



# Everything I Needed to Know about Being a Girl I Learned from Judy Blume

*Jennifer O'Connell (Editor) , Meg Cabot , Megan McCafferty , Melissa Senate , Diana Peterfreund , Stephanie Lessing , Laura Ruby , Erica Orloff , more... Stacey Ballis , Julie Kenner , Kristin Harmel , Jennifer Coburn , Elise Juska , Kyra Davis , Beth Kendrick , Berta Platas , Lynda Curnyn , Kayla Perrin , Cara Lockwood , Alison Pace , Megan Crane , Lara Deloza , Laura Caldwell , Shanna Swendson ...less*

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""I wonder if Judy Blume really knows how many girls' lives she affected. I wonder if she knows that at least one of her books made a grown woman finally feel like she'd been a normal girl all along. . . ."" -- FROM Everything I Needed to Know About Being a Girl I Learned from

Judy Blume

Whether laughing to tears reading "Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great" or clamoring for more unmistakable "me too!" moments in "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret," girls all over the world have been touched by Judy Blume's poignant coming-of-age stories. Now, in this anthology of essays, twenty-four notable female authors write straight from the heart about the unforgettable novels that left an indelible mark on their childhoods and still influence them today. After growing up from "Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing" into "Smart Women," these writers pay tribute, through their reflections and most cherished memories, to one of the most beloved authors of all time.

## Everything I Needed to Know about Being a Girl I Learned from Judy Blume Details

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# From Reader Review Everything I Needed to Know about Being a Girl I Learned from Judy Blume for online ebook

## Kendra says

You have no idea how much I wanted to like this book. I was a huge Judy Blume fan as a kid, so I figured that a tribute to her had to be pretty good as well. Nope. Perhaps if the 20-some contributing writers had each written something unique, the book would have been tolerable, but it's nothing but "Just like Sally J. Freedman, I..." and "Like Margaret, I..." through the whole damn thing. And, if I counted correctly, the plots of *Deenie* and *Forever...* were re-hashed 6,000 times. There were one or two gems among the essays, but for the most part, this book felt like assigned reading rather than pleasure reading.

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## Jennifer says

After reading twenty-three mediocre (IMO) essays by other female writers (I liked Meg Cabot's essay), I've come to the conclusion that I never felt a connection with Judy Blume's character because I had a fairly normal, non-dysfunctional childhood and adolescence.

- My parents are still married to each other.
- I didn't/don't have any conflicting feelings about religion.
- My mom took the time to explain to me that some day I would start menstruating and what that meant.
- Although I was "the new kid" in school a few times, I made friends fairly easily.
- I wasn't ever bullied.
- I never thought sex was bad or dirty. Instead I was taught it was something special and best left until I was in a committed, monogamous and married relationship.

Now, I'm not saying that you needed to have a dysfunctional childhood to enjoy and connect with Judy Blume's books, but I think it helps. The overlying theme of the essays was "I felt I was the only one dealing with my parent's divorce/my changing body/raging hormones/the bully at school/etc, and Judy Blume showed me I wasn't."

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## Cynthia (Bingeing On Books) says

I loved Judy Blume as a child and I have read just about all of her books. This book filled me with nostalgia for the books I did read and made me want to read the books of hers that I hadn't gotten to yet. There were lots of stories about lessons that these authors had learned from Judy Blume. The only issue I think I had with the book was that the essays got a little repetitive. They did talk about a lot of the same books and talk about a lot of the same lessons. Other than that, it was a great way to go down memory lane!

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## Manybooks says

Now I have always simply adored Judy Blume as an author and therefore, I was very much looking forward to reading this here compilation of "Judy Blume" themed essays. However and sadly, I have indeed found Everything I Needed to Know About Being a Girl I Learned From Judy Blume pretty well massively and utterly disappointing and not really at all what I was in fact looking for. For while I had fondly expected and hoped that Everything I Needed to Know About Being a Girl I Learned From Judy Blume would be first and foremost a celebration of Blume's oeuvre as a whole, as well as a literary analysis of the same, most of the featured articles except for perhaps Beth Kendrick's *The Mother of All Balancing Acts* are truly more or less nothing more than autobiographical snippets, which might indeed be interesting if I were actually looking for personal memoirs and desiring this, but which I most certainly was NOT.

