

This book is for you if...

- you have lost a loved one unexpectedly, and you want to know how to overcome the unbearable pain
- you have experienced other traumatic losses in your life
- you would like to learn more about the life lessons, processes and strategies to help you through difficult periods in your life
- you love real-life stories and memoirs
- you are searching for inspiration and motivation
- you are considering a journey of healing to help yourself and others
- you need to release yourself from feelings of self-doubt that hold you back
- you want to immerse yourself in a journey of self-discovery, growth and acceptance
- you want to learn how to move forward with your life
- you are hoping for a thought-provoking read

“Written from the heart! Hooked from the beginning, I went from pining for days gone by, to empathy and tears, and finally joy for my friend (‘The Cas Lass gone good’) who didn’t just survive trauma, but found her way to happiness and fulfilment.

Yvonne shares a tumultuous personal journey in a compelling, relatable, authentic way. A rare, humorous and inspirational page turner. Yvonne skilfully shares her own life lessons (‘Yvonne’s Top Tips’) and uses a wonderful vocabulary to evoke detailed imagery and engaging stories.”

**Kate Osborne**  
**Mindfulness Trainer and Results Trained Coach**



“They say that what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, and Yvonne epitomises that phrase over and over again. Trauma, loss, divorce, health issues, dealing with deprivation and more, this lady has been there and got the T-shirt!

I’ve known Yvonne for many years and didn’t know half of what she has written in her book. I’d sum it up by saying it is a handbook for life, and I love the snippets of wisdom at the end of each chapter.

Having authored myself, this doubtless has been a cathartic and healing process for Yvonne, and I know it will help so many people. Well done!”

**Colin Tansley**  
**Author of *Mastering the Wolf* and**  
***The Little Book of Wolfie Wisdom***

“A searingly honest account of an ordinary woman’s life, who through sheer hard work and determination has turned her life around and become a successful businesswoman following a devastating forced adoption at just 15 years old.

The basic principle of learning how to love and value yourself before others is a life lesson; hard to learn but, once grasped, proves vital.

A thought-provoking story if you are willing to be honest with yourself; you may well find answers to questions you didn’t realise you were looking for.

Good luck with the book, Vonnie!”

**Tracey  
Retired Police Officer**



“Are you one of them? There are so many people that would benefit from reading this book. Would you like to feel happier, have more confidence, and learn to like and understand yourself?

The author has laid her soul bare, giving total transparency of her life. It is a journey from a happy childhood to traumatic teenage years through to the responsibilities of adult and parenthood. Despite many struggles and setbacks, she has risen to the top of her profession and found happiness in all aspects of her life. A truly inspirational read.”

**Christine Ivel  
An avid reader who is very proud of  
her friend The Cas Lass**

“I have so much admiration for Yvonne writing this book as she has been open and honest, telling what is an extremely moving account of her life and family.

Yvonne has not been afraid to tackle subjects that are uncomfortable to deal with, and she does not shy away from the after-effects of what she had to deal with.

Having worked with Yvonne, she has used all of her experience to build a successful career and family life that she should be extremely proud of, and I am privileged to know her.”

**Janet Shreeve**

**Mother, Grandmother, Business Owner and Director**



“*Memory Boxes* is a thought-provoking book, rooted in truth and family. It demonstrates Yvonne’s bravery, passion, vulnerability, pain, and resilience. She is not afraid to admit to missteps and misjudgement, which makes it an absorbing, refreshing memoir.

*Memory Boxes* is utterly heartbreaking yet uplifting, and will linger in your mind long after you have read it.”

**Olivia Eisinger**

**Freelance Editor and Proofreader**

**One Woman's Story of  
Forced Adoption, Loss and Self-Loathing**

# Memory Boxes

**Illuminating a Path to Happiness**

**Yvonne Tomlinson**



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This book is memoir.  
It reflects the author's present recollections of experiences over time. Some names and characteristics have been changed, some events have been compressed, and some dialogue has been recreated.

