

# COPD At 45?

*“Seeing Carol Burnett helped me stop smoking for good!”*

—Marti Perone

(NAPSA)—On July 4, 2003, Marti Perone was smoke-free for 11 months. And every time she has the urge to light up, she remembers the moment she quit for good.

“I had a dream about Carol Burnett’s daughter, Carrie Hamilton,” said Perone, a longtime resident of New Jersey. “Carrie was a smoker and died from a cancer-related illness in 2002. The day I quit smoking I thought about Carrie a lot.

“Two weeks later, I was in a Manhattan restaurant having dinner and wanted a cigarette so badly. I just had to have one. I found a cigarette in my purse and grabbed my lighter. Just as I went to light the cigarette, I heard someone laugh—a loud laugh—a laugh I recognized. I looked over at the next table and there was Carol Burnett. I just stared at her. I couldn’t believe it. I took it as a sign I needed to stick to my goal. I threw the cigarette and lighter away. Seeing Carol Burnett helped me stop smoking for good!”

Perone, 45, began smoking at 20 just to be social. She would go out to a restaurant with her friends and someone would light up. And innocently enough, so did she.

It was the late 1970s and the health risks of smoking weren’t as prominent as today. The Surgeon General’s warning against smoking had been issued in 1964, but tobacco companies had targeted women with aggressive cigarette advertising campaigns.

“When I was young, the majority of people I knew smoked,” said Perone, who smoked for nearly 25 years. “When I started, we didn’t know the statistics about the effects of smoking. We didn’t have



that fear about it. And when you’re that young, nothing scares you.”

Well, 25 years later, something did scare her.

“I noticed that I was having trouble breathing when walking up and down stairs,” Perone said about her experience during the summer of 2002. “In the morning when I woke up I could feel the wheezing. There was this sound and it didn’t sound good. I could feel my chest tightening. I thought this is going to kill me. I thought about that a lot.

“This disease has a cumulative effect. I was in that age range when it begins to show up. Hearing and feeling the signs, I think I was a little shocked and thought to myself, ‘Hey, this is really happening to me!’”

Perone had all the signs of COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), which is more commonly known as chronic bronchitis or emphysema. COPD is a progressive lung disease caused primarily from cigarette smoking. It is the fourth-leading cause of death in the United States with more than 119,000 Americans dying annually as a result of this deadly lung disease. A study by

the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that 24 million Americans have COPD, but only 10 million have been diagnosed with it. Although there is no cure for COPD, treatments are available to help alleviate the symptoms of the disease and improve quality of life.

When the signs showed up for Perone, it was her call to action. She quit smoking and a friend recommended she go to the American Lung Association’s Web site ([www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)) for help. There she found the COPD Lung Profiler, which provided her with information about COPD, as well as questions to ask a physician about her own personal health.

“I went to a pulmonologist, which is a lung specialist,” Perone said. “The pulmonologist examined my lungs thoroughly. He asked me questions about my smoking history, took X-rays and gave me a spirometry test.”

The National Lung Health Education Program, a leading lung health organization, recommends all smokers and former smokers older than 45 ask their physicians for a spirometry test, which is a simple non-invasive lung test. Patients simply blow into a spirometer (tube connected to machine) for six seconds. This measures lung function and allows physicians to diagnose patients accurately and provide proper treatment.

“When I left the pulmonologist’s office, I knew the damage I had done to my lungs and what I needed to do to help myself,” Perone said. “People with COPD think they are getting what they deserve because they smoke. That’s not true. They need to put their guilt aside, go see their doctors and set a plan of action to save themselves.”