

You can find Judy Blume books in bookstores and online and watch *Judy Blume Forever* on Prime Video.



## THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF JUDY BLUME

With a new documentary and book-to-movie adaptation, Blume is as relevant as ever. BY NICOLE PAJER

“We must, we must, we must increase our bust.” Recite that line, and millions of women—young and old—will get the reference. It’s from *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*, a 1970 book by Judy Blume that clearly captured an 11-year-old’s coming-of-age angst and confusion about religion and puberty (the movie based on the book hits theaters April 28). Blume and her young adult and adult books (29 in all! More than 90 million sold!) have made a huge difference in the lives of so many (boys and men too) that it’s no surprise that her fans are eagerly awaiting the release of *Judy Blume Forever*, which premieres on Prime Video on April 21st. The documentary about her life and influence explores how a New Jersey housewife became an author who dared to delve into taboo topics around growing bodies, teenage sexuality, relationships and religion.

“I grew up as a good girl with a bad girl lurking inside,” Blume, who is 85, says in the

“I don’t think Judy Blume wrote her books to be timeless. I think she wrote them to be timely, and they were so timely that they became timeless.”

—author Jason Reynolds

documentary. “So by the time I started to write, I really had a lot to get out. I could be fearless in my writing in a way that maybe I wasn’t always in my life.”

And fearless she was, writing about menstruation (*Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*), bullying and self-esteem (*Blubber*), Asperger’s (the *Fudge* books), depression and grief (*Tiger Eyes*) and so much more. When Blume’s daughter asked her to write a book about teenagers who fall in love and “do it” but don’t come to some tragic ending, she wrote *Forever*, a book that actress Kathryn Hahn told *Parade* was much-beloved contraband when she was growing up.

“I remember a very dog-eared and highlighted copy of *Forever* we had to hide from the nuns. All the girls in my catholic high school would pass it around,” Hahn said. “It was very informative and formative, because we



“Everything I learned about sex or about crushes, I learned from Judy.”

—writer-actor Molly Ringwald

didn’t have many other ways to talk about sex. So thank you, Judy Blume.”

When people would ask Blume when she was going to write “a real book,” meaning for adults, Blume responded with “I am writing real books!” But she tackled more adult themes in *Wifey* (about shaking off the reins of conventional wifehood) and in *Summer Sisters* (about friendship and betrayal).

### CELEBRATING JUDY

*Judy Blume Forever* was the brainchild of director Davina Pardo, who was inspired on a road trip with her children five years ago while listening to audiobooks. “Judy’s voice filled the car,” she recalls. “It felt very visceral seeing my kids giggle at *Fudge* and then hearing it again for the first time in so long.” From there, Pardo set out to find out more about the

author’s life, realizing the power of the woman behind so many people’s favorite teenage books. “My filmmaker curiosity took over and I decided to reach out to Judy,” she says.

Blume, who has retired from writing and runs a bookstore with her



husband, George Cooper, was hesitant at first. “She was tempted, but not sure. She loved her life as a bookseller in Key West,” says Pardo. After co-director Leah Wolchok and Imagine Docs signed on, Blume was ready to open up her past to the world. “I knew once I decided to do it, I’d have to be honest about my life and my work. Otherwise, there was no point to it,” Blume told *Parade*.

The 97-minute documentary explores Blume’s writerly beginnings and her tremendous fandom. “She’s had almost a singular impact on readers,” Pardo says. “Her relationship with readers is unique among living writers today.” And that’s the part of the documentary—where she’s emotionally going through boxes and boxes of mail and treating each letter with tenderness—that Blume likes best: “I love it when the focus is on the kids



DAVINA PARDO AND LEAH WOLCHOK



“She allowed young women to be as complicated and as funny and as messy as we are.”

—writer-actor Lena Dunham

who wrote to me over the years,” she says. “Kids opened up to me in a way that they couldn’t with their parents. And I would answer.”

The documentary, which features author Jason Reynolds, writer-actors Lena Dunham and Molly Ringwald and others talking about Blume’s influence, also dives into Blume’s never-ending fight against book censorship, standing up to conservative Pat Buchanan on *Crossfire* in 1984 and her work with the National Coalition Against Censorship. (Many of Blume’s books are still banned in communities and libraries today.)

The filmmakers, who recently saw *Judy Blume Forever* with the author and a live audience at The Sundance Film Festival, were blown away by the response. “Judy comes to the film with such an emotional openness, and you can’t help but respond in that way as an audience member,” says Wolchok.

Seeing her life play out on screen, Blume told *Parade*, was “both weird and wonderful. It’s an honor, of course, and the directors have done such a good job, but it’s not easy for me to watch,” she admits. But for her fans, the documentary is a gift, just like her books were—and are. Thank you, Judy Blume. **L**

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