

Hands and Cigarettes

by Chris Hirschhorn

When I was about 6 years old, my mom smoked. I asked her if I could too. She said take a puff of my cigarette and inhale. Her **hand** switched her lit cigarette to my **hand**. I placed it between my lips like mom did and inhaled. I almost died. It was so awful. I could not stop coughing. My **hand** immediately gave the cigarette back to mother. I had an immediate distaste for cigarettes.

But eventually I found myself in college. My close friends at Barnard were always smoking and playing bridge. I'd watch, bored, as a **hand** would bring the cigarette to her lips and take a puff and then casually her **hand** would take the cigarette from her lips and rest it on an ashtray and then her **hand** would pluck a card, place it on the table and continue to play the game called Bridge.

I always wondered how they had time to smoke and play cards when I, as a pre-med / math major, hardly had time to grab a coffee & donut between classes what with all my labs, German Classes and library needs. Obviously, I chose the wrong major.

I never really missed the smoking thing until I was faculty at a private boarding school for young ladies in MA. I was aware that the other young faculty disappeared between classes and I asked, "Where do you go between classes?" The answer: "To the Smoking Room." I knew what I had to do. I bought a pack of cigarettes and disappeared to the Smoking Room in the 10 minutes we had between classes. I never inhaled and a pack lasted seemingly forever.

When I resigned from the faculty and moved back to NYC, I thought it quite sophisticated to smoke like everyone else. But I had a problem. I needed three hands: one to hold the cocktail, one to hold hors d'oeuvres, and one to hold a cigarette. I solved the problem – no food – just 2 hands to hold the cocktail and a cigarette. Soon that was a problem too, so I gave up the cigarette that I never smoked anyway and with one hand just drank. I realized that at Cocktail parties I really only needed **one hand** and that was for the **VINO**.

And that's the truth! - as Lily Tomlin, TV comic, seated in her rocking chair, would say.