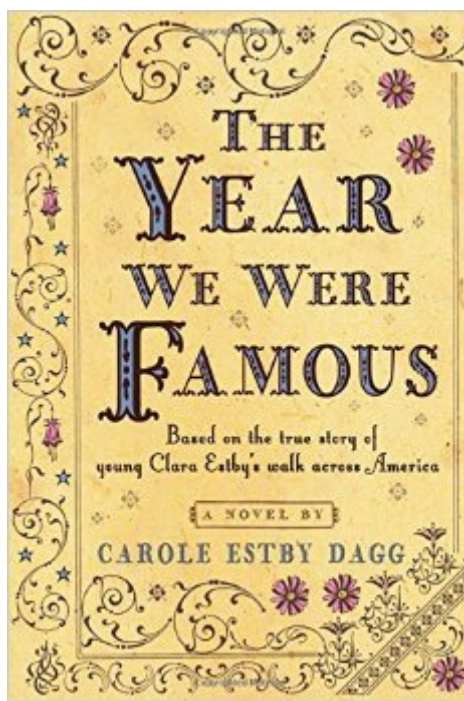


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# The Year We Were Famous



## Synopsis

With their family home facing foreclosure, seventeen-year-old Clara Estby and her mother, Helga, need to raise a lot of money fast—a no easy feat for two women in 1896. Helga wants to tackle the problem with her usual loud and flashy style, while Clara favors a less showy approach. Together they come up with a plan to walk the 4,600 miles from Mica Creek, Washington, to New York City—and if they can do it in only seven months, a publisher has agreed to give them \$10,000. Based on the true story of the author's great-aunt and great-grandmother, this is a fast-paced historical adventure that sets the drama of *Around the World in Eighty Days* against an American backdrop during the time of the suffragist movement, the 1896 presidential campaign, and the changing perception of a woman's place in society.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 950L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 256 pages

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Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (33 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #729,726 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #118 in [Books > Teens >](#)

[Historical Fiction > Biographical](#) #270 in [Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > United States >](#)

[19th Century](#) #788 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1800s](#)

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Debut novelist Carole Estby Dagg was inspired by her own family history to write the delightful new young adult historical novel, *The Year We Were Famous*. Based on the true story of the author's great-aunt and great-grandmother, this adventure-filled novel set at the time of the suffragist movement tells the tale of 17-year old Clara Estby and her mother, Helga, who decide to walk clear across the United States from the small Norwegian-American farming community of Mica Creek,

Washington to New York City--some 4,000 miles--to save their family farm from foreclosure. Helga, a dedicated suffragist, also wanted to prove that women deserved the vote, because a woman was resourceful enough to make it across the country on her own, without a man's help. All this, in an era when most women never went more than a few miles from their home. The story, told in the first person by Clara, opens with Clara, the eldest of eight children, having returned from high school in Spokane to her family's farm in Mica Creek. While brainstorming about ways to raise money to save their farm, her mother comes up with her idea of walking across the country, and begins seeking sponsors. At her pa's suggestion, Clara agrees to go along on an adventure that she can't begin to imagine: "This would be my year abroad, my year to turn the old Clara into someone bold, someone with newfound talents, strengths, and purpose in life." And when a New York publisher offers them \$10,000 if they complete the trip by November 30, 1896, they are on their way, equipped with calling cards, a letter from the mayor of Spokane attesting to their moral character, work boots, canteens, oil-skin ponchos, tooth powder and toothbrushes, two journals and six pencils, a second-hand satchel, and a compass given to Clara by Erick, the boy who's sweet on her--but no change of clothes! Needless to say, Clara and her mother have no shortage of adventures on the way, as they follow the train tracks East, including encounters with Native Americans, outlaws, handsome journalists, and even the President-Elect and First Lady of the United States, not to mention blizzards, flash flood, lava fields, heat, thirst, and a sprained ankle. Will they make it to New York on time to collect their prize and save the farm? You'll have to read this to find out. I, for one, had a hard time putting this book down. Author Dagg does an outstanding job bringing the voices of her intrepid ancestors to life; she extensively researched the lives of Victorian women in order to "get inside Great-Aunt Clara's head." Teens are likely to identify with Clara's personality clashes with her mother, as well as her dreams of a life more exciting than being a farmer's wife in rural Mica Creek and her struggle between family obligations and becoming independent. An excellent website for the book offers more information on historical context and discussion themes; this would be a particularly appropriate title for a mother-daughter book club, and although the protagonist is seventeen, the book would be perfectly appropriate for readers as young as ten.

*The Year We Were Famous* (by Carole Estby Dagg) is an amazing and heartfelt novel about a teenage girl's walk across the United States with her mother in the 1890s--all for the sake of a bet to win the \$10,000 prize that can save their farm in eastern Washington state. The story is engaging on at least three levels. First (perhaps foremost), it is a story of adventure: the fears, hardships, and deprivations along the 6-month trek from Mica Creek, WA to New York City as told from the point of

view of Clara Estby, the 17-year girl. Second, it is a story of relationships: the tensions teenage girls feel with their mothers, the secrets that are revealed along the way, the beginnings of a new love, and the ties to Clara's family and the man who has already asked for her hand in marriage back home. Last, this book is history, based on the real walk by the real Clara and Helga Estby more than one hundred years ago, who happen to be the Great Aunt and Great Grandmother of the author. Some readers may be familiar with the historical account of this trek (*Bold Spirit*, written by Linda Hunt), which is used in some college courses in Women's Studies departments across the US, but Dagg's novel engages the heart as a straight history cannot. Moreover, it speaks to young people of courage and hope, which is sorely needed today. My local librarian in Washington recommended it in a display of 'Washington Heroes in History,' and I have since shared it with neighbors and friends, all who have thanked me (the teenage girls AND their parents--its audience is ageless). I hope very much there will be a next installment, or at least a new novel by this winner of the Sue Alexander Award for Most Promising Manuscript.

I already read Jane Kirkpatrick's historical novel, "A Daughter's Walk, so I had some knowledge about Clara and Helga Estby's journey from Spokane, Washington to New York City in 1896 to earn \$10,000 to save their family farm and prove that women can endure as much as men in society. Remember, women's right to vote didn't happen until 1920. Olga Estby is a Norwegian-American mother and wife who lives on a farm with her husband and children. Her plan to travel with her oldest daughter, Clara, is sponsored by a New York City publisher. The author of this book is the great-granddaughter and great niece of Olga and Clara. Carol Estby has done a service in providing an accurate, descriptive and detailed account of their monumentous trek across the country on foot in 1896. I have to say that I was impressed that she was far more detailed about the journey than Kirkpatrick's book but she added more adventures and dimensions of Clara and Olga. Clara was not at keen at going at first on this journey but she became more willing partner to her mother's endeavour. I found Clara and Olga's relationship to be far more complicated than the Kirkpatrick's novel. I would have liked some more visuals to help detail their journey across the country like a map of the United States and their trails across the continent. I would have also liked to have seen maybe copied articles from newspapers about their journey. There could have also been illustrations and maybe a photograph depicting mother and daughter. I think the author should have also explained what happened to Clara's estrangement from her family and what happened. I would have liked to have read the actual accounts of the Estby family history regarding Clara's estrangement which lasted decades. But the Estby story about mother and daughter is touching and

well-done here as well. I can't get enough of the Estby women.

I love the fact that Carole Estby Dagg used her own family members as inspiration for this novel. The story of Clara and Helga's walk across the country is exciting for readers of any age. I had to keep turning the pages to find out what would happen next. Beautifully written and a pleasure to read!

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