

“Who Killed My Daughter?”

Lois Duncan Searches for an Answer

When her 18-year-old daughter was murdered in 1989, Lois Duncan, a popular author of young adult (YA) mystery and crime novels, suffered the tragedy of having one of her plots become reality. The following article by Maria Simson appeared in the “Book News” section of *Publisher’s Weekly* just prior to the release of *Who Killed My Daughter?*, Duncan’s 1992 book.

“Don’t Look Behind You was a book about a teenage girl who was chased by a hitman in a Camaro,” says Lois Duncan of her 1989 YA novel. “Later that year, my eldest daughter, who was the model for the girl, was chased by a hitman driving a Camaro.” The difference is that in real life, 18-year-old Kaitlyn Arquette was shot and killed. Since then, Duncan, who has 39 novels to her credit, has written only one book—*Who Killed My Daughter?: The True Story of a Mother’s Search for Her Daughter’s Murderer*.

Had Kaitlyn’s death been the random killing that the police labeled it, there would have been no need for a search. But while settling her daughter’s affairs, Duncan discovered from a telephone bill that calls had been made from Kaitlyn’s apartment to an unlisted California number minutes after her death. Other discrepancies, too, led Duncan to suspect that her daughter’s death was no accident.

“Soon after the murder I began having memory blackouts,” says Duncan. “As I didn’t want to misremember anything, I began taking daily notes”—notes that quickly began developing into a book. “It helped keep me sane. I would sit down and write a chapter in real time, but I never knew what was going to happen next.”

Duncan, who used to teach journalism at the University of New Mexico, spent the next two years following up leads. When these cooled, she turned, with some skepticism, to psychic investigators who helped her pick up the trail. But these leads, too, petered out. Duncan decided that “the only way to find out the missing information was to make the story public.”

Reading for Information

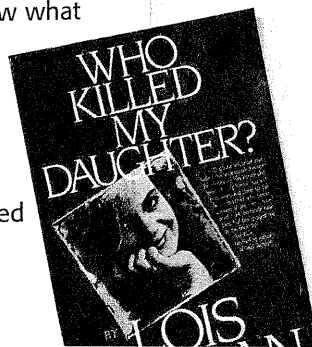
When you complete an essay or report for school, you write with specific goals or aims. This is true of all writers whether they’re writing a book, a newspaper feature, or a magazine article.

AUTHOR’S PURPOSE

Author’s purpose refers to the reasons the writer has for writing. Authors write for a variety of reasons, including to persuade, to inform, to entertain, or to express an opinion. Often there is more than one purpose for a particular piece of writing. In this case, Maria Simson’s purpose is to promote Duncan’s book to the publishing field. The article appears in a trade magazine that covers news in the book and publishing industry.

YOUR TURN Use the questions and activities below to evaluate the nature of the author’s purpose in this article.

- 1 In this lengthy passage, Simson gives information about Duncan and explains why she has written this book. What would you say is Simson’s purpose in this part of the article?



This January, on what would have been Kaitlyn's 21st birthday, she mailed the manuscript to her agent, Claire Smith, who in turn sent it on to both Dell/Delacorte publisher Carole Baron and Books for Young Readers division publisher George Nicholson. "We had done a lot of business with Lois through the Books for Young Readers department, so it was natural we would see it," says Baron. Even though she did not know Duncan personally, she was well aware of her daughter's death, having been in Albuquerque at the time of the killing.

Baron hopes that the book will travel beyond the normal true-crime audience to interest any parent who is concerned about the increasing violence against children: "It doesn't matter who you are—all kids can get hurt," she says.

According to associate publicity director Judy Westerman, the mainstream media, including major talk shows, have already expressed considerable interest in the book, which will no doubt bolster¹ Duncan on her first-ever author tour.

But Delacorte sees yet another audience as well, among Duncan's original readers—young adults. "Booksellers who know her from her novels are very interested in this project, and our sales force is tapping into that," says Baron. "Young adults will have no difficulty reading the book." Everyone connected with the book remarks upon its similarities to Duncan's YA stories of murder and mystery. And when Duncan visits the American Library Association and the Canadian Library Association this year, she will be participating both as an adult author and as a YA author.

There is, however, one other audience and that is the one Duncan is most desperate to reach. "We've found out so much [about Kaitlyn's death] but there are still holes. We're hoping that someone out there will be able to help fill a few of those holes." With that in mind, *Who Killed My Daughter?* opens with a list of possible scenarios² and unanswered questions, along with addresses for Duncan and for the New Mexico attorney general, in the hope that some reader will come forward with information that answers the question in Duncan's title.

1. bolster: support or strengthen.

2. scenarios: outlines or models of a supposed sequence of events.

② In these two paragraphs, Simson includes comments about Duncan's book from people in the publishing industry. What reasons does Carole Baron give for publishing the book? What do you think Simson's purpose is in these two paragraphs? What other information could she have included that would have helped her purpose?

③ Why do you think Simson includes this paragraph in a promotional piece for the publishing industry? Does she want to inform, to persuade, to entertain, or to express an opinion? Explain.

Inquiry & Research

Activity Link: "Full Circle,"
p. 755 Now that you've read an article about a real person trying to solve a loved one's murder, how would you compare Duncan's effort to those of the narrator in "Full Circle"?