? Did you think you should have done something?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Oh, sure. Yeah, I did, of course.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Did that stop?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** No. Not really.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The next morning, 1200 miles away in Vancouver, a police officer knocked on Nelly's door. She was washing the dishes and saw him walk up to the house. When she answered the door, he told her Dorothy had been killed by her husband. She couldn't believe it. Nelly invited the officer in. She tried to absorb the news. The officer stayed and helped Nelly dry the dishes.

John Ritter, one of the stars of *They All Laughed*, visited Peter in the days after, like any friend would. Audrey Hepburn came to the house with flowers.

But according to Peter, few people in Hollywood outside of the cast of *They All Laughed* called or reached out to him. Actor Cary Grant was an exception.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And the only person who didn't work on *They All Laughed* who called me was Cary. I choke up a little bit thinking about it. 'Cause he was so sweet. What he said to me was very sweet. He said, oh Peter, I'm so sorry. What a terrible thing to happen to you.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** No one else?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Nope. No, no, Hollywood they run away from things like that. Nobody wants to be involved with that kind of thing. But Cary was, he was a real pal.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** One of the people who should have called, of course, was Orson Welles. They still weren't speaking, but you'd think this kind of tragedy would supersede whatever gripes or resentments were keeping them apart. After all, Peter supported Welles' work, published books about him, and gave him a home when he needed it. But no call came.

There was a funeral in Los Angeles. It was at the funeral that Peter met Nelly for the first time. She wanted her daughter cremated. Then she gave Peter consent to have Dorothy's ashes buried at Westwood Village Memorial Park cemetery in LA. Everyone gathered at Peter's home afterwards.

In the weeks after Dorothy's death, Peter had to finish cutting *They All Laughed*.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** The picture kept me going. I remember sitting in the chair, at the cutting table with my hands clenched like this. Fists. I remember going through the entire period fists clenched. I don't know how I got through it.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** One thing that helped Peter get through it was an act of generosity. Around this time, Frank Sinatra sent Peter a copy of his new album. It was called *Trilogy: Past Present and Future*.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I had met him a couple of times. And talked to him. And I liked four songs I wanted to use in the picture, including the title song, "They All Laughed" by the Gershwins.

**FRANK SINATRA SINGING:** *They all said we'd never get together...*

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And, uh, so I called him and I said, Frank, I made this romantic comedy. And I really would like to use four of the songs you recorded on that last album. Which ones kid? I said, um, "More Than You Know," "They All Laughed," "You And Me," and um.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The other song Peter can't remember is a little number you may have heard of.

**FRANK SINATRA SINGING:** *Start spreading the news, I'm leaving today, I want to be a part of it, New York, New York.*

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Anyway, I said, but I don't have a lot of money Frank. He said, I'll get back to you kid. A week goes by, he calls me. I got you all four for \$5 grand, can you manage that? And do you know what it would have been if he, he hadn't, \$75,000 to \$100,000 per song. \$5,000 for the whole thing, the whole thing just unbelievable. And I was very touched, very touched. I said, Jesus, Frank, thank you so much. So much.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** After he finished cutting the movie, Peter went to Vancouver to see Dorothy's family and to Amsterdam to meet her grandmother. He traveled to New York and London, visiting all of the places they'd gone together. He even stayed in the same London hotel rooms where he and Dorothy stayed. And, off and on, he tried therapy.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I went to a couple, three or four people. But I didn't, there was one guy I kind of liked and I saw him quite a bit.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** In the throes of grief, Peter made a bad decision. And not a small bad decision, a bad decision that changed his livelihood, one that would reverberate for years to come. He started to fight with the studio over the marketing for *They All Laughed*.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I didn't like the ads. I said fuck it. And I said I'm gonna buy it back and distribute myself, which everybody said to me don't do that. Don't do that, Peter. Don't do that.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** But Peter did it. He bought *They All Laughed* back from the studio and tried to distribute it himself.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** And I just didn't listen to anybody. I mortgaged the house.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** The Bel Air House?

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Yeah. Mortgaged that house. Cost me about \$5 million, which is all I had. And I went bust from the picture.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Without the backing of a studio with an experienced distribution team, it's almost impossible to market and book a film in theaters across the country.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** You can't self-distribute because the studio can beat, any studio can beat you out. I wanted the picture to be seen. I wanted her to be seen as much as she could be.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** *They All Laughed* was not widely seen. The reviews were mixed. *Variety* liked it, *The New York Times* didn't.

