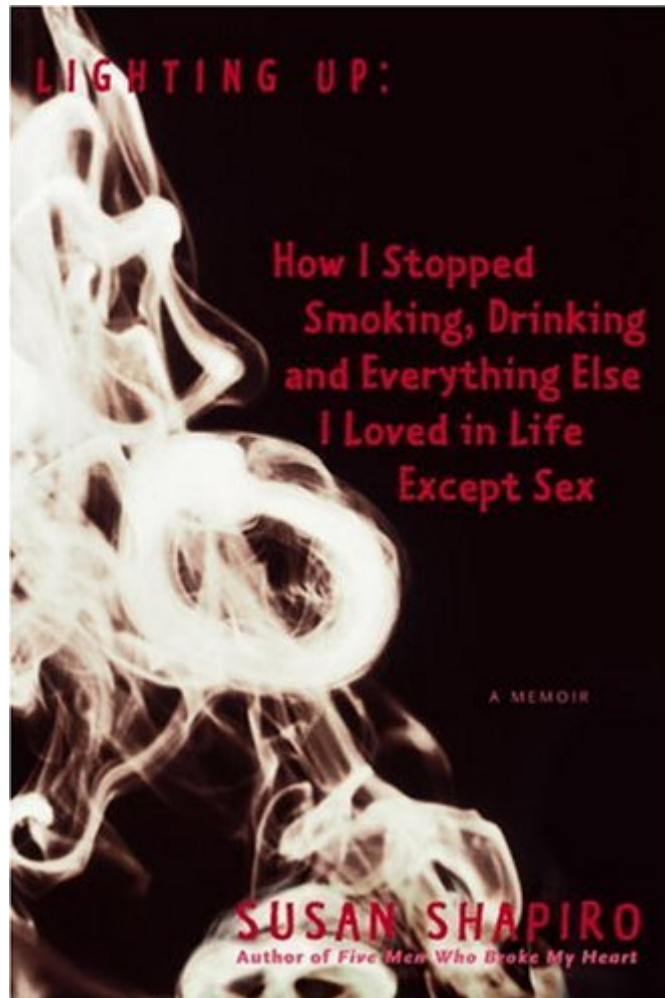




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Lighting Up



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Synopsis

In the critically acclaimed *Five Men Who Broke My Heart*, Manhattan journalist Susan Shapiro revisited five self-destructive romances. In her hilarious, illuminating new memoir, *Lighting Up*, she rejects five self-destructive substances. This difficult quest for clean living starts with Shapiro's shocking revelation that, at forty, her lengthiest, most emotionally satisfying relationship has been with cigarettes. A two-pack-a-day smoker since the age of thirteen, Susan Shapiro quickly discovers that it's impossible to be a writer, a nonsmoker, sane, and slender in the same year. The last time she tried to quit, she gained twenty-three pounds, couldn't concentrate on work, and wanted to kill herself and her husband, Aaron, a TV comedy writer who hates her penchant for puffing away. Yet just as she's about to choose her vice over her marriage vows, she stumbles upon a secret weapon. Dr. Winters, "the James Bond of psychotherapy," is a brilliant but unorthodox addiction specialist, a former chain-smoker himself. Working his weird magic on her psyche, he unravels the roots of her twenty-seven-year compulsion, the same dangerous dependency that has haunted her doctor father, her grandfather, and a pair of eccentric aunts from opposite sides of the family, along with Freud and nearly one in four Americans. Dr. Winters teaches her how to embrace suffering, then proclaims that her months of panic, depression, insecurity, vulnerability, and wild mood swings win her the award for "the worst nicotine withdrawal in the history of the world." Shapiro finally does kick the habit while losing weight and finding career and connubial bliss only to discover that the second she lets go of her long-term crutch, she's already replaced it with another fixation. After banishing cigarettes, alcohol, dope, gum, and bread from her day-to-day existence, she conquers all her demons and survives deprivation overload. But relying religiously on Dr. Winters, she soon realizes that the only obsession she has left to quit is him. . . . Never has the battle to stem substance abuse been captured with such wit, sophisticated insight, and candor. *Lighting Up* is so compulsively readable, it's addictive. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Susan Shapiro is funny. Some of that humor is derived from a keen perception, and some of it from a prickly honesty that doesn't flinch from showing her darker side. But it's the relationships in this book that make it great, Shapiro and her friends, her husband, and foremost her psychologist, "the James Bond" of addiction specialists. At one point in the book, he calls her "a woman of substance" and tells her future husband that he'd "never do better." At another point Shapiro's therapist accuses her of having "a chronic anxiety level connected to a hyperactive mind that's plugged into a very analytic level of consciousness." In fact, that's the engine that fires her quest to rid herself of smoking, toking, drinking, overeating. But counterpoint to her staccato mind, Shapiro also demonstrates an innocence. She's curious about everyone, including her shrink, spending half the sessions plumbing his mysteries. There's a childlike wonder in her outlook, reminiscent of Lucinda Williams when she asks: Is it much to demand / I want a full house and a rock and roll band? Like Williams, all Shapiro wants is passionate kisses from her hubby, and to make it as an artist -- both of which she obtains by the end of the book. In Shapiro's case, the art is memoir. She is unabashed about everything she is: ambitious, obsessive, generous, celebratory. And like Shapiro, you'll come away from this book embracing your own strengths and flaws, maybe even healing your own addictions.

"Lead the least secretive life you can," the author's addiction therapist writes. Personally, I'm

someone who avoids therapy so this book was especially helpful for me to realize patterns in my own addictive behaviors. Susan is a journalist and writes her memoirs with a reporter's stealth, examining everything from feelings, outside influences to dreams. Her naked honesty makes this a page turner and I found myself wanting more. (So of course, I ordered more of her work). It's truly admirable how bravely she reveals her vulnerability. In real life, the author is somewhat of a mythical character for aspiring writers who swarm her classes and workshops in hopes that through osmosis they can get published. The truth is, most people who study under her and take what she says seriously actually DO get published. Susan Shapiro is absolutely one of the top influential writers in New York City!

This book was an essential component in helping me quit over 10 years ago. The author is hilarious - it is very NY-ey. A wonderful tool.

Lighting Up is a great, can't put it down read. I devoured the story of writer and teacher Susan Shapiro, who found a shrink that served up a recipe for success. There was just one caveat: in order to find professional success (the shrink had already fixed her love life and got her husband to propose), she had to give up almost everything that made her feel good but was so bad for her. Shapiro takes you with her every painful (and funny) step of the way as she fights her addiction to pot, cigarettes, drinking, sugar and finds herself again when all else has been stripped bare.

Excellent. Entertaining and insightful. I got a lot from this.

This book helped me during early days of a cig quit. It was sweet and cool to experience an honest story of becoming more real as the defenses fall away.

I really liked this book. It was funny, insightful and real, and I couldn't put it down.

Not only was this book enjoyable and relatable -- it actually provided new food for thought. I believe I learned a lot that will help me overcome my own addictions (in fact, I just ordered a copy of "Unhooked", as well). It presents an honest, realistic, hugely entertaining and reassuring look at what it's like to change your habits - drastically and without replacing them with something else - and still manage to keep on living (and succeeding).

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