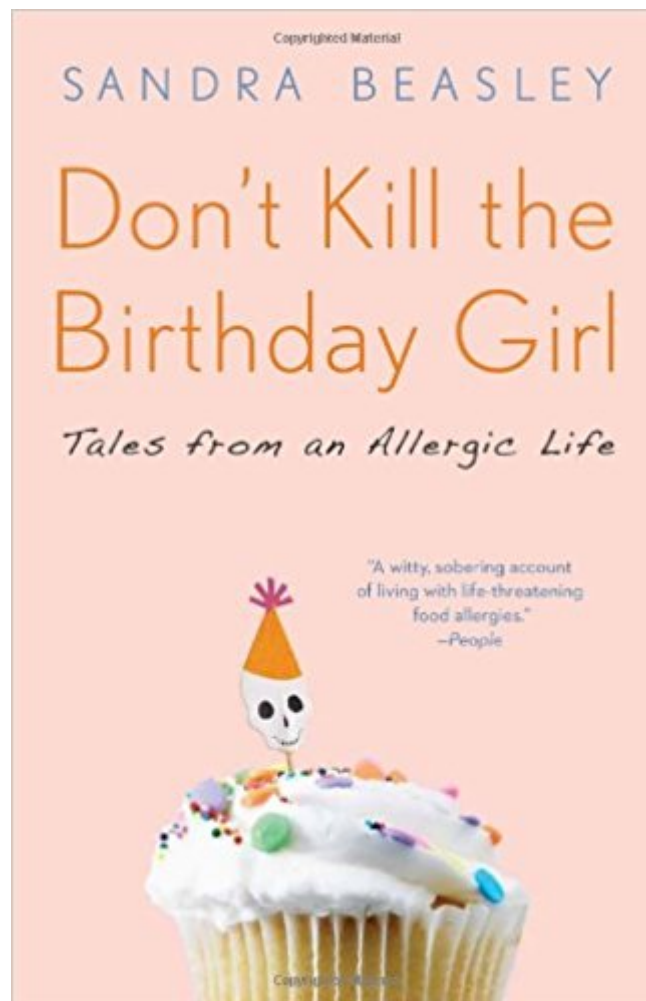




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# Don't Kill The Birthday Girl: Tales From An Allergic Life



## Synopsis

A beautifully written and darkly funny journey through the world of the allergic. Like twelve million other Americans, Sandra Beasley suffers from food allergies. Her allergies are severe and lifelong and include dairy, egg, soy, beef, shrimp, pine nuts, cucumbers, cantaloupe, honeydew, mango, macadamias, pistachios, cashews, swordfish, and mustard. Add to that mold, dust, grass and tree pollen, cigarette smoke, dogs, rabbits, horses, and wool, and it's no wonder Sandra felt she had to live her life as "Allergy Girl." When butter is deadly and eggs can make your throat swell shut, cupcakes and other treats of childhood are out of the question and so Sandra's mother used to warn guests against a toxic, frosting-tinged kiss with "Don't kill the birthday girl!" It may seem that such a person is "not really designed to survive," as one blunt nutritionist declared while visiting Sandra's fourth-grade class. But Sandra has not only survived, she's thrived—now an essayist, editor, and award-winning poet, she has learned to navigate a world in which danger can lurk in an unassuming corn chip. *Don't Kill the Birthday Girl* is her story. With candor, wit, and a journalist's curiosity, Sandra draws on her own experiences while covering the scientific, cultural, and sociological terrain of allergies. She explains exactly what an allergy is, describes surviving a family reunion in heart-of-Texas beef country with her vegetarian sister, delves into how being allergic has affected her romantic relationships, exposes the dark side of Benadryl, explains how parents can work with schools to protect their allergic children, and details how people with allergies should advocate for themselves in a restaurant. A compelling mix of memoir, cultural history, and science, *Don't Kill the Birthday Girl* is mandatory reading for the millions of families navigating the world of allergies and a not-to-be-missed literary treat for the rest of us. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A sufferer's witty, sobering account of living with life-threatening food allergies."

