

INTERVIEW WITH VAUGHAN SMITH

So why don't you smoke?

Some people look at smoking as a bad habit, but it's more of an addiction that is going to cost you your life. My cousin's grandad had the lung disease, is that emphysema? He had emphysema and he was dying of it and he had to have an oxygen mask on and tow around an oxygen tank. It was like something out of the movies. It was unreal.

Also, the fact alone that it's detrimental to your health, it's stink, you stink, all the time your clothes stink and then you become immune to the fact that you do stink. Smokers don't know that they stink, but they do stink. And the money! Just the money involved is insane. Some people go through a couple of packs a day! It's insane amounts of money. I read once that if you saved all the money over forty years that you spent on smoking, you could buy a Ferrari. Who doesn't want a Ferrari?

Do you think that the social attitude towards smoking has changed over the last decade?

I reckon the best thing that's happened, going-out-wise, clubbing-wise, restaurant-wise, is the complete ban on smoking indoors. It's amazing. When I first started clubbing, or going out, I usually go out for a beer or whatever at the pub, and when I was eighteen everyone was smoking inside. You'd come home and your clothes would stink and your hair would stink and you'd get into bed and you'd wake up in the morning and all your sheets would stink. It was just disgusting. Everything about it. You hadn't smoked all night, but just being in a room with so many people smoking, you'd passively smoked your way through probably an entire pack of cigarettes. You'd be coughing and just have the gross taste in your mouth. It's so filthy. So when that got banned it was just awesome.

So do you think that the ban on smoking in bars has changed smoking behaviour?

Sure, I mean you have to go outside now. You have to go away from where the action is. Among my group of friends, I think that we've only ever had one friend that has been a smoker. It just became the fact that he'd have to go outside and sit in the cold, or go outside and stand amongst a whole group of people he didn't know. He wasn't very socially active so it cut down the amount he was smoking drastically.

Tell us about your first experience with smoking.

I think my first experience was at intermediate and there was two kids called Vaughan at my school. The other Vaughan was caught smoking behind the sports shed so people just started saying, 'Vaughan was caught smoking behind the sports shed' and then everyone was saying, 'you got caught smoking', and I was like 'I didn't get caught smoking!'. No one in my family had ever smoked so it was completely not something I was ever used to. And then all of a sudden I was supposed to be a smoker and even the teachers were getting the Vaughans confused. It was like, 'Vaughan I was very disappointed to hear you

were smoking.' It's haunting me. It's horrible.

So did you smoke in your younger years?

I can only remember having one smoke. It wasn't even a whole one, it was a chronic bum puff, just a suck-in and blow-out real quick. It was at the A&P show, cos I grew up in a small town. At the A&P show everyone was just sneaking off behind this big ride to have a smoke. It was like the house of mirrors or something. The minute I did it I was just like, 'aaarghh that's the most disgusting thing', and coughing and spluttering and yeah, nah I haven't done it since. It's not something I've been into at all.

So was that one of the big reasons you chose not to smoke?

It might be hard to believe but in my younger days I was quite athletic. I used to play representative sport for the Waikato. I used to play hockey for Waikato and my school, so sporting-wise it was important for me to be able to run around and not be wheezing and puffing. I played sport with a couple of guys who did smoke, and they weren't big boys but they just couldn't keep up. Primarily because they would smoke all week and smoke at the weekend and just had no energy, no lung capacity.

Do you think smoking is seen as a normal behaviour?

I think when they banned smoking from bars and pubs it made a big difference. I didn't hear a single person saying it was a bad idea. Even smokers thought it was a good idea and because they have to leave their friends and go outside to smoke, you see less and less people going out for one. Socially it was a really good move to ban it from being indoors because now smokers have to exclude themselves from a group to go and smoke. I think for the same reason people got into smoking when they were young - the peer pressure to fit in - is the same reason that people will stop smoking now.

What would you say to a mate who smokes and has to leave the party to go outside?

