

# We Can Make a Difference

Abby Russell '91



*Ruth Stern, Abby Russell '91 and comics Jim David and Dick Capri at The Friars Club.*

My dad has always been the epitome of strength. An old photograph shows me at three years old, nestled like a young sparrow in my father's muscled, tender arm. The way my father carried me, it appeared I didn't weigh a thing.

Years later, his face was bloated and yellow-green. Tubes protruded from his nostrils as he lay unconscious under the harsh hospital lights of the recovery room. My dad had just gone through a procedure to treat his prostate cancer. Throughout my life, he had been there for me, but now it was my turn to carry him.

While my father was undergoing treatment, I was performing stand-up comedy a few times a month at various comedy clubs around the city. During the day, I produced television news features at NY1 News, but at night, I headed for the stage. Comedy and cancer. I decided to create the Hamptons Comedy Festival, a non-profit comedy arts organization that promotes laughter as a path to healing and makes grants for cancer research.

Now in our third season, many of comedy's brightest stars, both established and emerging talent, contribute their time and talent performing to sold-out crowds. We are experiencing a groundswell of support among the entertainment industry and the Hamptons community. The comedy industry's most prestigious society, The Friars Club, has established an award for special achievement in comedy arts, to be presented annually at the Hamptons Comedy Festival. And we are launching Comedy Fights Cancer/Laughter Promotes Healing, a Hamptons Comedy Festival initiative that brings comedy into hospitals.

In addition to the Hamptons Comedy Festival, I spend my time trying to make a difference as a documentary filmmaker. I probably frustrated many a Hewitt teacher with my never-ending stream of questions in class, but it's my inquisitive nature that propelled me into TV news. Ultimately, I started Nuforms Media, a television production company that produces documentaries. It's not easy work, but the potential ultimate reward of making a difference is why I do it.