

## ***Nearly Departed: Adventures in Loss, Cancer, and Other Inconveniences***

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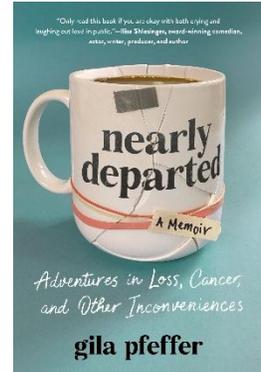
### **A sharp, funny, and heartfelt memoir of losing both parents to cancer and the daring choices made to avoid the same early demise**

By the time she was thirty, Gila Pfeffer was the oldest living member of her family, having lost her mother and her father to cancer. A blood test confirmed she carried the BRCA1 gene—which put her at high risk of developing cancer herself. Determined to break the cycle of early death in her family, Gila decides to undergo an elective double mastectomy.

This memoir follows her journey as she becomes a reluctant expert on how to sit shiva, grows up, falls in love, and enters motherhood, before her life is derailed yet again. Her double mastectomy reveals cancer already growing in one breast.

After enduring eight rounds of chemo and the removal of her ovaries, she takes her last-ever dip in the mikvah waters as a bald, menopausal, thirty-five-year-old mother of four. With chutzpah honed over years of repeatedly surviving the worst, she manages to save her own life.

**Gila Pfeffer is a Jewish American writer and humorist. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *McSweeney's*, *Today.com*, and elsewhere. Gila's monthly "Feel It on the First" campaign reminds women to prioritize their breast health. She splits her time between New York City and London.**



### **READER'S GUIDE**

1. Gila lost both of her parents to cancer, making her the oldest living member of her family by the time she was thirty. How do you think this affected her motivations throughout her memoir?
2. Gila's mother was resistant to getting a mastectomy when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. By contrast, Gila underwent a double mastectomy as a preventative measure. How does this illustrate Gila's mission to "outsmart her genetic destiny"?
3. Gila includes nonnarrative elements—the presurgical intake form (page 127) and the customer satisfaction survey (page 248)—as part of her story. Did you enjoy these sections? How did they change your perspective on Gila's story?
4. Throughout the book, Gila maintains her sense of humor, even in her darkest moments. Has humor helped you deal with tough moments in your own life?
5. *Publishers Weekly* has praised Gila for "seamlessly blending tears and laughter" in her memoir. What effect does the juxtaposition of humor with sadness have on the reading experience? Were there moments that made you laugh out loud or cry?
6. Gila's Jewish faith is an important part of her life. What role do you think faith played in Gila's breast cancer journey?

7. Gila was raising four children while undergoing treatment for breast cancer. How does she balance her health issues, both physical and mental, with parenting her children?
8. Much of the book revolves around Gila's family—her parents, children, sisters, and husband. Discuss how Gila's upbringing impacts how she raises her own children, and how her relationship with her sisters changes after her parents' deaths.
9. One of the main themes of *Nearly Departed* is learning about family medical history in order to overcome health issues. How does Gila advocate for preventative medicine throughout the book?
10. At the end of the book Gila shares that her sisters were inspired by her experience to get tested for the BRCA1 gene. Were there particular moments where you felt inspired by Gila's story?

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### **Praise for *Nearly Departed***

#### **2024 Winner of the Gilda Prize, Story Circle Network's Women's Book Awards A Reading Group Choices Favorite Nonfiction Book of 2024**

"This is the perfect book for anyone seeking levity in the face of devastation. Gila's life is a master class on perspective and how to handle some of life's darkest moments with fortitude and, most importantly, humor."—**Iliza Shlesinger**, award-winning comedian, actor, writer, producer, and author

"Few authors can move you to tears with their words—Gila is one of them. Reading this book, I felt like she was my best friend telling me her story, describing the details with joy and faithfulness, and pulling me in and never letting go."—**Sarah Cooper**, comedian and author of *Foolish*

"Pfeffer seamlessly blends tears and laughter in her vibrant debut memoir. . . The results are as funny as they are heartfelt and inspiring."—**Publishers Weekly**

"A darkly funny memoir."—**katiecouric.com**

"Pfeffer does not shy away from the grisly details of her treatments—or the agony of making what were often deemed risky medical decisions—but does so with a biting sense of humor that makes *Nearly Departed* as funny as it is revealing."—**Shelf Awareness**

"Conjures the ghosts of not just *one* cancer but *three* . . . Pfeffer takes tragedy off its pedestal of pity, gossip, and clucking tongues, stripping it of much of its power. . . Far from a horror story, [this memoir] reads like a heart-to-heart chat between friends."—**Jewish Book Council**

"Bringing humor to tragedy is a tightrope act, but Gila does it beautifully. Her writing is compelling and contains an irresistible combination of depth and lightness."—**Wendi Aarons**, author of *I'm Wearing Tunics Now*