

Le Bon Journal

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Volume 1 Issue 11: Smoke like you don't want to live

This issue is dedicated to all those smokers still smoking their lives away.

College tales

A classmate in college once confided tales of his amorous exploits. Through him, I learned what men find attractive in women.

One evening, he told me about a girl he liked very much. However, when he tried to kiss her, he could taste the aftermath of cigarettes. In fact, every inch of her body tasted like remnants of yesterday's ashtray.

I'll never forget the expression on his face. He was so disappointed that someone so beautiful could taste so bad.

Dining out in London

After California and Singapore, I'm pampered to expect a smoke-free environment to eat in. There is no such rule in Europe. In London, even the poshest restaurants do not have a separate smoking section. As a result, I have to cross my fingers while I eat, hoping that no one will start smoking next to me.

In Quaglino's, supposedly one of the earlier designer restaurant-cum-bars in the Green Park/Piccadilly area, the receptionist apologised that she could not get us a non-smoking table, but would make sure that we were seated in a smoke-free zone, at least initially.

Arriving with the dessert were two well-dressed couples who got seated next to us. That was when my trepidation started. No sooner than my second bite into the delicious white chocolate mousse, one of the ladies lit her cigarette. I motioned to my date to do something. Being a gentleman, he hesitated, and only turned to the lady after I pressed on his foot.

"Please. Would you mind?"

The lady put out her cigarette. Flipping her hair to the

other side, she made a loud sarcastic comment to her friends. "I just don't understand why non-smokers would sit here."

This annoyed me greatly. I dropped my spoon and turned to her. With all the fierceness I could muster up, I lashed back: "We DID ask for a non-smoking table. But this restaurant does not have one."

Needless to say, they spoiled our evening. Nowadays, I venture to restaurants so unpopular that even smokers avoid.

Awareness before change

I was surprised to find the top floor office smoke-free. For years I had avoided coming back because the owner smoked. This evening he revealed how he quit.

One day, he became conscious of himself. He was always lighting up a cigarette as a gesture when he got on the telephone. The ritual was this: dial the number, ring, answer, and light up a cigarette. Whenever he ran out of cigarettes, he would have to go all the way downstairs to replenish his supply. The more phone calls he made, the more cigarettes he lit. After awhile, he noticed this ridiculous, repetitive behaviour. Try as he might to change it, with Nicorette patches everywhere, he couldn't. He had become enslaved to this behaviour pattern. One day, he just had enough and quit for good.

The week before, I visited another ex-chain smoker. He quit smoking along with quitting his marriage. I stopped taking sugar in my tea and coffee when I left a significant relationship. Sometimes it takes big life changes to quit a habit.

Up in smoke

This morning my favourite radio station Classic FM reported that George Harrison of the Beatles died of cancer.

Long term cigarette smoking probably caused the throat and subsequent lung cancer.

Yet the millions of cigarette smokers around the world continue to smoke knowing that it's a major cause of cancer and heart disease. They continue to smoke knowing that their friends and family would become victims of second-hand smoke, a contributor to respiratory disease.

They know cigarette smoking kills. They know it's addictive. They know they are addicted. But they keep smoking.

Cigarette smokers have become so unpopular in California that my late friend Hiroko confessed that she had to smoke in her backyard to hide from her neighbours. And I recall how someone shamefully tried to hide his dirty ashtrays when I first visited his home.

Thankfully, smoking is now banned on most international flights and office buildings. But this means that the minute you leave the airport or office building, you have to walk through a cloud of smoke. And we've all become victims of passive smoking, especially outdoors.

In the last two months, I've heard on the radio and read on the Internet new studies that show why smoking is bad for you and the community.

1- Because they take "smoke" breaks, smokers are less productive than non-smokers, who become resentful of having to work more (to compensate for these breaks).

2- Second-hand smoking is terribly bad for children. Parents should know better than to smoke inside the house.

3- Smokers are deceived to think that smoking "light" brands is less punitive. They end up smoking more cigarettes to get the same amount of nicotine.

