

Dear Junior Sherlockian-in-Training,

I'm a former student of 221b Baker Street, Mrs. Shannon Carlisle's classroom, at an elementary school in Tennessee. As a student in 221b, I was introduced to the great detective through *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle* and *The Redheaded League*. I even read a few pastiches. Even though I am no longer one of her students, I have stayed in touch with Mrs. Carlisle.

After graduating from elementary school, I was finally old enough to read the *Enola Holmes* novels and found it to be an incredible experience. I easily connected with Enola. Enola is a powerful and untraditional Victorian girl. She encourages us to embrace independence, empower others, and use our gifts to enjoy adventures. She is inquisitive, smart, and thoughtful while fulfilling her own wants and needs. I appreciate her open-mindedness. Although she understands her reality as a Victorian female, she still follows her desires and when needed personifies a male to get jobs done. She is clever and subtle. She can slip between the shadows. In fact, as a Sherlockian, I feel that Enola is a stronger, more enjoyable character than her famous brother. I am grateful Nancy Springer created a character that I can admire and connect with, but I had a few questions for her.

In June of 2021, Mrs. Carlisle and I composed interview questions for Ms. Springer. We emailed her our questions, and she responded! Her thoughts are below. Enjoy meeting Nancy!

1. There are many references to the Canon in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries* (ex- plane tree in the backyard of 221b Baker Street). You know Conan Doyle's tales well! Do you have a favorite Sherlock Holmes story? If so, which one is it and why?

Nancy Springer: My mother had all of the Conan Doyle books and stories in a set, and at some fairly early age I began reading them. I read and reread everything about Sherlock Holmes until I memorized it, probably by the time I was ten or twelve years old.

2. In a past interview, you describe Sherlock Holmes as a cape-wearing superhero. Who are some of your heroes?

Nancy Springer: Really, the protagonists of all the novels I've written.

3. What made you think Sherlock Holmes could have an untraditional little sister?

Nancy Springer: The feminist in me. Much as I love Sherlock Holmes, it always struck me how little he actually knew about women, how this very intelligent man remained ignorant about half the human race.

4. Enola enjoys climbing trees, running across rooftops, and sliding down banisters. She is an adventurous tomboy. Would you have enjoyed doing some of the same activities Enola did? If so, what things?

Nancy Springer: I liked to climb trees, hang upside down by my knees, balance on things, jump rope, ride a bike. I tried but failed to do cartwheels and stand on my head.

5. We learned that your mom was an artist. Did her talent inspire you to give Enola's mother the same gift?

Nancy Springer: I guess you might say that. The rule is "write what you know."

6. Independence boosts self-confidence and self-esteem. Enola's mum encouraged her to be independent. Did someone in your life encourage you to be independent? If so, who and what role did they play in your life.

Nancy Springer: No, I wasn't encouraged to be independent. Actually, outside of my area of expertise (writing), I don't have a whole lot of self-esteem or confidence. These are problems I work on all the time, with the effect that I probably look like I'm sure of myself. I'm not.

7. Do your two older brothers possess character traits similar to Sherlock and Mycroft? If so, which traits?

Nancy Springer: No.

8. We are now enamored with the language of flowers, the language of fans, and ciphers and codes. Did you refer to certain reference books on flowers, fans, and ciphers/codes when writing your stories? If so, which books?

Nancy Springer: Yes, I had reference books, but it would take me an hour to cite them, so let's go on.

9. We learned that you created and use a Word Ocean when your ideas are running dry. Did your Word Ocean give you the idea to include a "mesmerist" in The Case of the Left-Handed Lady? It is a unique word. What are some of your favorite words? My favorite word is squelch (Rowan). It is fun to say! It feels satisfying to say it. My favorite word is embrace (Mrs. Carlisle). It has a positive and supportive connotation.

Nancy Springer: You two might want to look up Franz Anton Mesmer.

10. We are encouraged to use figurative language to help our readers better understand what we are trying to describe. You insert figurative language often (ex- "thoughts in a yarn-bucket snarl" and "she sailed like a ship on the Thames"). Do you naturally use figurative language, or do you have to add it as you revise your writing?

Nancy Springer: Naturally. The first thing I tell people learning to write fiction is to use strong, specific nouns and verbs, avoiding reliance on modifiers (adjectives and adverbs). Doing this leads to increased use of figures of speech and better writing.

11. Also, The Enola Holmes Mysteries are written using British English (ex-colour). Did you do that intentionally?

Nancy Springer: Yes.

12. From viewing past interviews, we learned that you used coloring books to get to know Victorian England. However, your writing is so descriptive (ex- “grey sky wept rain on me”)! Did you really learn all you needed to know about Victorian England through coloring books or did you also visit the United Kingdom before writing about Enola?

Nancy Springer: I never once visited England until I was invited over to watch the filming of the Enola Holmes movie. But I've read a lot of Victorian literature.

13. Is the next book (and we hope many more) going to follow the same plot lines (Enola and Sherlock Holmes and Enola and a missing person)?

Nancy Springer: Yes.

14. And finally, how many more Enola Holmes books are there going to be? Fingers crossed her adventures will be presented to us in many more books!

Nancy Springer: It depends on how long I live and/or keep my marbles.

If you had the chance to interview Nancy Springer, what would you ask her?

Rowan Van Horn
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