

Nostalgic memories of my youth
“The Greatest Story Ever Told”

By Jill Matlow, Feature Writer, Wall Street Dead aHead Family Member

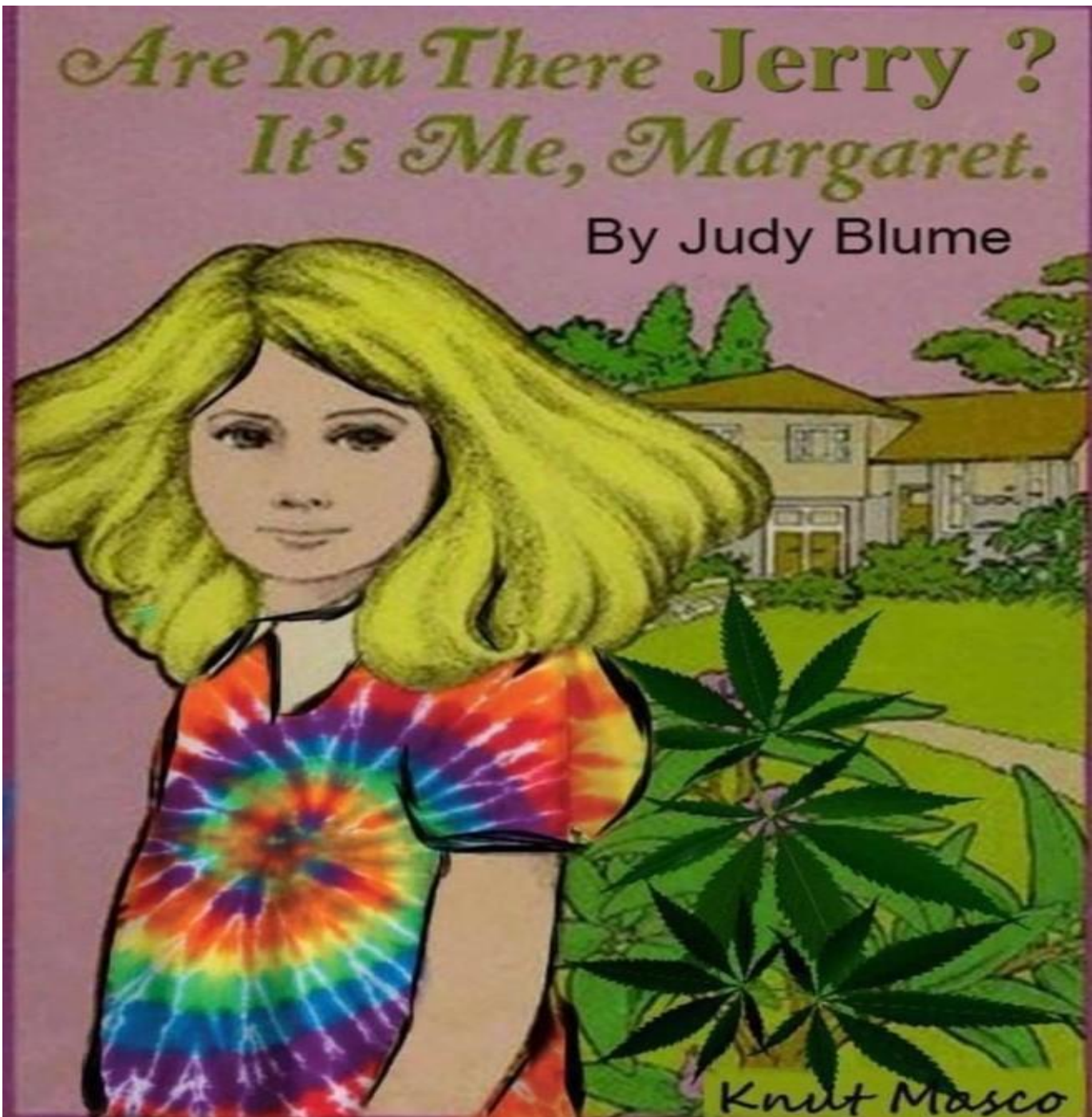


Photo courtesy of Knut Masco

Summer is that time of year most people can relax on the beach (or by the pool) with a good book (or in my case, an audio book) where we're transported to a magical place, far away from our daily lives. These days, more than ever, many of us long for this kind of blissful escape.

