



In the Unlikely Event by Judy Blume

About the author:

Judy Blume spent her childhood in Elizabeth, New Jersey, making up stories inside her head. She has spent her adult years in many places doing the same thing, only now she writes her stories down on paper. Adults as well as children will recognize such Blume titles as: *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*; *Blubber*; *Just as Long as We're Together*; and the five book series about the irrepressible Fudge. More than 85 million copies of her books have been sold, and her work has been translated into thirty-two languages.

Judy received a B.S. in education from New York University in 1961, which named her a Distinguished Alumna in 1996, the same year the American Library Association honored her with the Margaret A. Edwards Award for Lifetime Achievement. Other recognitions include the Library of Congress Living Legends Award and the 2004 National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters.

She is the founder and trustee of The Kids Fund, a charitable and educational foundation. She serves on the boards of the Author's Guild; the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators; the Key West Literary Seminar; and the National Coalition Against Censorship.

Judy is a longtime advocate of intellectual freedom. Finding herself at the center of an organized book banning campaign in the 1980's she began to reach out to other writers, as well as teachers and librarians, who were under fire. Since then, she has worked tirelessly with the National Coalition Against Censorship to protect the freedom to read. She is the editor of *Places I Never Meant To Be, Original Stories by Censored Writers*.

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Judy and her husband George Cooper live on islands up and down the east coast. They have three grown children and one grandchild.

Source: Author's website (<http://www.judyblume.com/>)

About this book:

In this brilliant new novel—her first for adults since *Summer Sisters*—Judy Blume takes us back to the 1950s and introduces us to the town of Elizabeth, New Jersey, where she herself grew up. Here she imagines and weaves together a vivid portrait of three generations of families, friends, and strangers, whose lives are profoundly changed during one winter. At the center of an extraordinary cast of characters are fifteen-year-old Miri Ammerman and her spirited single mother, Rusty. Their warm and resonant stories are set against the backdrop of a real-life tragedy that struck the town when a series of airplanes fell from the sky, leaving the community reeling. Gripping, authentic, and unforgettable, *In the Unlikely Event* has all the hallmarks of this renowned author's deft narrative magic.

Source: Knopf Doubleday (<http://knopfdoubleday.com/>)

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the environment of Elizabeth, New Jersey, before the crashes occur. How would you describe the community? How does the community band together after the first crash?
2. Throughout *In the Unlikely Event*, newspaper clippings are interspersed among the text. How do those articles help to provide context for the events that occur? How did they aid your understanding of changes in Elizabeth?
3. Class and status play a role throughout *In the Unlikely Event*. How does Miri see

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herself in the socioeconomic structure of Elizabeth? When does she feel most uncomfortable with her family's position? How does her idea of relative wealth change once she meets Mason?

4. Discuss Miri's relationship with her mother. How would you define the relationship between Miri and Rusty at the beginning of the novel? Are there special pressures on Miri because she is an only child? How do Irene and Henry mitigate the mother-daughter disagreements between Miri and Rusty? Does the relationship change once Miri has her own children? If so, how?

5. *In the Unlikely Event* is arguably a novel about the crashes as much as it is one about Henry Ammerman's development as a journalist. How does Henry's career evolve over the course of the novel? Is he ever conflicted by his role in reporting the tragedy? How has reportage changed since the 1950s?

6. How does Miri's idea of friendship change throughout the novel? Discuss the scene in which Miri visits Natalie in the hospital. How does this incident set the tone for their relationship going forward?

7. Discuss the conspiracy theories that emerge after the crashes. For the teenagers in the novel, how do these rumors act as a means of coping?

8. On page 35, we read that "Miri couldn't help wishing" she had a father like Dr. Osner. What does she desire in a relationship with a father? Discuss her reunion with her biological father. How does this experience change her? Does she ever find someone to fulfill the role of father in her life?

9. Discuss how working women are portrayed in the novel. What challenges do these women face? Can you point to any particular incidents in which the working women—particularly Rusty, Daisy, and Christina—face discrimination or judgment for their roles in the workplace?

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10. The crashes create a sense of palpable fear and anxiety for the residents of Elizabeth throughout *In the Unlikely Event*. How does it affect Miri on a psychological level? What about Natalie?

11. Several budding romances play out over the course of *In the Unlikely Event*. What relationship most surprised you? Whom did you root for?

12. How is teen culture described throughout *In the Unlikely Event*? What influence does pop culture have on Miri and her peers? Were you able to trace any similarities between the teens of the 1950s and the teens of today?

13. Discuss the events of the reunion. Did the characters' lives turn out differently from how you would have expected? Who changed the most?

14. Judy Blume has had a prolific career writing books for readers of all ages. How many of her previous novels, if any, have you read? How did your reading experience of *In the Unlikely Event* compare with her other works? Are you able to pinpoint anything in the writing or character development that felt distinctly "Judy Blume" in style or execution?

Source: Knopf Doubleday (<http://knopfdoubleday.com/>)

Other formats available at Halifax Public Libraries:

- Audiobook (on CD and as digital download)
- eBook
- Large Print