



Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great

Judy Blume

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Sheila Tubman sometimes wonders who she really is: the outgoing, witty, and capable Sheila the Great, or the secret Sheila, who's afraid of the dark, spiders, swimming, and dogs.

When her family spends the summer in Tarrytown, Sheila has to face some of her worst fears. Not only does a dog come with the rented house, but her parents expect Sheila to take swimming lessons! Sheila does her best to pretend she's an expert at everything, but she knows she isn't fooling her new best friend, Mouse Ellis, who happens to be a crackerjack swimmer and a dog lover.

What will it take for Sheila to admit to the Tarrytown kids -- and to herself -- that she's only human?

Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great Details

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From Reader Review Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great for online ebook

Lars Guthrie says

A recent New York Times article profiling a Georgia middle school teacher who uses the 'reading workshop' approach to literature noted that the teacher: 'As a teenager...loved the novels of Judy Blume and Danielle Steel. But in school she was forced to read the classics.' Here I thought I was working my way through the Judy Blume catalog because many of her books are viewed as classics of children's literature. Certainly her novels for elementary school readers, like this one about a ten-year-old, are staples of many language arts curricula. I'd rate Blume's work for kids just below Beverly Cleary's, which is high praise from me. They're thoughtful, well-written, and deal with real children in real-life situations. In 'Otherwise,' a good example, Sheila Tubman puts on a brave face but is afraid of dogs, swimming, spiders and the dark. When her family moves to a summer rental and she makes new friends, she is forced to confront those fears and take some risks.

I haven't yet read Blume's teenage or adult books. And I'm all for Nancie Atwell's 'reading workshop' approach, which encourages choice, and that great Georgia teacher who took a risk by introducing it in her seventh and eighth grade classes. I don't think kids in any grade should have to read any one book, even if by Judy Blume or Beverly Cleary. Kids should just have to read some books, and think critically about what they are reading. I have seen middle schoolers (and high schoolers!) who may never look into books by Mark Twain or William Golding or Harper Lee again because they were once required to read these authors, and that's a shame. What some middle school teachers might learn from elementary school is reading aloud a book or a part of a book their students might not pick up, where the teacher can stop and check if processing is going on. That's what often happens in fourth grade with Blume's 'Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing,' and many kids go on to read the rest of the Fudge books on their own.

Connolly says

This book was another good one from one of the best authors - Judy Blume. Great, interesting story and good for younger kids reading chapter books. Only thing is that Sheila is a bit self-centered and a tiny bit egotistical. Otherwise great.

Katie says

The kids really wanted another Fudge book, so I picked this one up because it was listed as the next book in the Fudge "series." Waste of time - Fudge is not in this book at all, and Sheila is not a main character I could root for. We spent some time after reading the book talking about how Sheila would be happier if she would tell the truth and try to do something nice for someone. Did some on-the-spot editing and skipping. Oh, well, there were a few funny parts, and the kids liked anytime the dog Jennifer was mentioned.

Manybooks says

Judy Blume's Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great is one of these novels that while I can and do much appreciate the plot-lines, the characterisation, the often spot on descriptions of 1970s America, I just DO NOT LIKE the main character (Sheila Tubman) all that much (if at all). Although massively insecure, with many fears (which also unfortunately her parents do not generally take in any way seriously enough), Sheila is nevertheless constantly, annoyingly boasting about how "wonderful" and seemingly perfect she is (that she is a yo-yo champ, even when she is not, that she can swim, although she is not only a non swimmer but massively afraid of water, that she is basically and for all intents and purposes the proverbial greatest thing since sliced bread); sorry, but I absolutely DESPISE individuals who think they are always right, or who have a ready excuse for everything.

Sheila's constant penchant for bragging, her stretching of the truth, her frequent and nasty squabbling with her older sister Libby are thus more than a bit grating, although I actually do with appreciation commend Judy Blume for having depicted the Tubmans as rather imperfect and somewhat dysfunctional (now the parents are in no way abusive, but they do seem to be rather careless and insensitive, especially towards Sheila's fears, and more than likely, her rather annoying bragging and boasting tendencies are actually desperate measures to hide and offset her own lack of self esteem, her own insecurities and the fact that her dearest and dearest are neglectful, and at best, rather distant). Definitely a worthwhile and enlightening read, but Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great is not a book that I could ever even remotely consider a personal favourite by any stretch of the imagination!