One summer over 50 years ago, and long before I fell in love with Jerry Garcia, I fell in love with a book that would transform my life. *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* by Judy Blume was a groundbreaking book for adolescents that would forever change the trajectory of how taboo subjects were discussed. Judy Blume's book made me realize that I wasn't the only pre-adolescent struggling to find the answers to so many questions that plagued me at that time.

I was mesmerized by her book.

At the 92nd Street Y this past April, I had the good fortune of attending a Q&A session with Judy Blume, followed by a screening of *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret*. Judging by the enthusiastic applause when Judy Blume walked onto the stage, it was obvious that the audience (mostly filled with my contemporaries), was just as excited as I was to not only see the author in person, but to also share in the thrill of seeing her book translated onto the big screen.

Are You There God? It's Me Margaret had changed all our lives and as we watched the movie, I'm sure we all secretly longed for those innocent days when life was so much simpler. You could feel the nostalgia filling the auditorium air as we watched the characters of our beloved book come alive on the screen.

For all of us, there is always that one book or author that has shaped our lives. Perhaps you read that book a year ago, last week, or like me, 50 years ago. It leaves an imprint on your mind (and in my case, my heart) that stays with you forever.

Looking back, do you remember what book impacted you this way and why?

It was time for me to put down my suntan lotion and reach out to my fellow WSDaH Family members (many of whom still enjoy reading a hard copy of a book) to discover which books left their mark on them the same way *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* affected me. In addition to hearing their "stories" (pardon the pun), you might discover some intriguing books worth exploring on your own:

Game of Thrones

"The 'Game of Thrones' series by George R.R. Martin had a profound impact on my perspective, not only towards literature but also in understanding the complexities of human nature. It was my introduction to a world where the line between good and evil was beautifully blurred, challenging the conventional wisdom often found in other fantasy literature.

Take Jaime Lannister for instance, initially portrayed as a villain for his actions against Bran Stark. Yet, as the series progresses, his complexities, insecurities, and latent nobility come to the fore, helping me understand that even those who do reprehensible things may not be entirely devoid of good. Similarly, characters like Daenerys Targaryen, who begin with righteous intentions, can also succumb to darker impulses under certain circumstances, indicating that goodness and wickedness are often products of the environment and situations we find ourselves in.

The books also allowed me to escape during some of the most challenging times of my life, and the aspect that made this possible was the series' commitment to realism. Despite its fantasy setting, the saga never shied away from portraying the grim realities of life, the brutalities of power struggles, the dire consequences of political maneuverings, or the raw emotions of its characters. I was pulled into the stories of Tyrion's struggle for acceptance, Jon Snow's quest for identity, and Arya's journey of self-discovery. Each of these narratives resonated with me deeply, making the escapism more meaningful because it never felt artificial or contrived."

[Jesse Jaffe](#), Founder, [The Bees: Alleviating Cyberbullying](#)

The Drawing of the Three

"The book that changed my life is actually a combination of three. One could not exist without the other. The first being my required summer reading in seventh grade. This book was a millstone; but then, any book felt that way to me at the time. The whole book? Cover-to-cover? Impossible. I did everything to avoid it and didn't read it. Life moved on. But I always remembered.

In my senior year I had a friend with an intimidating love and understanding of literature, a voracious reader. I was astonished by how much he enjoyed novels alongside the comics we gobbled down. At his suggestion I picked up 'Cujo' by Stephen King...and I couldn't put it down. I had no idea that a story without word balloons could draw you in and hold you down. I was hooked and devoured everything by King.

