

Judy Blume



Photo © Sigrid Estrada.

“**W**hen I was growing up, I dreamed about becoming a cowgirl, a detective, a spy, a great actress, or a ballerina. Not a dentist, like my father, or a homemaker, like my mother—and certainly not a writer, although I always loved to read. I didn’t know anything about writers. It never occurred to me they were regular people and that I could grow up to become one.”

—Judy Blume

Judy Blume is known and loved by millions of readers for her funny, honest, always believable stories. Among her hugely popular books are *Freckle Juice*, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, and *Just As Long As We're Together*.

A Conversation with the Author

When were you born? February 12, 1938.

Where were you born? Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Where did you go to school? Public schools in Elizabeth, New Jersey; B.S., New York University, 1961.

Were you a good student? Yes, especially when the teacher made the subject come alive!

What were you like when you were growing up? Small, skinny, a late developer. At first, very shy and fearful. Then, around fourth grade, much more outgoing. (I can't explain this change.) I enjoyed drama, dancing, singing, painting, and performing. I loved to roller-skate (we didn't have Rollerblades then). I also loved going to the movies and browsing at the public library. I was always reading something.

What were your favorite books? The Betsy-Tacy series by Maud Hart Lovelace.

What was your family like? A lot like the family in *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself*. That's my most autobiographical book. Sally is the kind of kid I was at 10. My brother was like Douglas, Sally's brother.

Are any of your other characters based on you or your family? Sheila, in *Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great*, has some of my childhood fears. And Margaret, in *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret*, has many of the feelings and concerns I had when I was in sixth grade. But her family is very different from mine.

Where do you get your ideas? I used to be afraid to answer that question. I thought if I ever figured it out I'd never have another one! But now I know that ideas come from everywhere—memories of my own life, incidents in my children's lives, what I see and hear and read—and most of all, from my imagination.

Of all the books you have written, which is your favorite, and who is your favorite character? An impossible question to answer. It's like asking a mother, which is your favorite child? Each one is special in a different way.

How old were you when your first book was published and which book was, it? I was 27 when I began to write seriously and after two years of rejections my first book, *The One in the Middle Is the Green Kangaroo*, was accepted for publication.

How long does it take you to write a book? At least a year, if there are no disruptions in my personal life and other professional obligations don't get in the way. What every writer needs is long blocks of uninterrupted time. You can't think if your life gets too busy!

Do you know the whole story before you start a new book? No. But before I begin to write I fill a notebook, jotting down everything that pops into my head about my characters and story—bits of dialogue, ideas for scenes, background information, descriptions of people and places, details and more details. But even with my notebook, I still don't know everything. For me, finding out is the best part of writing.

What's the hardest part of writing for you? I dread first drafts! I worry each day that it won't come, that nothing will happen.

Do you ever rewrite? I love to rewrite! Once I have a first draft I'm able to relax. It's as if I have the pieces to a puzzle and all I have to do is figure out how to put them together. I actually enjoy second and third drafts. Only then do I share a new book with my editor. After we talk. I do another rewrite and then a final polish.

Do you have a favorite place to write? During the summer months (my favorite time of year) we go to Martha's Vineyard, an island off the coast of Massachusetts. I have a tiny writing cabin there, far enough away from the house to feel very private. I get up early in the morning and work until noon. Sometimes I wish summer would last all year long.

What are you working on now? Right now I'm working on a really fun project—four short chapter books about *The Pain and the Great One*. I first wrote about this sister and brother (she's in third grade, he's in first) when my own kids were this age. Ever since, I've wanted to tell more stories about them. Now they've taken on a life of their own. The books will be illustrated by James Stevenson. His illustrations always make me laugh. So do the Pain and the Great One. I hope they'll make you laugh, too. The first book is called *Soupy Saturdays*. It will be published next fall.

Judy's thoughts on Censorship



Photo © Sigrid Estrada.

“It’s not just the books under fire now that worry me. It is the books that will never be written.”

—Judy Blume

When I began to write, thirty years ago, I didn’t know if anyone would publish my books, but I wasn’t afraid to write them. I was lucky. I found an editor and publisher who were willing to take a chance. They encouraged me. I was never told what I couldn’t write. I felt only that I had to write the most honest books I could. It never occurred to me, at the time, that what I was writing was controversial. Much of it grew out of my own feelings and concerns when I was young.

There were few challenges to my books then, although I remember the night a woman phoned, asking if I had written *Are You There, God? It’s Me, Margaret*. When I replied that I had, she called me a Communist and slammed down the phone. I never did figure out if she equated Communism with menstruation or religion, the two major concerns in 12-year-old Margaret’s life.