Now if you have never read Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great and are considering a perusal either for yourself or for your children, please note that this particular edition (which I think dates from around 2007) has (annoyingly and very much unfortunately) updated some of the technology, so as to feature computers and copy machines (both of which were NOT yet in use by and for the general public when this novel was originally published). Now these upgrades are rather mild, when compared to updates where in books clearly set in the 70s and early 80s, there are references to cell phones and emails (none of which thankfully does occur in Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great). However, and for me personally, it does chafe that so many publishing houses seem to have the annoying and frustrating attitude that books set in the middle to the end of the 20th century (1950s - 1990s) somehow should be upgraded with regard to technology in order for 21st century child readers to be able to fully understand and appreciate them (frankly, I consider this philosophy, this viewpoint, rather an insult to children and upon rereading, I have now firmly decided that the to and for me both annoying and unnecessary updates chafe enough to only consider a high two star, and no longer a three star ranking).

And finally, Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great also presents a prime example how general attitudes towards the family dog and pets in general have changed since the 70s, since the publication of the former. The fact that Jennifer the dog is basically chained in the backyard for most of the day, while this might indeed have been considered acceptable in the 70s, is definitely not all that much tolerated nowadays, and the rather casual and cavalier attitude towards Jennifer having puppies (and that obviously neither Jennifer nor Mumford had been spayed/neutered) does feel rather dated (but deliciously and informatively so, as it portrays American society and its general attitudes towards pets as it was, and is thus a perfect vehicle for discussion). And I do find it both refreshing and brave that with Sheila Tubman, Judy Blume has successfully and yes, compassionately, presented the general truth that NOT EVERYONE likes dogs, that there are those who simply do not appreciate canines, and those, such as Sheila, who are legitimately frightened of them (and although Blume also demonstrates that many of Sheila's fears regarding dogs are rather exaggerated and even slightly unreasonable, she also and thankfully never suggests that Sheila should

somehow learn to be friends with Jennifer and her puppies, simply because that is what many, what society as a whole seems to expect and dictate).

Jodi says

I loved this book when I was younger-- I read it at least a half a dozen times. I haven't read it in probably 15 years but I loved it just as much now. I found my old copy at my mom's house on Sunday and decided to read it again (it actually wasn't my copy since it has my sister Becky's name in it... but it's mine now). The book is completely falling apart at the seams-- the pages are loose and torn and wrinkled and it smells "old", which adds to the charm of it and reminds me of growing up. Maybe that's why this book is 5 stars for me-- the nostalgia of it all.

Either way, I love this book. I loved it when I was 10 years old and I love it now 20 years later! I'm going to have Aspen read it now- she's almost 10 and I think she'll love it. At least I hope she does.

D.M. Dutcher says

What Judy Blume does is portray children as they really are, not as what adults idealize them as. This means warts and all, and in *Otherwise Known As Sheila the Great*, she tells a story about a babyish, bossy, nervous girl named Sheila.

Sheila hates dogs, and hates the idea of learning how to swim. She puts up a false front, because she doesn't want to admit she can't do things. She has a love-hate relationship with her big sister, who dislikes her because her parents indulge her too much. When was the last time any modern YA author has written about a spoiled child and not made them the antagonist of a proper hero? She's a little whiny, quite insufferable at times, but feels like a real child.

Most of the book is her life in a new town. She grows slowly as she realizes (or is forced to accept) that her fears can't get in the way of doing things, and her parents won't baby her forever. She's still blind to a lot of her faults, and she'll probably never be seen as a good child. But she is a very real girl, and it's so refreshing to read a book where the child isn't a miniature adult or just a heroic template, a mini-conan or mini-gandalf, in a traditional fantasy novel.

The only things that detract are Sheila's internal age, and Mouse. Sheila sounds younger than ten years old. I'm not sure if this is because of the passage of time, though. One of the things you have to remember is that this is a thirty-year old book, and kids back then weren't as mature as they are now in some respects. This was before a generation of children grew up as latchkey kids or as driven achievers.

Mouse was the other issue I had. Not that she's bad. She's the "normal" kid who starts to change Sheila by being friends with her, but at times she felt a little insufferable. I guess it's good that we don't have a sequel to this book, because I can see them falling out in a nasty way when they get older.

Still, no one writes children like Blume.

Tukunjil Nayeera says

The first book was so great and I loved it so much that I was happy to find a whole new series. But this book ruined the series.

Sheila is a spoiled brat. I don't like her here though she was okay in the first book. She is a terrible liar. A kid of her age is not supposed to be a liar. She doesn't even know lying is not a right thing to do. I wonder why Judy Blume don't make her understand that very clearly!

