

The Unveiling of Hailey Lind

By: Dorinda Ohnstad

Had the opportunity to meet author Hailey Lind? Neither have I, but I've had the pleasure of getting to know sisters Carolyn Lawes and Julie Goodson-Lawes who frequently answer to the name, which is the pseudonym the two publish under. One an artist and the other a historian, both have a love of storytelling stemming from their childhood game of creating stories together to entertain themselves during long road trips. Julie is a skilled muralist and portrait painter who runs her own faux finishing and design business in the San Francisco Bay Area. Carolyn is a history Professor at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, where she specializes in American women's history. Both were published academic authors (one in anthropology and the other in history) before they decided to try their hand at writing fiction.

Unlike other novice authors, who customarily spend years completing their first manuscript, these sisters wasted no time in completing their first in six months. Then they faced the big question: "Now what?" Unsure how to market their completed work, Julie decided to head to the Willamette Writer's Conference in Willamette, Oregon where she met with editors, publishers and agents. Her networking resulted in several requests for partial manuscripts, which netted some very nice rejections. That's when the real work began. They hired a professional editor to assist them in transforming their work into a commercially viable manuscript. Writing a novel was not as easy as they first thought it would be, but their tenacity over an additional six month period yielded a final version of *Feint of Art*—albeit very different from its initial conception—as they learned the art of writing a novel in the process. These were valuable lessons they integrated into their writing processes for each of their future novels.

A revitalized manuscript in hand, the sisters sent out 38 query letters and received 35 responses declaring that an art theme wouldn't sell—at a time when *The DaVinci Code* was flying off bookstore shelves. Go figure. Thankfully, it only took one insightful agent and one publisher with the foresight to be looking for an art series to land the dynamic sister duo with a three book deal within two weeks. In real estate it's location, location, location, but in publishing Julie and Carolyn have shown it's right time, right manuscript, right publisher.

Julie and Carolyn have had a successful start to what proposes to be a successful and prolific writing career. Their first book, *Feint of Art*, was released in January 2006 and is currently in the running for an Agatha award for Best First Novel. The second in the Art Lover's Mystery Series, *Shooting Gallery*, was released in October 2006, a mere nine months later, and the third, *Brush with Death*, is set to be released July 2007.

Julie's love of art and fascination with the world of art forgery led the sisters to create the Art Lover's Mystery Series. The impetus for their stories is gleaned from true tales of the wacky escapades of art forgers. Each book is set in San Francisco, and what's not to love about its ambience as a setting for a mystery series. Insert the city's peculiar, and often

bizarre, inhabitants and you have characters that are both memorable and entertaining. Add to that the lurid world of art forgery and the romance of Renaissance artwork and you have the perfect setting for protagonist Annie Kincaid and her quirky friends. To add some spice to the mix, toss in a sexy art thief and a by-the-book landlord whose smile makes a girl's heart go zing and you have readers anxiously waiting for the next book in the series before they're done reading the one hot off the press.

Brush with Death will not disappoint Hailey Lind fans. It has the same cast of characters, same witty humor, same snappy dialog, same romantic tension, but a whole new adventure to experience along with Annie as she solves the mystery surrounding Raphael's painting *La Fornarina*.

How many more dead bodies and plots to steal priceless Renaissance artwork can protagonist Annie Kincaid stumble upon? Quite a few more I hope.

Q: Whose idea was it to write a novel together? How did that idea result in a completed manuscript?

Carolyn: I don't recall a moment when we said "Okay, that's it – let's write a book!" Instead, it evolved over time. For several years we would fill the hours of long car trips making up stories and batting around the idea of putting those stories on paper, but it never seemed to happen. Julie was the one who took the bull by the horns and showed up on one visit to Virginia with a stack of notes clutched in her hand. I was very impressed! We sat down at the computer and started fleshing out her notes – and our protagonist, Annie Kincaid, and *Feint of Art* were born.

It took many months before we had a completed manuscript, though we had so much fun writing together that it didn't seem like work. We felt such a sense of satisfaction that we'd finally done what we'd been threatening to do for years.

Julie: We were so lucky—at the time this all happened, Carolyn was on sabbatical and I was able to cut back some on my painting hours. It was so great, because we were in e-mail and/or phone contact everyday, so it felt as though we were together! It was a magical time: neither of us knew whether we would manage to get published, but we produced the manuscript just to see if we could fulfill our goal of writing a book...just for the love of the writing.

Q: How do you write a book together when you live on opposite sides of the country?

Carolyn: One word: E-mail! After we brainstorm a book (in person, if we can manage it, but on the telephone if we can't), Julie begins to write, using the ideas and characters we came up with, but heading in new directions as the story takes shape. She then sends a draft to me as an attachment to an e-mail. I download it, expand on what she wrote, add new material, and send it back to her. The drafts fly back and forth until the manuscript is done.

Julie: The e-mail is crucial. Free cell-phone minutes on the weekends are great, as well, especially for those hours-long plot formulations. It is so important to us to write with one voice—hence the single name—so the chapters go back and forth so many times neither of us can remember who wrote what. Most important is that we like and respect each other, and have separate strengths that work well together. Even when we get frustrated with each other, we work it out fairly quickly.

