

Hotter 'n a Hellcat

HEADING HOME WITH **JULIE ANNE LONG**

By **Elissa Petruzzi**

JULIE ANNE LONG is having the time of her life — in her very own time period. After concluding her much-beloved Pennyroyal Green historical romance series last year, Long has rejoined us in the 21st century, writing her very first contemporary romance.

“It was a blast, quite truthfully,” Long says of penning this month’s *Hot in Hellcat Canyon* from Avon. “Everyday contemporary life is just teeming with fun (and hot) possibilities, and you’re limited really only by your imagination. The range of conflicts available are different, too; when class barriers are more permeable (or non-existent) and gender roles are less strict, conflict tends to stem mostly from the characters and their personalities, which for me means they become even richer and more real.”

Long even admits to calling “on personal experiences and observations and sprinkling them in, in a more literal sense,” throughout the sexy tale, set in small-town California.

Personal experiences are admittedly a lot easier to come by when you can hop in your car and drive a few hours to see your setting in person, which worked for the author, whose fictitious Hellcat Canyon is situated not too far from the author’s Bay Area California home.

“Northern California gold country is just gorgeous — wild and woolly and rugged, with beautiful rivers,” she says. “Hellcat Canyon is kind of a fictionalized, idealized amalgam of the towns you’ll find in this part of the state. You have rich history, wildlife (even Bigfoot sightings!), small-town closeness (for better or worse), contrasts between great wealth and great poverty, people who never leave, people who never treat it as anything other than a weekend getaway. There are scary parts and beautiful parts.”

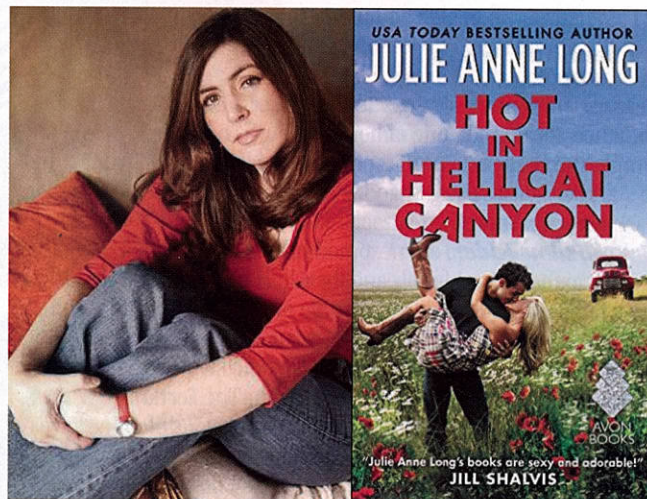
But if you’re still hankering for a hop across the pond, Long understands your yearning. After reading the epilogue of *The Legend of Lyon Redmond* (Avon ‘15), set in a contemporary Pennyroyal Green and starring descendants Isabel and Malcolm, series fans were enthusiastic about getting their full story.

And Long has good news for all her readers! “I can tell you that Isabel and Malcolm’s story is underway, and I actually have a complete vision of contemporary Pennyroyal Green,” she says. “As always, for me, it’s about time, and being smart about identifying the best way to use my emotional and creative resources and the best way to please readers.”

In fact, there are a host of genres Long would like to try her hand at, deadlines permitting, of course. “I have notebooks full of various ideas. I love developing characters and worlds and exploring relationships of all kinds. When it comes right down to it, writing is my favorite thing to do, even when it feels like existential torture, which it generally does toward the end of a deadline,” she says.

And she understands how all her fans feel, because she’s a reader too.

“I’m a voracious reader of many genres — I’m basically mainly looking for a really artful, compelling voice, a story that pulls you right in and keeps you there, a satisfying ending that



feels right and a story that lingers with you for a long time,” she says. “I want to walk around feeling like my body chemistry might have been changed a little by a book.”

But even though Long tells us, “I just like telling stories,” as a young woman she took a foray into a different art form — music.

“I loved music so much that I wanted to be it,” Long tells us of her rock star days. “I played guitar (competently, not with any genius), wrote songs (and some were pretty good — got some local airplay) and sang.” The author was in two bands, The Examples and Orphan Choir. Based in the Bay Area, they primarily played gigs throughout California. Long tells of some epic vintage outfits she wore to perform, including a “fabulous gold lame 60s cocktail outfit” as well as an “A-line mini dress with a bare midriff linked by rhinestone-studded chains — very groovy,” she laughs.

Eventually, the writing life was more for her. “It is tough to actually make it as a musician,” Long says, “so you have to want to make a life of it no matter what, and ultimately I’m really not made for sleeping on floors with smelly guys in small towns so we can play an hour at a college a long, long way from home. I figured that out pretty fast. But it was fun and hard and full of drama, triumph, humiliation, beer, noise, hilarity and hot guys.”

Sounds like the plot to a contemporary romance series to us.

In fact, Long promises some of her former life comes into play in the second Hellcat Canyon title, *Wild at Whiskey Creek*, which is out in late November.

But first, readers will enjoy their initial visit to Hellcat Canyon. “The town itself is almost a character in the stories,” Long says. “We have a local legend (which could either be a curse or a blessing), a few mysteries and there are ongoing conflicts and a few heartaches that I have a hunch readers will become invested in.”

Sounds good to us! What a time to be alive! ✧

For more information, go to JulieAnneLong.com.