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A View To A Kill

Yankton Native Helps Turn AP Coverage Of Sensational Arias Trial Into New Book

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As an Associated Press journalist for 15 years, Yankton native Josh Hoffner has served as lead editor on dozens of major stories all over the country. Based first at New York and now at Phoenix, he has worked on a number of riveting stories: the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. Airways rescue on the Hudson River, the Virginia Tech massacre and the assassination attempt on then-U.S. Rep Gabby Giffords (D-Ariz.).

But perhaps no story has taken so many bizarre twists and turns as his current work with the first-degree murder conviction of Jodi Arias in Arizona. The case included evidence of intense sexual activity between Arias and her victim, former lover Travis Alexander. The prosecutor painted her as a jealous stalker, and she defended herself as the victim of domestic abuse and Alexander's sexual desires.

Put together three M's — money, murder and Mormonism — and you have Hoffner's first book, "Killer Girlfriend: The Jodi Arias Story," published by Beaufort Books of New York City.

"You had a woman scorned who knifed and shot her lover in a jealous rage. She stabbed him nearly 30 times in the chest, slashed his throat and shot him," Hoffner said. "The crime was five years ago, and it drew worldwide attention because it became such a sensational trial. It became a tabloid sensation and gained such widespread interest."

The book represents a collaboration between Associated Press journalists Hoffner and Brian Skoloff, both of Phoenix. They provide a gripping, behind-the-scenes story about Arias' life, trial and conviction.

Skoloff covered the five-month Arias trial on a daily basis, while Hoffner served as lead editor. They also conducted a jailhouse interview of Arias shortly after her May conviction.

The trial contained a tremendous amount of explicit sexual material involving Arias and Alexander, Hoffner said.

"There were the email, phone calls and text messages for the jury (to see and hear)," Hoffner said. "It was mind boggling, that (the

couple) had phone sex for an hour. You had an attractive defendant and victim, and an enormous amount of sex and lies."

Hoffner remained amazed at the material arising from the case. "You tell yourself each day that you can't make this up," he said.

Arias also took the stand and went toe to toe with the prosecutor, Hoffner said. "Jodi testified for 18 days, and that's something that you almost never see," the journalist said.

Hoffner and Skoloff not only worked together on news coverage, they were approached by The

Associated Press about putting together an e-book and a later print edition. The book included not only the trial but also the life stories of Arias and Alexander, their relationship, the murder and investigation, and the tremendous worldwide interest in the case.

"AP had an interest in seeing how an e-book would work for a story that was still breaking news," Hoffner said.

"The AP gave its blessing for us to do the book on our own time. If we came across an exclusive, something we discovered later, the AP had the right of first refusal. They wanted to see if reporters could produce an e-book. With the e-book, we wanted to put it out the week of the verdict. We will have a new e-book printed when they decide the sentence."

