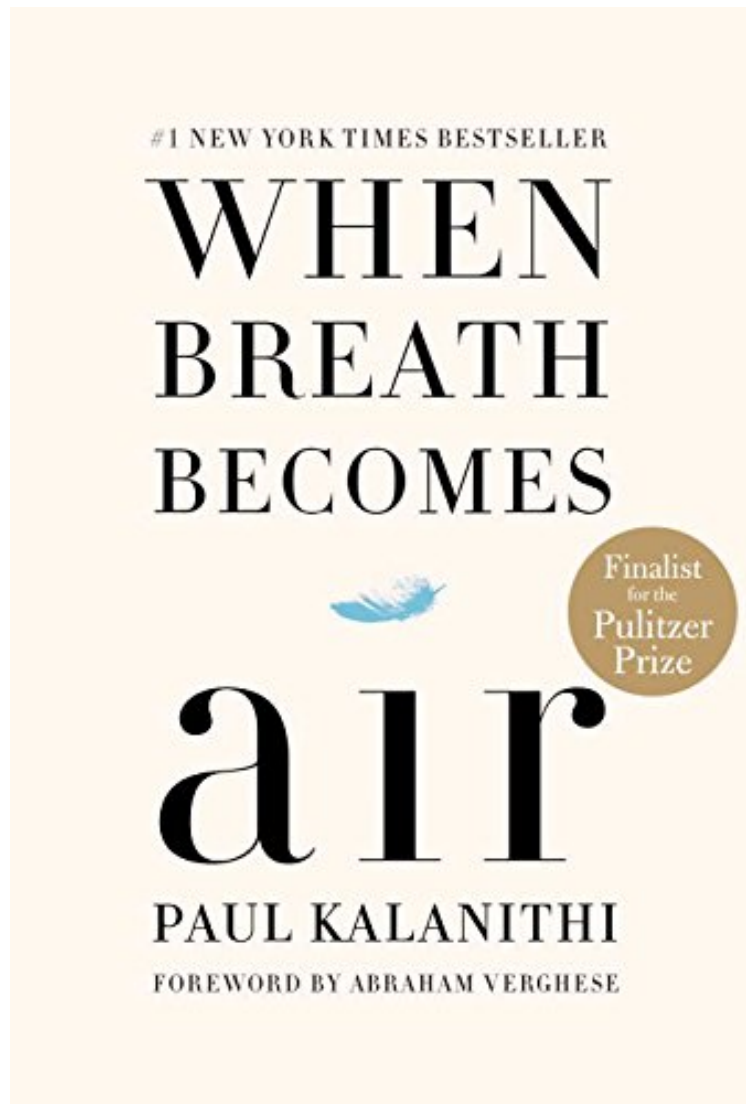


(Download pdf) When Breath Becomes Air

When Breath Becomes Air

Paul Kalanithi

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Paul Kalanithi : When Breath Becomes Air before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised When Breath Becomes Air:

1510 of 1558 people found the following review helpful. A remarkable book: Edifying, heartbreaking, eloquent and very realBy Ashutosh S. JogalekarI read this book in one sitting, long after the lights should have been turned off. I felt like not doing so would have been a disservice to Paul Kalanithi. After reading the book I felt stunned and hopeful in equal parts. Stunned because of the realization that someone as prodigiously talented and eloquent as Dr. Kalanithi