*This book is dedicated to my Grandad Fred,  
a hard working miner whose unconditional love  
never wavered.*

Sample



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Sample

# Foreword

**M***emory Boxes* is a book by a true Yorkshire woman and will be enjoyed by all Yorkshire and Northern women in particular. Yvonne Tomlinson's description of her family, her community, her experience of school life, marriage, divorce, love and loss, told in the words and cadence of a Northern woman, will resonate with many Northerners, especially with working class backgrounds. Her descriptions of personal and family tragedy, and coming to terms with them, will also resonate – but most especially with those who share her culture and heritage.

The theme that runs throughout the book, etched into the narrative as it is etched into her life, is the removal of her son at birth, and the silence that then surrounded this heart-wrenching experience. This is the tragedy that defines *Memory Boxes* and around which all the other themes coalesce. It even defines the structure of

the book, as she metaphorically boxes up this memory as a teenager and puts it away, and continues to box up her other memories. It is on writing the book that she finally opens the boxes and reflects on her memories.

Nevertheless, it is clear that although this terrible event has left an indelible mark on her life, she is not defined by it; she comes from a close knit family, full of love and joy. She has experienced deeply fulfilling life partnerships, has excelled in her work, enjoys golf and friendships, and dotes on her children and grandchildren. This is a life well-lived in and amongst the tragedies that come to us all. In this way, the story is both her story and everyone's story – and this is its deep attraction.

Reading *Memory Boxes* is like sitting down with your girlfriends one long sunny afternoon with a bottle of Prosecco (or two!) and sharing stories about each others' lives. The book has a warm, homely feel about ordinary people's lives and the wisdom of living, loving and learning. The extraordinary in the ordinary, the joys and sorrows of living, the determination and the love to find your path from the dark places, to come to terms with your greatest tragedies and, like the air, rise.

The word that comes to mind is cherish – a woman and a book to cherish. Thank you for sharing your story, Yvonne; I raise my glass to you, and wish you and your family well.

**Ruth Weston**

**Social Entrepreneur, Birth & Maternity Services Activist  
and Campaigner**



## Why?

Dear Reader:

**F**or years I had unanswered questions that nobody could help me with. Locking memories away in the box within my brain was easy, but it wasn't the answer – I didn't know that at the time.

For those of you who are going through difficult times, I don't have all the answers; I don't even have all my own answers but I do, however, have my own personal learning. We go through many things in life that change the direction of our path. My direction was changed at the age of 15, with innocence gone and a change that had a long-lasting effect on my life.

Those around me were unaware. Masterful at wearing a mask, I hid my emotions, the smile on my face covering many a true feeling.

I tried on many occasions to move on and to forget. However, one day, out of the blue, a television programme triggered a memory that made the mask slip – tears flowed and my mood altered. This was alien to me.

Opening up to someone is a starting point, but I couldn't open up to those closest to me. Fortunately, friends persuaded me and pointed me in the right direction. Asking for help is hard, but once you have done so, it gets easier; you learn to cope, to understand, and to make choices.

My choice was to let my past eat away at me and take me down a long and dark tunnel. Luckily, I discovered a hidden strength, deep within the recesses of my mind and soul, that was supported by my ex-husband, current partner, friends and children. They were and are my sense of reality which I will always remember. They didn't judge me, but gave me strength.

### **Why Am I Writing This Book?**

I want to help others to understand that we are all individuals; our life experiences make us the person we are. Acknowledgement doesn't happen overnight. To get to where you want to be takes time, honesty and transparency.

Contraversally, forgiveness is not always required; you don't always need to forgive others and you don't need to forgive yourself.

WHY?

I am truly happy with my life. It has been a journey, no, rephrase that – it IS a journey, a journey of learning, emotions, understanding, acknowledgement of the happy times, the sad times, and the everyday lifetimes.

*Yvonne*

Sample

Sample





# Memory Box 1: Childhood

## Nostalgic Echoes of Innocence

### Play

In the golden haze of memory, I revisit those long, sun-drenched summer days of childhood. The 1960s was a time when the neighbourhood street transformed into a playground, and the only rule was to play until the sun dipped below the horizon. It was an era where the dirt on your skin was a badge of resilience, a shield against the invisible foes that hovered in the background. Climbing trees, crafting toys from anything we could lay our hands on, indulging in games of hide and seek, and kicking a ball in the middle of the street were rites of passage, unencumbered by thoughts of risk.

