

Interview with Ewen Gilmour

Interview by Dave Gibson

Are you a smoker, a non-smoker, an ex-smoker?

I am just a non-smoker, that's simple. I don't see myself as an ex-smoker. I just see myself as a non-smoker, that's it.

Smoking no more?

Smoking no more.

That feels pretty good to say I imagine?

It does, it does but it just seems like I have always been a non-smoker you know?

I know. I understand what it's like. I am almost confused remembering how my life was with cigarettes.

I am hearing you, like I can't believe that I put quitting off for so long.

How long did you smoke for?

30 years. I smoked for 30 years and I can't believe I put quitting off and put it off and put it off and put it off and then when I finally did it, it wasn't nearly as hard as I imagined and now it just doesn't even cross my mind to have a cigarette.

Did you ever imagine that you'd smoke for that long?

Oh hell no, hell no. Who does? It's like, what is it, a lifetime commitment to suicide, that's what smoking is. I wish you know, if you could turn back the clock, it was one of those things I wish I had never taken up. I wish I had never started and now that I know how easy it was to give up I wish I had given up years ago. Imagine how much money I would have saved?

I reckon you would have saved \$5000 a year.

That's what I worked out.

Do you think it's as common now to smoke as it was a few years ago?

Even just a few years ago I think more people were smoking than they are now. You look at bars and clubs and stuff like that; when they first brought out the 'no smoking inside' rule there would be 100 people outside a bar having a cigarette. Now when you drive past a bar you are lucky if you see three or four out there.

Why do you think you smoked for so many years?

It fills your life. Like it fills your life, from you can't step outside without making sure you have got your lighter, your cigarettes, and you're constantly going, 'Oh can we stop so I can get some cigarettes?' It's like it just fills your life and messes with everybody else's, we're in a hurry, we are trying to get to the airport, 'Oh but I will just finish this cigarette.' I have no time for it any more. I am not anti-cigarette smokers, don't get me wrong. I actually go to cigarette smokers and say, 'Hey you know it's not as hard as you think to give up, because it wasn't you know? I thought it would be and sure, the first couple of weeks are hard but so is learning how to drive a car, once you get the hang of it it's really easy and that's like the way I feel with quitting smoking. Like now that I have got the hang of it, it's bloody easy.'

I agree with you. I feel that part of the problem is almost like a brainwashing that it's really hard to give up.

Yep.

And my whole life I've heard you know, 'It's really hard to give up Dave, it's really hard to give up.'

Yeah yeah, people keep telling you that. People keep telling you that and it isn't. It isn't that hard to give up at all and I think I was really lucky that I had people that wanted to support me through it as well you know, I had that support.

What kind of support did you get?

Well it was weird, I had made the decision myself. I made the decision that I was going to give up. I made it a couple of months earlier. I looked in my diary, I saw that I had got a couple of weeks off over Christmas, over summer so I set that as a date two months before so when I woke up on the morning I just didn't feel like a cigarette. You talk about brain washing, it was like I had brain washed myself into believing that it was easy to give up and I didn't need a cigarette and when I woke up that morning my body was already convinced I didn't need a cigarette. I reckon that was a really big help.

The support came from really weird places cause I didn't tell a lot of people I was giving up. I didn't make a big deal out of it but when people sort of saw and realised that I was giving up people that I didn't even know were coming up to me and going, 'I am really proud of you.' It was people I wouldn't have thought would care whether I smoked or not and people from really different walks of life you know? Everybody has been really supportive of me and smokers who know that I am not smoking, they don't smoke in front of me, you know, well they do now but they didn't then and if anything they tend to smoke less now because I don't.

Why didn't you tell that many people you were trying to quit?

I didn't want to tell a lot of people that I was giving up just in case I failed and then I didn't want to fail in front of all of those people but also I wasn't giving up for them I was giving up for myself, you know.

Awesome, I like that.

I never realised that I used to smell like that. I smell cigarette smokers and you know when a cigarette smoker walks in to the room, you can just sort of smell them and I must have been that smelly guy.

Yeah we all were that smelly guy.

I realise that I used to be that smelly guy. My mother-in-law, she came round to our house and I never smoked inside you know, even before it was illegal or whatever, but she said that the house even smells cleaner since I quit. There must have been something, probably the stink off me, on my clothes and my hair and all of that sort of stuff. Cigarette smoking is so bad, I can't even believe my wife used to kiss me.

Do you think it's as socially acceptable now as it used to be?

Not at all, it's not socially acceptable to smoke at all now. Those groups of cigarette smokers now at pubs and clubs and stuff is getting smaller and smaller and smaller. Whether it's because people are giving up or dying off who knows but the groups are getting smaller, which is a good thing.

Do you think it's uncool to refuse a cigarette?

