

New Book

Light Through the Cracks

By Lydia Dean

Takes us around the world to experience a harrowing natural disaster—an inspirational healing journey and search for what is already within us.

Gripping, insightful, relevant, and human—this book considers a fascinating interconnection of topics: the limitations and opportunities found in privilege, how altruism and philanthropy can go wrong, the importance of small acts of kindness, and the powers found in our natural world. ***Light Through the Cracks*** explores how our personal healing directly relates to our ability to make a difference in the world at large.



LIGHT
THROUGH THE
CRACKS

"I had learned in an incredibly roundabout way,
that in order to help others find their greatness,
I had to find my own."

About the Author

Born in Ottawa, Canada, Lydia is an author, humanitarian, and business-builder with a passion for travel, philanthropic work, and connecting with the wisdom found in our natural world. In 2000, she left a successful career in Orlando, Florida, to explore with her young family. They settled in a quiet village in the South of France where they discovered the joys of leading a simpler life. After traveling extensively to areas lacking education and opportunity, Lydia launched GoPhilanthropic Travel, a social enterprise that engages travelers with the lesser-known change-makers of our time. In 2011, she co-founded GoPhilanthropic Foundation, a non-profit organization that identifies, invests, and strengthens the impact of community-based organizations providing access to education, health, and basic human rights in marginalized communities.

In 2015, Lydia published *Jumping the Picket Fence*, a thought-provoking blend of traveling the world with young children, soul searching, and non-profit building. In 2021, she released a continuation of her courageous life path



in her second book, *Light Through the Cracks*, which both raw and relevant, challenges traditional views on “giving back” and explores how our personal healing relates to our ability to make a difference in the world. Ultimately, her writings inspire others to connect to humanity and to find their higher calling within it.

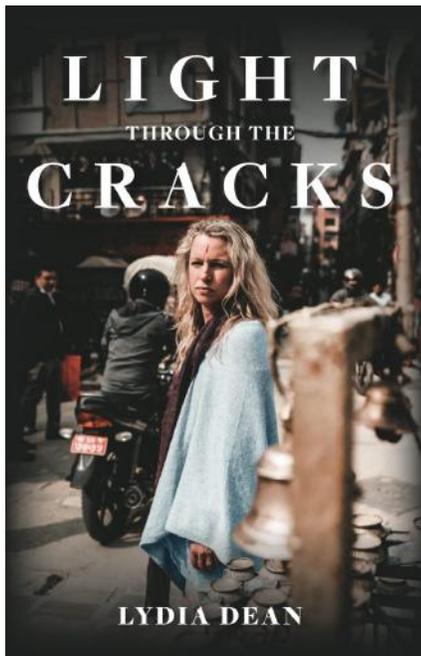
Lydia has three children and lives in Provence, France where she and her husband focus on restoration, renovation, and sharing the natural beauty of the region. She remains devoted to GoPhilanthropic Foundation and speaks on various topics relating to fearlessly following one’s inner voice, the ethics of giving back while traveling, and the beauty found in embracing our vulnerability.

Lydia is available for interviews with journalists upon request.

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Book Summary



In April 2015, Lydia Dean, co-founder of GoPhilanthropic Foundation, was on a work trip to Nepal when a deadly earthquake hit the region. Returning home to her family and facing the effects of PTSD, Lydia began a painful transformation that had her listening to and seeing the world through a new lens. With a distinct blend of raw truth and vulnerability, Lydia takes us on an intimate and thought-provoking

journey to the frontlines of human trafficking in Nepal and India, the indigenous Mayan communities of Guatemala, Mother Teresa's Home for the Sick and Dying in Kolkata, and the earthy fields of Provence where her family lives. Her awakening forces her to strip herself of the safe identity she hid behind and find strength inside the pain she had been running from. Lydia explores deeply relevant topics of our time—healing, philanthropy, the wisdom within nature and spirituality, and the inner work required of each of us to contribute fully to the world. These powerful stories of change have us reimagining the process of giving and receiving—both within and outside ourselves.

