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**Interviews:** Angela Hayes, Goldberg McDuffie Communications  
212-446-5104, [ahayes@goldbergmcduffie.com](mailto:ahayes@goldbergmcduffie.com)

**Review copies:** Kate Burke, Da Capo Lifelong Books  
617-252-5216, [Kate.Burke@perseusbooks.com](mailto:Kate.Burke@perseusbooks.com)

**CANCER IS A BITCH:**  
*Or, I'd Rather Be Having a Midlife Crisis*

By Gail Konop Baker

"I want to be brave. I want to be big. I want to be gracious and cool.  
I want to be the Audrey Hepburn of breast cancer."—**From Chapter Three**

On Valentine's Day 2006, Gail Konop Baker found herself sitting topless in the oncologist's office. Married to a doctor and a health and fitness devotee, Konop Baker assumed she would know when her body rebelled against her. And that, almost by virtue of her medical marriage, everything would turn out all right. While her cancer turned out to be highly treatable, she wasn't prepared for what happened to her during and after the experience. Emotionally, she became a changed woman, and chronicles the ups and downs of this transformation in **CANCER IS A BITCH: *Or, I'd Rather Be Having a Midlife Crisis* (Da Capo Lifelong Books; October 1, 2008; Hardcover; \$22.00).**

Konop Baker offers the reader a window on her most intimate thoughts and fears, and writes without shame about the self-pity she felt when first diagnosed, the anger she felt toward her husband, the despair that wracked her when she thought about her children without a mother. And then, she becomes determined to fight. She researches carcinogens, becomes an organic food evangelist, steps her running and yoga up a few notches in the hopes that extreme health will ward off the disease. Throughout, she wonders when her life—after years as a wife and mother—finally gets to be about her hopes, her dreams, her desires?

"As I sit on the examining table in the internist's office for my pre-op physical a day or two later, I think about Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*, how it was

praised for its lack of self-pity as I silently chant *poor me poor me poor me*,” she writes. “I am an armchair nutritionist, a person others consult for health and anti-aging tips, a lifelong subscriber to *Prevention*. I feel that ‘me’ slipping away as I wonder how I could suffer a condition more serious than my chain-smoking nitrate-loving fruit-phobic nonexercising mother-in-law ever experience. Fuck you, Joan Didion. It wasn’t *you* who keeled over before dinner.”

There are more tests, talk of surgery, friends who die, and friends who have affairs *for* her. There is bickering and fighting and making up with her husband, her sex life comes and goes, and getting her first child off to college turns out to be an easier task than she thought. Konop Baker’s kaleidoscopic view of a real life, lived through a real scare, will ring true to any woman who’s ever been party to an uphill battle, and wasn’t sure who would think she was crazy for her feelings and actions—or worse.

**CANCER IS A BITCH** is a rollicking, life-affirming read, by a true heroine for our times.

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**About the Author:** Gail Konop Baker lives in Madison, Wisconsin, with her family. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *LiteraryMama.com*, *Talking River Review*, *The Potomac*, *Mota*, *The Danforth Review*, *Madison Magazine*, *Yankee Pot Roast*, *Wisconsin Trails*, *Xanadu*, *Womansong*, *Pudding Magazine*, *Glass Review*, and an anthology funded by the Ohio Arts Council. Her *LiteraryMama* column "Bare-breasted Mama" made its debut in October of 2006.

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