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Catching My Breath: An Asthmatic Explores His Illness

Tim Brookes

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In this engrossing and informative book, National Public Radio commentator Tim Brookes conducts a passionate inquest into the origins and treatment of asthma. His motives are both journalistic -- some 12 million Americans have asthma -- and personal: Brookes himself is asthmatic and nearly died from an attack.

Catching My Breath records Brooke's mystifying and sometimes infuriating encounters with doctors, insurance companies, and homeopathic healers. He peers into a living human lung, undergoes homeopathic injections of silver and tobacco leaf in his back and neck, and even sees a psychic to ask otherworldly spirits about the causes of asthma. He surveys the dubious history of treatments (which include the use of decayed flesh and cockroach intestines) and grapples with an insurance company that agrees to cover him only if he doesn't get sick. A thoroughly unconventional exploration of illness from a patient's point of view, Catching My Breath is also the first book to give serious attention to the social roots of asthma, and raises profound questions about our attitudes toward illness in general.

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