"Healing our sick selves and our world would never be about solving, fixing, or finding perfection. Instead, it would involve a humbling yet liberating process of discovering and helping each other return to who we already are."

Book Details

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Testimonials

“Uplifting, beautiful, inspiring and so REAL. I couldn’t put it down and dog-eared countless pages. Light Through the Cracks is an honest, raw, and heartfelt journey of self-discovery and finding “home”. Lydia lovingly shares her amazing story of balancing family, personal health, and philanthropy while navigating what it means to truly give.”

- Lisa Wiseley

*“Authentic and compelling; as with her first book, Jumping the Picket Fence, I could not put down this book! **Lydia Dean’s story is emotional, honest, insightful, and ultimately, relatable.** She writes with an ease and authenticity that is rare. There is much to learn from this book, with its interwoven stories and themes that compel the reader to reflect on his or her own life and the meanings found within. I didn’t want the book to end.”*

- Robin Bailey Chen

*“An inspiring tale of a woman’s triumph over tragedy and her ongoing pursuit to conquer her inner demons. **I was captivated by her candor and her raw emotions.** It’s a must-read!”*

- Heidi Pfenninger



Key Themes, Quotes & Discussion Topics

Giving to oneself. It is a vital, essential part of being able to give to others. Healing the world begins within ourselves.

Altruism can go wrong—Helping when you don't fully understand context can be destructive.

Philanthropy. In order to be an effective and ethical philanthropist, one must engage in meaningful, sometimes painful, inner work.”

Indigenous wisdom—Holds important insights that we can all learn from.

“This next life coursework would force me to acknowledge that giving to myself was a vital, essential part of being able to give to others; that healing the world begins within ourselves.”

“These old ways of trying to fix inequality were actually creating more of the same.”

“Could there be a distinction between what came from pure and genuine altruism, and the push coming from less bright, shadowy sources within ourselves? What if our desire to give back, in some cases, was because something had been taken from us in the first place, and it left a gaping, weeping hole? Were these ugly experiences to be released, as we are often told, to be removed like foreign toxins? Or did we need to incorporate, love, and nurture them as essential pieces of ourselves? Perhaps we needed to accept and forgive our darker sides instead of constantly repressing them. My gut was telling me that walking through our pain and owning it was in fact a way to find our greatness—but I still had a ways to go in truly believing it.”

“Central to Mayan medicine, which is holistic in nature, rests of the belief in “ch’ulel,” a life force that exists in each of us and in all of the physical world around us. The body and soul, which are metaphors for the natural and spiritual realms, are inter-woven and inter-connected. Ch’ulel life force can be found in everything, from our own bodies to plants, animals, buildings, and mountains. If there is illness or a lack of life force in one area, it will affect other areas, compromising the whole system. Our universe, they believe, is ruled by the same principles, that everything is interconnected. Healing is about restoring the inherent balance and harmony of all things—no single component being more important than the other.”

Embracing vulnerability and letting go of fear can be transformative.

Privilege. Privilege can be ugly and can invoke feelings of guilt and shame. However, understanding your privilege can be a catalyst for change.

It is easy to fix things outside of us. We can be tempted to look over the fence and try and fix things on the other side, instead of looking at tending to what needs attention on the inside.

Embracing our shadow—we search for our strength through our pain instead of running from it.

“You have a job to do and fear has no role in it, it said with no uncertain terms. You can feel vulnerable—completely and utterly vulnerable. This might make you feel small, like you want to become invisible, but you are not to fear anything.”

“No matter what efforts we were making through GoPhilanthropic, we were able to leave the ugly realities and return to our privilege; I always left wondering if we were doing enough, whether there were opportunities we were not seeing.”

“Healing our sick selves and our world would never be about solving, fixing, or finding perfection. Our medicine would be about discovering and helping each other return to who we already are. And that takes work. Sometimes ugly long hard and humble work that we have to do alone. At other times we have to do it together. Either way, it wouldn't be good enough to want to give back without understanding where and how our own guilt, control, and identity show up in the process. We will be forced to go to vulnerable places in order to evaluate what has become an ugly word—privilege. But it's what we do with it that will reveal the beauty on the other side of it.”