But in 1980, the censors crawled out of the woodwork, seemingly overnight, organized and determined. Not only would they decide what their children could read, but what all children could read. Challenges to books quadrupled within months, and we’ll never know how many teachers, school librarians, and principals quietly removed books to avoid trouble.

I believe that censorship grows out of fear, and because fear is contagious, some parents are easily swayed. Book banning satisfies their need to feel in control of their children’s lives. This fear is often disguised as moral outrage. They want to believe that if their children don’t read about it, their children won’t know about it. And if they don’t know about it, it won’t happen.

Today, it’s not only language and sexuality (the usual reasons given for banning my books) that will land a book on the censors’ hit list. It’s Satanism, New Age-ism and a hundred other “isms,” some of which would make you laugh if the implications weren’t so serious. Books that make kids laugh often come under suspicion; so do books that encourage kids to think, or question authority; books that don’t hit the reader over the head with moral lessons are considered dangerous.

Censors don’t want children exposed to ideas different from their own. If every individual with an agenda had his/her way, the shelves in the school library would be close to empty. I wish the censors could read the letters kids write.

Dear Judy,

I don’t know where I stand in the world. I don’t know who I am. That’s why I read, to find myself.

Elizabeth, age 13

But it’s not just the books under fire now that worry me. It is the books that will never be written. The books that will never be read. And all due to the fear of censorship. As always, young readers will be the real losers.

Praise for:

FRECKLE JUICE

"Spontaneous humor, sure to appeal to the youngest reader."

—*The Horn Book Magazine*

IGGIE'S HOUSE

"The purpose is worthy, and the most perceptive aspect of the book is the interpretation of the reaction of the black family."—*The Bulletin*

ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT'S ME, MARGARET.

"With sensitivity and humor Judy Blume has captured the joys, fears, and uncertainty that surround a young girl approaching adolescence."—*Publishers Weekly*

JUST AS LONG AS WE'RE TOGETHER

"The story is lively, moves quickly, and captures the nutty, poignant world of very young teenagers."

—*Publishers Weekly*

THEN AGAIN, MAYBE I WON'T

"Tony Miglione is perfectly happy in Jersey City, and looking forward to going to junior high with his friends, so he is not at all pleased when he learns his father's invention has made the family rich. . . . With a new school and burgeoning sexual yearnings to cope with, Tony is a troubled boy. Judy Blume does a fine job of seeing all this from a boy's viewpoint."—*Saturday Review*

TIGER EYES

"This is a masterly novel."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

Book List



For Younger Readers:

THE PAIN AND THE GREAT ONE

Dragonfly PB: 978-0-440-40967-0
(0-440-40967-5)

THE ONE IN THE MIDDLE IS THE GREEN KANGAROO

Dragonfly PB: 978-0-440-40668-6
(0-440-40668-4)
Yearling PB: 978-0-440-46731-1 (0-440-46731-4)

FRECKLE JUICE

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-42813-8 (0-440-42813-0)

For Older Readers:

BLUBBER

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-40707-2 (0-440-40707-9)

IGGIE'S HOUSE

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-44062-8 (0-440-44062-9)

STARRING SALLY J. FREEDMAN AS HERSELF

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-48253-6 (0-440-48253-4)

ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT'S ME, MARGARET.

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-40419-4 (0-440-40419-3)
Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-90419-9
(0-440-90419-6)

IT'S NOT THE END OF THE WORLD

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-44158-8 (0-440-44158-7)
Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-94140-8
(0-440-94140-7)

THEN AGAIN, MAYBE I WON'T

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-48659-6 (0-440-48659-9)
Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-98659-1
(0-440-98659-1)

DEENIE

Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-93259-8
(0-440-93259-9)

JUST AS LONG AS WE'RE TOGETHER

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-40075-2 (0-440-40075-9)
Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-21094-8
(0-440-21094-1)

Included in BFF*: TWO NOVELS BY JUDY BLUME—
Just as Long as We're Together/Here's to You,
Rachel Robinson ("Best Friends Forever")
HC: 978-0-385-73407-3 (0-385-73407-7)

HERE'S TO YOU, RACHEL ROBINSON

Yearling PB: 978-0-440-40946-5 (0-440-40946-2)
Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-21974-3
(0-440-21974-4)

Included in BFF*: TWO NOVELS BY JUDY BLUME—
Just as Long as We're Together/Here's to You,
Rachel Robinson ("Best Friends Forever")
HC: 978-0-385-73407-3 (0-385-73407-7)

TIGER EYES

Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-98469-6
(0-440-98469-6)