And yes, much sadly, the vast majority of the presented essays of Everything I Needed to Know About Being a Girl I Learned From Judy Blume have therefore proven very much personally frustrating and annoying, as Judy Blume's fiction is to and for me generally and for the most part simply used as a plot device to move the diverse authors' memories of their childhoods and teenager-hoods along, with not really ever any in-depth literary analysis and interpretations of Judy Blume's actual novels, of her own printed words and themes (and therefore, from a personal reading pleasure and academic expectation point of view I can and will only consider a one star ranking at best for Everything I Needed to Know About Being a Girl I Learned From Judy Blume, but with the necessary caveat that this is indeed my own and personal opinion and that other readers might well consider the shown and featured biographical essays their proverbial cup of sweetly satisfying tea).

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### **Andrea says**

For all those Judy Bloom fans out there - boy does this book bring back some memories and make you want to crack open those old volumes and see what insight you can get from them now that you are past awkward adolescence. (Indeed, some of the contributors speak to this very thing.) However, after a awhile the essays got a little old. They seemed to say the same thing and focus on the same Judy Bloom books and/or characters (I lost count of how many times "Forever" was referenced). On one hand this speaks to the relevance of these characters and how they really spoke to people...on the other hand, for me, it made a bit of a tedious read. One essay mentioning Margaret and her breast issues read the same as another....

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### **Sarah says**

In films, they typically show people doing one of two things when in the home of someone for the first time, be they a potential friend or foe:

- 1) snooping in their medicine cabinets or
- 2) scanning the titles on their bookshelves.

While I've never done the first I do the second regularly. If a potential friend still has some of the best young adult fiction alongside the most dense non-fiction titles proudly and to balance them out, then it's a pretty safe bet we are going to be good friends. *The Velveteen Rabbit?* *Charlotte's Web?* All good signs. However, if I am at the house of a recently-made girlfriend and if I spy upon her shelves a Judy Blume book, or better yet should I zero in on a copy of *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* that looks as battle-weary from the wars of life laid away in books as my own copy now is, then I have a very strong and particular sense wash over me that this is most likely the start of a beautiful friendship indeed. That is the sense of fictive kinship

you get reading some of the better essays in this anthology - the shared, hysterical and hard-fought highs and lows that we all went through and keep hidden most of the time but should perhaps consider laying bare to one another more often.

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### **Mary says**

While occasionally offering something genuinely touching or amusing or what-have-you, this collection of essays by current girl-teen and chick-lit authors on their connections with various Blume characters served mainly to remind me that Anything You Should Need To Know About Your Girlhood Can Supposedly Be Learned from Judy Blume. There's a recurring mantra in these books that I remember reading on their covers years ago, the idea that they reflect the secret identity of every girl. Here you can discover someone Just Like You, find answers to some of your most distressing questions, and take comfort in the fact that you are not alone. Except, of course, if you happen to be The One Girl in the World who isn't Margaret. (For example.) For me, as for any other non-Margarets, these same books – books that communicated to several hundred thousand girls that they were not alone – bore a singular message that I was and always would be a freak. For me as for them, reading Judy Blume (post-Fudge, I mean) was proof positive that whatever I was, I wasn't a girl. A claim that these books could teach “all we needed to know about being girls” must implicitly define “girl” with a seriously heteronormative slant, as a healthy non-hetero-sexuality constitutes a significant barrier between a reader and any of Judy's girls. (That said, having read such a compelling recommendation of her in this collection, I like to believe JB would have further expanded her plot lines to meet the needs of her young audience, had the need occurred to her. But given that she didn't...) This commentary, like the books it discusses, fails to be as all-appealing as it intends. Ultimately, although I was occasionally hopeful as an essay began (Megan Crane's piece on what it's like to break up with your best friend struck a few chords and alluded to the Veronica Mars theme, which won it bonus points; Linda Curnyn excited actual finger-crossing when she reframed her first best-friendships as “crushes”), they all pounded back an old theme: Such books as make us happy, we could, if need be, write ourselves. And need be. If you want a book about what it's like to read Judy Blume as an asexual, a sexphobic, or a burgeoning lesbian, you're going to have to write it yourself. [Note to the publisher: Perhaps a companion collection along the lines of "Letter to My Grade-School Librarian: Where Did You Put the Nancy Garden"?]

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### **Sarah says**

The point -- that Judy Blume reflects universal experiences (as long as you're white and middle-class, which is the unspoken part of the point) that nonetheless tended to strike readers as personal revelations -- is well-taken, but also makes these essays, by and large, pretty unreadable. No one has anything interesting to say, and how could they, when the task at hand is to create variations on the theme "why my girlhood was a normal American girlhood and therefore Judy TOTALLY GOT ME." I'm as skeptical of (and, ahem, mesmerized by) the "my childhood was uniquely, epically awful" genre as the next girl, but turns out there's a reason there's no market for "my childhood, including my dad, was nice, if periodically minorly traumatic in lovely coming-of-age ways suitable for swelling music a la Full House." The only thing remaining? Explain the market for Full House.