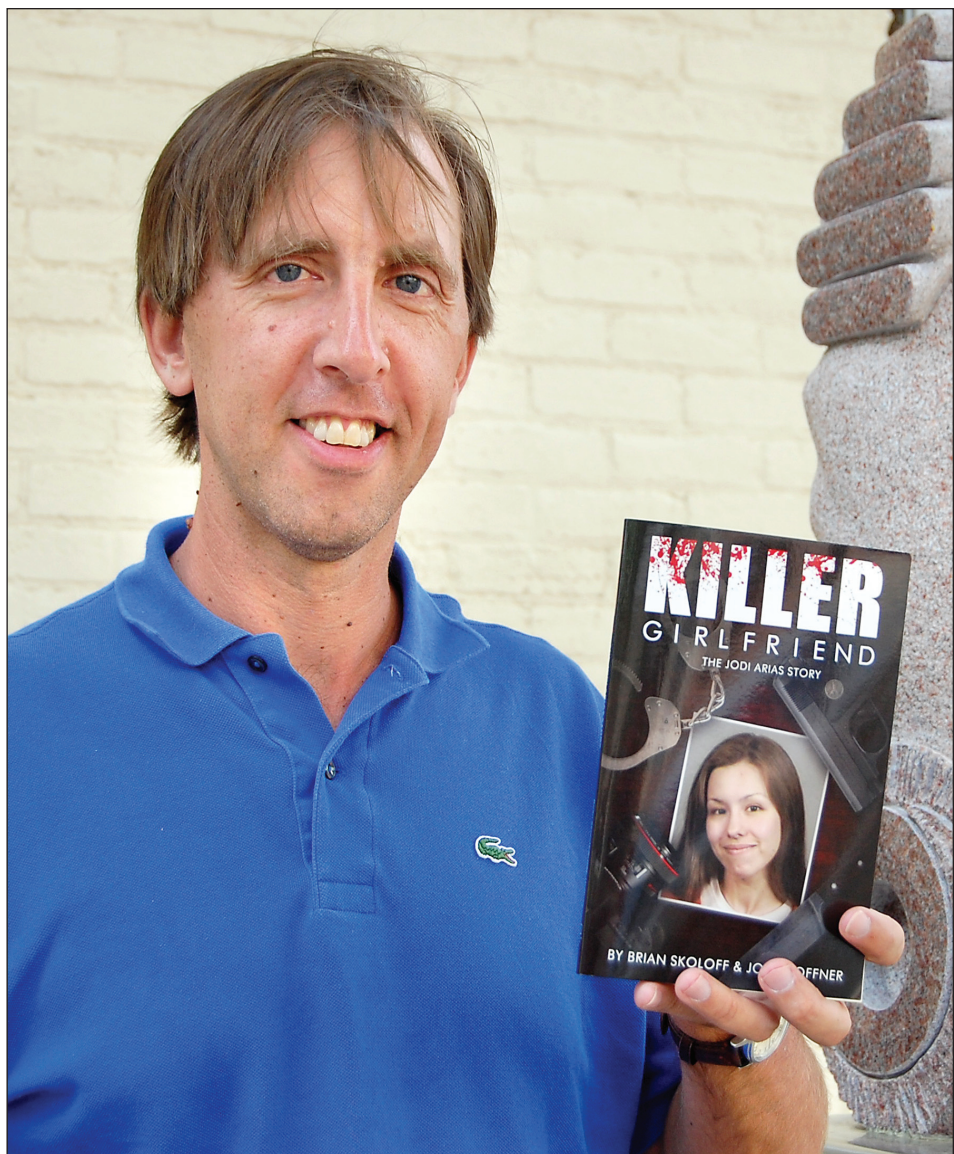
MEETING DEADLINE

Hoffner was used to tight deadlines, but the e-book was unlike anything he had encountered before.

"Jodi was interrogated on the stand for days. It was incredibly revealing, and only snippets could make the story," Hoffner said. "Brian had more than enough notes and transcripts. We also had this huge public record of interviews, transcripts and testimonies."

The book consisted of 24 chapters, with Hoffner and Skoloff dividing up the chapters. The two journalists cranked out the comprehensive book — 131 pages paperback, which included the verdict — in a month.

The e-book was published within 72 hours of the jury beginning deliberations. Every effort was made to ensure maximum newsworthiness and to tap into public interest. Most of the writing was done while the



RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D

Yankton native Josh Hoffner shows a copy of his book, "Killer Girlfriend: The Jodi Arias Story," that he co-wrote with fellow Associated Press journalist Brian Skoloff. Hoffner, a 1994 Yankton High School graduate, served as lead editor on coverage of the Phoenix-based murder trial.

trial was still under way.

"The writing started in early April, and we finished in early May," Hoffner said. "I would start writing in the morning, then work my day shift at the news desk, then start working again on the book. It became 14-hour days. My fiancée is a journalist, so she understood, but even she was glad when the book was done."

Hoffner and Skoloff became celebrities themselves, appearing on local and national interviews and at book fairs. However, Hoffner said the two journalists wanted to give a comprehensive and balanced account of Arias and Alexander without exploiting their story.

"We tried to be responsible in putting together the book. We didn't try to cash in on the story, even though there were salacious moments," Hoffner said. "It covers the beginning of their lives together. We tried to include Travis Alexander's side. We wanted to give more space to the story and not take sides. It's a balanced account, but there's a lot of vitriol said about Jodi Arias."

