

cally beaton

NAMASTE
MOTHER
F*CKERS



a modern manifesto
for keeping cool when
you're a hot mess

**'This is the best writing by
Mrs Beaton since that cookbook'**

SANDI TOKSVIG



Author photo by Natasha Pszenicki

Cally Beaton is a comedian, keynote speaker, awards host, business leader, podcaster, writer and entrepreneur. She has held senior management positions at some of the biggest media companies in the world. Early in her career she headed an independent television production company that was bought by ITV and Cally became the youngest and only female member on the board. She left to set up an award-winning creative consultancy, Road Trip Media, and went on to do a ten-year stint as Senior Vice President at the US studio giant ViacomCBS. If you want someone to blame for bringing *South Park* and *SpongeBob SquarePants* to the world, you need look no further.

In 2021 she launched her hit podcast *Namaste Motherf**kers* with a star-studded roster of celebrity guests, including Miriam Margolyes, Philippa Perry, Sally Phillips, Deborah Meaden, Kirsty Wark, Omid Djalili, Susie Dent, Sir Grayson Perry, Esther Rantzen, Paloma Faith and the Reverend Richard Coles.

Her popular Instagram reels have amassed over 100 million views and counting.

*Namaste Motherf*ckers* is her first book.

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NAMASTE MOTHER F*CKERS

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To Jake and Ella.

You've taught me everything,
apart from how to live without you.

PRAISE FOR

NAMASTE MOTHERF*CKERS

‘This is an absolute book.’

Dawn French

‘Who needs lots of long dead philosophers when you’ve got Cally Beaton bursting with life.’

Kirsty Wark

‘Immediately gripping and real – much needed. I LOVE THIS BOOK.’

Helen Lederer

‘For women, life is in two acts; the trick is surviving the interval. But once you get through menopause, it’s the best time of your life. Cally’s gutsy, hilarious, kick-ass book will teach you how to age with mischief, audacity and sass, and how never to pass your amuse-by date.’

Kathy Lette

‘If you’ve ever met a woman over 40, or ever plan to, read this so you don’t piss us off.’

Angela Barnes

‘This excellent book delivers empathy, peace of mind and hard-won advice with a side order of Cally’s trademark sweary feel good factor. Plus: way less effort than yoga.’

Viv Groskop

‘A charming, witty guidebook for anyone who’s ever felt like an invisible imposter.’

Deborah Frances-White

‘A hugely inspiring story of one woman’s refusal to go gentle into that good night (or anywhere) interwoven with a wise and witty guide to midlife – brava!’

Helen Russell, author of *The Year of Living Danishly*

‘Hilarious, furious, fabulous – she IS woman. Hear her roar!’

Louisa Young

NAMASTE MOTHER F*CKERS



Author's note on language

I was born into a world that was binary – you were gendered male or female, and your sexuality was gay or straight (ideally straight – definitely not queer). Women in my generation were still being encouraged to go to university to meet a suitable husband (I came out with a 2:1 and, to this day, no husband). Thankfully, the world has moved on in the intervening half-century. I identify as a cis woman, and this book comes from my lived experience as such. My intention in writing it is that there will be much with which you will identify, however you identify.

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Introduction

This book is not – and I repeat *not* – a luxury item. It is not about success, redemption nor vagina candles, but it has radical reinvention and possibility at its heart, combining human life hacks with life lessons from the natural world. It is my conviction that reinvention is an essential and recurring theme in people's lives in the twenty-first century – and that, as the years go by, reinvention isn't necessarily about downsizing. Instead, it can be about taking everything you've done to date along with you and going bigger, and bolder, ensuring that what you do next is the best you've done yet.

I've known for the longest time that this is a book that needed to exist, and one that I needed to write. It's a book that started out as an ember somewhere in my (no longer very fertile) innards, and has since become an unignorable blaze in my heart and soul. But I didn't know where to begin.

And then, something happened. I was ghosted for the very first time. Ghosted. At fifty-five. He was sixty-three (probably still is; he didn't actually become a ghost). For a minute I felt very modern, like one of those jilted Gen Z or millennial daters one reads about. I'd been aired, orbited and breadcrumbed before, and now I'd been ghosted. The night before we'd been at the theatre, holding hands, laughing, whispering in each other's ears while watching *Crazy for You* – ironically – then afterwards kissing and walking, arm in arm, across movie-perfect Waterloo Bridge. The next morning, gone. Just like that. I was baffled. Then hurt. Then, as the days rolled by, I became untethered and vulnerable. If it wasn't for social media, I'd have been calling around hospitals. Thanks to Twitter (I still refuse to call it X – I miss the little bird) I could see that he was tweeting nonchalantly about things like the cricket, which didn't seem the sort of thing you'd make your focus in your final hours in intensive care.

