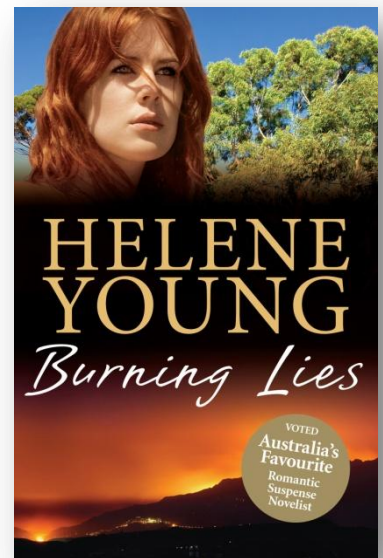


# Burning Lies

**Author: Helene Young**

**Penguin Q & A with Helene Young, author of *Burning Lies***



**What is your new book about?**

*Burning Lies* is a story of lost identity and the healing power of love.

Kaitlyn Scott is hiding from her past. She's changed her name and that of her son to escape the taint of being married to an arsonist. She's rebuilt her life, but when fire breaks out on the Atherton Tableland her world is in danger of unravelling.

Ryan O'Donnell's been working as an undercover cop for so long he's lost sight of who he really is. He doesn't much like the man he's become, but he can't see a way to turn his life around.

The two of them will come face to face with a vicious criminal who'll stop at nothing to keep his real identity secret. To stop him they'll have to navigate their way through the maze of lies and learn to trust each other.

**What or who inspired it?**

Several years ago my husband and I were caught in a major bushfire south of Sydney. I'd never been so close to a wild fire before and it was terrifying. We felt powerless to help, with no resources, no local knowledge and no training for the situation. When the power went out and the community was cut off I could feel the anxiety in those around me. I could only imagine how the fire fighters felt trying to control it. An arsonist, who was later arrested, was also a volunteer fire fighter and that made me want to explore the psyche of someone who's capable of doing such a brutal crime.

Another source of inspiration was from an existing character in one of my earlier books. *Burning Lies* is the final book in my Border Watch series and Ryan played a crucial role in *Shattered Sky*. His character had evolved from several conversations with policemen who all spoke of how incredibly hard it was for undercover cops to return to normal life. The strain on them left indelible marks. I wanted to honour the sort of work they do and explore how

they dealt with the need to always be on their guard. Our communities need people like them, but they are so often the unsung heroes.

The final inspiration is the beautiful Atherton Tablelands itself, a sprawling farming area to the west of Cairns. The farmers and small town folk who live there are great examples of rural Australia and its slower pace of life.

**What was the biggest challenge, writing it?**

The biggest challenge was doing the story justice. I've drawn on real life events as inspiration, but I didn't want to cause any offence to the many Australians who have suffered through the terrible hardship of bushfires. Even though it's fiction, there's much of the real world in *Burning Lies* and that brings a responsibility that I felt even more keenly with this story than with *Wings of Fear* or *Shattered Sky*.

**What did you want to achieve with your book?**

Foremost I want to weave a compelling romance through a thrilling suspense story.

With each book I want to take my readers to somewhere they've never been, into a situation they've never faced and take them on an emotional journey that will resonate with them.

I hope *Burning Lies* makes them think a little more about bushfires and the ordinary people who take on extraordinary responsibilities to keep their communities safe.

I hope readers will come away with a sense of what goes on behind the scenes to keep our vast coastline protected. It's an area most people know little about.

**What do you hope for your book?**

Like every author I want it to be widely read. But I'm an optimist so I'd also love to see it turned into a movie – a writer can only dream!

**Are there any parts of it that have special personal significance to you?**

There are a couple of scenes in the aircraft where my characters describe exactly what I see outside the window when I go to work and fly over our amazing country.

There's also a scene where a local community is under threat from fire and it's set in an area where very good friends were forced to fight hard to save their house. I could see that scene very vividly in my mind while I was writing it.

**Do you have a favourite character or one you really enjoyed writing?**

I can't choose between Kaitlyn and Ryan. They are both such strong people with compelling reasons for their actions. I wanted so much for them to find a way through the lies and find love, but it wasn't easy for them to navigate the path.

It took me while to dig deep enough to find the real Ryan – exactly what you'd expect from an undercover cop who's been in the job too long...

**Do you have a favourite scene you enjoyed writing?**

Oh that's a difficult choice! One favourite scene centres on Julia, Kaitlyn's mother. She's talking about growing up during the Second World War and then being sent to Australia as an orphan. I still end up misty eyed when I read it.

I also enjoyed writing the scene in the aftermath of the fire where we can see a real change in Kaitlyn. I love exploring that emotional development.

