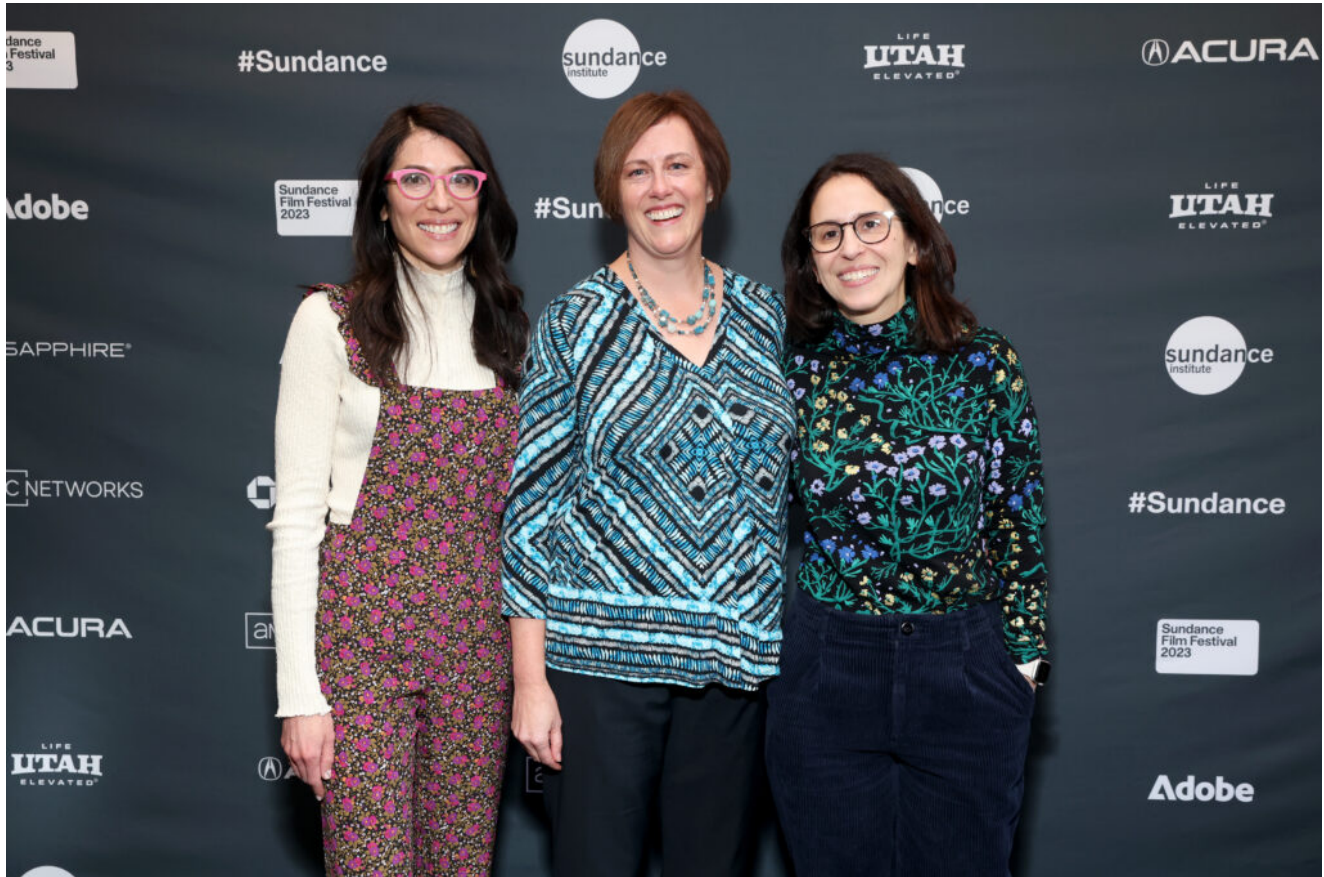


“Judy Blume Forever” is a Touching Tribute to the Beloved Author

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PARK CITY, UTAH – JANUARY 21: (L-R) Davina Pardo, Karen Chilstrom and Leah Wolchok attend the 2023 Sundance Film Festival “Judy Blume Forever” premiere at Park Avenue Theater on January 21, 2023 in Park City, Utah. (Photo by Robin Marchant/Getty Images)

By Peter Jones

Judy Blume Forever is a film well titled. While it would be expected for an acclaimed writer of young-adult fiction to get her share of fan mail, many of the teen girls — now middle-aged women — whose lives were touched by Blume’s groundbreaking work still correspond with the 84-year-old author.

And she writes them back in incredibly personal and thoughtful ways.

Blume is arguably the most beloved writer for young readers this side of Dr. Seuss — but also the most censored. The new documentary that tells her unlikely, often controversial story premiered January 21 at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival.

Like many of the readers who were interviewed for this loving tribute, co-director Davina Pardo grew up on Blume's work.

"Her books were the ones that I went back to again until they were threadbare," she told the audience after the screening. "But then 20 to 25 years later, I started thinking about her again when my kids encountered her books for the very first time."

That renewed interest would soon go beyond just finding quality books for her children to read.

"The filmmaker curiosity stepped in, so I reached out to Judy," Pardo says.

Blume, who joined the Q&A by Skype, says she was initially reluctant about the idea of making a revealing full-length documentary about her life.

"If I said yes to this, I was going to be as honest and truthful as I could be because there's no point in doing it otherwise. So that was a little scary," she says. ".. But I couldn't ask for anyone better to do this than [Pardo and co-director Leah Wolchok]. ... They were generous and patient, and they were so gentle with my readers."

In a past literary era once populated by the likes of Nancy Drew mysteries and bland teen romance novels, Blume offered up a series of honest and provocative books with titles like *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* and *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. The author found her niche in breaking down the social stigmas associated with such subjects as menstruation and teen sex with relatable fiction that spoke honestly to a loyal audience of mostly adolescent girls.

"Teachers and librarians were often afraid then of losing their jobs," Blume says of the backlash her books often received. "Today, their lives are being threatened... What I tell kids is if you care about any of these books, any books at all, and you're not willing to stand up, then they are going to be removed. Now, kids can't do it by themselves."

In the touching and personal *Judy Blume Forever*, many of the readers moved by Blume, known and unknown, discuss the life-changing effect her cutting-edge work had on their teenage selves. Molly Ringwald and Samantha Bee make appearances in the film, along with author Lorrie Kim, whose college graduation was attended by Blume after many years of close reader-author correspondence.

"We knew we wanted a range [of people]. We wanted cultural creators," Pardo says of those interviews. "It was also really important to have contemporary authors for young people today, and especially people whose books are being banned."

Blume's connection with her readers was based in that controversial realness in her work. *Forever*... was the first mainstream novel to portray teen sex as emotionally and physically survivable, but Blume also wrote from a boy's perspective in such books as *Then Again*,

Maybe I Won't, which dealt frankly with puberty and mental health.

"I could be fearless in my writing in ways I couldn't be in my life," Blume says in the film, which follows her evolution from "good girl with a bad girl lurking inside," to an able housewife and mother, to a trailblazing author, and a twice-divorced, currently in-love octogenarian.

A film highlight is Blume's appearance on *Crossfire*, in which she hilariously turns the table on Pat Buchanan when the conservative commentator suggests she is obsessed with masturbation.

"It's so weird to see yourself, your life, it's like you're looking at somebody else," Blume says of watching the film's old footage. "I loved watching everybody else, but when I was on screen, it's like, who is that woman? And she needs a good haircut... But I cried, of course. It's very, very emotional."