

A Lotus on Fire:

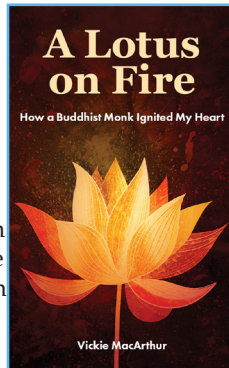
How a Buddhist Monk Ignited My Heart

by Lana Cullis

Vickie MacArthur's spiritual memoir, *A Lotus on Fire: How a Buddhist Monk Ignited My Heart* begins with a mystical quandary. She questions how a singular gaze of awakening shared between herself and Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh can be integrated and sustained within her spiritual framework, yoga practice and daily life. *A Lotus on Fire* is a spiritual love story that shares about both the ordinary and mystical relationship between spiritual teachers and their students, and how that relationship points us back to the true teacher within.

Written in the format of letters to her teacher, the arc of Vickie's story moves from a moment of individual awakening that evolves over time into a kind of collective wisdom, gained from integrating lived experience with the teachings and practices of yoga, Buddhism, and Christianity. Vickie is dedicated to helping others slow down and pay attention through somatic and embodied practices. She also teaches Yoga Nidra, as a way of relaxing, and releasing stress and trauma held deep in the tissues of our body. In *A Lotus on Fire*, Vickie's poetic prose and commentary serve as invitations to the reader to deepen their connection to embodied wisdom. Reading about the Plum Village practice of "Listening to the Bell," the reader may be drawn deeper and deeper into a contemplative posture—to pause, breathe, notice—from letter to letter and chapter to chapter.

A Lotus on Fire weaves together sacred teachings and practical living. Through tender and vulnerable self-reflection, Vickie takes us on



an intimate journey through her inner life, revealing all the highs and lows, doubts and fears, challenges and joys of the spiritual journey. *A Lotus on Fire* reveals hard won life lessons alongside more didactic exploration: uncertain diagnosis and treatment options when her toddler son was hospitalized for seizures; a hospice journey then subsequent grief following

the death of her mother from ovarian cancer; and discerning how to maintain a vibrant marriage alongside a devotee relationship with her teacher Thay.

The quest for spiritual awakening, and yearning for a teacher who can guide us, is an age-old story with enduring power. Who awakens? What do we awaken to? In the telling of her story, Vickie wrestles with intense longing and vulnerability, finally reconciling the fiery passion of the Christian mystic's heart with the calmness of the Zen Buddhist mind. Historically, the quest for spiritual union is not unfamiliar, although often viewed as unattainable or even ill-advised in the modern context. In yogic terms, this spiritual love is known as bhakti, the yoga of love and devotion. It is the spiritual love invoked by Sufi poets, Christian saints and mystics, Hindu holy men and Sadhu's, and Buddhist masters in the tantric tradition. Tempered with the Buddhist practices of mindful attention and non-attachment, Vickie's memoir ardently explores the energies of both eros and desire on the spiritual path.

A Lotus on Fire: How a Buddhist Monk Ignited My Heart is far more than a good read, it is a resolute call to open our hearts to compassion, our minds to

discernment, and to practice more loving kindness. Vickie's book mirrors her interfaith practice, giving ample room for the reader to consider the range of esoteric experience. Like any good memoir, her story turns out to be a universal story. Vickie's narrative beckons the reader to consider their own capacity for listening, claiming, and naming personal conversations with all that may be known as Sacred.

Lana Cullis lives, writes, and plays in Powell River, BC, (q̓at ʔət [qathet] Regional District) on lands traditionally stewarded by the Tla'Amin First Nation. Her story The Kiss appeared on the BC Writer's 2022 Literary Contest Longlist. Lana is a regular contributor with The Powell River Peak, guest hosts Life Story Writing online, and teaches "Writing into the Sacred" to community groups.

Vickie MacArthur offers classes and workshops at her yoga studio (Spirit in Motion Yoga) in Lethbridge, Alberta that focus on the healing connection between body, mind, and spirit. Her debut book, A Lotus on Fire, is summarized in the above review. For more information on Vickie and her book, see her website: www.vickiemacarthur.com