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**JUDY BLUME TO RECEIVE THE MEDAL FOR
DISTINGUISHED CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICAN
LETTERS FROM THE NATIONAL BOOK FOUNDATION**

First Young-Adult Author To Receive the Award

**To Be Honored on November 17 at
The 2004 National Book Awards Ceremony**

New York, New York — The National Book Foundation will bestow its 2004 Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters upon Judy Blume, one of the country's most beloved and widely read children's authors as well as one of our most vigorous activists against censorship. She is the first author of young-adult literature and the fifth woman to receive the Medal in the sixteen-year history of the award. She will be honored at the 55th National Book Awards Ceremony and Benefit Dinner in New York City on Wednesday, November 17.

In making the announcement, Harold Augenbraum, executive director of the Foundation, said, "Judy Blume is the first recipient of the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters whose primary audience is young readers. Our Board of Directors feels very strongly about presenting this Award to Ms. Blume, whose work has influenced and inspired countless children since the early 70s. Much of her readership first discovered her books on their own and as suggested reading in school, and continued to seek out her stories right into their adulthood, as she has written novels for older readers as well. Ms. Blume's active participation in the causes of the literary community and her struggles against censorship have also been exemplary."

The award is given to a person, who, in the opinion of the Board of Directors of the National Book Foundation, has enriched our literary heritage over a life of service, or corpus of work. The author of more than twenty books, Judy Blume has had a tremendous impact on young people, who turn to her books for help in navigating the travails of growing up and for characters with whom they can identify. From *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, a comic look at sibling rivalry, to *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, a coming-of-age classic for girls, Blume gives children and teens emotional truths void of sentimentality. Her realistic descriptions of how kids cope with a family move to the suburbs, divorce, or with their own sexual awakening have made her an iconic figure and one of the best-selling authors of all time.

“I’m thrilled by this unexpected honor,” said Ms. Blume. “We don’t write hoping to win awards. We write because we have to — because of a burning need to share our characters and stories. For those of us who write for young readers, the hope is always that something we’ve written will so touch a young person that she or he will become a lifelong reader.”

In the 1980s, Judy Blume experienced censorship first-hand when she learned that some of her books were being challenged and placed on restricted shelves in libraries or even removed. A strong believer in children’s intellectual freedom and their right to read a variety of books, Blume responded to the attacks on her books by becoming a vigorous opponent of censorship. She joined the board of the National Coalition Against Censorship and has brought much-needed attention to the issue and to many of the brave teachers and librarians who fight — at the risk of losing their jobs — to keep controversial books in their schools and libraries. In 1999, she collected and edited an anthology of short stories for young adults, *Places I Never Meant To Be: Original Stories by Censored Writers*, which features work by Norma Fox Mazer, Katherine Paterson, Walter Dean Myers, and Paul Zindel. All royalties from the sale of the book go to the National Coalition Against Censorship.

Judy Blume was born in New Jersey in 1938 and graduated from New York University in 1961. She began writing stories when she was in her twenties. *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* was published in 1970, bringing her wide public attention and the devotion of many adolescent girls. In that decade, Blume wrote thirteen other

books: eleven for young readers and one for teenagers, as well as *Wifey*, a novel for adults. Her most popular series for younger readers are the books featuring the irrepressible Fudge, and among her best-known novels for young adults are *Deenie*, *Tiger Eyes*, and *Forever*. Her two other best-selling adults novels are *Smart Women* and *Summer Sisters*. She is the founder and trustee of The Kids Fund, a charitable and educational foundation. Her books have sold more than 75 million copies and her work has been translated into over twenty languages. In 1996, she was awarded the Margaret A. Edwards Award for lifetime achievement by the American Library Association, and was named a Distinguished Alumna of New York University. She has won more than ninety awards, but says what she values most are the thousands of letters she receives each month from readers of all ages who share their feelings and concerns with her.

The previous recipients of the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters are Jason Epstein, Daniel Boorstin, Saul Bellow, Eudora Welty, James Laughlin, Clifton Fadiman, Gwendolyn Brooks, David McCullough, Toni Morrison, Studs Terkel, John Updike, Ray Bradbury, Arthur Miller, Philip Roth, and Stephen King.

The National Book Awards Ceremony and Benefit Dinner will take place at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in Times Square in New York City on Wednesday, November 17. In addition to Ms. Blume's recognition, the ceremony will also feature the announcement of the four Winners of the 2004 National Book Awards in Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry, and Young People's Literature. The highly anticipated list of 20 Finalists in these four categories will be announced at a press conference on Wednesday, October 13. Members of the press interested in attending this invitation-only event should call Camille McDuffie at Goldberg McDuffie Communications (212)446-5106.

Updated information regarding the National Book Foundation's 2004 Awards Ceremony and Benefit Dinner, as well as events in conjunction with National Book Month (October), can be found on the Foundation's website www.nationalbook.org.

The National Book Foundation was established in 1989 to expand the impact of the National Book Awards — sponsored every year in Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry, and Young People's Literature — beyond the single focus of literary recognition. The non-profit Foundation is well-known for its sponsorship of the Awards, which have been in existence since 1950, and is becoming equally known for the free educational programs it presents nationwide. The annual Awards ceremony serves as a benefit for the Foundation's charitable efforts.