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## **Vicki says**

There are moments where this book slips. That's no surprise, what with the fact that it's a collection of essays from so many different female writers. Some essays get boring, a few come with that unpleasant realization that you don't like the person writing them. But they're all pretty interesting in that they show how important Judy Blume books were for women who were teenagers in the 70s, 80s and 90s. I work with teen readers at a library. I don't see them hustling to pick up *Forever*...I think *Gossip Girl* and *The Luxe* series has kind of supplanted JB's particular variety of advice and exposure. Maybe that's something that we'll just have to live with -- modern girls won't be the sort who sneak around copies of Judy Blume's racier stuff, or their mom's copy of *Clan of the Cave Bear* (or whatever that goofy ass Jean M. Auel novel is called), or even *Flowers in the Attic*, which to this day is one of the most disturbing books I've ever come across. They know more than we did about sex acts. But when it comes to figuring out how we feel about that stuff, I think teenagers then and now and before are the same -- it takes some navigating.

That's where JB comes in. These essays are so cool because they sort of validate how much of our thinking about growing up and sex and friendship came from her books. Nobody was saying quite the way she was. And she's still a very powerful voice.

I think the best essay in the book is actually one in which one writer talks about how the books have evolved for her. When she was a kid, she identified with the kids of the book. Now that she's an adult, she sees how fleshed out and real the mother characters are. And she said that she thinks that were she to read the books as a grandmother, she would probably identify with those characters. So, yeah. Not every essay in this book will knock you out. But some of them will. The main thing that pops out is the power of those characters and situations and how we felt about it all when we first read it, and how those feelings sneakily inform parts of our characters. Who else does as universally as JB?

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## **Lisa says**

I had high hopes for *Everything I Needed to Know About Being a Girl I Learned From Judy Blume* as I loved Ms. Blume's books when I was a pre-teen, and I also enjoy reading others' impressions of shared interests. Yet, this book -- a collection of essays -- was a letdown for two reasons. First, nearly half of the entries were highly personal recollections that would have been more appropriate for the writers' private journals than for a public tribute to an author. (I often wondered if they had read the entire books they referenced, or just the controversial parts.) Secondly -- and more importantly -- the book was very poorly edited. As it was a collection of essays, I would have expected a Foreword by the editor that explained, for instance, the reason she developed this book and why she selected the contributors she did. (A paragraph on the back cover does not suffice.) In fact, a shortened version of the editor's own submission, an essay in which she describes "Judy Blume moments," could have served part of this purpose. Additionally, the order in which the essays were presented was haphazard, and the submissions were skewed toward just a handful of Ms. Blume's stories.

There were several essays that saved this book from a 1-star rating, among them *Cry, Linda, Cry* by Meg Cabot, *I Am* by Erica Orloff, *It Wasn't the End of the World* by Kristin Harmel, and, my favorite, *The Mother of All Balancing Acts* by Beth Kendrick. These entries captured the connection that Ms. Blume magically

made between her fictional characters and her very real readers, which is the true reason her work is, and will continue to be, treasured by so many.

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### **Anne-Marie says**

I consider myself someone who isn't in to short stories. But then almost every time I read a book of compiled shorts, I change my mind and decide that I should read more short stories. Part of my reluctance to embrace the short story is because I don't want to invest in something that will be over so soon. But then when I read one I once again realize that not everything has to be lengthy and detailed. Sometimes short is just long enough. And if the stories in this book were any longer, I would have stopped reading.

Everything I Need to Know got irritatingly repetitive toward the end.

A bunch of essays on how this or that Judy Blume book impacted this or that female writer who came of age in the 1970 - 80's. Most of the authors are of the chick-lit genre - which I have no pretentious problem with or anything - except that the majority of it seems \*to me\* to be highly unoriginal. It's like the same book over and over with a slight change in the details. I felt like there was meant to be some sort of "confessional" tone to the book that just failed miserably.

There was one story that really stood out - not just the best story in a tedious book of stories - but a really funny and sincere 9 pager that made me thankful I had stuck with it. Written by Jennifer Coburn (who?), Guilty House focuses on the lesser known Blume book Iggie's House (I was so tired of having the Margaret and the Forever and the Deenie deconstructed and compared by the time I had read the first quarter. And those are books sacred text!) which explores the subject of White Guilt. The First Black Family to Move to Town! There Goes the Neighborhood! I don't think a lot of people have written about how white people try so hard to seem so down with the brothers and sisters. I wish I had written this.

I do love Judy Blume though. I even have a dog named Judy Blume (who refuses to shit outside, by the way. thanks, Jodi).