So there it was, the latest version of something I've been grappling with for years: invisibility. He disappeared in an instant, as if I had dreamed him, and in doing so erased me – out of mind and out of sight. Overnight I'd reached my sell-by date. I never even got my goodbye. Having managed to avoid being ghosted during the dating decades since splitting up with the father of my at-the-time young children, it pulled me up short. I'd become invisible to him, and it brought into sharp relief how invisible and irrelevant I sometimes felt to the wider world, and also to myself.

When I'm having one of those days when I'm channelling 'I am woman, hear me roar', I'm all about invisibility on women's terms and for women's benefit. Would that playing Helen Reddy on a loop could be enough to keep a midlife woman – or, indeed, any woman – consistently empowered (although she herself is pushing eighty and still roaring, by all accounts, so fair play). But the reality is that the midpoint in a woman's life can be a right old bloody drag; such a drag that the peak age at which women die by suicide is in their early fifties – an oestrogen-deprived version of the heartbreaking men-in-their-twenties mental-health epidemic.

Menopause happens to over 50 per cent of the population, and if it was the other just under 50 per cent – you know, blokes, captains of industry, leaders of society, wagers of war – I reckon there'd have been a bit more done to help by now. Having not been talked about enough for decades – centuries, even – now you can't move for books, podcasts and articles about it, and it's doing for hormone awareness what salted caramel did for desserts.

After a recent gig, where I'd done a bit of menopause material – menerial – an audience member came up to me. We were having a rollicking good chat until he said . . . could he just ask, not that he's got anything against female comics talking about periods or menopause or sex or whatever – or, indeed, against female comics full stop – but how did I think his mother and grandmother coped with menopause without needing to talk about it all the time? Having briefly toyed with slapping an oestrogen patch over his still-open mouth (but they're very hard to come by, so why waste one?), I responded by explaining that we'd all coped with lots of things in the past, like dentistry without anaesthetic, or

passive smoking in public spaces, or dying in car accidents without seatbelts. And how did he know they'd 'coped', when women were routinely being locked in institutions and given everything from Valium to hysterectomies when all they actually needed was HRT? And if, for generations, men had been having their willies removed because of anxiety, depression and an inability to regulate their own body temperature, then I think we'd all feel able to agree that it's a pretty good thing it's finally on the agenda now. Yes? Right. Are we going for that drink or what?

No idea why I'm single.

Last month, I was offered the chance to join a workshop at my GP surgery about what to expect in perimenopause. I mean, it's brilliant they're offering this kind of thing, but I can't help noticing they're . . . er . . . ten years too late? Is this what NHS waiting lists have come to? Perhaps they're mistaking me for some kind of Benjamin Button of female hormones – I'll be working my way back to antenatal classes by the time I'm sixty. Next stop, a hip replacement for someone who's already dead. Either way, I doubt there's a midlife woman reading this who hasn't at some point been misdiagnosed, misunderstood or dismissed by her GP, in a way that simply doesn't happen to men. (And sadly, there aren't many younger women who won't also have had this experience.) This is medical misogyny – and we'll be returning to it later.

We may think, or at least hope, that equality is just across the horizon, but books like *Invisible Women* by Caroline Criado-Perez remind us that we are living in what is indubitably a man's world, not least because those who built it were mainly men: men who didn't sufficiently – or often even slightly – take gender differences into account. Smartphones are too bulky for us; buildings are too cold for us. When I used to skydive, parachutes were too big for us, and I daresay they still are. Cars are still designed around the body of 'Reference Man', meaning that although men are more likely to crash, women are more likely to be seriously hurt. I wish there was a suit that could be built around the body of a 'Reference Midlife Woman' so that men could walk a day in our shoes. Like Billy Connolly said: 'Before you judge a man, walk a mile in his shoes. After that, who cares? He's a mile away and you've got his shoes!' Midlife women across the land would be

willingly donating our shoes if only it meant we could see strides towards our needs being met – at work, at home and in the world at large.

Like all females born in the 1960s, it was inevitable that I would come hard up against invisibility (if one can indeed come hard up against literally nothing – physics never was my strong point), and the fact that you don't get to choose when you're invisible and when you're not. One of my earliest memories is of hiding from my brother behind the sofa when I was nearly two: *You can't find me!* At twenty-two months older than me, my brother could – mainly because my face was hidden behind the sofa, while the rest of me was very much sticking out. At nearly four, he knew more than me about most things, including that I was crap at hide-and-seek. (Later that day, we played a game that involved him pushing me down a steep hill in a wheelbarrow. I ended up smashing my head into a wall, then one of our goats did a poo on the kitchen floor; welcome to growing up in the 1970s. And to males pushing me around.)

I didn't realise it until decades later, but invisibility would go on to define much of my life. (Wheelbarrows and shitting goats, less so.) My brother went on to become a physicist, by the way. I'd get him to mansplain the viability of coming hard up against invisibility, but I'm too hot and too tired and I can't be arsed.