**What do you see as the major themes in your book?**

The main theme is identity or the loss of it through someone else's actions. *Burning Lies* also touches on disempowerment. When a person is wronged they can go to extremes to try and right that wrong not realising they have crossed a line to pursue it.

A secondary theme deals with the generation of people who lived through World War 2 and the way that event shaped their lives. Perhaps as my mum is 90-years-old I have a strong affinity with the hardships they endured. The Tablelands was also used as a staging post for troops during the war and many relics from that still survive. It's a strong reminder of how different the world is today.

**What made you set it in North Queensland?**

I've lived in North Queensland for 15 years and I've come to love the land and the people. It's easy when you're sipping a latte in Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane to think of countries like Papua New Guinea and Indonesia as being a long way away. The reality is that, on a clear day, when I fly over Cape York I can make out the coastline of PNG in the distance.

The abundance of abandoned airfields from the war era, the scattered population, and vast tracks of undeveloped wilderness make it the perfect setting for crime and suspense stories.

I think the romance of the wild country also lends itself to a rich and compelling love story.

**Did the title come instantly to you or did you labour over it?**

*Burning Lies* was named from the moment I sat down to write the story. With an arsonist and three characters all lying to protect their identities it fitted perfectly.

**To whom have you dedicated the book and why?**

The book is dedicated to the men and women who fly the surveillance aircraft around our diverse coastline. Their job is largely unknown yet they are a vital link in the chain that protects our country from disease, terrorism, drug-runners and smugglers.

**Who do you think will enjoy your book?**

Anyone who enjoys romance will turn the last page with a satisfied sigh, but also people who like plenty of action and intrigue will enjoy it

It's a contemporary Australian story with tight suspense, a strong emotional journey and a love story at the heart of it.

**Do you have a special 'spot' for writing at home? (If so, describe it)**

I write when and where I can. Juggling a busy day job as an airline captain means I spend time in hotel rooms so I've learnt not to be pickie about my writing spot!

If I had my way I'd be bobbing on the deck of a yacht tapping away at the keys... (My writer's imagination is off and running again...)

**Do you like silence or music playing while you're writing?**

I tend to write in silence, but if there's high emotion in a scene then I'll find a song that resonates and play it, and play it, and play it some more.

**When did you start writing?**

I've always been a dabbler. I won a Griffith University short story competition when I was still in high school and always assumed I'd write a book one day.

Life unfortunately got in the way and it wasn't until we moved to Cairns for my job with an airline that I started to write again with any intent. It felt as though I'd turned on a tap and I now have no hope of turning it off. Story-

telling is a compulsion. That's partly why I've signed on to be a friend and reading champion for the 2012 National Year of Reading.

**Did you always want to become an author?**

I don't think I set out to become an author – which is so much more than just writing a book. I knew had stories I wanted to tell, but I didn't really know anything about the publishing process when I sat down and wrote my first three manuscripts.

I look on them as my apprenticeship and know that I learnt a great deal through writing them, but they will remain in the bottom draw of the filing cabinet!

**Tell us a bit about your childhood?**

My childhood was spent alternating between East Brisbane, in the shadow of the Gabba Cricket Ground, and Currumbin Beach, where my family owned a beach shack. It was a carefree existence and as I was the youngest I was always doing things that were slightly too old for me. I was also a tomboy who rarely wore shoes and was most comfortable out doors.

My Dad was a huge inspiration for me. He was a ship's engineer so spent a lot of time away from home. Consequently he wrote stories for my siblings and I and posted them home for Mum to read to us. Until I started school I thought everyone wrote stories!!

Both Mum and Dad always encouraged me to follow my dreams and I'm very grateful that they instilled such a strong love of reading in me.

**If you've had other jobs outside of writing, what were they?**

My jobs are too numerous to list, but I started my employment life as a MacDonalds' Fries cook at 15. I've been an Outward Bound Adventure instructor; I've been a functions co-ordinator, the lunch cook in a psychiatric nursing home, a flying instructor and now a senior Captain in Australia's largest regional airline. It all makes great fodder for an over active imagination!

**Describe yourself in three words?**

Loyal, tenacious and generous.

**What star sign are you and are you typical of it?**

I'm a Gemini and friends tell me I am a typical Gemini. I think it helps with the left brain, right brain aspect of my two jobs. I have to be able to tune into

the left side when I put on my pilot's uniform – there's no room for imagination in a job where safety is paramount! On the flipside, of course, I want my right side in control when I'm being creative.

**What three things do you dislike?**

Dishonesty, rubbish dropped on the beach and cleaning wooden blinds...

**What three things do you like?**

Rain on an iron roof (I'm a Queenslander!), burying my toes deep into soft sand and the view from the flight deck.

**Have you a family, partner or are you single?**

I met my husband 26 years ago in the English Lake District and we still hold hands when we walk our manic staffie, Zeus. That's family enough for me!