Well, I mean it's their loss because the minute they go outside they're missing out on something. I hate repeating stories if they are good, so if he misses out on something while he is outside and comes back in and everybody's laughing, he's going to feel on the outside. He won't feel included in the joke or the story. Some people take up smoking because they think it will be social. Now that you aren't allowed smoking inside it's the very thing that will cost you your social life.

Why do you think some teenagers still think it's so 'cool' to smoke?

I guess it's that when you are a teenager you want to do things that are bad. You want to push the boundaries. Some people have a go at that boundary and smoke, and then become addicted to it, mainly because they fell for peer pressure. When I see a young person smoking, or even a person my age smoking all I think is, 'at some stage you were too weak to say no to peer pressure.' To me it doesn't say 'cool' or 'I'm looking rad, I've

got a smoke in my mouth', it says you were too weak to say no.

What would you say to a teenager who was dabbling in smoking or looking to start?

You've only got to go and see someone in a cancer ward in a hospital to realise that what you're pretty much getting yourself into is a life sentence. The way you go could be relatively quick because of smoking, or it could draw itself out over twenty years of the most horrific lung cancer or emphysema. By smoking you are pretty much locking yourself into a sixty-year-long suicide. Actually sometimes people aren't even that old. It's a death sentence. So seriously think about how you want to be ending up when you're sixty years old.

You might start off young thinking that it's the cool place to be. It might get you into the group of people that are into smoking. But when you reach eighteen you're going to be the person outside in the cold when everyone else is inside having a nice warm drink and it's an addiction that will cost you your life, whether or not it's at middle-age or later in your life. You'll be attached to an oxygen mask and pulling round an oxygen tank.

In your opinion, what do you think the worst thing is about smoking?

The worst thing about smokers is that they don't think about other people. Like the passive smoking thing. Nothing is worse than being in a car with somebody and they start smoking and you're like, 'oi! Can you like knock that on the head cos you know there are some other people in the car here.' Just in the weekend I was at an event and I saw a mother with her kid, smoking right in front of her child. I don't know whether or not she was even thinking about the fact that she was blowing smoke into her kid's face all the time, cos she was holding her under her arm so the kid was only about a foot and a half away from her.

The responsibility especially falls on parents. You don't swear in front of your children and you don't do other anti social behaviour in front of them like commit crimes. So why would you smoke in front of your kid and pass on your death sentence, your filthy habit, onto your kids. It makes them think it's normal behaviour.

Something else that really bugs me about smokers is the littering. Smokers are like, 'oh no I always put my cigarette butts in the bin', but you always see them throwing them on the ground. And it's always the ones you see throwing them on the ground who say they don't. I think they just subconsciously smoke and then flick the butts. Or people that flick their cigarette butts out the window of their car, and you say, 'why did you do that?' 'Oh I don't want my car smelling of smoke.' Well your car completely reeks cos you've been smoking in it for the last two years!

As a vocal performer/broadcaster, what are your thoughts about how smoking affects performance?

We're on air for five hours a day and we are locked in this studio so it's full on. There's no

time for smoke breaks to go outside, and if you did leave you could miss the golden caller who's going to call in and make the show for that afternoon. If they call in cos something has just happened to them, and you're outside having a smoke when they ring it's either engaged or it just rings and rings. So they'd hang up, and might not call back again. So it's just the chance that you could miss something and there's really no time. You've got to put on a fairly long song if you are going to go outside for a cigarette break. The boss of our afternoon show (with Fletch and myself) really likes the fact that neither of us smoke, so that all of our attention is on the job when we are being paid to be there.

Whereas you know if you are a smoker, you have to go outside for a break and it disrupts the flow of the show. It's like leaving the office for five minutes to go outside and have a smoke. No good. There's also the vocal impact of smoking. It affects a lot of people's voices and as it is you are clearing your throat cos you are talking non-stop so if you are a smoker you need to do it a lot more and it sounds a lot more harsh. Smoking really doesn't make for good broadcasting.