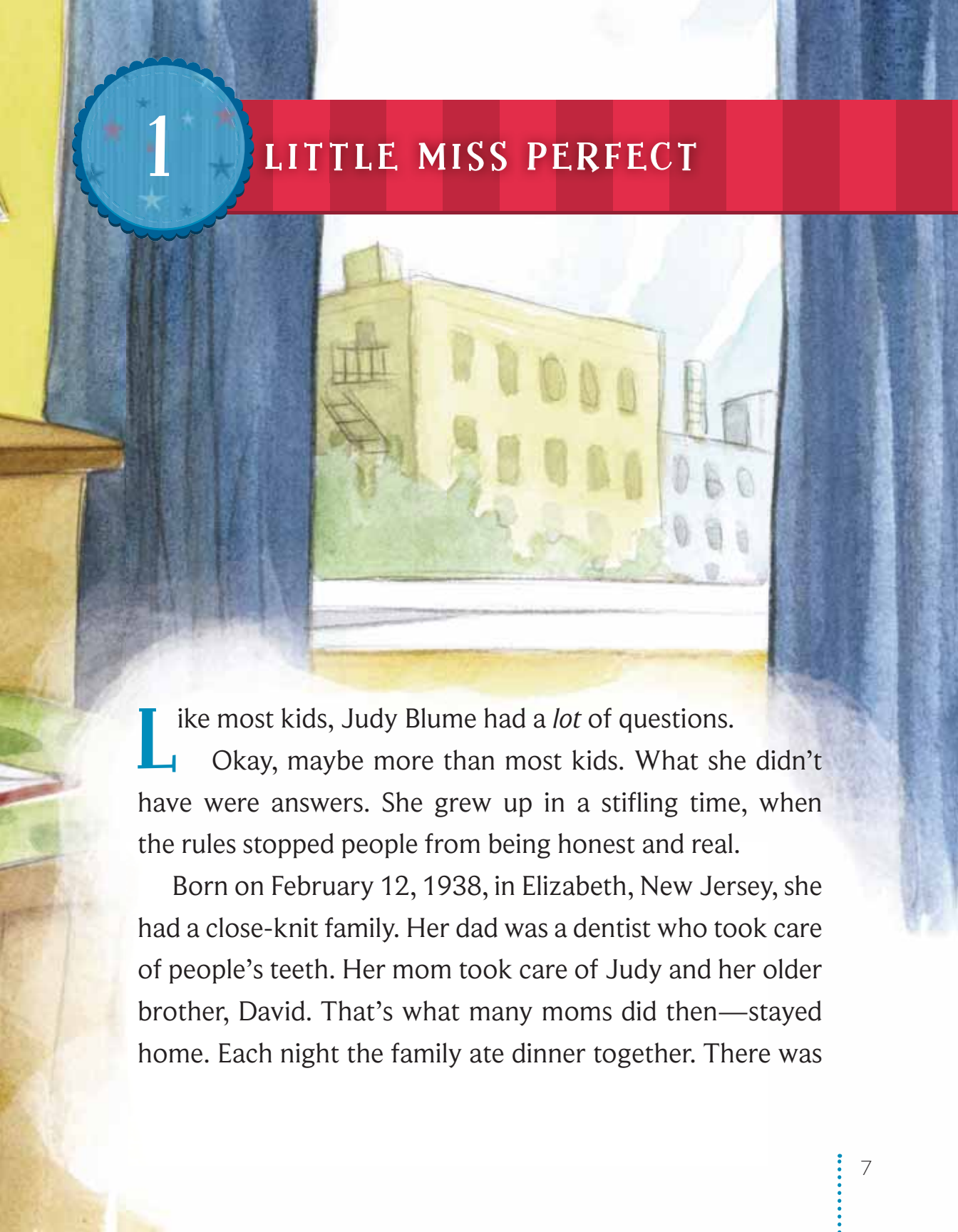


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LITTLE MISS PERFECT



Like most kids, Judy Blume had a *lot* of questions. Okay, maybe more than most kids. What she didn't have were answers. She grew up in a stifling time, when the rules stopped people from being honest and real.

Born on February 12, 1938, in Elizabeth, New Jersey, she had a close-knit family. Her dad was a dentist who took care of people's teeth. Her mom took care of Judy and her older brother, David. That's what many moms did then—stayed home. Each night the family ate dinner together. There was

no TV then, so they listened to *The Shadow* and other radio shows, and went to the movies.

