KICKING THAT HABIT

I had my first cigarette at a high school party some time in my senior year of 1995. Smoking was a "cool" trend at the frequent high school parties, so I thought it would be impressive if I joined the smoking crowd. At first I only smoked casually and occasionally. Around that same time, I got an evening job as a busboy in a restaurant. Back then, smoking was still legal in restaurants, so most of the restaurant staff regularly had a cigarette lit in the waiters' station. Restaurant work is at a fast pace, so it was common for the staff to enjoy a quick "smoke" at their resting intervals. With all my co-workers smoking, I was quickly sucked into the smoking world of the restaurant. Being 18, I was also old enough to go out to nightclubs. Back then, nightclubs were more like smoking festivals for the patrons. I had no problem smoking at the nightclubs, especially when my smoking friends were around me. It just seemed that everywhere I went people were smoking. Before I realized it, my occasional smoking turned into a bad habit, and almost instantly the negative side effects of smoking started to kick in. Only it took me four and a half years to realize what I needed to do. I decided to quit smoking.

It had become an expensive habit. I bought my first cigarette packs for about $1.30, but at the peak of my smoking days they had increased to about $3.50 a pack. I was smoking a whole pack a day, so $3.50 equalled to $24.50 a week and close to $100.00 a month! Smoking was financially affecting me. I did not make much money at my work, and my smoking habit was truly putting a "dent in my pocket." It got so bad that I was constantly looking for cigarette bargains. For example, one day I thought it would be wise of me to save a few dollars and buy a month's supply of cigarettes in bulk. I went to Sav On, and I bought five cartons of cigarette packs. I thought I was smart at first, but I only fooled myself because I got anxious to smoke more. Since I had all those packs on hand, three weeks is all it took me to smoke them all. To make things worse, I also had to worry about having enough cigarettes for my nagging friends. Whenever they were around, it seemed they only "hung out" with me to get to my cigarettes. They were constantly bothering me and draining my cigarette supply. This made me angry, especially when I would run out of "smokes" in nightclubs, where they sold for $6.00 a pack.

I also did not like the smell. The cigarette smoke caused an irritating stink that penetrated everything, including my car, my clothes, my apartment, and me. I disliked constantly smelling that stink; to make matters worse, it was impossible for me to dodge that stink no matter how much I cleaned and washed. I never discovered a cleanser good enough to neutralize the cigarette smell. Along with the stink came the permanent cigarette burns on my furniture, clothes, and car. Even though the burns were accidental, they left permanent impressions. For example, the front seat of my old car looked like the fur on a cheetah with all the smelly black spots left by burns. The cigarette smell also affected me in public. Non-smokers complained when my smoke would float towards them. I distinctly remember the way they would react in bars and other public facilities. I was lucky if the non-smokers just fanned the smoke out of their faces with their hands and then frowned at me. Other times I was not so lucky, such as when my smoking would result in arguments between us. Worst of all, smoking gave me an immediate bad breath. As soon as I inhaled the smoke, my breath got contaminated with the stink. I had to chew a whole pack of minted gum just to get my breath back to normal.
Furthermore, I realized that smoking was unhealthful. To start, I easily got short of breath. For example, I would lose my breath when I walked a long distance or played a game of basketball. It was embarrassing when people would see a young "guy" like me trying to catch my breath. Just as bad, smoking gave me a constant cough, even when I was not smoking. I remember I coughed so often that my mom got concerned about it and advised me to consult a doctor. She did not know I smoked, so she assumed I had a simple and curable problem. I never did tell her the truth about my cough. I also lost my appetite from smoking. I developed bad eating habits, which caused me to constantly gain and lose weight. Some days I craved food, so I ate to satisfy the craving. Worst of all, smoking stained my teeth and infected my gums. No matter how hard I brushed my teeth and flossed, my oral hygiene did not get better. I even visited my dentist twice, but my goal failed. My dentist made the point that as long as I smoked there was nothing he could do to fix my oral hygiene. Furthermore, smoking had its hidden dangers as well. I finally realized that I was increasing the chance of developing lung cancer. Once at a physical check-up, a doctor gave me a "reality check." He told me that, at the rate I was smoking, the possibility of my developing a lung disease was as soon as fifteen years.

It's been two years since I last smoked a cigarette, and I have no urge to do so. I am a person who learns from my mistakes, and I never do them again. I have also begun to exercise, and I also got back to my old physical shape. It's as if I never smoked. Along with regaining my health, I also stopped risking my family's health with the second-hand smoke that they were vulnerable to. Quitting smoking is one of the most rewarding things I've ever done.