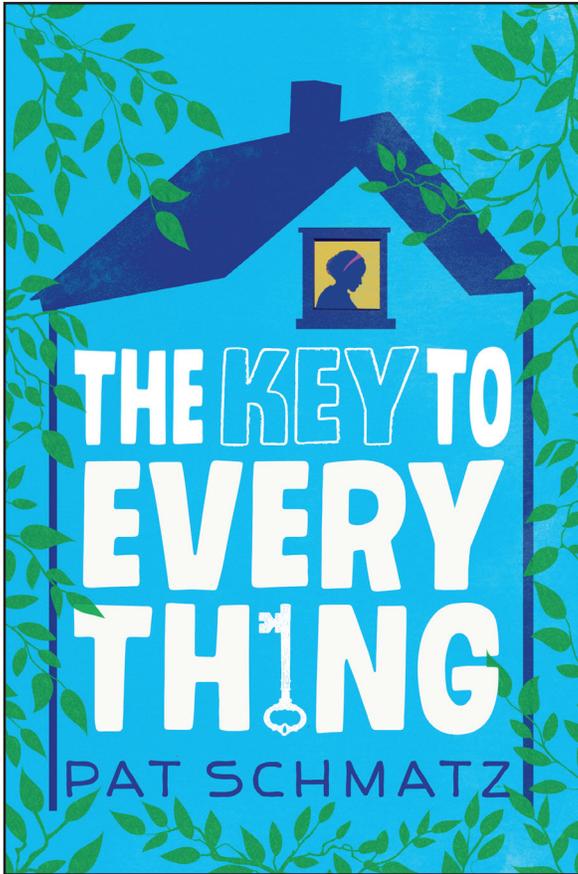


# SOMETIMES BEING A GOOD FRIEND MEANS LETTING GO



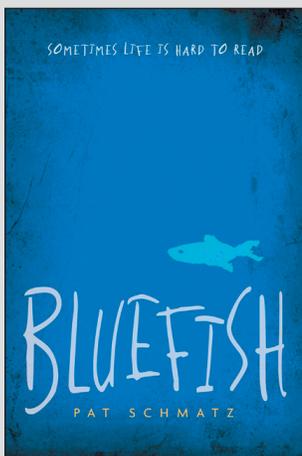
HC: 978-0-7636-9566-8 • Also available as an e-book and in audio  
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## THE KEY TO EVERYTHING

PAT SCHMATZ

Tash didn't want to go to camp, didn't want to spend the summer with a bunch of strangers, didn't want to be separated from the only two people she has ever been able to count on: her uncle Kevin, who saved her from foster care, and Cap'n Jackie, who lives next door. Camp turns out to be pretty fun, actually, but when Tash returns home, Cap'n Jackie is gone. Tash needs her—and the made-up stories of dolphin-dragons, the warm cookies that made everything all right after a fight, the key Cap'n Jackie always insisted had magic in it. The Captain always said all Tash had to do was hold it tight and the magic would come. Was it true? Could the key bring Cap'n Jackie back? In a heartfelt and stunningly written story, Pat Schmatz introduces readers to a tenacious, fiercely loyal girl struggling to let go of the fantasies and fears of her childhood . . . and say yes to everything that lies ahead.

**Pat Schmatz** is the author of the critically acclaimed *Bluefish* as well as *Lizard Radio*, which won the James Tiptree Jr. Literary Award for science fiction or fantasy. Pat Schmatz lives in Minneapolis.



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## Praise for BLUEFISH

- ★ “*Bluefish* is a lively, often-humorous, and ultimately hopeful page-turner. It has all the hallmarks of a classic contemporary young adult issues novel. It’s packed with memorable and believable characters and powered by the prospect of redemption and just a hint of romance.” — *School Library Journal* (starred review)
- ★ “With allusions to *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief*, this novel is also an ode to the significance of reading in the lives of young people and to a teacher who knows the power literature can wield. Unique and original, believable and poignant, this is a book with power of its own.” — *The Horn Book* (starred review)
- ★ “Readers seeking emotional warmth, congenial humor, and an affirmation of forgiveness and friendship will cozy up to these characters.” — *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books* (starred review)



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## A note from PAT SCHMATZ



Photo by Barrie Brewer

I've always loved stories about families, but my own family experience never seemed like anything I could write about. Neither my family of origin nor my adult family is anything like the Gilbreths, the Logans, or my other beloved literary families. My family, past and present, is a mix of biological and chosen, a complex conglomeration of in-laws and outlaws, adopted cousins, queers and rebels and shirttail relations.

A few years back, my friend and chosen sibling Nora gave me a bent skeleton key that she'd found in a secondhand shop and said, "I think it has a story — maybe you'll write it."

I carried the key in my pocket for several years. Then, one sunny summer morning in Pittsburgh, the key finally spoke. I was in town visiting the delightful Katz family, who have taken me in as one of their own. I'd gone out for a solo walk in Schenley Park, and over two hours a tale of intergenerational love and grief and magic first revealed itself to me.

The story came more sharply into focus as my own family moved through major transitions. Most significantly, a doctor told my ninety-one-year-old mother that her time was up, and she entered hospice. My mother, a classroom teacher for more than fifty years, loved family and stories. She was our family historian. She made her own decisions about meeting Death, and that six months of hospice time turned out to be less than two weeks.

Meetings with Death happen every day and all the time, in all of our families. Everyone does it differently, but everyone does it. My mother's meeting took place as I was reading aloud to her — *Cheaper by the Dozen*, a family story we both loved.

I lost the key during those two weeks I was helping her transition. I turned two houses and an apartment upside down looking for it but never found it. I didn't think I could finish the book without it — but I did.

*The Key to Every Thing* is about transition and growth, loss and loyalty. It's about the stubborn and unpredictable people who bring chaos and joy and fury to our lives. It's a story of love for our families' oddities and respect for the choices they make, some of which we approve of and some of which we will never understand.

It's a story of everything and Every Thing and how we make our way in the world, with and without our beloveds.



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#thekeytoeverything