Q: Were you close as sisters before your writing careers? Has working together strengthened your sisterly bond?

Carolyn: We were best friends as well as sisters before we became writing partners, and I can't imagine working with anyone else. Writing is such a personal undertaking, and to be able to share it with my sister has added a new dimension to our relationship, drawing us even closer. There's something unique about imagining and creating a new world together. We feel like proud parents!

Julie: Ditto. I can't imagine a greater gift than a sister who is also a real friend. The writing has opened up whole new aspects of our relationship, and requires us to interact all the time, which is fabulous. We also have a similar sense of humor, and tend to play off of one another all the time. We have a lot of fun, trying to crack each other up.

Q. Who are some of your favorite authors? Is there anyone in particular you draw inspiration from?

Carolyn: I've long been a fan of Elizabeth Peters (who also writes as Barbara Michaels), whose deft blending of interesting characters and twisty plots always kept me reading.

Julie: Elizabeth Peter's Vicky Bliss mysteries were my absolute favorite as a girl. I also enjoy the early Sue Grafton, Walter Mosley, Linda Barnes, and Janet Evanovich. Each for different reasons: the plotting in one, the humor in another, the pacing in another. I read outside of the genre also: I love Jane Austen, Barbara Kingsolver, Anne Lamott, David Sedaris, Amy Tan, Richard Russo, and Larry McMurtry. I'm all over the map. I draw inspiration from all of them—often when I get stuck writing, I give myself permission to read a lot for several days. That usually gets me going again.

Q: What is the most challenging aspect of a duo writing team?

Carolyn: We rarely butt heads, but it does happen. Occasionally we will have different ideas for how a character should act or where the plot should go. Fortunately, we have a huge store of good will, built over a lifetime as sisters, so if Julie feels strongly about something I'll usually capitulate, and vice versa.

Julie: From a practical perspective, one of the greatest challenges has been writing "over" each other, which happens when we're both working on the same chapter. She'll structure the story one way, I'll structure it another, and we both grind our teeth when we

have to reconcile the two versions. We've learned to avoid this by communicating better. One or the other will send an e-mail to the effect "I'm working on Chapter Two – don't touch it!" That usually solves the problem.

Q: What do each of you bring to the writing process that makes the novel better than it would be if you wrote on your own?

Carolyn: Our strengths complement each other, and the books benefit from that. Julie is a professional artist and brings her hands-on and academic knowledge of art and art history to our novels. I'm a historian, and while my specific area of knowledge has not been needed (yet!), I am accustomed to doing research and writing. Julie's very good at plotting – I don't know *where* she gets some of her ideas, it's a little scary – while I specialize in description and dialogue.

Julie: Writing as a team also helps when one of us just isn't feeling creative. Whenever I'm feeling "stuck" I call her and she revs me up, and I do the same for her. I also adore sending Carolyn my half-formed ideas or unfinished paragraphs, and having her add all sorts of detail and snappy dialogue...her additions usually spark new ideas, and it goes from there.

Q. What are your favorite and least favorite things about being a writer?

Carolyn: Favorite: The way characters seem to come alive – indeed, to take on a life of their own, and the story goes in a direction we hadn't consciously envisioned.

Least favorite: It's hard work! And can be lonely!

Julie: My favorite would have to be when the ideas flow and one feels as though one is channeling a story without actual forethought. It's so exciting! Sort of like a completely controlled, non-scary episode of schizophrenia, what with all those voices in one's head. Another favorite, as a published author, is receiving fan mail. There's nothing quite like hearing from a total stranger that they not only bought your book and enjoyed it, but that it made some difference –however small—in their life. That's an amazing feeling. We received one letter from a woman in New Orleans who discovered *Feint of Art* while sleeping on a friend's floor in Baton Rouge, after being ousted from her home by Hurricane Katrina. She told us that the book made her laugh and forget her troubles for a while, which was something she hadn't thought possible. She later went on to win our portrait contest, and now I'm painting a portrait of her late mother and we have a great e-mail friendship. That's really something.

Least favorite: Getting up at four in the morning, staring at a computer console, and realizing I have nothing whatsoever to say. It happens frequently. Also, the constant frustration of not having enough time and mental space to write as much as I would like. It gnaws at me.

Q: How many books do you plan for The Art Lover's Mystery Series?

Carolyn: How high can you count? We're working on the fourth book now, and have ideas for several more already sketched out. We also have plots for another series, as well as several stand-alone novels.

Julie: I think the number of books depends on the readers, and the publisher. There are so many wonderful plots out there in the world of art...but that being said, I imagine any series starts to run out of steam after ten books or so...maybe a dozen....After all, Annie has to settle down eventually, right?

Q. Do you know the ending to your book when you start writing? After it's in print, do you ever wish it had a different ending?

Carolyn: Sometimes we're not even sure "who dunnit" until we've written quite a bit of the story! That may sound odd but it's because the plots change and evolve as we write them.

Julie: I often have a sense of where the main plot and subplots will end up, but the actual ending never unfolds until we are actually writing it. Sometimes the writing comes to a screeching halt at the last chapter, while we ponder an interesting denouement. I haven't yet wanted to change an ending already in print, but I'm sure that day will come....