“The focus on others became our full-time existence, and one in which caring for ourselves oftentimes ended up last on the priority list. We would eventually face the consequences of this grave miscalculation, each in our own personal way. Not only was it counterproductive at times, but it represented what I now believe to be an outdated, limited assumption that giving needs to be a selfless act.”

“At times I had been in awe of their incessant need to be making a difference in the lives of others. It made me wonder whether we can be easily tempted to look over the fence and try and fix things on the other side, instead of looking at and tending to what needs attention on the inside.”

“If so, then perhaps we all had access to it, should be willing to search for it through the pain, instead of running from it, or dragging it with us. Perhaps there was a way to tap into this current of love and compassion and maybe, just maybe, it had no end. It wasn't the size of the tank that held a limited amount of fuel that mattered, but access to the infinite source that was key.”

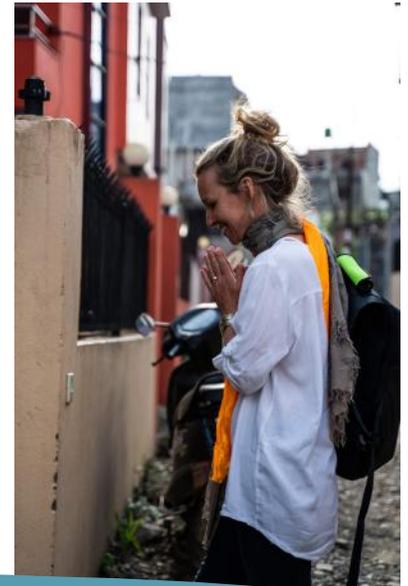
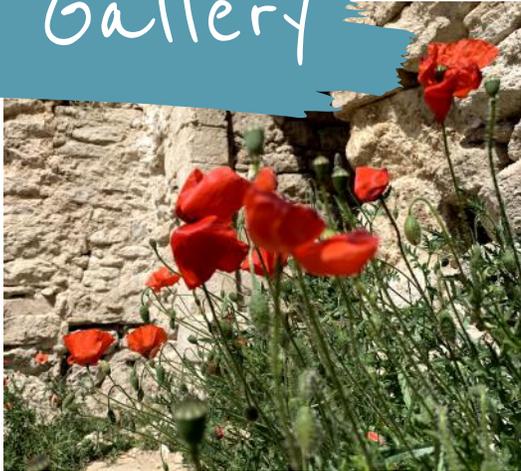
Collective action is needed to change our sick world.

Healing and nature. Healing is linked to spirit and the energy inherent in the natural world.

“Behind these uncertain feelings that my efforts, that our efforts and support were only a drop in a sea of need, sat another thought, a bigger knowing. Every single bit of care helped—even the smallest acts of kindness mattered. And it wasn’t the job of one to care—it was the job of many.”

“But something inside of me took hold, a force that was stronger than anything I could fear, and right then and there I decided to tackle this immense goal. I needed this dry strip of earth and she needed me.”

Photo Gallery



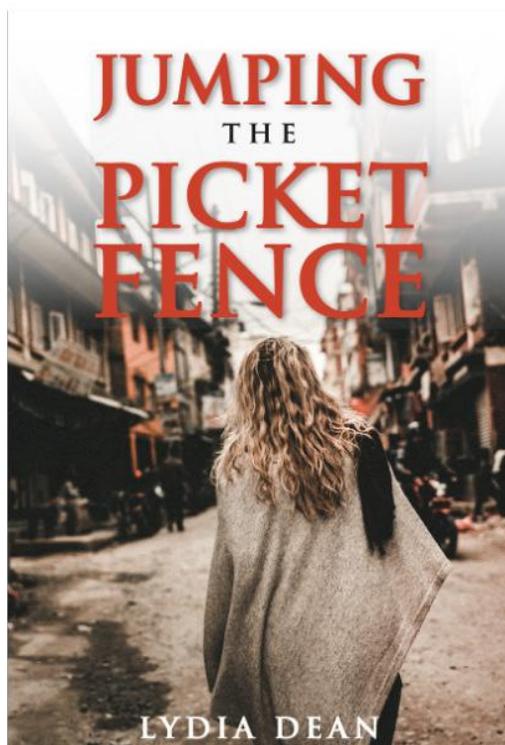
To see and download all relevant photos, please visit:
<https://photos.app.goo.gl/itRnrreso2fLFTje7>

