

Gilda Radner (1946-1989)

She was a castmate of John Belushi's when *Saturday Night Live* was washing over American culture like a tsunami, but she was in most ways besides her youth and irreverence an entirely different person than her costar. Her characters all had an innate sweetness, and she too was sweet. The main thing she shared with Belushi was that both performers were intrinsically, instinctively funny. Emily Litella was probably her funniest character. Litella was the woman of a certain age, hard of hearing, who would appear on "Weekend Update" to rebut arguments made in recent editorials concerning to take a few examples, "the deaf penalty" (instead of the death penalty) or "youth in Asia" (instead of euthanasia), and when corrected as to the topic, she would respond meekly to the audience and to host Chevy Chase, "Never mind." The catchphrase is still with us today.

But Radner is not. She married fellow comic actor Gene Wilder in 1984, and only two years later developed ovarian cancer, which she fought bravely and with characteristic humor until 1989. Radner leaves a legacy beyond her indelible comedy. She inspired the founding of the Gilda's Club movement, which now has wellness and counseling centers for cancer sufferers in several states. Gilda lives on.