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## Face to face with my 'growing up' coach

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Tears trickled down my cheeks and onto my well-worn copy of *Blubber*. Sophia rolled her own dry eyes and inched away, mortified that her mother was crying in public.

My 7-year-old's only awareness of the woman standing in front of us was through *Freckle Juice* — a fun read, but hardly life-changing. I, on the other hand, began my Judy Blume Experience three decades ago, and have lived in awe of the author ever since.



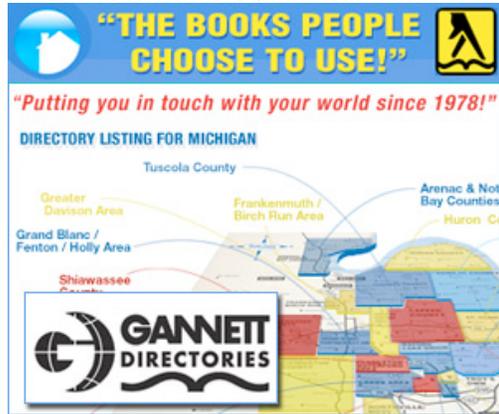
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I literally shrieked when I heard Judy Blume would be visiting the Novi Borders bookstore earlier this month to promote her new illustrated chapter book, *Soupy Saturdays With the Pain and the Great One*. The sentiment was shared by several of my thirty-something friends, all of whom cut their literary teeth on Judy Blume. We relied upon the prolific author to demystify puberty, divorce and puppy love,

doing so with humor and style. Now, we all had elementary-aged daughters who would serve nicely as an excuse for attending a children's book event. I shaped my entire day around our trip to Borders. It began with a frantic search through the house for the stack of "Judy Blumes" I'd packed up before moving from my childhood home. When I finally unearthed the books, it was like coming across a trove of diaries. Each cover evoked distinct memories of those days when boys made me blush, sleepovers were the highlight of my social calendar, and braces were my biggest problem.

I devoured my first Blume book the summer after my parents got divorced and I was sent to spend a week with my mom's sister in Wisconsin. Aunt Judy (no relation) answered my bratty question, "What's there to do in Elkhorn?" by handing me a copy of *Blubber* and pointing to the sun porch. I spent hours swaying in the hammock, too immersed in Jill's problems to think about my own.

For the next several Christmases and birthdays, Judy Blume books topped my wish lists. Margaret taught me about beginner bras and *What Every Girl Should Know*. Deenie taught me about scoliosis and junior high angst. Sally J. Freedman taught me about World War II-era Miami Beach and Jewish grandmothers. But above all, every book that Judy Blume cranked out taught me how well-crafted prose could transport readers to a different world. Judy Blume inspired me to write.

Which is why I couldn't help but cry when I saw her for the first time in person. After gobbling up her every word during the Q&A (and surreptitiously swiping away tears), I waited in line for the better part of an hour to shake her hand. With one eye on the autograph table and one eye on Sophia — giggling and wriggling with two book-loving pals we'd brought along — I made mental notes for a novel of my own, inspired anew.

Regardless of whether the day does in fact kick-start my higher literary ambitions, it was a roaring success for one reason: It kick-started Sophia's interest in quality children's fiction. Before our Blume encounter, Sophia had been content with Barbara Park's grammar-challenged Junie B. Jones. (Side note: When a young fan at Borders asked Blume how old Junie B. Jones was, the author graciously responded that she does not pen that series, adding, "I'm Judy B., not Junie B.")

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Upon our return from the bookstore, Sophia tore into her autographed copy of Soupy Saturdays, and has been alternating between it and Blume's Superfudge ever since.

I have my '80s-era paperbacks handy for when she's ready for her next selection, including my newly signed copy of Blubber. I hope my daughter gleans from each book everything I did: That growing up can be gut-wrenching and embarrassing and bewildering, but that we're never in it alone.

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