I might re-read some of my old Judy Blume favorites to see what I think of them now . . .

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### **fleegan says**

so far the essays in this book are great. it's interesting to read about how much these women authors loved judy blume's books, and how much the books helped them during their adolescence. i remember reading judy blume books, but not really loving them because they were all about girl stuff and i wasn't so girly. the whole thing about "oh no! i'll be the last girl in my class to start my period! why god, why?!" i totally didn't get. well, that and by the time i read it ('80s) we didn't have to use belted pads so that was a bit confusing to me as well. i should write an essay about judy blume books and how i was more confused than before i read the books!

i'm thinking maybe i read them too early? and now, now it's too late. aw.

but this book is really entertaining because a lot of the authors are writing these deep, dark adolescent secrets and then doing the whole (sorry mom!) thing. hee. good stuff.

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### **MaryAnn Harlan says**

It brings back so many memories of Judy Blume books, and that time period where every girl I knew read Judy Blume - we tried increasing our bust size like Margaret, and shared the pages in Forever (you know the pages), we all knew Judy Blume characters, they were the books of our childhood, and early adolescence.

It also brought me back to why I am a reader, what I find in the pages of a book and what I look for. I am a lit major - I spent a lot of years deconstructing and analyzing words and stories. I am a big believer in reader response - that a story does not exist in a vacuum, it is only understood through the lens of the reader and so everyone has a slightly different experience with a book. And yet author intent, if it is successful, allows us to share experiences, to move reading from a solitary past time to a shared social experience.

For my generation Judy Blume is a cultural touchstone, and sentimental me, found myself tearing up reading essays that reminded me of that touchstone. I swear if I didn't know better I would think people I knew were writing these essays. What am I saying? People I know wrote these essays, we just haven't actually met.

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### **Meghan says**

I liked this book in that it took me down a pleasurable trip down memory lane. If you're American and a girl, most likely you will have read at least one Judy Blume book in your formative years. Blume books are a coming of age guide for tween girls. And a few of the writers' stories, I thought were interesting.

What I didn't like about this book is how poorly written most of these stories were. You could definitely tell what genre they wrote and not at the top of their genre either. Other than Meg Cabot, I didn't know any of these women as writers and it will most likely stay that way.

But that aside, what I also realized was how differently Judy Blume affected me. I enjoyed Blume's writing. I found certain situations similar to mine but none in a life changing way. Maybe it was because I was adopted and Asian and so these girls always felt a little outside my norm. But mostly, I had happily married parents. My school valued intelligence so being smart was a virtue like being pretty. My classmates would compete at who was the "smartest" and while there was probably one girl who could have possibly won the "prettiest" title, we all generally got along with each other. It was a private parochial school run by my church and none of my classmates (kindergarten through 8th grade) ever had a crisis of religion or religious identity. The core group in my class knew each other from kindergarten and so we had a sense of safety and security with each other that comes with familiarity. So all these women's stories didn't make me think "oh yeah! That's how my childhood was." And I think I missed that part of this reading experience.

Also, there were a LOT of stories and not as many Judy Blume books so there were a LOT of repeat tales. And while each person was unique, what they gained from the book was pretty much the same. And by the end it felt less like a reminiscing session of female bonding but an after school lesson for a YA reader.

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### Torie says

I was so excited to read this book. I recently bought my 12-year old niece the "Best of Blume" 4-book set for Xmas. It has all my favorites: Are You There God?, Blubber, Starring Sally J., and Iggy's House. I was probably fresh from the rapturous online purchase when I noticed Everything I Needed to Know About Being a Girl in the "People who bought this book also liked.." bullshit section. So I jumped up from my desk and headed to the stacks with my call number, eager to hear what kind of magic Judy Blume had performed in other women's lives. The level of appreciation, devotion, and straight-up nostalgia didn't disappoint. Every time I think that my love of Judy and other 1970's YA authors would make me a great Young Adult Librarian, I catch myself and remember that YA's Golden Age passed at around the same time that classic Prog Rock did. It's an awkward comparison, I know, but I guess I need a YA Librarian to show me the Blubber, the Zia, the Dicey's Song of the current generation. But, I digress...

I couldn't figure out why I was getting so irritated with the writing of each of these essays until I was about a third of the way through the book. Then I realized that nearly every single one of the contributors is a "chick lit" or millennial YA author. No disrespect to y'all who are into that sort of thing, but once I caught on I knew there was no way I could finish the book, which was beginning to get repetitive anyway. I left it half-finished and never looked back, knowing that my feelings for J.B. didn't need to be validated anyway.

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