Intended Audience & Relevance

This book is for anyone wanting to make a difference in the world. ***Light Through the Cracks*** has the potential to disrupt and shift conventional, surface-level thinking about philanthropy and humanitarianism, to move the needle toward collective action to heal the world. It is a timely book that conveys wisdom that can be applied across all sectors in social change—climate, economic development, human rights, and mental health, to name a few. ***Light Through the***

Cracks will resonate with audiences who care deeply about helping others. We are at a turning point where healing our world is more urgent than ever. And yet, we cannot heal our world without turning the mirror on ourselves first. This book has the potential to inspire introspection in committed citizens across generations to pave the way for the collective strength we need to meet the challenges of our time.

Previous Work



Lydia Dean's acclaimed first book, ***Jumping the Picket Fence***, is the story of an ordinary woman's calling to discover her passions – and her extraordinary pilgrimage that would lead her around the globe, raising awareness and funding for people fighting for basic human rights.

Light Through the Cracks builds on the story told in *Jumping the Picket Fence*, yet delves deeper into the inner work needed to give fully to the world around us.

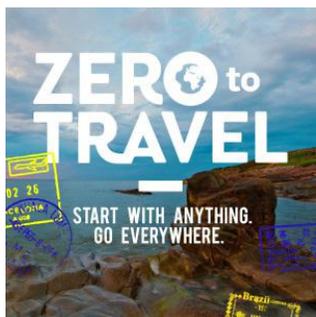
Past Coverage

Lydia Dean and her books have appeared in several podcasts and articles relating to travel, giving back, healing, and self-discovery including:



Mind Love with Melissa Monte • Episode 092: [Giving Back and Finding Meaning](#)

Mind Love is a popular, heartfelt podcast that discusses mindset shifts, energy frequencies, and modern mindfulness through raw stories, personal experience, and inspiring interviews.



Zero to Travel with Jason Moore • [Jumping the Picket Fence and Thinking Big with Lydia Dean](#)

Zero to Travel is for you whether you are newbie traveler thinking about your first international trip, a seasoned nomad, or someone in between – its mission is to help you fill your life with as much travel as you desire, no matter what your situation or experience.



Soul of Travel with Christine Winebrenner Irick • [Jumping the Picket Fence with Lydia Dean](#)

Christine Winebrenner Irick engages insoulful conversations with her community of fellow travelers exploring the heart, the mind, and the globe. These conversations highlight what tourism really means for the world.

A full list of podcasts episodes featuring Lydia can be found here: <https://lydiadean.com/podcasts/>

Featured Articles by Lydia Dean

- **Demystifying Philanthropic Travel** • <https://gophilanthropic.org/demystifying-philanthropic-travel/>
- **Funding Orphanages - Is it Helping or Hurting?** • <https://gophilanthropic.org/funding-orphanages-helping-hurting/>

Sample Questions for Lydia Dean

- What inspired *Light Through the Cracks*?
- Your tone is vulnerable and authentic. Why did you choose to tell your story in such a deeply personal way?
- *Jumping the Picket Fence* took us on a journey toward philanthropy and finding ourselves. How has your perspective changed since writing *Jumping the Picket Fence*?
- What do you hope your readers will gain from reading *Light Through the Cracks*?
- Why do you think it is so critical to explore oneself before, or during our efforts to contribute to the world at large?
- What are some steps your readers can do to start the inner work needed to heal themselves?
- You talk about identity and how it can be a blocker to our own awakening. Can you share more about this?
- People rarely question the process of “giving back.” Why do you think it is so important?
- What authors and books do you draw inspiration from in your writing?



Proceeds from book sales contribute to healing the world.

