



When Breath Becomes Air

By Paul Kalanithi



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#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • For readers of Atul Gawande, Andrew Solomon, and Anne Lamott, this inspiring, exquisitely observed memoir finds hope and beauty in the face of insurmountable odds as an idealistic young neurosurgeon attempts to answer the question *What makes a life worth living?*

**NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY
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At the age of thirty-six, on the verge of completing a decade's worth of training as a neurosurgeon, Paul Kalanithi was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer. One day he was a doctor treating the dying, and the next he was a patient struggling to live. And just like that, the future he and his wife had imagined evaporated. *When Breath Becomes Air* chronicles Kalanithi's transformation from a naïve medical student "possessed," as he wrote, "by the question of what, given that all organisms die, makes a virtuous and meaningful life" into a neurosurgeon at Stanford working in the brain, the most critical place for human identity, and finally into a patient and new father confronting his own mortality.

What makes life worth living in the face of death? What do you do when the future, no longer a ladder toward your goals in life, flattens out into a perpetual present? What does it mean to have a child, to nurture a new life as another fades away? These are some of the questions Kalanithi wrestles with in this profoundly moving, exquisitely observed memoir.

Paul Kalanithi died in March 2015, while working on this book, yet his words live on as a guide and a gift to us all. "I began to realize that coming face to face with my own mortality, in a sense, had changed nothing and everything," he wrote. "Seven words from Samuel Beckett began to repeat in my head: 'I can't go on. I'll go on.'" *When Breath Becomes Air* is an unforgettable, life-affirming reflection on the challenge of facing death and on the relationship between doctor and patient, from a brilliant writer who became both.

Praise for *When Breath Becomes Air*

"I guarantee that finishing this book and then forgetting about it is simply not an

option. . . . Part of this book's tremendous impact comes from the obvious fact that its author was such a brilliant polymath. And part comes from the way he conveys what happened to him—passionately working and striving, deferring gratification, waiting to live, learning to die—so well.”—**Janet Maslin, *The New York Times***

“An emotional investment well worth making: a moving and thoughtful memoir of family, medicine and literature. It is, despite its grim undertone, accidentally inspiring.”—***The Washington Post***

“Possesses the gravity and wisdom of an ancient Greek tragedy . . . [Kalanithi] delivers his chronicle in austere, beautiful prose. The book brims with insightful reflections on mortality that are especially poignant coming from a trained physician familiar with what lies ahead.”—***The Boston Globe***

“Devastating and spectacular . . . [Kalanithi] is so likeable, so relatable, and so humble, that you become immersed in his world and forget where it's all heading.”—***USA Today***

“It's [Kalanithi's] unsentimental approach that makes *When Breath Becomes Air* so original—and so devastating. . . . Its only fault is that the book, like his life, ends much too early.”—***Entertainment Weekly***

“Split my head open with its beauty.”—**Cheryl Strayed**

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of January 2016: *When Breath Becomes Air* is a powerful look at a stage IV lung cancer diagnosis through the eyes of a neurosurgeon. When Paul Kalanithi is given his diagnosis he is forced to see this disease, and the process of being sick, as a patient rather than a doctor--the result of his experience is not just a look at what living is and how it works from a scientific perspective, but the ins and outs of what makes life matter. This heart-wrenching book will capture you from page one and still have you thinking long after the final sentence. —*Penny Mann*

Review

“I guarantee that finishing this book and then forgetting about it is simply not an option. . . . Part of this book’s tremendous impact comes from the obvious fact that its author was such a brilliant polymath. And part comes from the way he conveys what happened to him—passionately working and striving, deferring gratification, waiting to live, learning to die—so well. None of it is maudlin. Nothing is exaggerated. As he wrote to a friend: ‘It’s just tragic enough and just imaginable enough.’ And just important enough to be unmissable.”—**Janet Maslin, *The New York Times***