Peter was now grieving and broke. And his movie was disappearing from screens. Peter would stay immersed in his grief, consumed by it for the next five years.

To this day, *They All Laughed* remains Peter's personal favorite of all his films. It's also admired by some of today's younger directors like Quentin Tarantino, Noah Baumbach and Wes Anderson. On the 25th anniversary of *They All Laughed*, Wes Anderson, who directed *Moonrise Kingdom* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, interviewed Peter about *They All Laughed*.

**WES ANDERSON:** I really loved the way it was shot. It's very kind of natural and fluid and has a lot of energy and has a kind of precision in the way its done.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** Thank you, that's what I liked.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Here Peter tells Wes Anderson why it's his favorite.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** If you said which film you've made so far is the most like you, I'd say *They All Laughed*. It's my sense of humor, it's very romantic, it's urban, it's New York, my hometown. I was crazy about all the women in the picture, I was in love with Dorothy, I was crazy about Colleen and quite fond of Patti and I loved Audrey Hepburn.

**THEY ALL LAUGHED CLIP:** Hi Angela, I'm Christy. Are you Christy Miller? No Shit.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** After Peter and I talked about Dorothy, I made a decision. There was somewhere I wanted to go. My producer came along.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** One day I am going to learn how this car works. That's very exciting. And here we are Westwood Memorial Park Cemetery. Man, this thing is hidden.

**PRODUCER:** You'd never know.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Totally, its tucked behind big towers which, across the street from Westwood village.

**PRODUCER:** It's nice too. They don't have maps they don't encourage a lot of tourism. It's peaceful.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** It's very Peaceful. 1911. Its old. There're people here who died in 1925, 1926. I saw 1923.

**PRODUCER:** As I was walking, I saw Darryl Zanuck's grave. Its right over there too.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Darryl Zanuck, John Cassavetes, Farrah Fawcett and Dorothy Stratten.

**PRODUCER:** So Ben, why are we here?

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** You know, I don't know why we are here. You know? I know why we're here, but I don't know if I can express why we are here. If there was any hesitation about doing this podcast it would be talking to peter about the most important event of his life: Dorothy Stratten's murder. And to do that you've got to tell so much of Dorthey's story, which has been told before in so many exploitative ways. And you know her murder was so sensational, so awful really. It was awful for peter and it was hard for me to talk to him about it and harder for him to talk about it. So, I don't know. I sort of felt like we should come and see Dorothy's grave and seek her permission. Which is nonsense, you know. Just a way to make me feel better. And then I think while we're here this is exploitative. But I want to tell her story well.

**PRODUCER:** Right there where that big plant, that succulent is.



**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** So we found Dorothy Stratten's grave site. February 28<sup>th</sup> 1960 to August 14<sup>th</sup> 1980. She was 20 years old. 20 and a half. And Peter chose the quote on it. It's from A Farewell to Arms and I guess Peter Shortened it. Is that right?

**PRODUCER:** Yeah.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** So it's a Hemingway quote: "If people bring so much courage to this world, the world has to kill them, to break them. So of course, it kills them. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too, but there will be no special hurry. We love you DR." That's what he called her. It's nice. It's a good quote.

**PRODUCER:** It makes me happy to think Peter comes here.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Yeah this is a nice place to come.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Next time on The Plot Thickens, Peter tries to put his life back together.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I turned down a lot of things. I didn't want to work. I thought I'd never make another picture. The only reason I really did make another picture is I needed the money. I was broke, really broke.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** And he finds love in an unexpected place.

**PETER BOGDANOVICH:** I didn't fall in love with Louise because she was like Dorothy. Although she is in certain ways, and she's as, as kind and as thoughtful and as self-effacing, but I just, I just got along with her. And she was funny. And we got along.

**BEN MANKIEWICZ:** Angela Carone is our Director of podcasts. Our story editors are Joanne Faryon and Susan White. Editing by Mike Voulgaris. Thomas Avery of Tunewelders composed our music. Mixing by Tim Pelletier and Glenn Matullo. Production support from Yacov Freedman, Susana Zepeda, Julie Bitton, Mario Rials, Heather Geltser, Philip Richards, Ben Holst, Dipanker Mazumder, Bailey Tyler, Zara Chowdhary, Jeff Stafford and Millie De Chirico. Our web team is Josh Lubin, Mike McKenzie, and Matthew Ownby. Special thanks to Scott McGee, Steve Denker, and the WarnerMedia Podcast Network. TCM's General Manger is Pola Chagnon.

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I'm your host Ben Mankiewicz, thanks for listening. See you next time.