GoPhilanthropic Foundation

GoPhilanthropic is a U.S.-based organization co-founded by Lydia Dean, made up of a community of “everyday philanthropists” who provide funding and networking support for about 40 local programs in Central America, and Asia. GoPhilanthropic’s mission is to strengthen the impact of community-based programs in underserved regions of the world.

Vision: To create a network of partnerships fostering a shared responsibility in solving global issues.

Mission: To identify, invest and strengthen the impact of community-based organizations providing access to education, healthcare, and basic human rights in marginalized communities around the world.

GoPhilanthropic Foundation was born out of a desire to redefine the traditional check-writing charity model to one that reflects active, engaged, and collaborative philanthropy. It provides a dynamic platform for donors to learn about and become directly engaged with the programs they fund through travel and educational opportunities. In doing so, they become more informed and connected participants in global issues. Find out more at www.gophilanthropic.org.

GoPhilanthropic Travel is a separate social enterprise working in sync with GoPhilanthropic Foundation offering the opportunity to learn about and gain a deeper understanding of the issues facing our world. The journeys explore how we can each take an active role in being a part of solutions. Find out more at www.gophilanthropictravel.com.



Excerpt: Light Through the Cracks

PROLOGUE

The only true gift is a portion of thyself.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

I WOULD STARE INTO THE DEPTHS of her black eyes, which I was sure went into the very soul of the earth. I was also convinced they touched the clouds, where the spirit world communicated directly through her. Tauheedah is a shamanic healer in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. There is something larger than life about her, a reminder to not take what we see at face value because there might be way more to it than meets the eye. I had started seeing her a few months before, not long after moving out to the West Coast from Rochester, New York, for our teenage son Nick's developing music career. I had a growing intrigue for the mystical world—a curious interest for what wasn't falling into neat logical boxes, which seemed to be everything at the time. I understood that there was more to life than what we could see—as if other powers were navigating the whole scene behind a veil, making sure it would all end up as it was meant to be.

Tauheedah doesn't ask questions. She just seems to know what is going on inside of you—and all around you. Instead of feeling like you are drowning in your worries, she has you moving through them, swimming through them, as though you are gracefully observing your life as a calm and unbiased outsider. She talks of strange past lives, weaving them into the present like there is nothing odd about it—like we can all see as she does. My sessions with her felt indulgent at first, like I didn't deserve this attention. But once stretched out on the table in her cool, dark room, the air thick with incense and something both unknown and eerily familiar, and with Whole Foods and Chipotle across the street yet light years away, it felt just right.

Unless she told you something you didn't want to hear.

"The book you are publishing. It is too soon," she said unemotionally one day. "There is a big thing missing in it—a major part, a significant experience ... it's not the right time," she said matter-of-factly.

A wave of dread washed over me as I thought about having uploaded the last and final manuscript of *Jumping the Picket Fence* to CreateSpace, Amazon's self-publishing platform, that very morning. I had been giddy in the moment, during that one click when all of the major details of my life so far, the events that had led us down an unconventional path, were beamed up into the stratosphere. All I had yet to do was

approve the printed sample copy that was to come in the mail, and the fourteen years of grueling energy it had taken to document the journey would be over.

I had made a vow to myself in writing the book. I wanted to be honest, to share the whole story and not just what appeared to be a pretty ending. I had felt terribly lost and lonely at times in my journey—in myself, in my motherhood, and in trying to find a useful place for a genuine desire to contribute to a world that had so much wrong with it. And while we had set out into the intimidating philanthropic arena with beautiful intentions and hopes of making a difference, we had been naive and underexperienced. I was sure there could be value in sharing the mistakes I had made and the lessons we had learned along the way. I had sat in front of brave individuals who had faced horrible atrocities, yet had found a strength and power in themselves to walk through them to find a better place on the other side. My greatest lessons had been taught by their willingness to share their vulnerability, and I challenged myself to do the same.

