

## Lois Duncan Speaks Out

*The Author of I Know What You Did Last Summer talks about why she hated the movie*

by Cate Baily

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**M**ost authors are thrilled when their books are made into movies. Lois Duncan wasn't. When she saw the movie based on her book *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, she was horrified. And not for reasons you might think.

It was filled with sensationalized violence that wasn't in my book," she told *Scope*. "It made murder appear to be something to sequel and giggle about."

The 1997 movie, which stars Jennifer Love Hewitt and Sarah Michelle Gellar features a crazed fisherman who terrorizes and gruesomely kills teens with a hook. There is no such character in Duncan's novel. The movie ends with the message from the fisherman/killer "I still know...," setting up audiences for the sequel, *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer*, which comes out this month and stars Brandy.

### Tragedy

**L**ois Duncan has spent a career writing novels about murder and mystery. She's never believed in making death seem trivial in her fiction. Tragically, after years of writing, she found out firsthand how agonizing death really is. In 1989, Duncan's youngest daughter, 18-year-old Kait, was shot to death on the highway as she was driving home from a friend's house.

"Having sat by the hospital bed of my teenager daughter, watching her brains ooze out from bandages of her bullet-ridden head, I am here to tell you that there's nothing fun about murder," the author says.

Before Kait's murder, Duncan made a name for herself as one of the preeminent authors of thrillers for young adults. She wrote *Killing Mr. Griffin*, when Kait was 7, and *The Third Eye* when Kait was 14. Duncan had always known she wanted to be a writer. "I was composing rhymed verse as soon as I can talk," she says.

She started writing for teenagers while she was still one herself. She was published in *Seventeen* many times during high school. But, as an adult, she continued writing for teens because she found they were a great audience. "I don't have to 'write down' to them," Duncan says. "They are mature enough to appreciate adult subject matter, and yet still young enough to be open to new ideas."

When Kait was killed, Duncan was at the height of her career. She had several book contracts pending, but she put them all on hold. How could she write fictional mysteries when a real-life horror story was consuming her life? Instead, she began looking the circumstances about Kait's death. Her nonfiction book *Who Killed My Daughter?* tells the story of her search for the solution to Kait's murder.

## The Conspiracy

**A**s soon as Duncan began investigating, she started to doubt the official police determination that the murder was a random crime.

She began by combing through Kait's belongings for clues, putting up flyers in the neighborhood where the crime was committed, and reading police reports. Then, though she was reluctant, she consulted a psychic.

Before her daughter's death, intriguing topics for fiction, and many of her thrillers contained phenomena such as astral projection—the ability to leave the physical body and travel anywhere. But now, she actually believes strongly in things like ESP and reincarnation. She says, “After working with psychic detectives during the investigation of her daughter's murder, I am convinced that certain people, like Karen in *The Third Eye*—all of us to at least some degree—are naturally gifted with telepathy and clairvoyance.”

The psychic confirmed Duncan's belief that the shooting was not random and sent her down new trails in search of her daughter's murderer. As she worked, she realized that there was an eerie overlap of fiction and reality. In her novel, *Don't Look Behind You*, Duncan had used Kait as a model for the spirited and rebellious main character, April. In the story, April was chased by a hit man in a Camaro. One month after the book was published, Kait was chased by a hit man in a Camaro (according to Duncan's theory).

Duncan novel believes that she has solved part of the mystery—but not all of it. She thinks that her daughter was killed because Kait was planning to expose a crime ring her boyfriend was involved in. Duncan also thinks that the crime ring is protected by certain members of the police department—which would explain why the police were so quick to call the shooting a “random” and close the case.

But, none years after the crime, she still does not know who killed her daughter. Duncan maintains a Web site where people can get updates on the case shared any information they have.

## No Ending

**T**hough there is still no real ending to Kait's story, Duncan has begun writing fiction again. Last year, she published *Gallows Hill*, about a girl whose life is threatened when her town finds out she has supernatural powers.

Duncan doesn't think that population movies and books should avoid the topic of murder. She just believes that the subject the subject should be handled honestly. "Violence is a fact of life in today's society., and therefore it has its place in books and films," she says. "But I strongly believe that people who create those books and films have a duty to treat the subject seriously and to show the terrible consequences, not only for the victim but for all those who loved the victim and who's lives will never be the same.

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### **Talk About It!**

**Discuss these questions with your classmates:**

1. What is your opinion of violence in the media? Does violence in movies or TV cause real damage? If so, how? Do you think violence in the media is OK if it's dealt with honestly? Or do you think writers and producers should completely avoid the subject of violence. Explain.
2. What are Lois Duncan's feeling about the paranormal? What are your feelings? Do you believe in ESP? Why or why not?
3. Why does Lois Duncan like writing for teenagers? Do you agree with her description of teens? Why or Why not?

### **Word Match**

**Match each vocabulary word with It's definition:**

- |                     |                                       |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| _____ 1. trivial    | a. not very important                 |
| _____ 2. preeminent | b. resisting control                  |
| _____ 3. pending    | c. outstanding                        |
| _____ 4. telepathy  | d. awaiting conclusion                |
| _____ 5. rebellious | e. silent communication between minds |

### **FYI: Lois Duncan on the Web**

To find out more about Lois Duncan, visit her Web site at: <http://www.iag.net~barq/lois.html>  
At this site, the author talks about her life and her other books that have been made into movies

or might be made into movies. There is also links to materials you can use if you're doing an author report on Duncan, and updates on the investigation into Kait's murder. Plus, you can click on her mailbox to send Duncan and e-mail message.

**Credits:**

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**Notes on this article:**

- The <http://www.iag.net~barq/lois.html> link will *not* work. The correct link is <http://loisduncan.arquettes.com>.
- The correct answers to the *word match*: 1. **A**; 2. **C**; 3. **D**; 4. **E**; 5. **B**.