“Paul Kalanithi’s memoir, *When Breath Becomes Air*, written as he faced a terminal cancer diagnosis, is inherently sad. But it’s an emotional investment well worth making: a moving and thoughtful memoir of family, medicine and literature. It is, despite its grim undertone, accidentally inspiring.”—***The Washington Post***

“Paul Kalanithi’s posthumous memoir, *When Breath Becomes Air*, possesses the gravity and wisdom of an ancient Greek tragedy. . . . [Kalanithi] delivers his chronicle in austere, beautiful prose. The book brims with insightful reflections on mortality that are especially poignant coming from a trained physician familiar with what lies ahead. . . . The narrative voice is so assured and powerful that you almost expect him to survive his own death and carry on describing what happened to his friends and family after he is gone.”—***The Boston Globe***

“Devastating and spectacular . . . [Kalanithi] is so likeable, so relatable, and so humble, that you become immersed in his world and forget where it’s all heading.”—***USA Today***

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“[*When Breath Becomes Air*] split my head open with its beauty.”—**Cheryl Strayed**

“Rattling, heartbreaking, and ultimately beautiful, the too-young Dr. Kalanithi’s memoir is proof that the dying are the ones who have the most to teach us about life.”—**Atul Gawande**

“Thanks to *When Breath Becomes Air*, those of us who never met Paul Kalanithi will both mourn his death and benefit from his life. This is one of a handful of books I consider to be a universal donor—I would recommend it to anyone, everyone.”—**Ann Patchett**

“Inspiring . . . Kalanithi strives to define his dual role as physician and patient, and he weighs in on such topics as what makes life meaningful and how one determines what is most important when little time is left.

. . . This deeply moving memoir reveals how much can be achieved through service and gratitude when a life is courageously and resiliently lived.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“A moving meditation on mortality by a gifted writer whose dual perspectives of physician and patient provide a singular clarity . . . Writing isn’t brain surgery, but it’s rare when someone adept at the latter is also so accomplished at the former.”—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“[A] moving and penetrating memoir . . . This eloquent, heartfelt meditation on the choices that make life worth living, even as death looms, will prompt readers to contemplate their own values and mortality.”—*Booklist*

“Dr. Kalanithi describes, clearly and simply, and entirely without self-pity, his journey from innocent medical student to professionally detached and all-powerful neurosurgeon to helpless patient, dying from cancer. Every doctor should read this book—written by a member of our own tribe, it helps us understand and overcome the barriers we all erect between ourselves and our patients as soon as we are out of medical school.”—**Henry Marsh, author of *Do No Harm: Stories of Life, Death, and Brain Surgery***

“A tremendous book, crackling with life, animated by wonder and by the question of how we should live. Paul Kalanithi lived and died in the pursuit of excellence, and by this testimonial, he achieved it.”—**Gavin Francis, author of *Adventures in Human Being***

About the Author

Paul Kalanithi was a neurosurgeon and writer. He grew up in Kingman, Arizona, and graduated from Stanford University with a BA and MA in English literature and a BA in human biology. He earned an MPhil in history and philosophy of science and medicine from the University of Cambridge and graduated cum laude from the Yale School of Medicine, where he was inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha national medical honor society. He returned to Stanford to complete his residency training in neurological surgery and a postdoctoral fellowship in neuroscience, during which he received the American Academy of Neurological Surgery’s highest award for research. He died in March 2015. He is survived by his large, loving family, including his wife, Lucy, and their daughter, Elizabeth Acadia.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Doris Simmons:

People live in this new moment of lifestyle always try and and must have the time or they will get large amount of stress from both everyday life and work. So , once we ask do people have free time, we will say absolutely indeed. People is human not really a huge robot. Then we consult again, what kind of activity have you got when the spare time coming to anyone of course your answer can unlimited right. Then do you ever try this one, reading textbooks. It can be your alternative throughout spending your spare time, the particular book you have read is definitely When Breath Becomes Air.

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