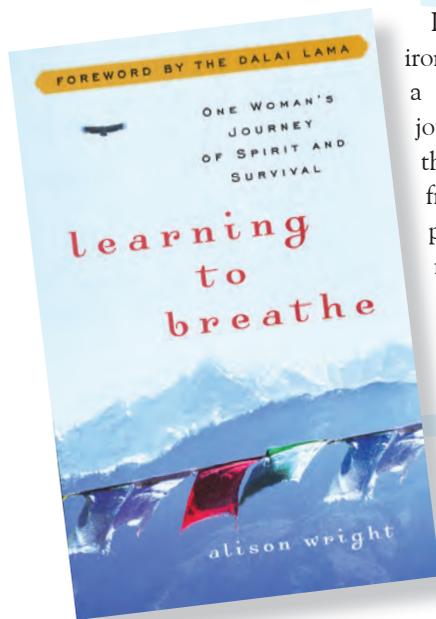


Learning to Breathe:

One Woman's Journey of Spirit and Survival

By Alison Wright

Review by Sue Mayfield-Geiger



It's the first thing we do, and ironically, the last thing we do. Take a breath. For international photo journalist Alison Wright, it would be the breathing techniques she learned from her Buddhist meditation practice that would give her a reprieve from taking her last breath in the prime of not only her life, but her career.

What pushes some to soar to the highest of heights and others to just settle? Whatever that euphoric tonic may be, Wright was obviously born with an overdose because of the wanderlust that has always run through her body and soul. As a child, she could not sit still and spent most of her time yearning to see what the rest of the planet looked like. At the age of 10, she was given her first camera, and she knew instantly that would be the vehicle that would lead her to her heart's desire. She has spent the last 20 years documenting and photographing endangered cultures throughout the world.

In January of 2000, Wright was traveling on a rickety packed bus in the winding mountains of Laos in Southeast Asia when it collided head-on with a logging truck. Many died and several others were critically injured, but no one as critically as Wright. With her left arm slashed open and full of broken glass, she was unable to move her legs and suffered a multitude of internal injuries. As she lay on the side of the road barely able to breath, she began concentrating on every moment and every breath she could manage to take. The internal injuries made breathing difficult, and it would be 14 painful hours before she received medical attention. Several surgeries took place in Thailand and more back in the U.S.

Told repeatedly that she was lucky to be alive, she was also told she would probably never walk without a cane or be able to haul heavy camera equipment again. Not only did she prove her array of doctors wrong, she climbed Mount Kilimanjaro less than two years later, made a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash and even returned to Laos and got on

that very same bus and took the very same route.

"Once I let go of fear and clinging to life, my heart expanded to a capacity that I had never known possible," says Wright of her accident. "It was my years of living among the Buddhist cultures of Asia that had early influenced me to discover the human connection within all of us. Now this philosophy helped me feel accepting of the fact that I was going to die there alone in this isolated, guerilla-infested area of Laos with no one by my side. I left a note for my family to let them know that I did not leave this world afraid. But it wasn't my time."

With a forward by the Dalai Lama and a heartfelt review by actor Richard Gere, Wright's book is indeed a page turner. As she recuperates from her accident, she reminisces and shares the amazing experiences of her career; introducing the reader to some of the most humble beings you will ever meet. And she still lugs a camera – all over the world – without a cane.



About the author:

Alison Wright has journeyed the world as a photojournalist for two decades, focusing her efforts on human rights issues and documenting the traditions of endangered cultures. Wright's photography is represented by *National Geographic* and *Corbis*, as well as being published in a multitude of world-wide periodicals such as *Islands*, *Smithsonian*, *Time*, *Forbes*, *Oprah*, *The New York Times*, *Outside*, and many more. She is a recipient of the Dorothea Lange Award in Documentary Photography and a two-time winner of the Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Award. Her writing and photographs have been published in four books, as well as through the Discovery Channel Photo Journeys series. 

A percentage of the proceeds from Learning to Breathe go to the Faces of Hope Fund that works with community organizations to help provide health care and education in Asia and Afghanistan. The needs run deep and all donated money will go directly to the projects. Every tax-deductible dollar you give will help support a life or help educate a child.