Here's the thing – being a midlife woman is nothing if not a series of contradictions, and for all its limitations, invisibility is also a superpower – right up there with teleportation and being able to fly. My solo show the year I turned fifty was called *Invisible*, inspired by the words of French author Yann Moix (at the time aged fifty himself) about women over forty-nine being 'invisible' going viral. No one likes to be underestimated, and no one likes to have their story written for them. So I wrote my own story – and never had I been more visible. It doesn't matter whether it was a hit or a flop; it was my show, in my words, performed to my audiences.



Despite all this, midlife is a time not for compromise and resignation, but for empowerment and ambition – and that’s why I knew I *needed* to write this book. And you *need* to read it! OK, you are reading it. I’ll calm down.

What you’re about to read is empowering but also practical. It’s my own story of unexpected midlife reinvention, what led up to it and what has happened since, and it challenges at every turn the age-old narrative that women become invisible when they cease to be fertile. Allow me to reassure you – it’s not a smug, redemptive story inviting you to be more like me. I’m not one of those climbed-up-Everest-on-one-leg-in-a-tweed-suit types; this is more the still-don’t-know-what-the-fuck-I’m-doing-but-if-I-can-do-it-so-can-you school of self-help. Don’t worry, you’ll be fine. Or as fine as any of us can hope to be.

This is also a book about defying the bullshit expectation that midlife women at best maintain (looks, careers, relationships), and at worst decline. Not sure now’s the time for a quote from an old (dead) white guy, but hey – in the words of Frank Sinatra, ‘The best is yet to come’. For balance, my daughter bought me a brilliant T-shirt for my birthday, and on it, it just says in big letters: ‘My weight is not the most interesting thing about me’. What a brilliant, feminist thing to have on a piece of clothing. I’d wear it more, but it makes me look fat.

I have written this book partly as a memoir, but more importantly as a stereotype-defying manifesto. It’s about my experiences of life in the boardroom, then of treading the boards, and throughout it all being a single parent. And it includes nuggets of wisdom, with perhaps the wisest of all coming from my autistic zookeeper son, who has spent the past two decades sharing feminist case studies from within the animal kingdom. In fact, he’s taught me pretty much everything I need to know; apart from how to be a single parent in an empty nest, with him and his little sister now fledged.

First, we’ll take on the boardroom. After more than two decades of senior management positions at some of the biggest media companies in the world, sitting in male-dominated groups like Sigourney Weaver in *Gorillas in the Mist* (only more males and less handsome), I have stories to tell. Loath as I am to use the phrase ‘pale, male and stale’ – sometimes it just slips out – that was the world

I inhabited. Thank goodness I traded it in for comedy, where the gender balance is . . . well, pretty much exactly the same, actually.

Before I went from holding court to playing court jester, from the front of planes to the back of Megabuses, my side hustle during the boardroom years was coaching, training and public speaking. What people want from coaching or an inspirational talk is a) an amnesty on pretending everything is OK, b) to be reassured that ‘it’s not just me’, and c) words and thoughts that can turn into meaningful actions. (It’s the same with comedy, if you replace c) with ‘having a laugh’.) So here, I’ll be sharing my all-time favourite takeaways for free (well, you did buy the book). No pressure to do them unless you want to; life’s hard enough. But they’re here if you want them. And I promise you, they bloody well work.

Thirdly, I’ll be sharing lessons from the animal kingdom. As humans puzzle over the glass ceiling and how to get more women into leadership and empowered positions, could it be possible to look to the natural world for solutions? The answer is yes. My son has introduced me to some of the world’s strongest females – often in person, despite my protests. Thanks to him, I know the natural world is full of gender stereotype-busting females whose stories I will tell, from orcas to bonobo apes (who, frankly, make Germaine Greer look like an amateur).

And finally, there is a sprinkling of *Bake Off*-worthy gorgeousness atop it all, in the form of exclusive nuggets from my conversations with celebrities, experts and national treasures over a couple of hundred episodes of my podcast, *Namaste Motherf**kers*. Each episode ends with three questions:

1. What would you pick as your namaste motherf*cking life-changing moment?
2. What’s your favourite joke?
3. What bit of life advice would you give to anybody listening?

I've picked the very best of these to share with you, as well as some extra interviews done especially for this book.

You'll laugh, you might cry (when you read [Chapter 4](#), you'll see that's a good thing) and, as part of a collective of women going through similar things, you'll feel lighter (emotionally, not physically – we're not into beach bodies around here, unless your beach body is the exact same body you have at this very moment, blobbed out reading this).

Last but not least, my intention is for this book to resonate far beyond these pages with tips, tricks and takeaways in every chapter. Think of it as a road map to help you get out of your own way.

*Namaste Motherf*ckers* is about presenting our authentic, imperfect selves to the world and being the narrators of our own messy stories. If you're still wondering if this book is for you, then – unless you're living in a remote yurt without a mum, daughter, sister, female friend/partner/neighbour – I'd say it will have more than passing relevance. Join me in this celebration of and for the female of the species: invisible no more.

part one

THINK ABOUT IT