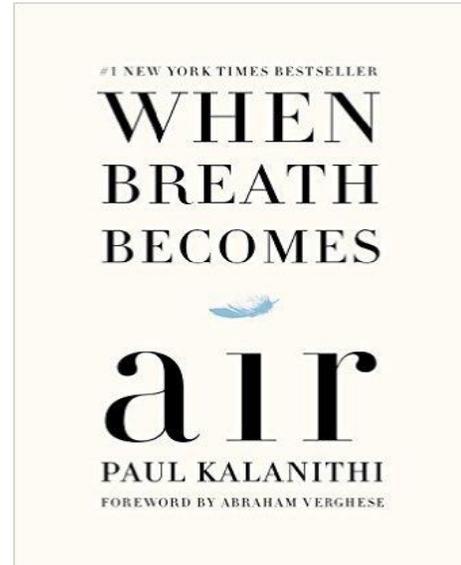


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*Spotlight on Books*

*When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi

At age thirty-six and at the cusp of his career as a neurosurgeon, Dr. Paul Kalanithi received a terrible terminal diagnosis. He learned that he was suffering from an advanced and virulent lung cancer that would end his life sooner than later. Many faced with such a diagnosis turn away in denial but Paul Kalanithi was one of those who faced it head on.



A true renaissance man, Paul used his brilliant writerly gifts to make sense of what was happening to him with the goal of leaving a memoir for his family that could also function as a how to guide for others dealing with a similar fate. In his own very elegant words *“Severe illness wasn’t life altering, it was life shattering. It felt less like an epiphany ... and more like someone had just firebombed the path forward”*. In addition to medical training, the author had earned a degree in English literature and had read widely since childhood. This background infuses his prose with a lyrical quality that is breathtaking.

Medicine requires a great deal from its practitioners and Kalanithi brought a workaholic nature to his challenging specialty. Like many, he was waiting to tick off a few more boxes on his career path before he began to enjoy life outside of the operating room but ironically what remained was the necessity of learning how to die. He quickly learns how to separate the wheat from the chaff and he and his wife dedicate themselves to strengthening their marriage which had been faltering and also engage in the death defying act of having a child.

Cancer memoirs are prolific and this title stands head and shoulders above most. Paul Kalanithi belongs to that gifted group of medical men – think Atul Gawande and Abraham Verghese – who librarian Nancy Pearl has described as *“physicians who write more than prescriptions”*. Never maudlin, *When Breath Becomes Air* lingers with the reader for a long time – there are so many passages worthy of re-reading. As the author wrote to a friend: *“It’s just tragic enough and just imaginable enough”*!

- Review prepared by Deborah Bruser