•People "Charming" Beasley is a warm and lively guide to the quirky world of allergies | a vital call to arms for allergy awareness. • Boston Globe "An honest and amusing medical memoir that's also a patient-written primer on food allergies. This birthday girl doesn't kvetch, though she has every right to. She doesn't consider herself a victim, just someone who has to experience the world differently from the rest of us." • Washington Post "Beasley shares surprisingly delightful stories about her own fraught relationship with food."

•Prevention "An unself-pitying meditation on what it's like to live without goodies most of us consider essential. What's more, she somehow manages to make the whole thing hilarious." • Booklist "Intelligent and witty | enthralling | thoughtful and well-written." • Publishers Weekly "Award winner Beasley (e.g., Barnard Women Poets) offers a cultural study of living the 'allergic life.'" • Library Journal "Fascinating | humane and informative." • Kirkus Reviews "[A] fun read...Beasley is certainly inspiring to anyone who's suffered from allergies or other medical conditions that make you feel like you're on the outside looking in. But her memories of a supportive family who stuck with her through hard times, friends and lovers who accommodated her needs, and her narrative of independence and self-sufficiency will strike a chord with any reader—even those whose gustatory options are endless." • SeriousEats.com "For readers who suffer from allergies, or care for someone who does, for parents who wonder why they can no longer send their child to school with the American staple, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, or for anyone curious about how Sandra Beasley handles a lifelong challenge successfully, this book is for you. Winning, wise and humorous, you'll think twice when someone says, 'Pass the peanuts.'" • Adriana Trigiani, bestselling author of Don't Sing at the Table "Sandra Beasley's memoir is so bright and lucid

and compelling, so intelligent and affecting— is even more than a gripping tale of living with numerous, potentially deadly allergies. Brilliantly combining her personal narrative with medical research and cultural analyses, Beasley's memoir is ultimately an exploration of how we negotiate our vulnerable, permeable selves in a world that is filled equally with joy and harm.

•Richard McCann, author of *Mother of Sorrows*

"Don't Kill the Birthday Girl is much more than a compelling examination of food allergies—it's a meditation on human fragility. Sandra Beasley has made visible the potential hazards of what so many of us take for granted and moves away from the body's rejection of allergens into the story of what it means to live and love. In sparkling prose, Beasley has written a memoir that becomes a remarkable

—undeniably informative, and a real pleasure—both hip and wickedly smart." —Alex Lemon, author of *Happy: A Memoir and Fancy Beasts*

"Sandra Beasley's book is both hilarious and moving. It's about what it's like to live in fear of hidden parmesan, but it's also about teenage rebellion, romance and George Washington Carver. Recommended for everyone, no matter what their immune system is like.

—A.J. Jacobs, author of *My Life as an Experiment* and *The Year of Living Biblically*

"Don't Kill The Birthday Girl is a compelling and enlightening exploration of what life is like for someone with life threatening allergies. Thoughtful and witty but most important, educational, this book is a must read for anyone who has or knows someone with severe allergies—which means everyone.

—Jill McCorkle, author of *Going Away Shoes* and *Carolina Moon*

From the Hardcover edition.

SANDRA BEASLEY is the author of the poetry collections *I Was the Jukebox*, winner of the 2009 Barnard Women Poets Prize, and *Theories of Falling*, which won the 2007 New Issues Poetry Prize. Her honors include a DCCA Individual Artist Fellowship, the Friends of Literature Prize from the Poetry Foundation, and the Maureen Egen Writers Exchange Award from Poets & Writers, Inc. She lives in Washington, D.C., where her prose has been featured in the *Washington Post Magazine*.

From the Hardcover edition.

**Pros:** This book was exactly as the title claims. This is a book about the author's experience with life threatening food allergies. Not only does it give many personal examples, but she explains the studies behind food allergies and the history behind certain aspects of said food allergies.

**Cons:** The author is allergic to many things, dairy and egg being the biggest ones. If someone is allergic to

some other, so of the advice may not be applicable to them. Overall, this book is helpful in finding ways in which you can live happily in the world despite the risk of death at every corner from food allergies. I purchased this book in order to find ways to help my 3 year old daughter with dairy allergies. I have since found that there are many more causes for concern as she grows including when she is old enough to be on her own. Having said that, I am glad I have this in my library for her to be able to use when she gets to that stage.

