



Breath: A Lifetime in the Rhythm of an Iron Lung: A Memoir

Martha Mason

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After contracting polio as a young girl Martha Mason of tiny Lattimore, North Carolina, lived a record sixty-one of her seventy-one years in an iron lung until her death in 2009, but she never let the 800-pound cylinder define her. The subject of a documentary film, an NPR feature, an ABC News piece, and a widely syndicated *New York Times* obituary, Martha enjoyed life, and people. From within her iron lung, she graduated first in her class in high school and at Wake Forest University, and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She was determined to be a writer and, with her devoted mother taking dictation, she became a journalist?but had to give up her career when her father became ill. Still, Martha created for herself a vast and radiant world?holding dinner parties with the table pushed right up to her iron lung, voraciously reading, running her own household, and caring for her mother when she became ill with Alzheimer's and increasingly abusive to Martha. When voice-activated computers became available, Martha wrote *Breath*, in part as a tribute to her mother. "This book is her story," writes Anne Rivers Siddons in her preface, "told in the rich words of a born writer. That she told it is a gift to everyone who will read it. That she told it is also as near to a miracle as most are likely to encounter."

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