

# A Reading and Discussion Guide

**Readers' Choice Award Winner - 19th Annual Minnesota Book Awards**  
**Autobiography, Memoir & Creative Nonfiction Finalist**

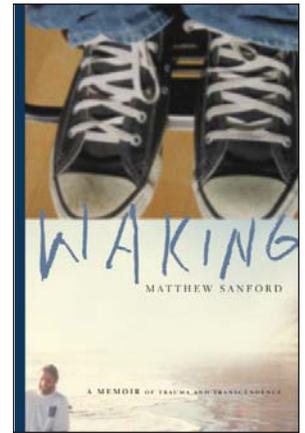
## ***Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence*** **by Matthew Sanford**

Rodale, 2006

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### **SUMMARY:**

Thirteen-year-old Matthew Sanford's family was returning to Duluth, Minnesota from Missouri where they spent the Thanksgiving holiday with relatives, when their car skidded on an icy road and rolled three times. Matthew's father and sister were killed in the accident which left him paralyzed from the chest down. This pivotal event set Matthew on a lifelong journey from his intensive care experiences at the Mayo Clinic to becoming a paralyzed yoga teacher and founder of a nonprofit organization. *Waking* is Matthew's story of healing and rebuilding, a journey which involves a rejection of much of what traditional medicine tells him and the turn to yoga as a core practice of his daily life.



### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What does the author mean by silence? Give examples of silence in your own life.
  2. What is meant by the author's belief that silence both connects and disconnects us simultaneously?
  3. What is the relationship between silence and aging?
  4. How does the age and innocence of the author impact his journey of healing and self-discovery? How might his journey have been different if the car accident had occurred in his adult years?
  5. What roles do the descriptions of the body play in the narrative?
  6. What roles do the author's mother and brother play in his recovery?
  7. How has the book stretched or changed your understanding of yoga?
  8. Yoga has been a powerful, life-changing practice for the author. What other factors are key to the author's journey of transcendence? What other practices might be helpful to someone who has experienced life-changing trauma?
  9. Are there aspects of the author's life which you felt were missing from the telling of the story? If so, why do you think those pieces are missing, and was it a conscious decision on the part of the author?
  10. Does the book get you thinking about the health care system differently?
  11. The author hopes that each reader will see himself or herself in the story. In what ways do you see yourself in the story?
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## A CONVERSATION WITH MATTHEW SANFORD:

### Q. What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I wanted to share an insight about consciousness and the mind-body relationship, one that my life has shown me over and over. My story, although extreme, is one that we all share. We all have our stories of traumas and hardships; and we are all leaving our bodies – the process of aging guarantees it. My goal was to write a book that leads the reader to see themselves in my story, to write a book that had a shared truth at its core – we all have healing to do. Like most idealistic writers, I wanted to write a book that might make a difference in the world, big or small.

### Q. How long did it take you to write *Waking*?

I started the book right after my sons were born in early 2000 and finished at the end of 2004.

### Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing this book?

I had to recount and, in many ways, relive a slew of very painful experiences. I was also writing *Waking* during a very busy time in my life, in the midst of founding the nonprofit organization, Mind Body Solutions, followed by the opening of a yoga studio in 2002.

### Q. What do you hope readers take away from reading this book?

I hope they think about their own life and their own stories in new and powerful ways. I also hope that they feel new potential within their mind-body relationship. Most importantly, I hope they feel hopeful.

### Q. How and when did you first decide to become a writer?

I never set out to be a writer. I have always felt that I had an insight to convey, and writing a book became one of the vehicles of my sharing. That being said, I do consider myself a writer now and not just because my book was published. Rather, I can now say that I love the writing process. It definitely helped my confidence, though, that *Waking* was published.

### Q. What are you currently writing, and what inspirations do you have for future books?

I have a whole book of content that didn't make it into *Waking*. This content is more philosophical in nature, and I imagine it to become a series of intimate essays on mind, body and consciousness. I also have two books going that are more practical in nature: a guide to increasing presence with the body and a book on the intersection of yoga and disability.

## ABOUT MATTHEW SANFORD:

Matthew Sanford has been exploring the intersection between mind and body since becoming paralyzed as a young teen. He is the founder of the nonprofit organization Mind Body Solutions and does motivational public speaking throughout the country on the mind-body relationship. He is a yoga instructor who specializes in adapting this practice for people living with disabilities. Sanford lives in Orono, Minnesota with his wife and son. *Waking* is his first book. For additional information about the author and his work, visit [www.matthewsanford.com](http://www.matthewsanford.com).



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