Q: Your knowledge of Renaissance era artwork and forgeries is amazing. Where do you research information for your books?

Carolyn: We draw upon our many years of academic training, which taught us how to do research. Thanks to the Internet, all kinds of material is available at our fingertips and so we do our best to be sure that the art history referred to in the books is accurate and up to date. Julie also subscribes to an art forgery listserv, which is the source of many of our ideas. We also scour the newspapers for ideas, which we embroider upon a great deal.

Julie: Yes, the internet is fabulous for research. I also have a whole library of art books, gathered over a lifetime. My particular areas of interests are the Italian Renaissance...and forgery. As an artist, it has always intrigued me that more artists don't go for the money and forge paintings. On top of everything else, it seems like so much fun. But then again, there are those pesky morals to consider....

Q: It is as much fun reading about Annie Kincaid and her group of quirky friends as unraveling each of your novel's mysteries. How much do you draw on your own lives in the development of your characters?

Carolyn: Quite a bit, actually! Annie's apartment is based on the apartment I lived in when I first moved to Norfolk, and Annie's studio is based on Julie's former art studio. Neither of us has been an art forger – Julie out of integrity and me out of a lack of skill – but otherwise many of Annie's experiences and attitudes are drawn from our own lives. We change the names to protect the not-so-innocent. We have both lived abroad, Julie in

Barcelona and me in Paris, and that sense of being an outsider looking in forms the core of Annie's world.

Julie: I have a lot of quirky friends in the Bay Area, and I don't hesitate to draw upon their characteristics and experiences while coming up with characters for Annie's world. Also, my clients are some of the wealthiest people in the area, and there's plenty of fodder there! And designers and art dealers...believe me, there are more ideas out there than there are pages to describe them on.

Q. Character, Setting, Story. Which is your starting point? Do you outline your plot before you begin? If so, how extensively?

Carolyn: We started by imagining the character of Annie Kincaid, and building a constellation of characters around her. The setting was an easy one for us, since we're writing about a place, the San Francisco Bay Area, where Julie lives and we both grew up. We develop the story last, and it tends to evolve greatly from first to final draft as we try out ideas, find they don't work or we just don't find them convincing, and try something different. We don't do extensive plotting initially because we've learned that it doesn't work for us; rather, the plot grows out of the interaction of the characters, which is something we can't always foresee.

Julie: Character and setting came to us first. As a muralist and faux finisher, people used to ask me about my job all the time. It holds a certain fascination for a lot of people; not only the details of the job, but how one might pursue a career that is also a true love. So our protagonist, Annie Kincaid, has an everyday life a little like mine – minus the son and day-to-day obligations, and with the addition of forgery and a murder or two! I've been fascinated by forgery my whole life, so I really wanted to bring in a lot of that technical and philosophical information.

We're forced by our publisher to produce an outline, but not once has the end result been true to the original outline! I have storylines in my head, but things play out on the page along their own course, to a certain extent. Then there's a LOT of re-writing to be sure we've addressed all the twists and turns appropriately, and dropped clues, etc.

Q: What advice would you give to writers aspiring to make their foray into the mystery market?

Carolyn: Write about a world you're familiar with, otherwise it won't sound authentic. Write a book you would want to read even if it wasn't yours. Don't fall so in love with your own prose that you lose objectivity; remember, you're trying to write a book that will appeal to others. We've cut material that we liked very much but just didn't fit the plot. Be prepared for disappointment. When we were looking for an agent to represent us we heard "no" many times before we heard "yes." And when you do get an agent, listen to her!

Julie: I would say my golden rule is: do what you love. If you love writing, then *write*. Don't worry about publishing until you have a really good manuscript, and when you do, don't give up. Ever. Good writing will find its audience eventually. Most writers surrender too soon. One great thing about the mystery community is its openness: join Sisters in Crime (even if you're a man, you're welcome too!), Mystery Writers of America, or other writers' groups where you can learn things and interact with both aspiring and published authors. If you can swing it, attend writers' conferences: they're inspirational and instructive. Listen to everyone's experiences – they can teach you so much—but never forget to listen to your interior voice, the one that tells you to write.

Q: You have a new book coming out soon, what can you tell us about it?

Carolyn: *Brush with Death*, the third in the Art Lover's Mystery Series, will be out in July. Annie is restoring a mural in a columbarium, which is like a mausoleum except that it stores cremated ashes. Noticing a light in the cemetery next door, she stumbles across a grave-robbery in progress. As the story develops, Annie learns more about the history of the columbarium and the adjoining cemetery, discovers a dead body, and tries to save her grandfather, master forger Georges LeFleur, from a ruthless art investigator. She also struggles to resolve her conflicting feelings for Michael, the sexy art thief; Frank, her landlord; and Josh, her contractor boyfriend. Annie's friends are there to help her – when they aren't hindering her – as the mystery of *Brush with Death* unfolds.

Julie: Sounds about right!

To find out more about Hailey Lind and upcoming appearances in your area, you can check out their website at www.haileylind.com.