All of us know people who are deathly allergic to one foodstuff or another, which they must avoid at all costs. Sandra Beasley's life has been circumscribed by a huge list of debilitating, potentially deadly food allergies--eggs, dairy, soy, beef, shrimp, cucumbers, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, mango, cashews, macadamias, pistachios, swordfish and mustard, by her own count. But as Beasley's new book, "Don't Kill the Birthday Girl," demonstrates, she is far too intelligent and spirited to allow those allergies to define or limit her life. "Don't Kill the Birthday Girl" is part memoir, part informational non-fiction and part an act of advocacy on behalf of Beasley's fellow 12 million U.S. food allergy sufferers. The other 288 million of us can't really know what it's like to check every list of ingredients or every restaurant menu to ensure that harmless-looking cookie, burger or salad won't kill you. Beasley tells us exactly what it's like to avoid birthday or wedding cake as you would cyanide, or to go into sudden anaphylactic shock because the cocktail you just drank contained sour mix that used dairy protein as a binder, or because your boyfriend didn't tell you he'd just drunk a glass of Ovaltine before you kissed him. Some of the best writing in the book deals with the incomprehension, sometimes bordering on hostility, Beasley encounters from waiters and other strangers who don't understand that stray bit of shrimp or cashew is making her very, very sick. (For my money, however, the best line in the book is directed not at Sandra, but at her vegetarian sister Christina by their Texas grandmother: "Honey, you know God gave us animals so we could eat them.") "Don't Kill the Birthday Girl" contains fascinating information about the history of scientific research into allergies and ongoing advances in food allergy treatments. A fair number of pages are devoted to the current scare over peanut allergies, an allergy Beasley doesn't happen to have. ("In stabilizing peanuts for the sake of storing them in a jar, we may have destabilized their consistent ability to be recognized as food by the body," she writes.) Throughout the book, Beasley's voice is consistently witty, eloquent, and self-deprecating--the perfect guide to the strange and unpredictable world of food allergies. "Don't Kill the Birthday Girl" is an absorbing and fascinating book. Meanwhile, if you want to read more of Sandra Beasley's work--and you almost certainly will--check out her excellent, prize-winning books of poetry: "Theories of Falling" (whose "Allergy Girl"

sequence covers much of the same ground as "Don't Kill the Birthday Girl") and "I Was the Jukebox."

I loved this book! Informative, entertaining, and (for me) easy to commiserate with. There were so many times that I felt myself nodding along and saying, "exactly!" While not as severe or as numerous, I have food allergies. Beasley captured in words the internal debate of whether or not to sit through a dinner you can't eat or stand up for yourself when going out with friends, the annoyance of explaining that 'yes, there is milk in cheese...in butter, too', and the anxious mindset that goes with knowing any open food event could leave you miserably ill. It was also nice to get a review of some of the allergy knowledge I already knew and to learn a few new things, too.

I have Celiac Disease and must avoid gluten and dairy. I did not know if this book would help me since I technically do not have an allergy. Sandra Beasley's "Don't Kill the Birthday Girl," however, had a huge impact on how I live my every day life. I have no choice but to constantly think about what I eat and while my reaction is not as extreme or deadly as Sandra's, eating the wrong thing will lead to severe sickness and pain for about 2 weeks. I cannot stop recommending this book to my friends with allergies and without allergies. Her explanations of the difficulty in eating out and dating as well as her excellent discussion of the difference between allergies and Celiac Disease are things that my friends just don't understand. Thank you Sandra for writing a book that describes exactly how I feel as a twenty-something with food issues.

As a parent of a child with food allergies, I try to stay up on current research, but it often is pretty thick reading (meaning boring). This book reads like a novel and has all sorts of information I haven't found elsewhere (like how mango seed is part of the nut family but the fruit of it isn't). The author tends to go all out on telling her horror stories but every time I learned a little something, even if it was just that the body is resilient. Overall, it's very good for anyone who has someone they love in their life who has food allergies.

Sandra Beasley wrote simply about her life as an allergic child who has to function amongst a world of people who for the most part are not aware of the dangers an allergic person must face. I found her to be extremely understanding of others and sympathetic towards them. It would be important for anyone who knows or lives with another who is allergic to read this and see what life is like from the others view point.

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