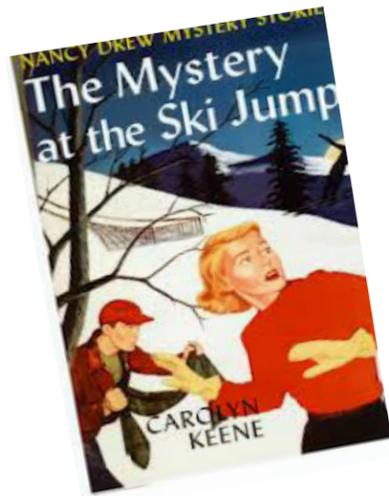


## NOT SO MYSTERIOUS



The first book that changed my life came in a dark green Marshall Field's bag, left by a customer in the Bridal Department where my mother worked. In those days, anything that came from Marshall Field's signified something that was sure to be wondrous. She brought it home after a late night shift and well past my bedtime I started reading, struggling to see through the light underneath my door until I fell asleep in its pages. That's how *The Mystery at the Ski Jump* by Carolyn Keene, a Nancy Drew book, came my way.

Changing my life may seem like an overstatement, but it was the first giant leap I can pinpoint on the road to my lifelong love of books of all kinds. As an adult, I can assign all types of important feminist principles to that night. Here I was, an elementary school girl, being exposed to a take-charge teen who solved mysteries

and drove a roadster. Although I wasn't sure what a roadster was, her life sounded glamorous and I wanted in. She was her own gal, with great friends and a dreamy boyfriend. That book sparked a need to know more and I devoured the Nancy Drew books, then moved on to biographies of great American women. Annie Sullivan saved Helen Keller! Dolly Madison saved George Washington's portrait! Nancy Drew saved everyone! "I could do anything," I thought as I read while walking to school and by the streetlight late at night and in the park on the swings and under the table at family gatherings.

What I couldn't have seen at the time was that although my empowerment was sparked by a teen detective and informed by those heroic women, it was really shaped by the person who brought me that first book. Here was a mother, not more than a girl herself, with four kids and few resources. Never one to pity herself, she worked most nights and weekends in that Bridal Department, helping starry-eyed girls find the perfect mix of satin and tulle in which to start their married life. In her spare time she was the chief cook and bottle washer, transportation captain, homework checker, cheerleader, patcher-upper and nurturer that made all of us want to be better.

Carolyn Keene, the author of the Nancy Drew books, was really an assortment of women who wrote Nancy's adventures under a collective nom de plume. This group created Nancy, helping to determine who she was, her values, her spirit and where she was going in life, all without fanfare and acknowledgement. This collective of strong women made her who she is today. And really, isn't that how we all got here?

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