

INTERVIEW WITH JOEL LITTLE

So why don't you smoke?

I guess I've never really been interested in it. I've never even smoked one cigarette, as hard as that might be to believe, but I just never liked the idea of it and never liked the smell of it. I've always found it kinda gross. My parents were both smokers. My mum doesn't smoke anymore but dad still smokes. One of my strongest memories as a kid is of my dad cleaning my face when I had food with his hankie and he'd lick that hankie and if he'd been smoking it would be the crustiest thing ever.

How do you think the attitude towards smoking has changed over the past decade?

It's just not as accepted by everyone anymore. In my group of friends hardly any of them smoke and the ones that do are the ones that are kind of left standing outside while everybody else is inside at parties. People are realising more and more that it's dangerous and that it's just not that cool to be a smoker. It's almost turning into an antisocial thing now where you have to leave everybody else to go off and have a cigarette. It just seems pretty pointless to me.

Why do you think those friends smoke?

A lot of my friends that smoked at high school probably did it because they were trying to appear grown up. Like, they'd see adults smoking and maybe think that is what you're supposed to do if you want to be a grown up. Most of my main friends weren't smokers, it was just kinda people that we knew that would smoke.

Do you think peer pressure is a big issue for younger people who start smoking?

Yeah, probably. I mean you want to fit in with your friends and if they're doing it you might think that it's something you're supposed to be doing, but just because your friends do it doesn't mean that it's right or it's a good thing to do. There's no point in it and hardly anyone's doing it anymore so you may as well not be one of the few that does do it.

Where else do you think the influence to smoke comes from?

Seeing it on TV and in movies and that kind of stuff. Seeing musicians and rappers and whatever with big cigars and that kind of thing. It can be portrayed as something that is cool, but I think you see less and less people in bands smoking these days, especially if they are trying to take care of themselves.

Do you think that smoking is an accepted thing to do in society?

I think these days more and more it's seen as an abnormal thing. It was weird when we were on tour in Australia and you're still allowed to smoke in bars there and it just seemed like it was such a weird thing to go over there and to go home stinking of smoke. It's so nice to come back to New Zealand where it's not as accepted.

How normal is it to be smokefree these days?

Well, I mean these days you know you'll see someone smoking and it doesn't look like it's a weird thing. People still smoke but it's just not something that everybody wants to or feels that they have to do. I'd say the majority of people probably don't smoke these days. If you don't smoke, you don't get a hard time. Like, when you were younger, you could get a hard time for not smoking, especially with people a little bit older.

As a performer, how do you think that smoking would affect you?

I think it would make things a lot more difficult if I was a smoker and I was trying to sing as well. If you're on tour and you're playing every single day, you've gotta take care of yourself. I can't personally go out drinking every single night because my voice gets destroyed. I'm not the greatest singer in the world anyway so I've kinda got to do what I can to make sure that it stays ok. If I was smoking, I would definitely be losing my voice on a very regular basis.

What is your advice around smoking for up and coming musicians who want to make it big?

I would just say, 'take care of yourself'. It's not gonna be a thing that's gonna benefit your voice and so if you are serious about something like that then you're gonna have to think about it quite seriously. Think about whether or not smoking is gonna help your band out at all, cos it's probably not.

What would you say to people close to you who are smoking?

Well, my dad still smokes and we've got friends that do smoke. I guess it's everyone's personal choice but don't think there are any smokers out there who think that what they are doing is good for them. They all know that it's bad but it's just something that they are kind of stuck in. Half of them are trying to stop and the other half know that they should stop.