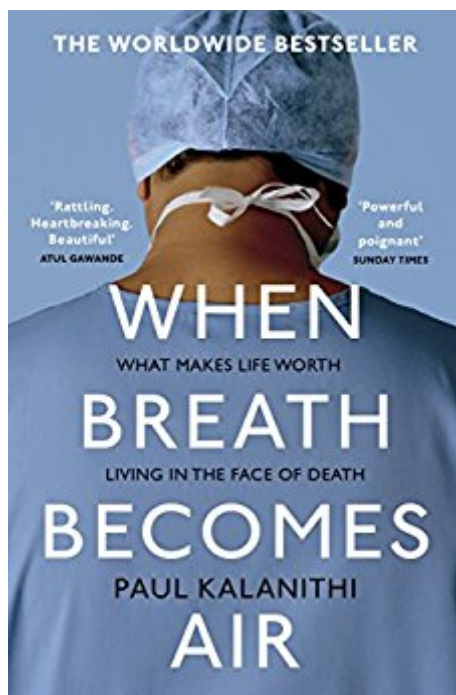


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# When Breath Becomes Air



## Synopsis

THE NEW YORK TIMES NUMBER ONE BESTSELLER THE SUNDAY TIMES NUMBER ONE BESTSELLER SHORTLISTED FOR THE WELLCOME BOOK PRIZE 2017 'Finishing this book and then forgetting about it is simply not an option...Unmissable' New York Times At the age of thirty-six, on the verge of completing a decade's training as a neurosurgeon, Paul Kalanithi was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. One day he was a doctor treating the dying, the next he was a patient struggling to live. When *Breath Becomes Air* chronicles Kalanithi's transformation from a medical student asking what makes a virtuous and meaningful life into a neurosurgeon working in the core of human identity—the brain—and finally into a patient and a new father. What makes life worth living in the face of death? What do you do when life is catastrophically interrupted? What does it mean to have a child as your own life fades away? Paul Kalanithi died while working on this profoundly moving book, yet his words live on as a guide to us all. *Breath Becomes Air* is a life-affirming reflection on facing our mortality and on the relationship between doctor and patient, from a gifted writer who became both.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I 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

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 surgeon’s 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.

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