

Interview with Shelton Woolright

Interview by Barnaby Weir

Tell us about your first experience of smoking...

I was on the beach at Omaha on a summer holiday. I would have been about twelve and I was with my cousin and we found a packet of Holiday cigarettes. I can remember them in the sand. My cousin had already had a couple of cigarettes, he was a bit of a naughty one, and he was like, 'Here have a cigarette', and I just kind of smoked a cigarette and felt a bit weird and a bit naughty. I remember being a bit shy to hang around my mother straight after that cos I was real scared I stunk of cigarettes.

Why did you want to quit?

I think the whole reason I wanted to quit was because when you actually look at the idea of smoking, it's pointless and I think you look like a bit of an idiot really. It's quite stupid and there's no need for it. You're killing yourself and you're having to stand outside in the cold if you can't smoke inside. What is actually the point of smoking? You think it's meant to relax you or whatever and it does the opposite really, it speeds up your heart. Other than that, you just become addicted to something and then before you realise that it's a stupid idea, you're addicted.

What has been the hardest thing about giving up?

When I was smoking I never believed I was a fulltime smoker. I feel with smokers they go, 'No I don't smoke, you know I only have a smoke when I drink or after I've had something to eat or when I go for a drive', and then before you know it you're in these routines of having a cigarette. And that's how I felt and that's how I realised I was addicted. I'd have a cup of tea in the morning and it wouldn't feel complete without a cigarette or I'd have a meal and it wouldn't feel complete without a cigarette. And these routines, if you can break those then that is the easiest way to quit smoking.

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

They probably choose to do it because it's who they hang around with or they look up to someone that smokes. So I think that's one of the things that needs to still be changed and kids need to be educated on how to make their own decisions on whether they want to smoke and to actually know the actual effects of smoking would be the best thing. I believe that changing smoking in bars and stuff is awesome cos when you drink you find yourself smoking a lot as well, so it's one the hardest things to break. It's good to be able to walk out of a bar and not stink of smoke or play a concert and not stink of smoke and be able to breathe, because when you're up on stage you get pretty exhausted and you don't want to be breathing in the stinky smoke.

How do you think smoking affected your performance?

You definitely perform a lot better when you don't smoke because you can breathe properly and your stamina lasts a lot longer. You come off stage and feel like you've only done half of what you would have if you'd traveled overseas where they still smoke in bars, like Australia. It's a bit of trouble to perform over there.

How did you become addicted?

I experimented and then it just became something to do. It was normal, you could smoke in bars, you could go to a concert, you could smoke on stage, and now that's not normal, it's just stupid. I didn't believe I was addicted but I had to realise that I was. As soon as I walked off stage after drumming I would feel like I needed a cigarette. There's still a lot I have trouble with, like in town or whatever, you're in a bit of a party mode and you feel like a cigarette, but then you realise that you're outside in the cold and look like a bit of a monkey.

What do you think are the worst things about smoking?

I didn't realise when I was a smoker, when you come back inside and sit down at a table how much you actually smell of cigarette smoke, and it's disgusting. When you're having a conversation with someone and they've just had a cigarette it's like, 'Wow, do you know how much you stink?' I think that's pretty crazy.

Do you think peer pressure is a big reason people smoke?

There is peer pressure but I never got pressured, no one ever held me down. But I was surrounded by it so I thought it was normal. Whether they were cool kids or not at school, you'd be out at a party and they would smoke and offer you a cigarette. So you just take it and then before you know you're addicted. Once you buy a pack of cigarettes then you're pretty much telling yourself that you're a smoker. There are so many people out there that still think they'll smoke just one packet a week, but that becomes two or three and then you're smoking a pack a day.

What is your advice to young people who have started smoking?

Seriously what is the point? When you break it down, what you're doing to yourself and what you look like – you're sucking on a piece of paper filled with some leaves or something - it's really pointless. There's no good side of smoking, you're just going to look like an idiot and you're going to feel like an idiot when addiction takes over. That's how I felt, and that's one of the main reasons I forced myself to stop.

What are your thoughts on smoking within the entertainment industry?

I guess people truly still believe that a cigarette is relaxing. In the music or TV industry there's a lot of stress, everything's flat out, so when people get a chance to have a break,

they want a cigarette. It's dumb because it does the opposite, it accelerates the heart apparently, and doesn't relax you at all.

Did you replace cigarettes with anything when you got cravings?

I'm still battling the addiction. Just take a deep breath and actually think what the point of smoking is, look towards the future instead of right now. It might come back again in another half hour but you've got to battle it. Each day it gets better and better and each urge coming back in half an hour becomes an hour and then half a day and then a day. You've got to just battle that urge. It just comes down to yourself and thinking about your future, your health.

Have you ever supported friends to quit smoking?

I've got some friends that still smoke. I've got friends that are trying to quit and are having a lot of trouble, and that's kind of the sad thing. I'll get an excited mate come up to me and say 'hey I've stopped smoking', and then you'll see him two weeks later having a cigarette. That's where you've got to offer encouragement and let them know that it's not really that normal to smoke. Friends that have completely quit, they feel so much better, they can do so much more in life now. I've got a close friend who quit because of their baby, that's awesome. He feels so much better now that he doesn't stink and his baby is not inhaling secondhand smoke. I'm really proud of him for that, he's teaching his kid that smoking is not normal.