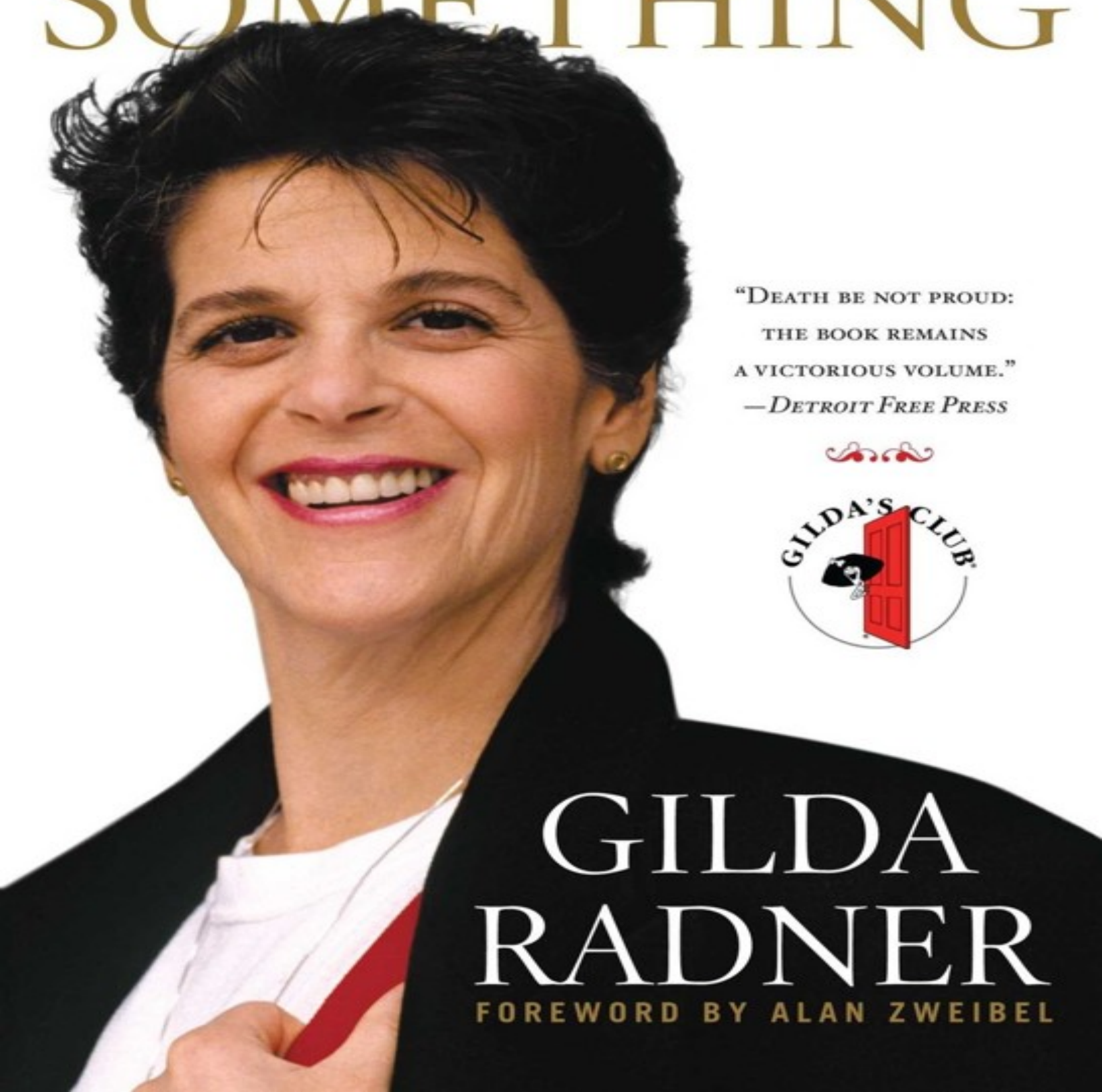


20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION—NEWLY REVISED

IT'S ALWAYS SOMETHING



"DEATH BE NOT PROUD:
THE BOOK REMAINS
A VICTORIOUS VOLUME."
—*DETROIT FREE PRESS*



GILDA
RADNER
FOREWORD BY ALAN ZWEIBEL

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To my dear husband, Gene Wilder

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Foreword

We had so much fun.