With her allowance money, every week Judy bought a book at the bookstore. After visits to the public library, she'd play Library when she got home, with herself as a tiny librarian. Her favorites were the Betsy-Tacy books by Maud Hart Lovelace, comforting stories about best friends growing up in a small town.

Which did she like better—books or boys? At six she was in love with not just one boy, but two (Jimmy and Tommy). In sixth grade she formed a club with her four best friends, called the Pre-Teen Kittens. Over Oreo cookies and Cokes, they compared notes on the changes in their bodies . . . and boys. Judy liked a different boy every week.

But Judy never got in trouble.





Her brother was the rebel (once, he kicked his kindergarten teacher in the stomach). She felt she had to be the opposite: “I was Little Miss Perfect.” Her relationship with her parents was fond but not honest. Basically, she told them what they wanted to hear: “I never felt that I could be sad or disappointed or even angry.”

Her biggest crime, for which she was never caught, was writing reports on books she had invented. She just wasn’t that interested in horse stories or books about little girls on the prairie.

Where were the books that talked about real family relationships, boys and girls, bodily changes, and racial prejudice?

And religion. Her Jewish family followed certain traditions but was not particularly religious. Her father had six

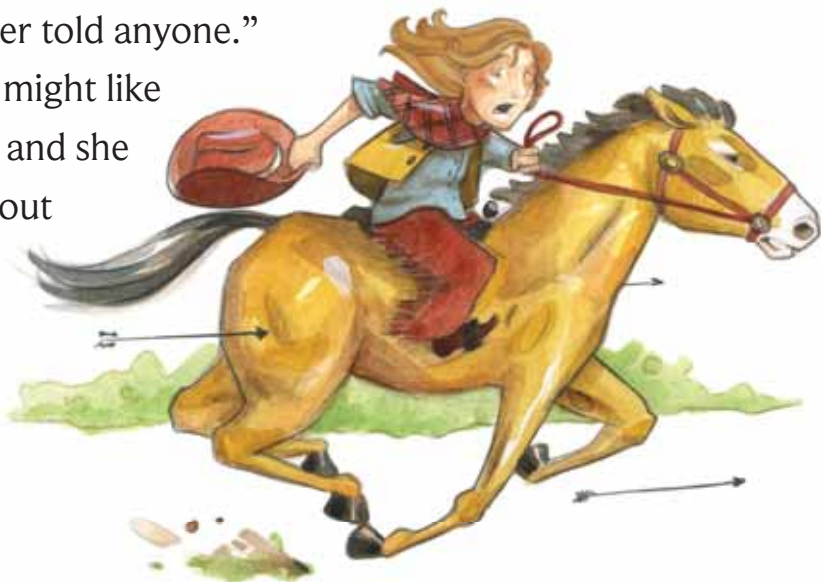
brothers and sisters, most of whom died during Judy's childhood. Her family "was always sitting Shiva"—the weeklong Jewish tradition of mourning a close relative. Religion was so confusing.

And what about all her fears? Judy was afraid of lightning and thunder, vomit, sudden loud noises, dogs, and swimming. She worried that her father, whom she adored, would die young like his siblings. At night she bargained with God to keep her dad alive, making up prayers she'd repeat seven times a day.

"I wanted to read books about real life," she complained. "I always thought I was the only one and . . . I thought I was weird." But back then most parents avoided talking about personal stuff with their kids.

Inside, Judy felt herself becoming "a secret storyteller," making things up in her head: "Stories and stories and stories, but I never told anyone."

She thought she might like to be a librarian, and she also dreamed about becoming a cowgirl, a detective,





a spy, a ballerina, and a movie star. In reality the careers open to her were nurse, teacher, airplane stewardess, and stay-at-home mom—which is what everyone expected her to become.

Being a writer seemed as unreal as one of her made-up stories: “I didn’t know anything about writers. It never occurred to me they were regular people and that I could grow up to become one.”

Judy went to an all-girls high school. Too bad, it didn’t

have boys. But like many bold women, she later said this gave her confidence. Girls ran the show at her school.

She was always a good student. She worked on the school newspaper and kept a diary. She sang in the chorus, studied piano, and took modern dance. She adored dancing, but it was probably not going to work out as a career. Her toes had a weird way of making funny sounds on the stage—*crack! pop!* The other dancers would get the giggles.

But the older she got, the more boring she felt. She wished she had the “depth and curiosity” she’d had as a ten-year-old.

After graduating with high honors, she picked a college that was said to have cute boys.

After all, the average age women got married then was twenty.

