

FROM THE HEART

BEHIND THE SCENES OF *YOU CAUGHT ME KISSING* BY DOROTHY BRIDGES

By Carla Fischer

Like the center of a wheel, Dorothy Bridges is a woman behind the scenes and the spine of her family. Her powers of observation translate into her ability to put into words what she sees, hears, and feels. It is a gift she gives herself and those fortunate enough to be privy to her fine talent as a poet. Ageless at 89, this spirited lady tells a great story, with a wonderful, sometimes, ribald sense of humor and a heart of gold to match. She spreads her love among her three children, Lucinda, Jeff, and Beau, their families, friends, environmental programs like *Earthtrust* and numerous dogs and cats. The Bridges' warm and comfortable home has always bubbled with a myriad of activities. Lucinda Bridges says, "We had a houseful of fun with people creating music and songs. I had a foster sister from the Philippines." Lucinda recalls how her mother, who acted in the Drama Society at UCLA with her dad, encouraged them to put on little shows with acting and dancing. She should be heading up parenting groups with the child-rearing knowledge she discovered. She credits much of her success as a parent to a psychology book she read by Dorothy Baruch *New Ways of Discipline*. "The secret was giving them 'time.' Why do children want to be naughty? It's because they want their mother's attention. If they know their mother's going to give them attention anyway, they don't have to be bad to get it. My God, it worked like a charm! Each child had their own 'time'. It's this kind of respect she shows her children. It has been handed down to their children, going full circle. Dorothy and Lloyd created a family connected by strong and loving ties.

Her husband for sixty-two years, actor Lloyd Bridges, is the love of her life. She likes to refer to him as Bud in her poems. He passed away seven years ago, but remains alive in their hearts and memories through her words.

A SEA OF LOVE

I have known so much love

That it spills over

Trickles, seeps, and runs like a wanton river

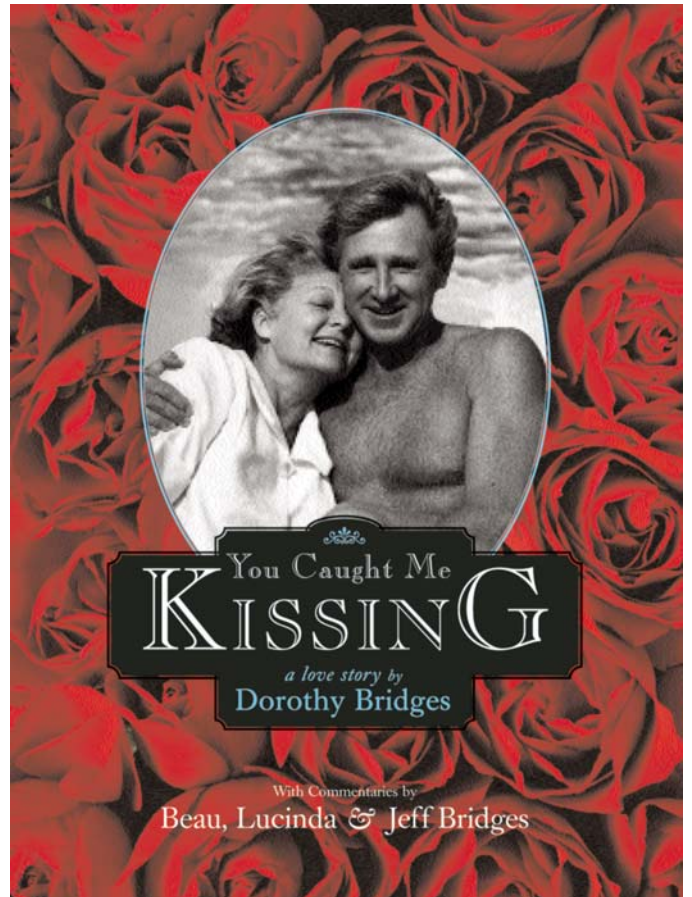
Into all the crannies and cracks of this granite world.

And persistent, relentless, it presses forward

To the surge and reward that the sea of eternity has promised.

Dorothy Bridges lives in Malibu and Westwood. When asked how she originally got to Malibu, she said, "We rented a house in the summertime. We were looking to move from the city. Riding down the beach one day in 1960, we saw a home with a sign 'For Sale or Rent'. It was \$75 to rent or \$56,000 to buy with \$1000 down. So, he wrote a check to buy the house. Our kids never knew camp."

