

## Struggling to Quit

**By Aracelis**

I smoked a cigarette the first time because of a boy.

It was three summers ago, when I was 16. My mother was a smoker but my boyfriend, who also smoked, was the real problem. One night after he left my house, I was sitting alone in the living room, wondering what people saw in cigarettes.

My mom was already sleeping, so I went to the ashtray and found a cigarette butt. I took it into the bathroom to take a couple puffs.

It tasted like crap, so I put it out, went back to the sofa and started to pray. I asked God to forgive me for smoking. I was so scared and I didn't know why, so I swore I wouldn't smoke again.

## No More Good Girl

The next day, my boyfriend was walking me home, smoking a cigarette as usual.

"You know, I smoked the other day," I told him.

He said, "Yeah, OK," but I didn't think he believed me.

"I took three puffs," I said.

"You mean pulls," he corrected me.

I felt so stupid and childish because he knew more than I did. I was such a goodie two shoes, I wouldn't have believed me either.

"If you really did smoke, then here." He handed me his cigarette. I quickly took another three pulls just to show him. He looked amazed. After that, I'd smoke one or two a week, just to fit in. I didn't think I looked like a goodie two shoes anymore.

## Hooked on Loosies

A few months later, I made the transition from the occasional cigarette to a few per day. That started after I broke up with my boyfriend.

I had a big crush on a guy who worked the night shift at the grocery store near my house. I really wanted to see Charlie so I'd go to the store all the time.

The store sold single cigarettes, called loosies, and I'd pretend I was only going there for the cigarettes. I started smoking every day.

After we traded phone numbers, he started calling me to visit him at the store. He'd smoke and pass me free cigarettes while I talked to him, so I started to smoke more. After we started dating, I'd always have cigarettes on me and pretty soon, I was smoking a pack a day.

### **Making Up Reasons to Smoke**

I even came up with new reasons to smoke. I'd smoke when I was upset at my mother or anyone else. I'd smoke when I was standing next to someone who was smoking and that person gave me a bust down (half a cigarette).

Three years after my first cigarette, it's gotten much worse. I'll have one after every class and one after my internship. When I go home and do homework for hours, I use cigarettes to help me stay up and keep studying. I'm not smoking a whole pack anymore, but I smoke about 15 a day.

I usually take my mom's cigarettes, and yes, she knows. Sometimes she even buys me packs. But I've stopped buying packs with my own money, because each pack is about \$7. Now I try to only buy loosies, which cost 50 to 75¢ apiece. I think that if I only have one, I can only smoke one. Sometimes I won't buy a juice or candy so I can get a loosie.

### **It's Making Me Sick**

After an argument or a stressful day, a cigarette makes me feel like I'm sitting on a cloud. I feel as if I don't have any worries.

But then I feel tired and can't breathe when I go up the stairs. And when I wake up, I spit a lot. It's not the sexiest picture in the world.

I even started developing asthma a few months ago and that's something I never had before.

I've seen a lot of commercials on TV that show how much worse it can get for me. Smoking has more negative effects on my life than positive ones, and I wish I could quit.

But I want someone to make me do it. I wish people got tickets for smoking outside. Maybe then I wouldn't smoke so much.

### **Deciding to Quit**

I recently decided I wanted to quit smoking, so I did more research on the effects of smoking.

The American Cancer Society website ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)) says that "smoking causes about 87% of lung cancer deaths and is also a major cause of heart disease." It also

says that “each year secondhand smoke causes about 3,400 lung cancer deaths in non-smoking adults and 46,000 deaths from heart disease in non-smokers.

My biggest wake-up call has been seeing the actual lungs of a smoker at an exhibit of dead bodies. They looked horrible, black and burnt. I don't want my insides looking like that.

### **Everyone Was Smoking**

So I've started quitting by trying not to smoke when I'm walking outside. On the first day I cut back, I swear every person who passed by me had a cigarette between his or her fingers. I wanted to run through the street to get away from them all. But I didn't give in that day.

It's been a couple months since then, and I still haven't quit. Every morning I swear I'm going to do it, but I go to the kitchen and there they are, waiting for me to light one up. Sometimes I grab one and smoke it.

I've learned that nicotine is what's making it hard for me to quit, according to the American Cancer Society. Nicotine, an ingredient in cigarettes, is highly addictive. Although it produces a feeling that leaves smokers happy, once you want to quit, it says, "Sure go ahead and leave me...you'll be back." And sadly, that's been true for me.

### **Easier Said Than Done**

I've asked my boyfriend to not let me smoke around him, and he's agreed to help me. He smokes too, but only three or four a day. He just doesn't want me smoking as much as I do. The other day, I asked him to hold an unlit cigarette for me and he broke it in half. It made me so mad but I know he was doing it for my own good.

Obviously, quitting is easier said than done. I can write all day about why a person should quit smoking, but I continue to smoke about 12 cigarettes a day. I do want to quit, so my plan is to continue trying to smoke as little as possible.

*For more information on quitting, contact the New York State Smokers' toll-free Quitline (1-866-NY-QUITS), or the National Cancer Institute's website ([www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)).*