I can't see why it would be uncool not to smoke. Nobody smokes now, people who smoke now are just like 1% of the population, or they should be.

Even in the comedy scene?

Even in comedy. Of course you should always refuse a cigarette, you should never accept a cigarette. People used to come to me all the time, this is one of my favourite things that I used to enjoy when I was a smoker, people would come to me and go, 'Have you got a spare cigarette?' Well as it turned out none of them were spare you know? Even if I didn't smoke them all that night, I would be smoking them the next day, none of them were spare. There were no spare cigarettes. When I gave up smoking I had a packet that had 13 cigarettes left in it, all of those cigarettes are spare cigarettes, I have still got the packet at home sitting there on the table mate, so the temptation is there in front of me any day that I want to I can pick up cigarettes and start smoking again but I just don't want to.

What's stopping you?

I just don't want to smoke any more. I am just sick of it. I am sick of the money I spent. I smell better now, other people smell better, well not all of them, some of them now actually smell a little bit worse.

What do you think smoking says about a person?

I don't know, I don't want to judge people. I don't know. I was a cigarette smoker, what does it say about me? I can't say, 'Oh that's a weak person' because then, well I can I suppose but then that means I was a weak person and I suppose I was. I didn't have the willpower to give up. Or another thing you hear people say all the time, 'Oh I can give up any time I want'. You might be able to do that at the beginning but the longer you smoke the less chance you have got of being able to give up any time you want.

What was quitting like?

The first two weeks were pretty hard but then everything, once you get the hang of it, is easy. You realise you don't even miss it.

That's true, it's not the end of the world if something's hard.

No not at all.

In your opinion, what's the worst thing about smoking?

Oh the worst thing about smoking is the smell, it's the nicotine on your fingers, it's the cigarette butts everywhere. So many positives about being a non-smoker aye? It's just like I say, I wish I had done it so much earlier, could have done it 10 years ago, could have done it 20 years ago.

If you weren't married, would you go out with a smoker?

Yeah well my wife went out with a smoker and when I first met her she was a part-time smoker. She hasn't smoked for years but she was a part-time smoker. Would I go out with a smoker myself now? I don't think I would because I don't think ... who am I kidding? You know if any chick wants to go out with me I am going to go, 'Of course, aye?' Guys, you know what I am saying aye? Seriously though, I wouldn't want to go out with a cigarette smoker because I wouldn't want to start smoking again.

Do you think you can tell a non smoker from a smoker?

I can tell smokers I think yeah. I saw a guy down the road just before, nicotine on his fingers and stuff like that you know, pretty easy to tell.

Have you or anyone you know had any success calling Quitline?

Yeah I called Quitline. It was my decision. I picked up my packet of cigarettes and I called Quitline and said, 'I want to give up smoking' and they told me all about it and sent me out the things and that's how I went and got the patches for \$5. \$5000 a year on cigarettes, \$5 to give up.

Awesome. So you are like a poster boy for Quitline then?

I am a bit of a poster boy for Quitline and they were great too. They were so supportive and they were just so like, 'Oh good on you man, you've made a good decision just phoning us.' They knew that I was still going to be smoking that day but they knew that I was making this decision myself. It was about me making the decision myself to do it. I had to give up for myself first.

What advice do you have about supporting family and friends who are trying to quit?

Don't be too hard on them and a little bit of praise now and then goes a long way. I think you have got to support them.

Were there any triggers, like alcohol, that made it harder to quit smoking?

Well I probably was a little bit unconventional in the sense that everybody had said to me, 'Try and stay away from the alcohol while you are giving up smoking', which is fair enough but a week after my date of when I stopped smoking I had a stag doo to go to and I knew that I would be in a lot of trouble because there was going to be a lot of drinking and a lot of smoking going on so what I did is the first day as a non-smoker, I got out of bed, went down and got the newspaper and a beer and went back to bed that morning and I drank beer all day so that was like at my worst time, I was drinking in preparation so that when I was drinking at the doo I wouldn't have that worst time and it worked really well. A week later I went to the stag doo, there was drinking, there was smoking, we were in a big room and I am the only non-smoker in the room and everybody else was smoking, and I didn't feel like one, it was fantastic. It's about changing your habits as well, you don't get out of bed, make the coffee and read the paper like you used to, you get out of bed, maybe go have a shower then make a coffee then read the newspaper, so it's just changing the way you do things so that you're breaking those habits.

Had you tried to give up before?

I had given up before, quite a few years ago though. 20 years ago I gave up for three months but I lived with some cigarette smokers and we all smoked inside in those days and I had a really cool room and quite often we would spend an evening in my room and they would smoke in my room and stuff like that and I woke up one morning and there was an ashtray with a cigarette in an ashtray right next to my bed and I just picked it up and lit it and that was it. I had been a non-smoker for three months.