

The Power of Personal Testimony

How Personal Stories Add Insight Into
the Toll of Tobacco

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In doing the project that resulted in the book *Smoke Damage: Voices From the Front Lines of America's Tobacco Wars*, I sought people whose lives had been affected in significant ways by tobacco-related disease.

The people I interviewed for *Smoke Damage* told different kinds of stories.

- Some told stories about illness.
- Some told stories about loss.
- Some told stories about getting addicted to cigarettes and struggling to quit smoking.
- Some told stories about awakening to the harms caused by smoking and by secondhand smoke.
- Some told stories about whistleblowing.
- Some told stories about political struggle.

I relied on a variety of sources to find people who were willing to share their stories.

- Newspaper articles
- National support organizations with local chapters
- Local cancer-survivor support groups
- Local speak-out groups
- Personal and professional networks
- Ads in health-related publications
- Agricultural assistance organizations

What Stories Can Do

- Make statistics meaningful on a human level
- Reveal impacts that are hard to quantify
- Make consequences vivid and more likely to move people
- Make information about impacts more memorable
- Humanize those who deliver challenging information

Stories Are More Powerful When They ...

- Illustrate patterns documented by other research
- Include concrete details
- Are told “from the heart”
- Have a beginning, middle, and end
- Come from a credible source