I have many dear friends who smoke heavily. It's become very unfashionable to smoke, I tell them. The health risks are also well-known. Other than raising awareness and persuading them to quit, I don't know how else to

prevent the early deaths of these dear friends.

One thing is clear: where there's a will, there's a way. And many of us non-smokers and ex-smokers secretly believe that our smoker friends and colleagues just don't have enough guts or willpower to quit. Either that or they aren't averse to the kind of slow, painful deaths that cancer patients endure.

Leaving Houston

I went over to the bar and sat next to a Russian petroleum engineer who bought me a drink. Drowning himself in double vodkas, he tried to convince me to do the same. He admitted that he was scared to death of getting on that plane. When he asked me to join him outside for a smoke, I politely declined. I told him that I was scared to death of getting cancer from inhaling cigarette smoke.

Playing soccer in Germany

We formed two teams. The German team was made up of tall, good-looking, non-smoking German students from University of Kiel. The foreign team included me and some Dutch and English guys.

Unfortunately, the English guys, being heavy smokers, soon ran out of breath. Needless to say, we were defeated.

Moving to St John's Wood

Out of desperation and necessity, I moved into a house full of smokers. The carpet was stained permanently from cigarette butts.

Since my room was right above the kitchen, I could smell the cooking. In the mornings, I could hardly distinguish between the smell of fresh coffee and the smoke of a cigarette.

My housemates smoked everywhere. They would smoke right in my face while I was eating.

At that time, I was more concerned that my precious houseplants would get smoke-sick than myself being able to live in such a household.

Eventually, as each smoker left, I would find a non-smoker to take his/her place.

By the time, all smokers were replaced, the house became orderly and clean also. By that time, I realised that I could not stand the smell of cigarette smoke.

Working out

At the health club, people expect to sweat. When smokers sweat, you can smell it.

The new Pilates teacher came up to me and asked if I had any injuries. It was a typical query at the beginning of a new class. Before I could say no, I could smell her cigarette breath. I immediately lost respect for her.

How could a fitness instructor smoke? What sort of example is that?

I shouldn't be surprised. Even doctors smoke.

Matchmaker's agony

My web developer friend could make someone a good husband, I decided. If only he would quit smoking, he could be the perfect candidate.

In a short walk around the block, he could easily have smoked two cigarettes. As much as I enjoyed our conversations, I wished he would quit.

He said that once he finds the right woman, he would quit for her.

I said that the right woman would only show up if he's quit already.

Who is right?

An ex-smoker confesses

I asked my ex-smoker friend why and how he quit.

He said that he has never liked smoking. As a teenager, he was really into sports and never expected to smoke.

Then this pretty girl came along. She had been smoking since she was fourteen. Both her parents were chain smokers. And naturally she

introduced him to smoking as well as the other addictive activity beginning with the same letter.

Before long, he became a regular smoker. Twice he had tried to quit, only to start again by picking up a cigarette out of impulse and habit.

If you're surrounded by smokers, he said, it's easy to keep smoking.

So how did you quit, I asked.

A different girl came along. All it took was one question, before they even met, "Do you smoke?" It was the way she asked it. He threw out all his cigarettes, matches, and ashtrays from that question onward.

AIDA principle

In marketing, first you have to make customers AWARE. Then get them INTERESTED. Cultivate a DESIRE. And they will take ACTION to buy your product.

I don't believe smokers deliberately want to continue smoking. Given all the health warnings, I am convinced that all smokers want to quit.

The problem begins with awareness. Do they realise that lighting up a single cigarette in a non-smoking room destroys the atmosphere? Do they realise that some people are allergic to smoke? Do they realise that their mouths taste sour and stale?

If they get interested enough to quit, they will look for solutions.

Ah! The hard part is to generate enough desire and willpower.

Even if they act on their desire and quit, it's no guarantee that they won't pick it up again.

My chain-smoker uncle finally quit smoking after watching his non-smoker son die of lung cancer.



Editor

Anne Ku is a non-smoker who advocates a smoke-free world.

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