

## NEWSMAKER: JUDY BLUME

Judy Blume's books have been favorites of children and teenagers for three decades. Her 25-plus titles include classics like *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* and the Fudge series, featuring put-upon 4th-grader Peter Hatcher and his irrepressible younger brother. Blume is also an outspoken opponent of censorship, a result of attempts through the years to ban her own books, which sometimes explore complicated themes such as grief and sexuality. She is the 2014 spokeswoman for National Library Week in April.



group, why they aren't going to remove a book just because someone says they should. They stand up for their readers' rights. Don't try to threaten them because they won't back down. They are my heroes.

**Have you ever changed the mind of someone who wanted to ban a book?**

**What did you say?** I've tried with parents who are freaking out over a chapter in *Superfudge* called "Santa Who?" This is something new. For 25 years almost no one complained about that chapter. No one wrote to say I was ruining Christmas, which was the last thing on my mind when I wrote that chapter. Suddenly, challenges are everywhere. The children involved are often able to read themselves. Some parents say [the children] are 9 or 10 years old. I try to tell parents it's much better if their children find out the truth from them than it is to hear it on the playground or on the school bus, which doesn't mean a family can't enjoy the idea of Santa. But isn't that always the case? Better to learn about sex at home than on the playground, too.

**Your work is iconic for a generation of readers. Is it strange when people talk intimately about your characters, or are you used to it by now, like knowing a friend in common?**

I'm grateful to my readers and am always happy to talk with them about my characters. Yes, it is like having friends in common. I feel the same way about parents and kids reading the same books and talking about the characters. It's a good way to communicate. "What would *Margaret* do?" ■

**I know you're not supposed to ask writers this, but how's the current book going?**

**JUDY BLUME:** Slowly! It's never good for me to stop and start, and with this book I've had to do that several times. Two years off to write and produce the *Tiger Eyes* movie. Months away from it for other reasons. But now—now!—this is the year. I'm determined. Actually, I'm close to having a draft I can share with an editor.

**Where is it set? You've written before that you only like to use locations in your books that you know well.** It's set in Elizabeth, New Jersey, my hometown, in 1951–1952. It's based on real events that happened when I was a young teenager. In some cases locations are as important as characters. Knowing a location really well, even if it isn't an essential part of the story, helps me make it real for my readers. I can't tell you how many readers I've heard from who have tried to visit Peter Hatcher's apartment house in New

York. (Sorry, the *real* apartment house is on a different street.)

**You tweeted recently that "tweeting is more fun and less anxiety producing" than writing. What is it about writing that makes you anxious when you've done it for so many years to such great success?** I was less anxious at the beginning of my career when I didn't know anything. One book after another poured out spontaneously. I had nothing to lose. It's that spontaneity that I hope for every time, to get lost in the story, lost in the lives of my characters. It's harder when you've met with success. The stakes are higher.

**What role do you think libraries should play in combating censorship?** I think of libraries as safe havens for intellectual freedom. I think of how many times I've been told about a librarian who saved a life by offering the right book at the right time. Yet librarians often have to be fearless. They have to be ready to explain to an angry person, or