In those days, my mother's hair blazed like a flame, and she exuded youth and vitality. Frolicking under

the evening sun, I often found myself curious about the conversations shared by the mothers while we kids revelled in the freedom of the outdoors. Our street saw only sporadic traffic and was a safe haven.

I recall the art of skipping, a skill my mother taught me, turning a simple washing line into a makeshift skipping rope. The rhythmic twining of the rope by the mothers at either end created a makeshift arena for our exuberant jumps. Bumps and grazes were the currency of our play, earned as our feet tangled with the skipping rope, sending us tumbling to the ground. And as the evening drew to a close, fatigue battled with our reluctance to surrender to bedtime.

The 1970s bestowed upon us endless summer days, a time when the outdoors trumped the allure of the television screen. Computers and electronic games were not for the likes of us; our entertainment was forged in the practicality and ingenuity of building go-karts with scavenged pram wheels and discarded wood. Johnny and Shawn, the local go-kart virtuosos, transformed our mundane afternoons into thrilling races along the pavement, with no hint of the backaches that plague modern sedentary pursuits.

Kites soared in the azure sky, fashioned from plastic bags, string and canes, masterfully crafted by my dad. Our kites became loyal companions, accompanying us wherever we roamed. Life was simple, and happiness was measured by the love shared among us.

My younger brother, Martin, affectionately nicknamed Ginger Babby by our parents, mirrored my every

step. The self-appointed strong and bossy big sister, I inadvertently led him down the paths of scraped knees and teary escapades. Yet, our bond was unbreakable, a testament to the shared adventures and occasional mishaps.

Amid this innocence, a daredevil spirit beckoned. I became the 'tomboy,' thirsty for excitement. That's what we called girls before the millennium who played with boys, and preferred the rough and tumble of boys' games rather than dolls. Martin, my faithful companion, followed in my footsteps, both figuratively and literally. His admiration was evident as he attempted to climb a tree after witnessing my fearless ascent. Predictably, he would tumble, tears and scraped knees the price of his daring imitation. Guilt cloaked me briefly; after all, as the elder sister, I should have known better. Yet, our childhood mischief carried on, oblivious to the consequences that loomed in the shadows.

One particular year stands out vividly, a time when we resided in the suburb of Airedale, in Yorkshire. Our three-bedroomed council house witnessed the whims of innocence. The streets echoed with children's laughter, untethered by the constraints of traffic, watched over only by nosy neighbours. A kite-flying escapade took an unexpected turn when Martin lost control, and our prized possession hitched a ride on a passing double-decker bus! Laughter turned to dismay as the bus carried our kite away, and we chased it down the road in futile pursuit. The consequences of our escapade were inconsequential then; we were free spirits, undeterred by the unforeseen risks of our adventures.

In those bygone days, our journeys were guided not by GPS but by familiar landmarks. The garage, with its adjacent sweet shop, served as our North Star. Crossing main roads at a tender age, I felt the rush of independence. The sweet shop, a treasure trove of delights, beckoned with its jars filled with sugary wonders. Watching the sweets tip onto the scales, the sound of their measured weight in ounces, held a certain magic. A sixpence could buy me black chews and monkey nuts, timeless treats that still evoke the flavours of my youth. The memory of blackened teeth and sticky smiles remains, a testament to a time when innocence was savoured and pleasures were simple.

In the symphony of recollections, these fragments of childhood innocence composed the overture to a life marked by simplicity, camaraderie, and the boundless joy of unfettered play.

## **The Forgotten Stroll**

### **In the Shadows of Innocence**

Let's journey back further into the recesses of my childhood, a time when my brother was confined to the safety of his pram, cocooned in the embrace of our seemingly idyllic neighbourhood. It was an era when Mum felt an unwavering sense of security as she manoeuvred the world with a pram, a symbol of maternal devotion.

On a routine day, we embarked on a pilgrimage to the local Co-op, a mere 15-minute walk from our house. I