



JF: What led you to dream up the idea for your fictional heroine, Cece Caruso?

SK: Cece is an ex-beauty queen from Asbury Park, NJ, who finds herself pregnant and married (in that order) by age seventeen. She puts her cheating husband through grad school until one day she wises up and leaves him, taking her daughter and moving to West Hollywood, CA, and reinventing herself as a biographer of dead mystery writers (her longtime obsession—along with a passion for vintage clothing). Except for the mystery obsession (and our height and weight—just under six feet and just under..oh forget it), Cece and I are very different. She's really funny, for one thing. And bold. And a little bit brassy, and a little bit defensive. I suppose she's my alter-ego. I invented her so she could do all the things I'd never dare. She says what's on her mind. She meddles with impunity. She wears white after Labor Day. She tiptoes up into dark, dusty attics armed with nothing

but the 14th edition of the Chicago Manual of Style...

JF: Describe Cece in 5 words or less.

SK: Shopaholic with a heart of gold.

JF: What is the essence you want your readers to take away from reading *Not a Girl Detective*?

SK: As the book opens, Cece and her two best friends, Lael and Bridget, take off in a borrowed baby-blue Cadillac on a disaster-plagued road trip to a Nancy Drew fan convention in Palm Springs. Like Nancy, Bess, and George, Cece and her chums can't seem to avoid trouble. But it's their loving relationship with one another that sustains them. In the Nancy Drew books, Bess and George count on the fact that Nancy is infallible. Cece, however, makes one mistake after another, but she knows her friends are there to cushion the blows, as she is there for them. This book is very much about the power of female friendship.

JF: How did you come to choose the Carolyn Keene/Nancy Drew background for your current book?

SK: After Perry Mason, I desperately needed something girly, and my daughters were really into Nancy Drew at the time, so it seemed a natural choice.

JF: What was the most interesting thing you discovered in your Nancy Drew research? Anything particularly mysterious, amusing or fun that you ended up using for your book?

SK: I became really interested in Grace Horton, who was the original model for the Russell Tandy covers of the earliest Nancy Drew books, so I decided to make her a focus of the mystery within my book. She proved a very elusive subject, however. I did discover that she was a Harry Conover model—this was the agency which pioneered the idea of the “cover girl.” And I did track down and purchase on-line an old newspaper advertisement for Ry-Krisp crackers, with a color illustration of “lovely model” Grace Horton, wearing a red bathing suit and red and white polka-dot slingbacks. Russell Tandy also loved to put Grace in red and white (see cover of *The Sign of the Twisted Candles*—she’s wearing a fabulous white satin dress and skinny red patent leather belt).

JF: Many of the Nancy Drew Sleuths will be reading this interview. Share your experiences in researching at the 2003 Sleuth convention as it translated into the fictional fan convention in your book.

SK: I had a great time at the convention, and met a lot of interesting people. I was incredibly impressed with their level of expertise. I learned that real knowledge like that comes out of passion and commitment. And the collections! I was astounded by them, in particular the careful and loving ways in which the books and memorabilia are displayed in people’s homes. When you read the book, you’ll see that I transform the Sleuths into the “Society of Chums,” and I make their president, Clarissa, a lot more fierce than our Jenn. And I set the convention in Palm Springs, and juxtapose the Chums with a somewhat incongruous group gathering at the conference hotel at the same time...

JF: What is your favorite Nancy Drew book? Do you have a least favorite?

SK: I have three favorites: *The Clue of the Broken Locket* (original text), because I love the scheming Kitty Blair; *The Clue in the Jewel Box*, because once you say, “priceless heirlooms” I’m hooked; and *The Mystery of the Fire Dragon*, because I’m into anything about Aunt Eloise, and also, I can’t resist the idea of George as a dead ringer for the slinky Chi Che Soong.

My least favorite is *The Mystery of the Moss-Covered Mansion* (revised text): the explosive oranges strike me as ridiculous. Also, the rare bird farm in *The Double Jinx Mystery* is a hoot (no pun intended).

JF: What does Nancy Drew mean to you?

SK: Like any number of archetypes from Joan of Arc to Wonder Woman, Nancy Drew is unstoppable, infallible, and utterly devoted to righting wrongs. With no mother to ever tell her “no,” and a father who only ever says “yes” (plus a housekeeper who can make

an unholy variety of desserts from scratch), her life is a Freudian fantasy come true, which is to say very different from my life or yours. Still, what makes Nancy Drew so powerful is the fact that she opens up a space for dreams; she opens up the whole possibility of possibility. I've watched my daughters take in the message; they don't identify with Nancy's privileged existence—they don't even think about that aspect of the books. What they see in Nancy Drew is the fact that life can be really exciting if you make it so. They see that they have the power to shape their own lives.

JF: Have you begun to collect the series and all of the various collectibles? If so, describe your collection.

SK: I guess I caught the bug, because I seem to have all the Applewood reprints that are out, plus all the yellow-spined rewrites that I read as a kid. What I really want, though, is the Madame Alexander doll...that, and the Playboy magazine with Pamela Sue Martin on the cover in her trenchcoat.

JF: You have tackled Perry Mason and Nancy Drew. What is in store next for Cece Caruso in future volumes?

SK: The next Cece Caruso mystery is called *Sam Spade in the Green Room*, and takes on Dashiell Hammett, author of *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Thin Man*, among other books. Next up after that is *Miss Marple in Palmdale*—finally, Agatha Christie!