

Interview with Ladi6

Interview by Lewis Whaitiri

How would you describe your smoking status?

I am trying hard to be a non smoker but failing every now and then but mostly really good, mostly doing really well. So trying to be a non smoker but sort of a smoker still-ish.

You're on the journey to give up?

Yeah I'm on the journey.

Do you reckon smoking is as common as it used to be?

I don't think so. I mean I grew up in a household where my mum smoked 24/7 in the house, all my family did and everyone in my neighborhood did. And I never see that anymore, like when you walk in and go 'oh is that you smoking inside? Very 1980's.' It's really uncommon now so that's good. I think it's becoming more and more antisocial to smoke you know, and you definitely feel no one else is smoking. Or everyone else smells good and I stink you know?

Why do you think some young people still take up smoking?

I started smoking when I was really young and all my mates did it. We all started smoking and seeing boys and it was kind of a rebellious thing. That's why I started and I think that that's one of the relevant reasons why teenagers still smoke it's like, 'stuff mum and dad I'm going to smoke.' And then they never make that deal with themselves at that time that they're not going to smoke forever and they get addicted and the next thing you know they're near 30 and still smoking and going 'I hate this but now I can't give it up.'

Is it becoming uncool to be a smoker?

Yeah I think it's really uncool.

Do you think it's socially acceptable to refuse a cigarette?

Yeah I find that cool because I'm on the journey of trying to give up and I love it when people offer me cigarettes and I go 'oh no I don't smoke', like yeah in your face. I find it cool especially being on this journey of trying to give up smoking. I like it when I can say 'actually I'm a non smoker thank you very much.'

What do you think smoking says about a person?

I think people would see it as a weakness. I see it as a weakness in myself that I smoke and I don't want smoking to control me. Like taking 11 hour flights from here to LA and you know stressing out because I couldn't have a cigarette, that sucks man. Like how weak am I that I'm craving a cigarette when I'm flying to LA; 'hello, be excited', but instead I'm like 'c'mon, seven more hours to go.' The control that it had on my life was ridiculous you know.

Like weeks before flying and trying to plan out how I am going to do this, how I am going to manage the flight and thinking, 'I'm going to need sleeping pills to knock myself out because

I'm going to be craving so bad.' And I had this moment where I just thought 'this is crazy!' It's a cigarette for goodness sakes, it shouldn't be controlling me, I should be controlling it. That's when I kind of realised I had actually lost the battle and I needed to give it up.

So as a musician what are your thoughts on smoking and how it affects you?

It's super important to not smoke. I used to make up heaps of excuses, like it gives me that soul sound so I need cigarettes. I would laugh it off but the reality is my set is really quite high, we jump around a lot and it's more a party set and you're getting people dancing and when you're running out of breath, it's really embarrassing. People have paid to come and see you. It's unattractive if anything else, it's quite ugly.

And I really noticed when I started giving up smoking. My first go I gave up for about six months and straight away the difference in my breath control was huge. Like I could just rap for days. There are so many reasons to give up. Even smokers know that there're a million reasons. If you wrote a pros and cons list there are no pros, it's all cons you know? And for me, performance and my ability to perform and rock a stage and not run out of breath - that was one of the major ones.

As a role model to a lot of people, does it concern you that you might be seen to be promoting something even though you're not meaning to?

I hate thinking of the fact that I may be responsible for people starting smoking. That just totally terrifies me. As a mother of a young child, I just hate thinking of him smoking one day and it being like whoever he idolises they will be an influence on him. So I mean, that's a part of the reason why I wanted to be part of this campaign. You've got to break the chain, you've got to break the cycle somewhere for your kids.

So when you have people over to your house, do they smoke inside?

They just go outside and shut the door. Yeah, don't put your butts in my garden! But I try not to be judgmental at the same time cos I don't want to be like, 'you're a dirty smoker'. I mean I can't say that to my mum and lots of people I know smoke. But at the same time I know that by me giving up it's really made them think. Like my mum's talking about giving up and she's been smoking for, must be like 40, 30 years or something. But when I first started to try and give up she really started seriously thinking about it and I just think that's amazing because usually there's no way she would. Her ciggies are like her bread and butter you know.