What does she love about Malibu? She said, "We all loved to catch grunion. We'd do it naked. We'd go up around County Line where our good friends actor Larry Parks and his wife Betty Garrett had a little shack." She laughs heartily, remembering the good times they shared. Dorothy continues to enjoy the restaurant Guido's, "because you can see people you know there."



CF: When did you begin to write?

DB: I always wanted to be a writer. I read and wrote poetry since I was nine. I started keeping it when I fell in love with my husband Lloyd, at UCLA. He was studying political science to become a lawyer in order to please his father. I was an English major, writing his papers because he hated political science. In my day, you only went to college for one of two reasons: to get a husband, preferably a doctor or a lawyer, and the last thing in the world you wanted was an actor.

He wrote a Valentine to me on Valentine's Day and for the next sixty odd years, I wrote him a Valentine. Jeff came over not long before his father died. We were in my little office upstairs and he was looking at my books. He said, "Oh, I don't believe this! This is one of my favorite books." It was Kahlil Gilbran's *The Prophet*. He looked at the inscription that said, 'To my sweetheart, on her 18th Birthday.' That's how far back we went.

I started a journal on our wedding day. The idea when we got married was that he was going to be a famous actor and I was going to be a famous writer. I told him, "Well, I can't be a writer, 'cause I don't have a typewriter and writers have to have one and I'll have to wait till we can afford one." So, he bought me one. I sold a couple of things to *Good Housekeeping*. He said, "Someday you'll publish these poems." I said, "No. No one would want to read them."

I don't know why I didn't get a job as a writer when I got married and went to New York. When he met me at the train, he told me he had taken a three-year lease on a one-bedroom apartment with a pull-down bed. It was \$75 a month with a doorman. I said to him, "How are we going to eat?" He was making \$72 a month recording for the American Foundation for the Blind.

He said, "You'll get a job." I sold gloves at Sterns Department Store near 42nd Street, because I knew I hadn't married a financial genius.

We had a wonderful marriage and had three children: Beau, Jeff, and Lucinda. We lost our little boy Gary to crib death. She wrote:

*The heart can break most noisily
The pieces clanging as they scatter.
Or sometimes crack so silently
One scarcely hears the final patter.*

I also wrote a book of children's poetry based on something my children would say. I'd hear them say it and I'd write it in a poem. They each had a poem written for them every birthday.

LUCINDA BRIDGES: She kept a diary and journal every day of her life for probably seventy years. She went back through all her diaries and for each child, on their twenty-first birthday, she gave a conglomerate adventure from being conceived until we were twenty-one. We each have one with pictures and written in her own hand.

DB: Lucinda has three boys, Jeffrey has three girls, and Beau has five children. On my 80th birthday, my husband pre-arranged for each child to get up and recite one of the poems I wrote for them. This is one I wrote for Jeff because he was so scruffy.

*Don't call me baby out on the street
Or when I'm playing next door.
Don't call me darling
Or sweetheart
Or pet
I don't like those names anymore.
Just call me Jeffrey or Tommy
Or whatever name comes in your head,
But still call me sweetheart and pet at night,
When you put me to bed.*

CF: Every birthday, Valentine's Day, and anniversary you have written a poem for your husband, Lloyd. It is a gift to us that you've decided to share them in your new book, *You Caught Me Kissing*. What inspired your decision to publish this book?

DB: Jeff had just finished making the film *A Door In the Floor*. He's also a talented photographer and creates a book of photography with a narrative, encapsulating the making of the film. It's like a love gift for the cast and crew, for every film he does. We were all having lunch at the Peninsula Hotel one day. The waiter told Jeff that a gentleman, over yonder, would like you to call him. He wanted Jeff to write a children's book. Jeff said, "My mom is the writer in our family. I'll send you some of her stuff."

LB: Dorothy had just come home from the hospital and the family had one of their round-table meetings with some representatives from I-Books, in connection with Simon & Schuster, to decide what to do. They were fascinated with the work they received and wanted to meet with the whole family.

CF: Is there a story behind the title of your new book, *You Caught Me Kissing*?

DB: There was pressure to change the title from *I Sent My Love A Valentine* so it could be marketed throughout the year. Cindy and I were playing



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Scrabble and having martinis at the beach. She told me to put a book over my head and meditate on a new title. I began thinking of this photograph of Lloyd and I kissing when he was on a movie set when she asked, "Have you thought of anything yet?" and I said, "*You Caught Me Kissing!*"

At my husband's memorial service, the children read some of my poems to him. It wasn't a sad thing. It was more of a celebration of his life.

