

The 11-19-86 Reactor

Paul Azevedo



It's Time for a Smokeout

When my father died early this year, my sorrow was mixed with relief that his continuous, round-the-clock effort to take in oxygen through his injured lungs was over. His life had become a matter of endurance. We knew his lungs could not be improved or repaired. It was something he had to put up with until he was relieved of his burden. He did not blame the tobacco companies. I do. He blamed himself. I don't.

It is one thing to read all the warnings about the dangers of smoking, from cancer to heart disease to emphysema. It is another to talk to a man you love and admire who is preoccupied night and day with oxygen bottles, tubing, "nebulizers" and the other paraphernalia that goes with the miserable lung-damaging problem called emphysema.

I do not wish on my worst enemy what I saw my dad endure. And yet, every day I watch some of my best friends, people I admire and like, as they give in to their addiction not once, but many times. How strong is their addiction? I told a friend, one with strong political feelings that I would vote for Lou Papan, her candidate, if she would not smoke for two months. She couldn't overcome her addiction, even for that short period, even with that incentive. Other friends, relatives, business associates are also in the grip of what I can only call this monster seduction. There are probably worse addictions, such as heroin, cocaine and even marijuana, but cigarettes are more ubiquitous and probably do more total damage to the public health.

If you are a smoker, I know you probably want to quit. I also know that that isn't easy, or my father would have quit 30 or 40 years ago. But you can stop for one day! Right? Why not make tomorrow, Nov. 20, that day. That's when people from all over will be putting out their cigarettes and joining the Great American Smokeout.

I know that usually when you are urged to stop smoking, the argument is that two pack a day smokers die 8.3 years before their non-smoking counterparts. That's true, but I'm really more concerned about your comfort during your last years. Why put up with oxygen bottles, and getting up every hour through the night, every night without respite? It's a rhetorical question, but why not keep your lungs in good shape?

Help your lungs by keeping your hands, your mouth and your mind engaged. Chew gum. Suck on a straw. Chew on a toothpick. Work together with a friend. Make it a game. Each of you can help the other over the rough spots. Above all, take smoking seriously. You're not a child any more. It is children who start smoking. They do it to impress their friends, or to feel sophisticated, or for any of a hundred childish reasons. I lucked out. When I started one fine day, I discovered that cigarettes tasted terrible and I decided they weren't worth the effort. Lucky me! Even though it was dumb luck, not a decision arrived at intelligently, it was one of the best moves I ever made. Happy Smokeout!