When the news broke that Ray Bradbury passed in the summer of 2012, I felt sadness mixed with guilt. Bradbury was always on my list of authors I 'needed to catch up on'. I knew he had something I was supposed to know. And he deserved more importance than my shallow 'to do' list. This time it was 'The Illustrated Man', one of his collections of short stories, and I was off and running again in a whole new direction; a life altering change that has affected everything I do in life and my work.

Where King made me love reading...Bradbury made me love words and writers and books and all the ideas and heart and emotion and poetry and thought that goes into them. To read his work is a world of enjoyment, but to hear his words, his speeches and lectures is food for my soul. I was blessed to have been raised by loving father, but I consider Ray Bradbury, one of my few creative poppas, and 'The Illustrated Man' was just the beginning, because if you continue to read Bradbury, you're off on wonderful tangents like Charles Dickens, Edgar Rice Burroughs and M. Frank Baum and authors you've never heard of before, like Joyce Carol Oates and John Collier and poets like Dylan Thomas and Emily Dickinson. I've read more authors because of Ray Bradbury and his love for words and books and people and life.

Last summer when my wife and I were on a road trip I found a local used bookstore. Among my finds was 'A Light in the Forest' by Conrad Richter... the book I was supposed to read in the summer of '77! Before my eyes...the albatross, the millstone, the 192 page, bane of my existence when I was ten years old. A worn paperback with the same cover I stared at blankly from June right through September many summers ago. Seventy five cents; it was a must-have. And I read it in a day and a half. Forty five years later, my scholastic triumph was complete. And it's a wonderful book, one of the prize additions to my bookshelf. Foe became a friend.

I love books. I can't live without them. But I remember what it's like to not understand books and to fear them. It's one of the reasons I built a little library in front of my house. It's made from an old cabinet that was out for the garbage, I painted it yellow, added red lettering to the side (like something Bradbury would describe), put casters on the bottom and I wheel it out every day. It has free books for everyone, every age. Few things in life give me more pleasure than sharing books and seeing people enjoy them; especially new readers. The 'Tom Lynch & Company Little Free Library' gives me more happiness than it ever gives out.

I've often thought about the books I might have read as a boy if I knew better. Did I miss out? But I realize that without the struggle to understand their importance, I might not have such a strong passion to share books as much as I enjoy them. What I missed in my youth, I've gained in my old age. And all it took to turn the tide was a rabid dog and a tattooed man."

[Tom Lynch](#), Co-owner, [HAVOC Media Design](#)

Born to Run by Bruce Springsteen

"I have been a fan of Bruce's music for the past 40 or so years. I have gone to over one hundred of his concerts and still continue to see him perform. When I read his book (and also listened to him read it as an audio book) I never realized the man I worshiped and loved all these years had gone through such struggles as a musician starting out and throughout his adult life.

Bruce really opened up and went into depth about his battle with psychological issues, his challenging relationship with his father and how he is finally (mostly) at peace with himself. I definitely had no idea how much his wife, Patty Scialfa, had helped him through all his mental struggles. I gained huge respect for her and their relationship. Of course as a female fan, I never was a huge supporter of him being married to her (or anyone else for that matter) but after reading his book, I completely respect their marriage and love her for how she supported him.

This book really made me see who Bruce is beyond his music and now when I see him I have a much greater appreciation for him as a musician, songwriter and performer. I guess it's true, 'once in a while, you get shown the light, in the strangest of places if you look at it right...'"

[Amy Feldman](#), Senior Executive Account Manager, [Audacy](#)

According to [Simon & Schuster](#), Judy Blume is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of beloved books for young people, including *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (which celebrated fifty years in 2020), I guess I'm not the only one who thinks *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* was the greatest story ever told...

"In the case of good books, the point is not to see how many of them you can get through, but rather how many can get through to you."

– Mortimer J. Adler