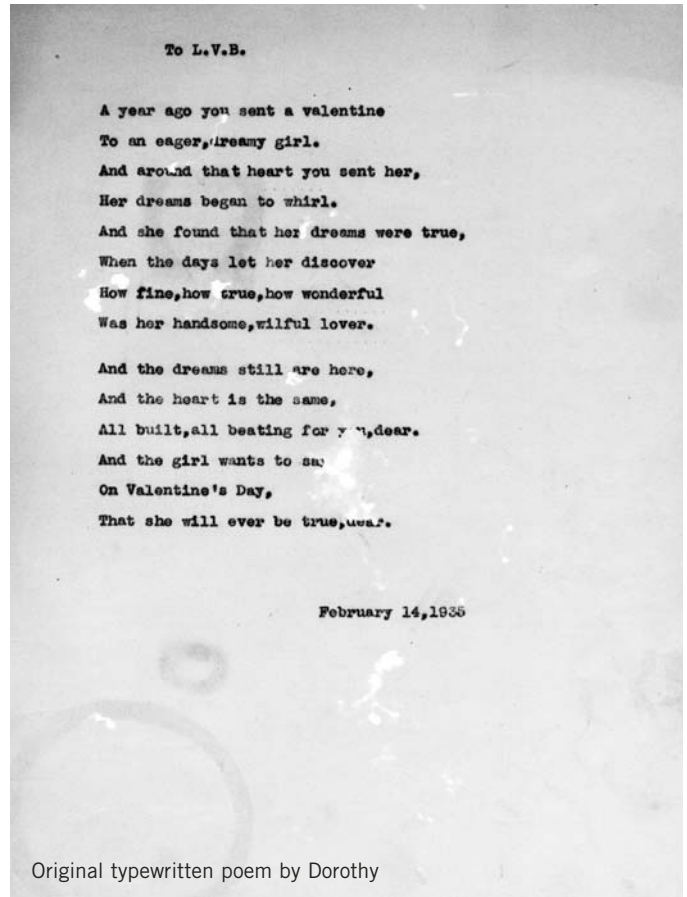
After Bud died, when the time came to write a Valentine, I couldn't help but write another Valentine, even though he wasn't here. In an excerpt she wrote:

*What makes me take my pen once more?
I see the day is drawing near,
My yearly purpose makes it clear,
I'll write the words and use what art'
To let you know what's in my heart.*

In speaking about what it feels like to have her work published, she said, "Sometimes it's very scary. I'd like it to appeal to those who relate and feel like they had written the poem themselves."



Preparing for a part



Original typewritten poem by Dorothy

LB: She's a very cool, loving mommy. We worked three months going through books, boxes of archival photos, and secret stashes of forgotten writings for the book. It was a rich, fulfilling journey for both of us. A book tour is planned, beginning with *The Today Show*, which will be shot in the family home, a book signing date at The Grove's Barnes and Noble January 27th at 7:30 PM, then on to New York City and possibly Chicago, for *Oprah*.

She has written thirteen chapters of her memoirs and is attempting to complete the last three challenging chapters.

CF: They used to call you The General. How did you earn that nickname?

DB: I like everything to be planned and stick to that plan. For example, at a party, I like people to pay attention to the birthday boy or birthday girl. We go around the table and each guest tells their favorite memory about that person. If you don't know the person, there is an alternative. You can tell a joke, sing a song, or tell your first sexual experience!

CF: Who are your favorite poets?

DB: I like Edna St. Vincent Millay, Emily Dickenson, and Dorothy Parker.

CF: What do you consider your greatest achievement?

DB: Raising my children.

CF: What is your most marked characteristic?

DB: Setting the stage for having a good time.

CF: If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

DB: I would be more disciplined about what I ate.

CF: What talent would you most like to have?

DB: I'd love to be able to sing.

LB: Either dad or mom sang to us every night, especially a Lullaby written by their good friend Betty Garrett and Jerry Dolin. As the years went by, we've all sung it to our own children.

CF: What is it that you most dislike?

DB: People pretending to be something they're not.

CF: Who are your heroes or heroines in real life?

DB: Jimmy Carter, Nelson Mandela, and Hillary Clinton.

CF: When are you happiest?

DB: When all my family's around me.

CF: What do you value most in your friends?

DB: I value humor.

When asked, if there is one thing she'd like people to walk away feeling after reading her book, Dorothy answered, "To know how precious love is in their life."

Thank you for your poems, Dorothy. They are beautiful and full of heart in their honesty, humor, and love. They are private and at the same time, universal songs.