

LUCY MANGAN IS... OUTSPOKEN

“Re-reading Judy Blume: it's time travel”



Aaaaall together now, ladies, 'I must, I must, I must increase my bust!' I'll have you out

of those Gro-bras in no time. *Then Again, Maybe I Won't*. It might take *Forever*. Stop *Blubber*-ing. The whole thing's, like, *Superfudge*-d up but *It's Not The End Of The World*.

Have you cracked my brilliantly clever code yet? That's right – I've been re-reading my Judy Blume books, in preparation for interviewing her. Yes, Judy Blume. The one and only. Her. Otherwise known as Judy The Great.

It's such a weird experience, re-reading such formative books years after you first took them into your heart. It's the closest to time travel you'll ever get. Remember the days of copying homework, being told off for hogging the (landline! Not even cordless!) phone, being friends with people just because your parents were friends or they lived nearby? Remember everybody fancying the same boy in class, trying to make sense of Tampax instructions and bolting down dinner as fast as you could so you could get away from your family and back to your REAL life outside? It's all still there, waiting for you between softback covers. (Although I am still pretty much

baffled by Tampax instructions. I still go by my younger but far more adventurous and adept sister's advice: 'Just whack it up there. If you jump off the loo in pain, you've gone too far'. Thanks.)

It's all waiting for you along with, it must be said, all the more scarifying bits too. Remember the anxiety induced by half-heard adult conversations?

The real and relentless pressure to do anything and everything that made you popular? The fear of never getting your period, losing your braces or growing your breasts? Oh GOD.

What's most frightening of all, however, is realising how little has changed. Margaret's Nancy (no, wait, that sounds like a reference to a distaff 'Ralph' – Nancy was Margaret's supremely confident best friend in *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, not her genitalia, 'kay?) goes by another name now – the frenemy – but she still exists, in every classroom in the land and amongst the social circles of those of us really old enough to know better. The bullying of the overdeveloped Laura Danker (also in Margaret's class) has the official name of 'slutshaming' now and we know it spreads far beyond the classroom – although there are also the seeds of a cheering rebellion against it. The fat-shaming in *Blubber* seems to be enjoying an unfettered renaissance, though. So does the evil queen of queen bees Wendy who gets away with everything but whose victims do not yet seem properly empowered to kick her into touch. Though pushing her under a bus, à la Tina Fey's masterwork (and just to add to your sense of

time warping round you, let me just note that *Mean Girls* was released 10 YEARS AGO last month) remains an option.

Would Deenie come to terms so readily today with the abandonment of a modelling career or is the premium she and other people would place on her body too great now? Her mother would be an even greater basket case, that's for sure.

And divorce – once such a huge deal that *It's Not*

The End Of The World's

Karen and other Blume characters go to great lengths to hide their shame from friends – is all around us. But although my peers are now the ones getting divorced rather than watching their parents do so, I'm not sure the grief of the children involved is any less.

Forever remains startling in its rarity as a narrative in which the heroine has sex and doesn't get punished for it. You won't believe this – I didn't – because we all think we were the first to discover it, just as every generation thinks it is the first to discover sex itself, but *Forever* was first published in 1975. Nearly 40 years on, it still feels strange, fresh and liberating to read such a story. Katherine has sex, enjoys it, doesn't get pregnant, doesn't regret anything, doesn't marry Michael and by the end has survived the sadness of first love and first break-up and moved on. It runs counter to all expectations still.

Whatever the differences, Blume still sells in the millions and I'm so glad. The books armed me well when I was young, and they will do so for girls (and boys) now too. The only thing you have to remember is that in real life, you should never, ever sleep with anyone who names his penis. Let alone someone who names it 'Ralph'. Other than that – enjoy.”



FIVE MORE BITS OF ADVICE FOR ADOLESCENTS

1. Spots never go away
2. Pubic hair is nothing but trouble
3. Ditto periods
4. Sex feels just like you think
5. Really – don't go near a named penis

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