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Breathing For A Living: A Memoir



Synopsis

Now in paperback comes the moving account by an extraordinary young woman who mounted a daily struggle with cystic fibrosis in an effort to lead an ordinary life. Twenty-one-year-old Laura Rothenberg had always tried to live a normal life--even with lungs that betrayed her and a constant awareness that she might not live to see her next birthday. Like most people born with cystic fibrosis, the chronic disease that affects primarily the lungs, Laura struggled to come to grips with a life that had already been compromised in many ways. Sometimes healthy and able to attend school, other times hospitalized for weeks, Laura found solace in keeping a diary. In her writing, she could be open, honest, and irreverent, like the young person she was. Yet behind this voice is a penetrating maturity about her mortality, revealing a will and temperament that is fierce and insightful.

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Customer Reviews

Take a deep breath before you read this slim little volume - and then try to imagine you can't do it, can't draw in enough air to feel like you've accomplished anything. That's life for Laura Rothenberg, who, we readers know at the outset, died at age 22 of cystic fibrosis before seeing her memoir published. Strung together from a series of essays, diary notes, and emails she kept during her adolescence and very brief young adulthood, *Breathing for a Living* is a devastating portrayal of what life is like for a very young and very terminally ill person. It's raw, beautiful, bittersweet, honest - and as the most joyful section (a lung transplant becomes available) quickly becomes the saddest

as complications and tissue rejection set in, the writing becomes more illuminating and lustrous. Superb. Would that Laura had lived on to write again.

Laura was supposed to be in my year at Brown, and although I didn't know her, I knew her face as I did many of the other kids at Brown (being that we're about 5500 students). I was in one of her classes - the one that her grandmother refers to - and I clearly remember her coughing, the comments on the daily jolt, Laura's op-ed piece and the professor's remarks the next class. I remember being so disappointed and angry that the professor actually had to get up in front of our 500 student class and tell us to be respectful of one another. When I listened to Laura's piece on NPR, I felt chills throughout my body. This was someone I barely knew, but I could feel her strength and energy shining through. Reading her memoirs gave me a feeling that I can't explain - I knew some of her close friends at Brown and travelling back and forth between home, school, and multiple hospitals while remaining strong for others is such an admirable quality that many of us can't even imagine having. Laura is such a unique person with very strong qualities that I find truly amazing. Although her memoirs can be saddening, they're a reminder of how lucky we are and how trivial some of the things we complain about really are.

I first heard Laura Rothenberg's story on NPR - as a student at Brown she recorded her daily life with Cystic Fibrosis - waking up each day trying to breathe - multiple treatments each day to rid her lungs of the thick mucus that clogged her airways. A typical story of this chronic terminal disease, but told in private, personal terms. Laura was a model for other students her age - she so wanted to live and to love. She went through a bilateral lung transplant but suffered from chronic then acute rejection. She was able to find romantic love with Brian and friendship with her many friends. Whomever Laura knew she touched their lives, and many of these people remember her in their stories in this book. Tragically Laura died at age 22 - she was ready to die when the time came, and she helped prepare her loved ones for this loss. People with Cystic Fibrosis are my heroes - they live each day trying to breathe - every day of their lives.

I am a 26 year old woman with cystic fibrosis. In reading Laura's memoirs I found a very real and honest view of what we (CF patients) go through everyday. Laura had an amazing strength and courage to endure all her trials and I found reading her personal story helped me understand some of my own feelings. I think this book is a wonderful read for all persons...if you face an illness, know someone who does or just want to be touched by a lovely young woman's story.

Being one of the nurses who cared for Laura at Hasbro Childrens Hospital, one cannot help but to become emotional while reading this story. It brings back visions and memories of a young woman who brought so much light to our lives. She made me look forward to going to work and seeing her beautiful smile. She also made me appreciate life much more than I had prior. Laura is always in our hearts here at Hasbro.

I have a lot of respect for Laura Rothenberg, for having lived her whole (entirely too short) life struggling with health issues that most of us can't imagine, and for trying to give others a glimpse into the world of the chronically ill. That said, I would be lying if I claimed to find her memoir as compelling as so many others have. I think my biggest problem was that I didn't feel I got to know much about Laura as a person. Most of the book seemed to consist of detailed descriptions of the procedures performed on her, using medical jargon that I am not familiar with, so while I definitely got a sense of the hell she went through on a daily basis, and the frustration it caused her, I didn't garner any real knowledge of her disease. That would have been okay if the book was balanced out with more about her life away from the hospital - her family, friends, and school, and how she balanced these with her illness. So many friends and relatives were mentioned in passing, but we never got to know them. The emails she wrote to the people she cared about are presented anonymously, so we don't know who she's writing to. I didn't even know that she had a boyfriend until the epilogue, when she mentioned moving in with him. I just didn't feel that I got to know much about this young woman at all, and I really would have liked to.

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