If you were single would you go out with a smoker?

Personally if I was single I wouldn't go out with a smoker because the sad fact is that smoking stinks. It smells.

Considering the quitting journey that you and also your mum are on, in what ways do you think you can support her and support other family members to quit?

I've got a book that I read and that was really important on my journey and I buy copies and I hand them around to people who are thinking of giving up smoking. I bought one for my mum and she said that when she's ready she'll read it and I know she will. Me and my aunty, we stopped smoking together, she's smoking now but we kind of had a friendly competition going on and that was really good for her because she actually stopped for about four weeks.

Those are the sorts of things I do with my family. I mean like the majority of the people in my family smoke. So I try not to be too hard out and try not to force my thing on them. I know that just by me being outside and having our cups of teas and our yarns and our catches up and stuff and just me not having a cigarette in my hand, I know that in itself has an impact on my family. I know they look at me and go 'ooh look at her trying to be whatever' but I know that they're secretly going 'I wish I was like Ladi, I wish I didn't smoke. I wish I was sitting there not smoking too.'

So what has your quitting journey been like?

You know it was really easy and then it gets hard and then it gets easy and then it gets hard. It's just a never-ending circle. I read Alan Carr's *Easy Way to Stop Smoking*, I gave up just like that and that was it all over. I think I gave up the first time for six months and this is from smoking for a good ten years.

I just thought, 'wow, this is like magic'. Then we went on the road and next thing you know I'm tired and I was just having a ciggie because everyone else was and it like gives you that little stimulant to stay awake a little bit longer. Then it slowly just crept back into my life until next thing I know I'm buying a packet and I'm looking at this packet going, 'I thought I got rid of you, what the hell?'

So I had to start again and then you realise it's a cycle and you've got to kind of keep on top of it. Like an addiction to anything, you've got to remind yourself every day to not do it or to be aware. The best thing is just don't start. It is a hassle to give up. It is something that you have to be thinking every day until you fully don't think about it anymore. So yeah, don't start that's the main thing. Do something else rebellious like run away. Just kidding I'm not promoting running away but take off with your girlfriends for a fun weekend at frickin Hamner hot pools or something.

When you first took up smoking did you imagine you'd be smoking forever?

Do you know, that is the craziest thing, when I first started smoking I didn't think that I was still going to be smoking in the future. That was one of the big questions in this book, 'When did you decide that you were going to smoke forever?' and that really hit home. I was like 'true that, I never decided I was going to smoke forever'. In fact I always just thought it was one of these things I was doing with my mates, I never really thought it would get in control of me and take over my life like it did. Seriously, at that point in my life when I was full on smoking, I couldn't imagine never smoking and that just blew my mind that I actually couldn't imagine myself without a cigarette. I would smoke even when I felt uncomfortable and I knew people were looking at me going 'ooh what is she doing?' I still had to smoke and I didn't want to. That was the crazy thing - smoking when you don't want to - why would you do that?

And obviously you talked about your son before - was it him that prompted you to stop smoking?

How sad is it that it wasn't my son that prompted me to stop smoking? That is so sad. I even smoked the whole time that I was growing pretty much. I mean he's five now and I smoked like from one to four. I didn't stop smoking. I tried to. I tried my very best but no I didn't. How sad is that?

Do you have any advice for pregnant smokers?

I'm kind of afraid of sounding really judgmental but I mean I would say, use that opportunity. I would say use this opportunity now to give up, you might as well, you're pregnant. Just try and do it, do it for your baby, do it for yourself.

So what finally prompted you to quit then?

I was sick of it. I actually got to my end of my rope with it and I just hated it and I couldn't believe I had to have a cigarette every 15 minutes. It was just stupid. I was flying a lot and I couldn't go on a three-hour trip to Melbourne or whatever without thinking about smoking and like international airports where you've got to go into this stink as room and it's disgusting. You want to dry retch but you sit in there and you smoke away.

