



Breathe breath

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A newborn baby must cry immediately after birth
God's plan and design to start the little one breathing
A joy to the mother's heart
The first breath of oxygen and the first stage of breathing.

The second stage is what we all want ... quietly breathe in, out
Most of us breathe like this all our lives, take breathing for granted.
In out, in out. Mouth shut. No thought no effort. No worries.
Others suffer from asthma, allergies.

Others, like my son, my husband, me, fight diseases like lung cancer.
My breathing involves shortness of breath if I move.
In nose, out mouth, in nose, out mouth. Control. Work for control.
Be still. In nose, out mouth.

Then, consciously and carefully, in nose out nose, in nose out nose.
Finally, unconsciously, breathing properly, almost asleep.
If I move, I go back a step or two, start again. Oxygen 24/7.
Plastic hose attached to a cannula and a converter follow everywhere.
Bottled oxygen allows me to go out. Envious of you who breathe.

I often feel ugly. Grateful to be able to breathe at all.
My husband had COPD. My son died of lung cancer.
When he died, we watched him breathe less and less. Finally no breath.
We will all die when we quit breathing. Slow, slower, stop.

The final stage of breathing.
Breathe.
Breath.
God's plan.

Betty Smith was a teacher who began her career in 1959 and earned a bachelor of education degree while teaching full time and raising 3 boys. At the urging of Dr Hollis Roth and Lindsay Hancock, RN, she submitted this poem while undergoing palliative care in Lethbridge, Alta. Her poem is being published posthumously.

Competing interests
None declared

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