was taken from the world at such an early age. Hopeful because even in his brief life of thirty-seven years he showcased what we as human beings are capable of in our best incarnations. His family can rest assured that he will live on through his book. *When Breath Becomes Air* details Dr. Kalanithi's life as a neurosurgeon and his fight against advanced lung cancer. Even in his short life he achieved noteworthy recognition as a scholar, a surgeon, a scientist and now - posthumously - as a writer. The book is a tale of tribulations and frank reflections. Ultimately there's not much triumph in it in the traditional sense but there is a dogged, quiet resilience and a frank earthiness that endures long after the last word appears. The tribulations occur in both Dr. Kalanithi's stellar career and his refusal to give in to the illness which ultimately consumed him. The first part of the book could almost stand separately as an outstanding account of the coming of age of a neurosurgeon and writer. Dr. Kalanithi talks about his upbringing as the child of hardworking Indian immigrant parents and his tenacious and passionate espousal of medicine and literature. He speaks lovingly of his relationship with his remarkable wife - also a doctor - who he met in medical school and who played an outsized role in supporting him through everything he went through. He had a stunning and multifaceted career, studying biology and literature at Stanford, then history and philosophy of medicine at Cambridge, and finally neurosurgery at Yale. Along the way he became not just a neurosurgeon who worked grueling hours and tried to glimpse the very soul of his discipline, but also an eloquent writer. The mark of a man of letters is evident everywhere in the book, and quotes from Eliot, Beckett, Pope and Shakespeare make frequent appearances. Accounts of how Dr. Kalanithi wrestled with walking the line between objective medicine and compassionate humanity when it came to treating his patients give us an inside view of medicine as practiced at its most intimate level. Metaphors abound and the prose often soars: When describing how important it is to develop good surgical technique, he tells us that "Technical excellence was a moral requirement"; meanwhile, the overwhelming stress of late night shifts, hundred hour weeks and patients with acute trauma made him occasionally feel like he was "trapped in an endless jungle summer, wet with sweat, the rain of tears of the dying pouring down". This is writing that comes not from the brain or from the heart, but from the gut. When we lost Dr. Kalanithi we lost not only a great doctor but a great writer spun from the same cloth as Oliver Sacks and Atul Gawande. It is in the second part of the book that the devastating tide of disease and death creeps in, even as Dr. Kalanithi is suddenly transformed from a doctor into a patient. It must be slightly bizarre to be on the other side of the mirror and intimately know everything that is happening to your body and Dr. Kalanithi is brutally frank in communicating his disbelief, his tears, his hope and his understanding of his fatal disease. It's worth noting that this candid recognition permeates the entire account. Science mingles with emotion as compassionate doctors, family and a battery of medications and tests become a mainstay of life. The painful uncertainty which he documents - in particular the tyranny of statistics which makes it impossible to predict how a specific individual will react to cancer therapy - must sadly be familiar to anyone who has had experience with the disease. As he says, "One has a very different relationship with statistics when one becomes one". There are heartbreaking descriptions of how at one point the cancer seemed to have almost disappeared and how, after Dr. Kalanithi had again cautiously made plans for a hopeful future with his wife, it returned with a vengeance and he had to finally stop working. There is no bravado in the story; as he says, the tumor was what it was and you simply experienced the feelings it brought to your mind and heart. What makes the book so valuable is this ready admission of what terminal disease feels like, especially an admission that is nonetheless infused with wise acceptance, hope and a tenacious desire to live, work and love normally. In spite of the diagnosis Dr. Kalanithi tries very hard - and succeeds admirably - to live a normal life. He returns to his surgery, he spends time with his family and most importantly, he decides to have a child with his wife. In his everyday struggles is seen a chronicle of the struggles that we will all face in some regard, and which thousands of people face on a daily basis. His constant partner in this struggle is his exemplary wife Lucy, whose epilogue is almost as eloquent as his own writing; I really hope that she picks up the baton where he left off. As Lucy tells us in the epilogue, this is not some simple tale of a man who somehow "beats" a disease by refusing to give up. It's certainly that, but it's much more because it's a very human tale of failure and fear, of uncertainty and despair, of cynicism and anger. And yes, it is also a tale of scientific understanding, of battling a disease even in the face of uncertainty, of poetry and philosophy, of love and family, and of bequeathing a legacy to a two year old daughter who will soon understand the kind of man her father was and the heritage he left behind. It's as good a testament to Dr. Kalanithi's favorite Beckett quote as anything I can think of: "I can't go on. I will go on". Read this book; it's devastating and heartbreaking, inspiring and edifying. Most importantly, it's real. 668 of 715 people found the following review helpful. *What Makes Life Meaningful* By Jill I. Shtulman Sometimes you don't go out and find a book; the book finds you. Facing an impending loss without a foundation of faith to fall back on, I find myself asking, What is the meaning of life if we're all just going to die? Paul Kalanithi answers that question in the most meaningful way possible in his outstanding book. A 36-year-old neurosurgeon, Paul wrestled between medicine and literature as an eventual career. Medicine won out and he was just on the cusp of a stellar trajectory when he was diagnosed with metastatic lung cancer. Paul nurtured a passionate belief in the moral dimensions of his job. He also strongly believed that the relational aspect between people undergirded meaning and that life's meaning has everything to do with the depth of the relationships we form in our journey. He says this, The secret is to know that the deck is stacked, that you will lose, that your hands or judgment will slip, and yet still struggle to win. You can't ever reach

