

# How One Young Screenwriter Snagged the Rights to *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*.

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*Photo courtesy of Kelly Fremon Craig*

When Kelly Fremon Craig was a tween, she hid in the closet reading Judy Blume’s timeless classic *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*. Like many girls over the past three generations, Fremon Craig found comfort in Blume’s pages. What Fremon Craig couldn’t have known then—what’s still impossible for her to believe now—is that she would eventually adapt and direct a film based on the beloved 1970 novel. During a *TODAY Show* appearance in January, Blume said of the Lionsgate-produced film, “I think the movie is better than the book.”

I recently chatted with Fremon Craig to find out what it was like to take on such a high-pressure project from an author who served as “a North Star” for her as a writer.

**Amy Paturel:** You’ve said that you were obsessed with Judy Blume when you were a young girl. What drew you to her books?

**Kelly Fremon Craig:** Judy Blume’s books were the first that made me feel seen. They were more honest, more relatable. I felt as if she were writing them directly to me. *Margaret* made me realize I wasn’t the only one praying for boobs and lamenting being a late bloomer. *Then Again Maybe I Won’t* uncovered the embarrassing stuff boys were going through, too.

And I have a vivid memory of reading *Forever* when I was 12, a book about two 17-year-olds who fall in love and decide to have sex. Within a few pages, I could tell I was too young to be reading it—and I spent the next 6 hours absorbing every word. It was the first book I finished in one sitting.

**AP:** Why were you so determined to adapt *Margaret* into a feature film?

**KFC:** After I finished *The Edge of Seventeen* [the 2016 coming-of-age film Fremon Craig wrote and directed about a prickly teen who learns self-acceptance] and was considering what to do next, I thought about books I'd love to adapt. Judy Blume's novels were at the top of that list. So I started re-reading her work with an eye toward film. When I got to *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, I was knocked flat. It wasn't just the book's radical honesty about puberty, it was Margaret's earnest spiritual search.

When I first started writing, it felt like there were so many people in the room with me—Judy Blume, 10 million of her fans, my 12-year-old self.

It makes sense that Margaret would start asking the larger existential questions at the same time as her body is changing, her friends are changing, and her family is moving and shifting. All of that uncertainty drives her to search for something greater beyond herself, to wonder, "Is anyone up there making sure I'm going to be okay?" I was the same age when I began asking that question.

**AP:** For decades, Judy Blume refused to option the rights to *Margaret*. What prompted you to go after them anyway—and how did you change her mind?

**KFC:** I knew in my heart that *Margaret* would make a beautiful film, so I wrote Judy a letter telling her how impactful her work was for me and how passionate I was about *Margaret* in particular. I wasn't sure she'd read the letter, let alone write back. But the next day, there was an email from Judy Blume in my inbox. I was so stunned, I almost passed out. She was warm, kind, and she had nice things to say about *The Edge of Seventeen*.

I called Jim Brooks [who produced *The Edge of Seventeen*], told him how much I wanted to adapt the book, and if we could get the rights, would he produce it. He read it and immediately understood how special it was. Together we flew to Key West to meet Judy in person and pitch our hearts out. By the end of that meeting, I started to feel like, "We're doing this! I think she's on board."

**AP:** Why did Margaret's conversations with God resonate so deeply with you? Do you have conversations with God?

**KFC:** I have been talking to *something* for as long as I can remember. From the time I was very young, I wrote in my journal as if I was writing *to* someone. Sometimes the someone felt like God. Sometimes it felt like some wiser, truer part of myself. Maybe those two things are one and the same? Like Margaret, my notion of what God is shifts and expands and evolves.

There are times when I have real faith that there is some kind of Divine order to our lives, and other times when I have real questions. I just know I am endlessly fascinated by the mystery of it all and I have been since childhood.

**AP:** How did you manage the pressure inherent in this particular project?

**KFC:** It was unlike anything I've ever written. When I first started writing, it felt like there were so many people in the room with me—Judy Blume, 10 million of her fans, my 12-year-old self. I was terrified of disappointing them, so I had to find a way to gently clear them out of my head so I could get to work. When I shifted my focus toward making a film that made me feel the same way the book does, without being held captive by every detail, that freed me to make the changes an adaptation required while still serving the spirit of the book.

**AP:** What does your writing process look like?

**KFC:** I'm the kind of writer who writes in long spurts. I give myself permission to write an embarrassingly bad first draft, then lock myself in a room for hours. I lose track of time. I forget to eat. My house becomes a disaster. Sometimes I check myself into a hotel and write for 16 hours a day, for 5 days straight. It's not healthy. It's obsessive. But it's the way I work.

**AP:** What was it like to hear Judy say she thinks the movie is better than the book?

**KFC:** I'm still trying to process it! I think I will be until the day I die. I care so much about this story and the brilliant characters that live within it. But more than anything, I wanted to make Judy proud. That she feels we captured the spirit of her cherished novel on film, well, that means everything to me.