

# talking back

## LETTERS FROM READERS

### SMOKE ALARM

While reading ‘Smoke Screens’ [by Judith Newman, Beauty, Health & Fitness] in your May issue, I felt like I was having déjà vu. I, too, was a nonsmoker diagnosed with lung cancer that resulted in the partial removal of my lung. I was even misdiagnosed, because I was not only a nonsmoker but too young and a distance runner, with no history of cancer of any kind in my family and no smokers in my family. However, I had been exposed to secondhand smoke while working successfully as a comedian for almost fifteen years in smoky venues all over the world. I like to think of myself as a surrogate smoker. It was someone else’s habit, but I carried the tumor to term.

What I lost in respiratory function, I gained in a belief that it was no mere earthly coincidence that my talent to make people laugh and my bout with lung cancer created a life-altering intersection. I now use my gift of humor to be a vocal and effective advocate for the prevention of tobacco use and for greater public awareness of the dangers from exposure to secondhand smoke, especially for children. I want all of the people my audiences to die laughing not from cigarette smoke.

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