perfection, but you can believe in an asymptote toward which are ceaselessly striving. Just as his surgeons scalpel eased disease of the brain and saved lives, his words give reasons for living. The grace with which he navigates his journey from a top-rated surgical resident to writer to his most important role of all, husband and father of a young daughter his book is ample testimony to how one life well-lived can continue to create such a great impact. In the foreword by fellow doctor and writer Abraham Verghese, that doctor writes, He (Paul) wasn't writing about anything he was writing about time and what it meant to him now, in the context of his illness. And in the afterword by his wife Lucy, the meaning of that time becomes even clearer. I felt the sense of having lost a personal friend. Let me make this clear if I haven't already: this is NOT a self-pitying, manipulative memoir and it is not the reason I'm 5-starring it. It's a beautifully written, insightful, page-turning book on how we connect as humans and why life no matter how truncated is worth living. I will be recommending this strongly to just about everyone in my life. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Beautifully Written By Kevin Wright In *When Breath Becomes Air*, Paul Kalanithi describes memorable moments and obstacles in his life. Paul, a brilliant Stanford surgeon, is diagnosed with lung cancer in his mid-30s, despite having never smoked in his life. Paul's beautiful writing paints a vivid picture of his life. His stories, from cutting open his first body to napping in the desert, all become lifelike and encapsulating because of his diction. He was an obvious polymath, with a masters degree in English from Stanford and a medical degree from Yale. He excelled academically. He writes in the book, You can't ever reach perfection, but you can believe in an asymptote toward which you are ceaselessly striving. Throughout his life, he searches for the meaning of life. He pursued medicine to find out what makes life meaningful, especially at the end of life. Paul argues that human relationships are what make life meaningful. He was a neurosurgeon resident, at the peak of his career, right before he was able to practice with no supervisors. I would recommend this book to anyone. It was an easy and enjoyable read. I finished it in its entirety in two sittings. Paul's life story is incredibly interesting and his message is compelling.

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER PULITZER PRIZE FINALIST 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 The New York Times Book Review People NPR The Washington Post Slate Harpers Bazaar Esquire Time Out New York Publishers Weekly BookPage Finalist for the PEN Center USA Literary Award in Creative Nonfiction and the Books for a Better Life Award in Inspirational Memoir 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 naive 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

.com An 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 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: Its just tragic enough and just imaginable enough. And just important enough to be unmissable. Janet Maslin, *The New York Times* Paul Kalanithis memoir, *When Breath Becomes Air*, written as he faced a terminal cancer diagnosis, is inherently sad. But its 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 Kalanithis 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 its all heading. *USA Today* Its [Kalanithis] 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* [When Breath Becomes Air] split my head open with its beauty. Cheryl Strayed Rattling, heartbreaking, and ultimately beautiful, the too-young Dr. Kalanithis 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 isnt brain surgery, but its rare when someone adept at the latter is also so accomplished at the former. *Kirkus* s (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.