I couldn't stand that that was me. That I was that person. That was how much I had let smoking take control of my life. I thought 'okay this is over. Me and smoking are no longer friends. You're dumped.'

So apart from the book that you're reading, what other services did you use?

I rang the Quitline and they sent me out patches, which I decided not to use actually in the end because I found the book through a friend, and when I started smoking again and needed to give up again it was the book that I went back to. It was the psychological things that I realised had a hold of me. I kept saying to myself, 'I only smoke when I'm stressed' but it said it in the book: 'do you smoke when you're also partying, when you're also having a good time, when you're sad, when you're upset, when you're angry? – Yes.' It was one of those moments when like little light bulbs were going off in my mind that I'm just lying to myself.

Do you have any advice for people trying to quit?

Yeah, don't start. If you're a young person out there, don't start. I'm telling you, it's so difficult to give up. It's just a huge waste of money. I'm not a rich person yet, I may make music for a living and I make music videos but that was another one of the big things is that it costs so much money and it's not worth it. Save that ciggie money for a car or a house.

Do you wonder how much you would have spent on smoking over the years?

Oh my goodness I've smoked for like ten years and, I don't know that's probably a pack of 20's every three, two days, that's like \$11-\$12 bucks a packet. I mean the amount is phenomenal. I probably could have gone around the world and back several times just visiting amazing places instead of smoking. It blows my mind that I would just waste all that money like that and that it never really occurred to me. I never really thought about it, I never truly sat down with a calculator and did the sums.

Can you think of any other things that would help people quit?

I mean from the first campaign, GP Waru said 'cigarettes are sold right next to your milk' you know and that is so true. You shouldn't be able to see them. They make them all shiny, and when you're a kid you think they're lollies and you genuinely think, 'I want that, that gold packet right there or that pretty red one or you know that one with the cute camel on it or whatever.' It's evil packaged in goodness and it is right next to your lollies and I absolutely think it shouldn't be. I absolutely think that they shouldn't have it anywhere near the front counter you know with your chewing gum and your lollipops and your candy canes and then

there's your big ciggie display behind you. I think that's absolutely wrong and that it shouldn't be displayed at all in fact.

Do you still get cravings?

I never get cravings now. If everyone else is smoking around me, I'm like 'go on then give me a little puff.' And then I'm like 'that's right, yuck'. I don't actually have the big hard core cravings for it anymore.

How would you describe your physical ability before trying to quit?

I started going to the gym and then I knew that I had to give up smoking because I couldn't breathe. I was doing weights and I seriously could not breathe. I knew it was the smoking and it wasn't that I was physically unfit, it was just my lungs were too clogged up with tar and crap and I needed to quit and let my lungs clear out. I noticed a major improvement in my fitness at the gym after stopping smoking and my trainer was just like 'oh give it up straight away'. She was like, 'why even bother getting a gym membership if you're still smoking?'

So apart from your fitness what other benefits have you noticed?

I've noticed my skin has got a lot better. It stopped being so dry and I actually stopped getting acne as much because I was really prone to acne for some reason. And when I stopped smoking I noticed that my skin started cleaning up like almost immediately it was like unbelievable. My teeth weren't as yellow, my clothes smelt like I could wear them for longer instead of having to put them in the wash after a night out. I noticed my eyes started clearing. I thought when I gave up smoking lots of things would change but the reality is not that much changes. You just don't smoke anymore, you're just living a little bit more healthily you know.

How do you deal with friends smoking? Does it tempt you?

Actually the smell of smoking puts me off. I can't stand it anymore. I can't stand sitting next to someone that smokes anymore. I mean I'm not rude I don't tell them to move I just move to the other side if the smoke's blowing in my face. I kind of do a little bit of a wave in front of my nose so they know and put it somewhere else you know. Don't be a dirty smoker, get away from me, but yeah.

Any thoughts on the tobacco industry?

I just think, man the tobacco industry makes so much money off us, and man we're stupid for giving them all that money and they suck for taking it man. And how many people die of smoking related diseases and they don't stop? I think that they are bad people and you know we need to stop smoking and stop giving our money to tobacco industries. They're evil.