A BIZARRE TALE

A number of elements raised the Arias story — which in turn fueled "Killer Girlfriend" interest — above other murder trials, Hoffner said.

Arias and Alexander came from vastly different backgrounds. Arias was raised in a typical small-town California family in the restaurant business. Alexander was raised in a poverty-stricken family amidst drug use.

Arias and Alexander met through their involvement with the Prepaid Legal Services business, where he was a successful salesman. He was raised a devout Mormon, and she converted to Mormonism. He outwardly wanted to maintain his Mormon faith and marry a good Mormon woman, but Alexander and Arias engaged in a steamy affair that Hoffner characterized as kinky sex.

"It wasn't just murder — people were cap-

tivated by the sex, lies and videotape," Hoffner said. "Travis and Jodi had a stormy, tumultuous relationship filled with jealousy and anger. Travis referred to Jodi as his 'dirty little secret.' There was this intense clash where he wasn't living his Mormon faith."

The public showed an insatiable appetite for every aspect of the story, Hoffner said. The interest was fueled by live streaming video of the trial, non-stop television coverage, social media and even third-party tweeting on behalf of Arias.

The trial became such a spectacle that a number of people came from across the nation to attend the proceedings. Interested persons even started to line up in the middle of the night for a spot in the courtroom, and at least one person sold the coveted seat to another spectator.

"O.J. (Simpson) was the granddaddy of cases, and it was the coming of age for cable TV. Now, you have streaming video, computer and social media. Jodi even had her own hash tag and was trending," Hoffner said. "It's a reality TV world. We have a new court TV era where you watch the trial. It got great ratings because the public was interested, and the media coverage ramped it up."

JAILHOUSE INTERVIEW

As if the trial coverage wasn't sensational enough, Hoffner and Skoloff were granted an hour-long jailhouse interview with Arias right after her conviction. Arias had already done a series of television interviews, but she declined some media requests, Hoffner said.

"For us to receive the interview was very incredibly unusual," Hoffner said. "First, she had to grant us the interview. Then, Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio had to agree with an interview."

Arpaio had gained international headlines in his own right because of his tough stand on

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Chris Vadala, SD Jazz Orchestra Open YAA Pops Series

After successfully presenting the Yankton Area Summer Band's 31st Concert Series, Yankton Area Arts will launch its Summer Pops Concert Series on Tuesday, July 16, showcasing a wide range of talented musicians from the area.

The first performers in the pops line-up will be The South Dakota Jazz Orchestra with guest soloist Chris Vadala.

The South Dakota Jazz Orchestra (SDJO) is one of the most consistently outstanding big band jazz ensembles in the region. SDJO performances include works by jazz masters such as Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Oliver Nelson, and Stan Kenton, as well as the music of new jazz composers. Monthly performances in downtown Sioux Falls provide a home base for the group, fostering talented musicians and offering the opportunity to work with guest artists. In addition to this upcoming performance with jazz multi-reed virtuoso, Chris Vadala, the SDJO has backed some of the best-known jazz musicians working today. Recently fea-

tured artists include Matt Wallace, tenor saxophonist; Steve Wright, trumpeter and composer; Steve Weist, trombonist and composer; Dennis DiBlasio, baritone saxophonist, flutist, and composer; and Mike Miller, jazz guitarist.

One of the country's foremost woodwind artists, Chris Vadala is in demand as a jazz/classical performer and educator. Vadala's performing career has been highlighted by a long tenure as standout woodwind artist with the internationally recognized Chuck Mangione Quartet, which included performances in all 50 states and 21 countries and performing credits on five gold and two platinum albums, plus two Grammys, one Emmy, one Georgie (AGVA) and one Golden Globe Award. He has also performed and/or recorded with such greats as Dizzy Gillespie, Quincy Jones, B.B. King, Chick Corea, Ella Fitzgerald, Aretha Franklin, Plácido Domingo, Sarah Vaughn, Natalie Cole,

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