Gilda and I were hired to be a part of a new show, to be called “Saturday Night Live,” and the time we spent together was dedicated to comedy. Writing jokes and creating characters. And boy, it was fun. The mid-’70s. Two kids roaming the streets of New York at a time when everyone seemed to be our age. Fellow boomers who shared our life experiences during the same cultural revolution. We’d take subways and long walks and even longer dinners where we’d bring legal pads and try our best to make each other laugh. And if we did, we wrote it down. And if it made our “SNL” colleagues laugh, Lorne Michaels put it on television. The success of the show put us in the company of famous people and allowed us to enter rooms where parties were taking place. We took none of it too seriously—it was a ride we tried to enjoy without losing our sense of wonder.

Then adulthood set in. Grown-up things like marriages and mortgages and careers that no longer involved each other put our friendship to a test across a country that now separated us. She in Los Angeles and I in New York in a pre-Internet world where handwritten letters and late-night phone calls did their best to keep us connected. But inevitably we drifted apart.

When I co-created a television show in 1986 that required me to move to California, I called Gilda. In an attempt to revive a dormant relationship, I would ask her out; she’d accept, and then break the date at the last minute. Time and again this happened and I got angry. She explained that she was sick. That her mind wanted to do things that her body no longer allowed her to do. The doctors called it Epstein-Barr virus and said it would have to run its course. When it was correctly diagnosed as ovarian cancer, a heroic Gilda emerged. She used her fame to shine a light on her sickness and show the

world that you can lead a quality life by dealing with it head-on. She looked it straight in the eye and dared it to get the better of her. To prove her point, she went to Lakers basketball games, appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine, and made cancer jokes on *It's Garry Shandling's Show*.

Her illness drew us closer. My job was to make her laugh. To take her mind off what was happening to her. Yet one night, during a quiet walk along a California beach, she told me she would have preferred to be a ballerina; that comedy was about what was wrong with the world—people laughed because something was too big, or too small, or too much, or not enough. Quirks and exaggerations were the essence of parody. Irony and discomfort the grist for humor. But ballet was about harmony. Poetry in controlled motion. A finely tuned, musically carried body at peace with all that surrounds it.

Gilda's contribution straddles both worlds. Her comedy still makes people laugh whether she's loud as Roseanne Roseannadanna or running around like the little girl with whom she was always in touch. At the same time, her pleas for early detection, urgings to celebrate all of life's delicious ambiguities, and legacy of Gilda's Club help people find the ballet in their own lives. I think she would be pleased.

Alan Zweibel
New York, N.Y.
May 2009

Introduction

I started out to write a book called *A Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife*. I wanted to write a collection of stories, poems, and vignettes about things like my toaster oven and my relationships with plumbers, mailmen and delivery people. But life dealt me a much more complicated story. On October 21, 1986, I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Suddenly I had to spend all my time getting well. I was fighting for my life against cancer, a more lethal foe than even the interior decorator. The book has turned out a bit differently from what I had intended. It's a book about illness, doctors and hospitals; about friends and family; about beliefs and hopes. It's about my life, especially about the last two years. And I hope it will help others who live in the world of medication and uncertainty.

These are my experiences, of course, and they may not necessarily be what happens to other cancer patients. All the medical explanations in the book are my own, as I understand them. Cancer is probably the most unfunny thing in the world, but I'm a comedienne, and even cancer couldn't stop me from seeing humor in what I went through. So I'm sharing with you what I call a seriously funny book, one that confirms my father's favorite expression about life, "It's always something."

Buddha told a parable in a sutra

A man traveling across a field encountered a tiger. He fled, the tiger after him. Coming to a precipice, he caught hold of the root of a wild vine and swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above. Trembling, the man looked down to where, far below, another tiger was waiting to eat him. Only the vine sustained him.

Two mice, one white and one black, little by little started to gnaw away the vine. The man saw a luscious strawberry near him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other.

How sweet it tasted!

Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings,
Compiled by Paul Reps