

INTERVIEW WITH SIMON HUGHES

Do you think that most people see smoking as a normal part of society?

No. I think the fact that they're banning smoking indoors in pubs and all over the place kind of shows that people are definitely against smoking. It is not the normal thing. It is not the majority. It is the minority of people who are smoking in New Zealand anyway. Picking up the cigarette is going to make you the minority.

How do you think the indoor smoking ban changed smoking behaviour?

I think it is funny. It's not social, it's anti-social. A lot of places you go you see the smokers huddled out in the corners smoking their cigarettes. And let's be honest, no one wants to speak to someone who's blowing smoke in their face all the time. I think that smoking is more of an anti-social thing to do as opposed to a social thing to do with friends.

Do you think attitudes towards smoking have changed over the last ten years?

It's hard to tell for me because I'm not that old, but yeah, I think it has definitely changed because people are realising the effects of smoking. I think that they're getting a bit wiser about it and realising that there's no good reason to start smoking.

What reasons are there to not smoke?

Money is a big thing. I mean it costs a lot of money in the long run. When you're addicted you end up spending thousands a year which you could spend on a lot better things. The smell too. People probably spend more time trying to get rid of the smell than they spend smoking the cigarette itself, so it's a bit of a time waster.

Tell us about your first experiences with smoking.

I just remember in high school everyone handing around a cigarette. It felt to me like you know, the people who were smoking were the people who were just trying a bit too hard. I didn't really want to be a part of that you know. Also I remember the smell. I wasn't into it at all so I didn't really see anything that was beneficial about smoking.

When you were younger did you feel peer pressured to join in with smoking?

No, I definitely didn't feel like an outsider for not being a smoker. The fact that I don't even enjoy it itself leads me to think, 'why would I want to smoke?'

Why do you think a lot of young people think it's cool to take up smoking?

I think they probably get sucked in by the pressure of thinking that it is the 'cool' thing to do. They probably think that if they do smoke a cigarette then someone is going to accept

them. But from my experience, most of the people who were picking up a cigarette wanted attention and you could tell that was their way of getting attention. It ended up backfiring on them because it wasn't considered a cool thing to do and I remember a lot of people looked at them and realised this and they were kind of more of an outsider with the smoke.

What are your thoughts on the music/entertainment industry and where smoking does or doesn't fit into that?

I think smoking has been portrayed as part of the image of being in a rock band or whatever. But it is definitely not a part of rock music at all and it doesn't have to be. It's just like you know, the fashion of the day. Back in the day certain clothes were the fashion, you move on and especially now that we are wiser about what smoking does to us, we should be wiser about exposing smoking to other people, because bands can obviously affect a lot of people.

What would be your advice to a young person who believes that smoking is part of being in a band?

I think the most important thing for smokers or for people starting out is to look ahead and think about how many other people you're affecting, not only yourselves but also your mates, your family, and the people around you. So, look ahead and think, 'do you want to be spending all of this money? Do you want to smell like smoke constantly? Do you want to be anti-social? Do you want to ruin your health?' You should rethink why you are smoking.

In your opinion, what is one of the worst things about smoking?

Probably the fact that it affects other people who don't smoke. That's the big thing, because they don't really have a choice in the matter and they are the people being affected by it, by others smoking.

What does that make a smoker then?

Selfish, I guess.