“Well it’s already in the queue for publishing,” I said to Tauheedah. “GoPhilanthropic has its annual fundraising event at the beginning of January here in LA, and the book launch has been timed with the event. I mean, I suppose I could put the brakes on, but things are in motion. I feel it is a little too late to stop. Do you think I am making a major mistake by following through?”

Tauheedah looked off into the distance, her eyes dancing up and down, her head turning gently as if she was scanning and listening to something or someone at the same time.

“Not really,” she finally said. “You can carry on,” she continued, shaking her head from side to side, her thin black braids moving in concert.

“But there is something missing. I am sure of it.”

CHAPTER 1

NIGHTMARES IN KATHMANDU

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I'll meet you there.
—Rumi

APRIL 25, 2015—THREE MONTHS LATER

I pulled out the oversized key and unlocked the ancient padlock that secured the wooden door of my hotel room. The porter placed my suitcase gently on a leather case holder near the entrance, then turned to leave.

“Namaste,” I said, bowing slightly, palms together.

I quickly walked over to the antique desk. Pulling my computer, cell phone, and notepad from my bag, I placed them on the desk and settled into the chair. The sun had not managed to peek through the clouds that day, and the room felt dark and cold. A chill ran up my back and down the length of my bare arms. I wandered over to



my suitcase, opened it up, and grabbed my woolen sweater that was lying on top of a heap of dirty clothes. It was high time to do some wash, but I was due to fly back to Delhi the next day, then onward home to Los Angeles. A case full of foreign-smelling clothes was always a sign of a good voyage. You never have a way of knowing, as you pack your things, crisply folded and tidy before leaving, what you will encounter in your time away, how it will change the way you see things.

As I pulled on my sweater, I glanced at the bathroom door—my mind wandering to the thought of a long-needed soak in the bath. Peeking further around the corner, I saw a deep, white porcelain tub lined with small square handmade local soaps and plush white towels. God, that is tempting. The visits to grassroots nonprofit organizations (NGOs) during the past week, coupled with two days of trekking with Raj, a Nepali friend who owns the Social Tours travel agency that supported social development in Nepal through tourism, were enough to have me stripping off the sweater, along with the rest of my clothes, and running the warm water.

As I stood naked, the tub halfway full, I got an odd feeling, a sudden urge to turn off the water and put my clothes back on. I had better get to my notes, I told myself. There's no time to indulge in a bath.

I returned to the task of transcribing my notes, my stomach reminding me that I had skipped breakfast and had forgone grabbing lunch as I marched past the café downstairs and up the flight of stairs to my room after checking in. My schedule was too tight for lunch, as I was due to meet with the director of Little Sisters, a program offering school sponsorship to economically disadvantaged Nepali girls. I was also anxious to capture my impressions from this morning's meeting with an inspiring young change-agent, Indra Prasad, who had built a school for children who lacked access to education outside of Bhaktapur. We had spent hours together discussing his belief that parents, no matter how economically challenged, should be expected to invest in their children's future. "It can't be a handout," he had said emphatically. Indra's words played over in my mind during the bumpy drive to the hotel back in Kathmandu. We were hearing this more and more from the grassroots partners we had formed relationships with at the foundation. Efforts to create better futures for people in need had to begin with their involvement. They were the key players in their own transformation. Somehow something so basic could be easily overlooked or minimized by the various stakeholders who were engaged in fixing what seemed broken. Just get the money where it needs to go, where it can have the most impact, was oftentimes a donor's mantra.

Out of the blue, I felt a shaking beneath my feet. I stopped typing on my laptop and turned my full attention to the sound of a deep rumble. I tried to place the noise—maybe a generator, commonly used here in Kathmandu as they suffer from frequent power outages. At one point, I had asked around about why power outages happened so often, but had never gotten a straight answer. A few said that the lack of power was one of the many residual effects of Nepal's decade-long civil war. Poor infrastructure, political instability, and corruption still plagued the country. Most hotels seemed to kick their generators into gear late afternoon, I thought to myself. I glanced at the time on my phone—11:55 a.m.—it was a bit early for that.