I missed lil Fudge and fourth grade boy Peter Warren Hatcher whole time reading this book.

Shannon says

Thought Sheila was a jerk.

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

I always enjoy re-reading a Judy Blume book, but Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great is actually a first read for me. I found it on my Kiddo's bookshelf and thought it would be a nice summer novel.

Sheila Tubman, 10, lives in NYC with her parents and older sister Libby. She also lives with a lot of fears and phobias, beginning with the usual - dogs, spiders, the dark - and adding to that now is swimming pools (or at least, the water in the pool). This makes for a difficult summer for Sheila when her father announces that the family will be house-sitting at the home of a colleague in Tarrytown, NY for the summer. Sheila is pretty excited about getting her own room, even if it is filled with models put together by one of the owner's sons, along with a note telling her not to touch anything or else. And on top of that, the first night there, Sheila sees a spider on her ceiling. But worse than a spider, is the little dog named Jennifer that the Tubman's will be taking care of for the summer.

So far, Sheila's Tarrytown vacation is not getting off to a good start, but then she meets Merle Ellis, called Mouse, a girl her age who is pretty good at doing tricks with a Duncan yo-yo. Sheila likes to think she is perfect and has learned to cover her fears with a combination of false bravado and little white lies, but Mouse sees right through her and even confronts her about her fears. Perhaps capitalizing on Sheila's on that, Mouse tells her about nearby Sleepy Hollow, Ichabod Crane and the legend of the Headless Horseman. Yes, it creates a new worry for Sheila.

Meanwhile, at the pool, Sheila's swimming lessons are very slow-going but her swimming teacher, a college student named Marty, needs the money for college, so he can afford to be patient, but if Sheila isn't swimming by the end of summer, Marty forfeits the money her mother is willing to pay.

There is an awful lot of appealing, fun things for Sheila to do during her Tarrytown vacation, but will she be able to overcome her fears and get around her phobias in order to enjoy it?

And after I read Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great, I totally understood why my Kiddo like it. Like Sheila, she also had a few fears and phobias growing up. And Judy Blume was (is) a favorite writer of hers.

Blume has a remarkable ability to take issues that are common among kids and look at them with humor and honesty, so that kids seem to trust that everything will work out eventually, for her characters and for her readers.

If you've already read Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing, the first book in the Fudge series, then you've also run into Sheila Tubman. She is Peter Hatcher's neighbor and nemesis. Peter, older brother of Fudge, does make a brief appearance in Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great with his dog, mostly to introduce the idea of Sheila's fears and phobias. And although this is part of the Fudge series, it is a nice stand alone chapter book.

I like the way Blume tackled themes like friendship, siblings, courage in this novel and shows that while it isn't always easy to overcome fears, it does feel really good when one succeeds at getting past them enough to enjoy a real sense of accomplishment. Sheila doesn't go home at the end of summer completely over her fears and phobias but she does make a good start and that's what counts.

When I asked my Kiddo if she liked this book when she read it, she said it helped her realize that her own fears and phobias could be overcome, and that, for the most part, they have been conquered. She said Judy Blume was her favorite childhood author, so much so that she read and enjoyed every book Blume has written, including her adult fiction.

Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great was originally published in 1972. It was updated once to reflect technological changes but there are still no cell phones or computers easily available to the kids in the novel, which is kind of nice. So things may still feel a little dated, like playing with yo-yos and mimeograph machines, but not so much that kids won't enjoy it today. I know from experience that everything old becomes new again, sometimes, so maybe I should dust off my own Duncan YoYo and pass it on to another kid.

Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great has been in continuous print since it was first published in 1972. All the Fudge books are sitting on the shelf where I found this one. I think I'll revisit those soon.

This book is recommended for readers age 7+

This book was borrowed from my Kiddo

This review was originally posted on Randomly Reading

Aubree Bowling says

In this book, my kids learned how NOT to lie away insecurities and how NOT to be a friend who is bossy, condescending, and arrogant. an adult can recognize that Sheila is insecure so she tells exaggerative lies about her shortcomings and inabilities, but kids see a child getting away with being a liar. We had a lot of discussions about being honest and kind to people who reach out to us in friendship as we read this book. Sheila Tubman is 100% an anti-hero and a walking object lesson.

Seth says

So how exactly does this get classified as a "Fudge book"? Fudge is not in it, although his brother Peter makes a very brief cameo. I don't know what order they were written in, but at the very most this appears to be a spin-off of Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing.

