

# Behind the Scenes with the Creators of Judy Moody—Rare!

## A star is born

Now that Judy Moody has gotten famous, saved the world, and is rumored to be able to predict the future, it's hard to imagine a time when the determined third grader wasn't around.

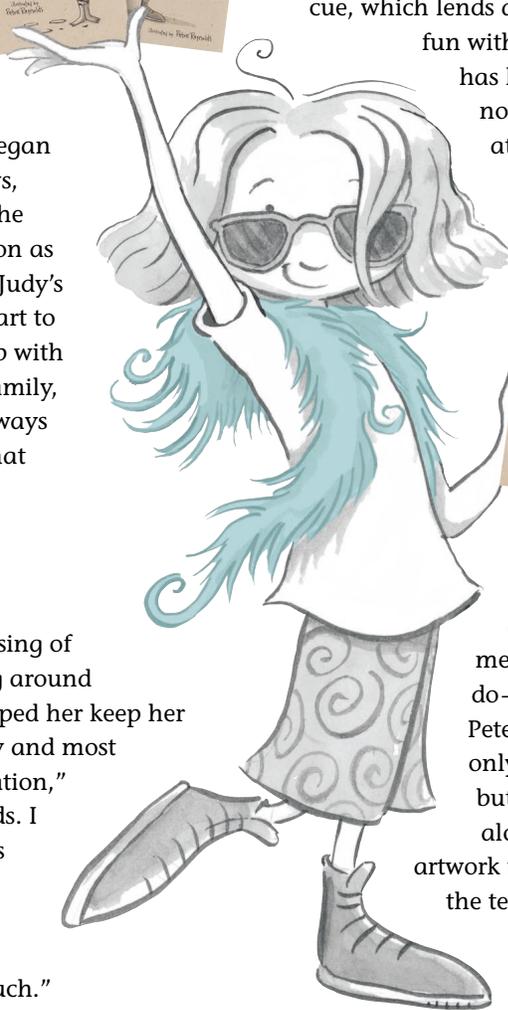
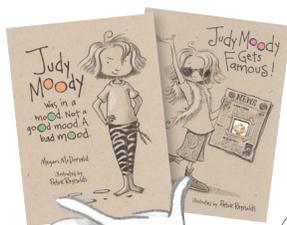
For Megan McDonald, inspiration began with a name. "Judy Moody," she says, definitively. "The name says it all. The character began to take shape as soon as I hit on a name for her." The rest of Judy's persona followed easily, thanks in part to the author's memories of growing up with four talkative older sisters. "In my family, we love to tell stories," she says. "Always have. And we love to exaggerate. That keeps all those memories alive."

Luckily for Judy Moody, Megan McDonald's childhood included a real-life Toad Pee Club, an actual Hedda-Get-Betta doll, and the amassing of many peculiar collections. But being around children in the present tense has helped her keep her heroine fresh. "The voice of the story and most of the antics come from my imagination," she says, "but I do hang out with kids. I have a gazillion nieces and nephews and two neighbor girls who were happy to tell me everything about third grade, including getting 'white cards' all the time for talking too much."

As for Judy's moodiness, Megan McDonald figured she was on the right track when kids at schools she visited often asked questions like, "Are you ever in a bad mood?" or "What kind of mood are you in when you write?" "That got me thinking about kids' awareness of moods, and my own moods," she says. "I began to want to write about a character who was uplifting, but not afraid to show the range of moods we all go through."

## Doodling Judy

For illustrator Peter Reynolds, Judy's moodiness was the first thing he liked about her. "I'm a big believer that temperament is one of the most overlooked facets related to kids' success in learning," says the artist, who heads a studio that produces children's programming. "I'm fascinated with all that stuff. So . . . Judy Moody? The Me collage? Boom! I felt an instant connection."



Bringing Judy to life on paper wasn't quite so instantaneous, however. "We went through about 30 different Judys," he admits. "At one point Judy had her hair tied back. But it seemed very controlled. So I untied it, and it kind of went ring-ring-ring. Then I added a curly-cue, which lends a bit of quiriness to her." He also had fun with her clothes, tiger pants and all. "Judy has her own internal path to fashion," he notes, adding that her independent attitude reminds him of his own daughter. "Judy to me seemed very real, compared to fantasy versions of what little girls are like."

## A character takes on a life of her own

Indeed, Judy Moody seems so real that Megan McDonald has to stop sometimes and

remind herself that Judy's an invention. "My friends, my sisters, and my husband are always saying to me, 'That's something Judy Moody would do—you have to write that!'" Meanwhile, Peter Reynolds's illustrations continue not only to capture the character's feisty spirit but also to nudge the creative process along. "Peter will introduce things in the artwork that may never have been mentioned in the text, which demonstrate his total comprehension of who the character is," says editor Mary Lee Donovan. "With every book, Judy 'liter-ally' and 'figure-atively' becomes a more complete person because of the way Megan and Peter build on what the other person brings."

One of the things Megan McDonald likes most about spending time with Judy Moody is that "each episode or adventure with Judy is an invitation to be funny. And at the heart of humor is the wonderful ability to laugh at ourselves." She hopes readers take away from the books "a good read, a laugh, a warm feeling. Judy Moody certainly knows the struggle, but in the end she triumphs with ingenuity and tenacity." As for Peter Reynolds, he has equally positive feelings toward the character he helped create. He says, "I hope kids feel that Judy is the cool, goofy, fun kid in school who you want to be your friend."

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