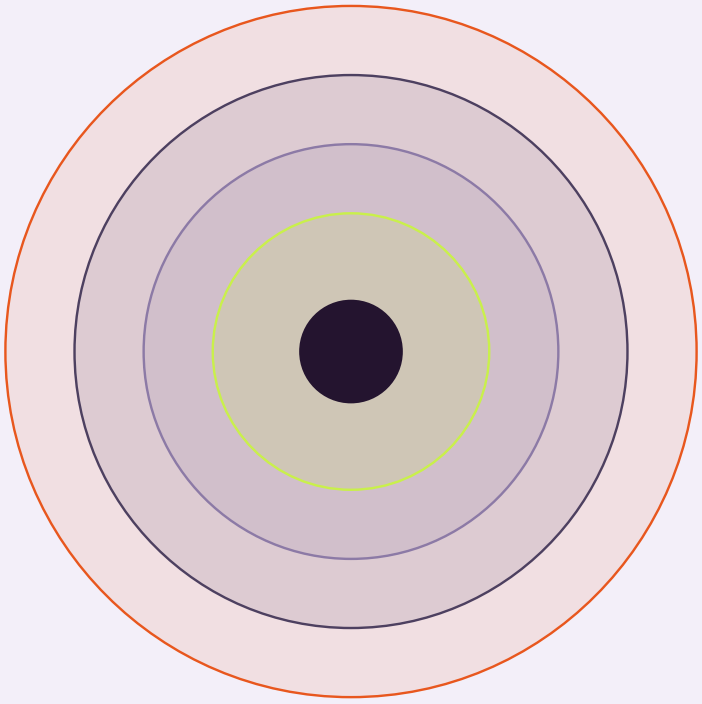


Learning to Breathe: A Mem-oir

A reading of the book by Clara Hughes (2026)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Learning to Breathe: A Memoir, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Clara Hughes is a Canadian athlete who won six Olympic medals in cycling and speed skating, and a long-time public advocate for mental health. Learning to Breathe picks up after her racing years, when the habit of pushing through pain kept drawing her to gruelling hikes and long bikepacking trips. In 2021 a serious knee injury, the hot flashes and mood swings of menopause, and the return of her depression brought her to a stop. Finding little support for menopause in conventional care, she looked further: to a women's health specialist, to somatic therapy and breathwork, and to guided psychedelic-assisted therapy, which she describes with humour and candour. The memoir follows her back to childhood trauma she had spent decades outrunning, and toward mended relationships, a gentler way of moving, and a new start in midlife. It follows her earlier memoir, Open Heart, Open Mind.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Pushing through pain wins races, and it can quietly cost you everything outside them.

Hughes built two Olympic careers on overriding what her body told her. The memoir asks what that habit did once the racing stopped and there was no medal to make the pain worth it.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Movement can be medicine, and it can also be a way to outrun what hurts.

After retiring she championed movement as medicine for mental health. Yet the pull toward ever longer hikes and bikepacking trips kept wearing her down. The same habit can help you heal or help you hide, and only you can tell which it is today.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The injury that stops you may be the first honest pause in years.

In 2021 a serious knee injury took away the thing she used to cope. With nowhere to run, the feelings she had kept at a distance caught up with her. A forced stop is painful, and it is also information.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Menopause belongs in the mental-health conversation, not in a footnote.

Hot flashes and mood swings arrived at the same time as her depression came back. She found little support for what menopause was doing to her. If your mood shifts in midlife, it is worth asking a clinician about hormones as well as mood.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Depression you have managed for years can come back, and that is not a failure.

Hughes had spoken publicly about depression for a long time. Its return showed that recovery is not a finish line you cross once. Noticing it early and asking for help again is the skill.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

When the first door has no answer, keep asking for care that fits.

The memoir describes conventional care that had little to offer her for menopause. She kept looking rather than settling. Advocating for yourself, with notes, questions and a second opinion, is part of getting well.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Sometimes the work is finding where the pain started, not only coping with it.

The long stillness after her injury brought back childhood trauma she had spent decades outrunning in sport. Coping skills get you through the day. Looking at the roots is what changes the pattern.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Healing can be funny, frightening and eye-opening in the same week.

She describes her guided psychedelic-assisted sessions with humour and alarm by turns, alongside somatic therapy and breathwork. This is her story, not a recommendation: such therapy is still experimental and tightly regulated in most places, Canada included. Talk to a clinician before considering any treatment.

9 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Midlife can be a starting line, not only a slow finish.

The book ends with mended relationships, new ones, and old fears faced. Hughes changed course in midlife. You can begin again at any age, with your body as a partner rather than a tool.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] List the times you pushed through
- [ ] Write your two-signal stop rule
- [ ] Book the appointment you keep putting off
- [ ] Make a crisis card
- [ ] Tell one person the true version

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Breathe for a minute before you decide
- ◯ Swap one hard day for an easy one
- ◯ Keep a one-line body and mood log

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

☐ SETUP 1

List the times you pushed through

Write down three times in the last month you overrode a signal from your body or mind: pain, exhaustion, a low mood.

Next to each, note what it cost you afterwards.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 2

Write your two-signal stop rule

Pick two signs that mean you rest today, such as pain that changes how you move or less than five hours of sleep.

Write them on a card or in your phone and follow them before you start any hard session.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 3

Book the appointment you keep putting off

Call your doctor, a women's health clinic or a mental-health service this week.

Bring a short written list of what has changed: mood, sleep, energy, pain and, if it applies, your cycle.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 4

Make a crisis card

In your phone notes, write one person you can call, your doctor's number and your local crisis line.

In Canada that is 9-8-8, by call or text; anywhere, if you are in danger, call your local emergency number.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 5

Tell one person the true version

Choose someone you trust and tell them how you are really doing, not the race-day version.

Ask them to check in with you in a week.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Breathe for a minute before you decide

Before a workout or a big push at work, take one minute of slow breathing with a longer out-breath.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Swap one hard day for an easy one

Each week, turn one session you would normally attack into an easy one.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Keep a one-line body and mood log

Each evening, write one line: sleep, pain, mood and energy.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
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30 ○						

December 2026

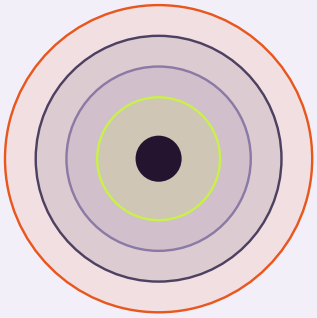
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Strength is also knowing when to stop, and asking for help before the finish line.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER CLARA HUGHES