Sheila Tubman, last seen being forced by Peter Hatcher and Jimmy Fargo to remove her name from the cover of a school report the three of them worked on together, takes center stage in this book. Her family leaves the city for the summer for Tarrytown, living at the home of one of her father's professor colleagues.

I never read this book as a kid, but I can say that even though I am now close to 40 that I quite enjoyed this book. Judy Blume has gained notoriety for her more controversial works, but what shouldn't be lost is the fact that she is a really good children's author. She has the skill to understand how children think and then write about it in a way that the reader can relate to.

Sheila Tubman is a little bit of a phony. Holden Caulfield would hate her. She covers up her fears and insecurities with stories and excuses. For example, when she meets potential new friend Mouse Ellis, who is a whiz at the yo-yo, Sheila explains that she used to be an accomplished yo-yoist as well, but has forgotten most of the tricks because it was years ago and if she practiced they would all come back to her. As she's only 10 years old, Mouse eventually realizes that Sheila is full of crap and asks her why she doesn't just admit to not being able to do something.

I never was in auto shop, but once a peer told me about what an idiot the shop teacher was because he didn't know that there weren't spark plugs on a diesel. I played along, as if of course this was as basic as the ABCs or 2+2. (I had no clue about diesel mechanics.) My friend said, "See, even you know that!" So I made myself out to be more knowledgeable about a subject than I actually was in order to gain esteem with my social group, which was a total Sheila Tubman move.

I don't know that Sheila ever completely gets over this character flaw within the pages of this book, although she does make some progress. But maybe the lesson that is being taught here is - be true to who you really are and people will like you anyways. Maybe even more than if you keep concocting tall tales.

Christy says

Again, I'm not a Judy Blume fan, but I liked the "Fudge" books when I was a kid. While Fudge is not in this book at all, and Peter is only at the beginning....the book centers around Sheila (who appears in all of the "Fudge" books). One thing I normally like about books is that the main character has an arc...they grow and change throughout the book. Sheila is as rude and annoying at the end as she is at the beginning.

Another thing I didn't like about this edition...the original was written in 1972, so they updated it with a CD player and a PC...but other stuff wasn't updated, and it just didn't work.

Jeff says

Sheila is a sad, dreadful character that while possibly an accurate account of some kid's childhood and thus an opportunity for empathetic understanding makes for a slog of a read. The cruelty and lies that come from childhood fear and self-loathing come across as more pathetic than funny or endearing to this reader.

Much beloved author Judy Blume, is often compared to Beverly Cleary, but Blume is a poor substitute for Cleary. While Cleary's characters have foibles, they are always generally likable and you can see them learning and growing with each page. Blume's characters learn in stilted fashion and leave me with a much worse taste in my mouth. I'll take Ramona Quimby over Sheila the Great any day.

midnightfaerie says

Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great by Judy Blume was the second book in the Fudge series of which I'm reading to my 5-yr-old. Since he has twin 2-yr-old brothers, I thought this series was a perfect fit. Since this was the only book to cover the girl's life, I was going to skip it. But when I told my son, he said in a perfectly sarcastic voice, "M-om! You can't skip a book of a series! That's just not right!" So I ordered it, and we read it. He absolutely loved it. I had forgotten what it was about, only remembering how much I loved the Fudge books, which I had read in fourth grade. In this one, Sheila goes to away to the country for the summer and makes a new friend, Mouse, and goes to camp and has to learn how to swim, which she's deathly afraid of. I haven't started swimming lessons with my son yet, but told him a while back that, he too, would be required to swim. He hates getting his face wet and acts like he's drowning when ever I rinse his hair in the bath. So he could completely relate to Sheila in this way. I often made comments like "Boy, she's really scared of swimming and getting her face wet! Hmmm, I seem to recall that I know someone else like that...but I can't remember..." And my son's reply is to punch me in the arm, roll his eyes, and say "M-om!"

So we're off to Superfudge now, and he's very excited. I thought he'd get tired of me reading the chapter books after a while but he almost always asks me to read an extra chapter. We've made it a habit to read a chapter or two during breakfast, and so when he doesn't get it now, he's disappointed. I'm always excited to read the next book or to decide on which to read next. We especially like ones where we can watch the movie afterwards. There are so many to choose from!

As far as the book goes, it's excellent! One of my favorites as a kid, and even though my son is reading it at a much younger age, he too, loves it.

ClassicsDefined.com

Wasee says

Loved the first book, I was so happy to find a whole new series..
& then, this book ruined everything.. :/
