

**Title:** *Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence*

**Author:** Matthew Sanford

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**Reviewed by:** Steven E. Brown

In the first chapter of *Waking*, Matthew Sanford writes, “Some people are born with a smile on their face, and I am one of them. I do not mean this metaphorically. I literally mean that my mouth does not seem to possess the ability to form a frown. . . . After all that has happened, I am grateful for this fact” (p. 3).

At the age of thirteen, Sanford’s family was in a car accident. His father and his older sister died. He was thrown from the vehicle to awaken in a hospital several days later paralyzed from the chest down. As readers we know from the outset, there is a happy ending to this story. We know this from the synopsis of the book and from the author himself, who in the first pages introduces us to his family—a wife and children—and to concepts of healing. We also know there is a long journey from pain and agony to get to *Waking*.

On the initial page we learn the Minnesota-based Sanford separated his mind from his body while experiencing traumas after his accident. “Leaving my body became a survival skill” (p. xv).

In the first of the book’s three sections, Sanford describes his trauma and pain. He recalls what he can dredge up in his memory about the accident and consequent hospitalizations. He lived not only with pain of his disabling condition, but with the agony of knowing he survived a horrendous event that rendered his family asunder. He guides us through these experiences.

In the final two sections he leads readers through his emergence from his life of pain and despair. He begins to explore other ways to move through the world, from his wheelchair. This journey leads him to a yoga teacher. Never having worked with a paralyzed person presented challenges to Sanford’s mentor and together they figured out how to apply yoga in his situation.

Sanford found yoga to be his personal method to connect with the wider universe and to heal, while he remains paralyzed. In 2001, he founded Mind Body Solutions, a non-profit charitable organization, dedicated to the idea minds and bodies work better together. Near the end of the book, Sanford writes:

If nothing else, my life has taught me one thing. The mind and body that I have are the only mind and body that I have. They deserve my attention. And when I give it, I receive so much more in return (p. 222).

This well-written autobiography is one of the first to explore disability and healing from a perspective that disability is not an inherently negative condition and

healing does not mean walking away from a wheelchair. It deserves a wide audience.

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