

# THE TIFFANY BOX

By Kathleen Buckstaff



## *An interview with Kathleen Buckstaff*

*Will you summarize your book? What's **The Tiffany Box** about?*

This story is about me when I was a young mother, and ultimately, about my mother, and how we each changed when she was diagnosed with cancer. I use only my emails, letters, diary entries and columns from that time period to tell the story.

What's captured in these documents is surprising. It was surprising even to me.

Sometimes people living with a serious illness gain insights into life that the rest of us don't have. This happened to my mom.

It's Tuesdays with Morrie except the story is between a mother and her daughter.

*How did this come to be a book? Why did you write it?*

Five years after my mom died, we moved back to California, and one of my best friends gave me emails she had saved that I wrote to her during the years when my mom was sick.

After I read them, I was stunned. I had captured moments with my mother—words, phrases, details that I had forgotten. I had been so affected by the sadness of her death that I forgot what we laughed about. I forgot the beauty and the intimacy of what we had gone through together. I forgot what she taught me, in how she lived and how she died.

I shared the emails with a few friends and saw that I had captured a story that was universal. Most people lose someone who is most dear to them in their lifetime. And if we're lucky, we have incredibly intimate exchanges with them before they die. But after they're gone, the sadness can be overwhelming and it's easy to forget the life and the love. It was for me. I forgot the joy and the love because there was so much pain in the loss. The emails, diary entries and letters brought back the life.

Initially, I created a one-woman play out of the material I had. I worked closely with Artistic Director Carol MacLeod. I'd read out loud an email to her and I'd say, "I can't include that, it's too embarrassing." And Carol would say, "That's the good stuff! We've all felt that way. You just say it."

When I performed the play *The Tiffany Box*, one older man came to see it four times. After the last performance, he waited for me, thanked me and told me that I had captured what he went through when he lost his wife like no other person had ever done. He told me he finally remembered the love.

That's why I put together this story. That one man made it worth it. Other people who saw the play wrote me letters telling me their stories. They were remembering the love and the joy that they had shared and not just the rotten ending. That's when I decided to put it into a memoir. I wanted to share my story with more people.

**Click here to order *The Tiffany Box* at [www.tiffanybox.com](http://www.tiffanybox.com)**

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## *How is the book structured?*

The story spans seven years. The book alternates between my private emails, letters and diary entries and polished columns. In 1996, I was writing emails to an old roommate of mine who lived in New York City. She had one child and was a painter. I had two children and was a writer. I'd send her samples of my writing as well as regular emails about life as a mother.

Eventually in the book, the columns are accepted by the *Los Angeles Times* and then *The Arizona Republic*. The story follows me as I write, get published and get pregnant with our third child. After he's born, life seems to be settling into a sweet craziness of writing, kids, and remodeling a house across the street from my mom and dad.

And then my mom is diagnosed with cancer. And everything changes.

I stopped writing the column to take care of my mom and wrote only emails to my closest friends. The plot is captured in emails and diary entries.

There's an honesty in the emails that I could never have intentionally created for a public audience. It's what I told only my best friends: the good, the bad, the ugly and the really beautiful. Usually we don't tell someone we don't know about a sacred moment we have with a beloved who is dying. We tell our best friends and that's it. If we tell at all.

## *What does the title mean?*

After my friend gave me back emails I'd written to her, I went through boxes, many, many boxes looking for more emails. I had an old computer salvaged. I found a diary. I found old letters.

There was one box I avoided. It was a bright blue Tiffany box. This one had contained a wedding present for Dan and me. It was the largest Tiffany box I'd ever seen. I kept the box on a shelf in my garage. After my mom died, I put her correspondences there. I put other things there too. For years, whenever I saw that box on the shelf in my garage, it broke my heart.

I finally opened the Tiffany box.

Read the book and see what I found.



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