The shaking became more intense, the rumbling more powerful. Turning around



to look out the window, I noticed the two water bottles on the coffee table suddenly topple over. A sickening feeling washed over me, and without thinking, I stood up, only to be pushed to the side by a violent tremor. My eyes moved in a circle from the table to the walls to the ceiling, then back to the table, until I realized that they were strangely no longer solid and flat. They were moving, like waves on an ocean, soft and fluid. Or were they melting?

This is not good. I'm either hallucinating or something terribly wrong is happening. My instinct was to run, but I couldn't move my body. It was paralyzed, like in those dreams where you are willing your legs into motion, and they just don't budge. But this felt all too real to be a dream.

I waited for the unsettling motion to stop, but it persisted, intensifying with every second. The sound of shaking buildings continued but was now combined with a new noise—moving furniture, which had become solid again, screaming around the floor. I watched as the tall cabinet slid across the room. But the worst was about to come—the deafening sound of an entire building collapsing echoed across the valley, followed by piercing screams coming from both near and far.

A bomb. There's been a bombing. I was sure of it now. Glass shattered from the courtyard below; the cry of terrified voices shook my body and mind out of its fear-induced inactivity. I glanced at the door to my room, now swinging wildly, opening then closing, the big keys banging loudly as they smacked against a door that no longer fit into its frame. Big, bright, warm light streamed from the opening, and I suddenly knew my job, my way out, was to follow it. Now.

But for a brief millisecond before heading out the door, I looked back through the window of my room, out toward the gray, cold sky. Different objects, I couldn't make out what they were, flew through the air. The objects were then replaced, as if on a screen of consciousness, by the faces of my family. One by one their images lingered—my husband, John, the love of my life. Nick, almost a grown man of eighteen. Emma, sixteen, and dear Isabelle, only nine. She can't lose another mother. Then a sickening feeling flushed through my body. I couldn't place it at first. It wasn't fear, anger, or sadness. It was an emotion I hadn't quite fully experienced in a long, long time, maybe since childhood when all feelings seem purer and more heightened. Dread. Yes, that's what it was. Dread enveloped me, spreading all over me, as I realized that this might be it, the end. My time had come. Waves of grief then coursed through my veins. No, not yet, it can't be yet. It went by too quickly. There are things I still need to do.

The bedroom door smacked loudly again, and at that moment, only one thought raced through my mind—GET OUT. I scrambled across the floor as it moved violently, throwing me into the side of the bed, then over to the other side of the room to the TV stand. I finally made my way out of the door to the top of the stairs, and with no time for steps, I lunged down the flights of stairs, my hands out by my sides as I was tossed from one wall to another. I landed in a heap on the stone terrace outside the ancient building. For a brief second I felt relief—I had made it out alive. OK, I'm OK. I breathed deeply and looked down at my feet and realized I had lost a sandal. But I am safe, from this bomb or whatever this is. It must be over.

Just then, a tall man approached me, all color drained from his face. "Earthquake,"



he said firmly. I guess it should have been clearer to me earlier, but I had never lived through one before, apart from a few light tremors felt during our trips to Costa Rica. I had never felt such violence from the earth, had never known this destructive side of her.

I stumbled to my feet, brushed off my jeans, and lifted my head to take in the scene. I noticed the little lunch café that I had considered eating at earlier had collapsed on one side and was reduced to a pile of stones and glass. Staff in their uniforms, and guests in both business clothes and bathing suits, were running from every doorway and stairwell, all headed toward the pool area, where they were gathering in a disorderly crowd. Everyone looked stunned and stone-figured, locked in an internal world of panic. People used their hands to cover their faces and their ears, blocking out the deafening sounds of disaster around us.

It was then that I looked up and noticed a three-foot wall of water coming out of the pool and onto the patio where we were all huddled. The crowd scrambled and fled in every which direction. The torrent of water swept forcefully underneath my feet, taking away my other sandal as it surged to the other side of the terrace. Rock tiles, now split and broken, pushed up out of the ground, and a massive clay planter tumbled from the ledge next to me. Cracking, crumbling, screaming—When will this be over? Make it stop.

**Light Through the Cracks is available for
purchase on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).**