

Breathing Better Living Well

"No Butts About It: Free at Last, Free at Last!"

Stories and Letters

If you would like to share your story, please email Jane@breathingbetterlivingwell.com

Tim's Story

"Tobacco contains nicotine which is an addictive drug. Smoke cigarettes and you will get addicted to them. It's a nasty, smelly, horrible addiction. Smoking causes all kinds of diseases such as cancer and emphysema." These are the words my dad said to me when he caught me smoking at age 13.

Dad had just been released from M.D. Andersen Cancer Research Center for exploratory surgery for lung cancer. He pulled his shirt back and showed me the fresh scar that ran down the center of his chest and curved around his lower left rib cage. He asked me, "Do you want one of these one day?" At the time I swore to myself that I would never smoke again. My dad passed away 6 months later and as time went by, my commitment not to smoke seemed to be forgotten.

All through my life, smoking was the thing to do. Smoking has been my companion and friend when nobody was there or I had no place to go and nothing to do.

I was diagnosed with asthma in my early 20's and was told that if I didn't quit smoking, it wouldn't be very long before I would have trouble climbing stairs, running, or even walking. Of course, I would not listen. Because of my "nothing can hurt me" or "it will be a long time before something happens" attitude I continued to smoke.

I was diagnosed with COPD at age 46. I was told by my doctor to go home and talk to my family and to get my final affairs in order. I asked him if there was anything I could do and he told me, "Yes ~ IF you stop smoking and do what I tell you, you might be able to live a little longer – but if you keep smoking there is very little I can do."

He referred me to a pulmonologist who started me on some very good medications and referred me to Pulmonary Rehabilitation. I smoked through it all and one day I figured out that it wasn't doing any good because I would not stop smoking and was only getting worse.

I decided it was time to quit. I used the patch and made it for 70 days but slipped and smoked for one week. I went back on the patch and went another 60 days and slipped again. I smoked for another week and went back on the patch. I am ashamed to admit it but I slipped again and smoked for a whole month. It didn't take long for the smokers cough to come back, along with all of the congestion and difficulties in breathing.

I have fought this addiction for the last year and some days I win but it keeps its head reared at all times. I have been quit for two months now but must stay on guard at all times...My dad said "THIS is a horrible addiction and it will kill you." Those words echo in my ears everyday.

A letter from Arlene to Kay

When Kay was trying to quit smoking, Arlene, as a friend who had walked that road before, sent her this note of encouragement.

“Hi Kay! Just wanted to let you know that the craving does lessen. The more time that goes by, the less the urge. For me, it was hard to get past that hand-mouth thing. So, I stuffed my mouth with hard candy and food, not the best way...just substituting one addiction for another.

“When I quit, Labor Day, 1984, I didn’t know that the car would start without a cigarette, or that I could talk on the phone without one. Tea, alone? ... without a butt? Impossible! But that passed. For a long time after I quit, I had the smoking dream... the one where I would light up and wake up in a panic, breaking out into a cold sweat. It was before my COPD diagnosis... during my long denial period, and yet... even then, I knew that one more butt would kill me because there was no such thing as only ‘one.’

“Today, I very rarely get the urge except after I put the Thanksgiving turkey in the oven... [in years past] that was the time I would sit for a few minutes, feet up, and light up....a short break before beginning the rest of the cooking. For the last few years, we’ve gone to a dear friend for that holiday...no more urges for that day!

“Seriously, it really does pass...it’s just hard to see when recovery is so new....Just take it one day at a time... it’s the only way to survive it!

“Health!”

Arlene

A note from Linda to Joan

This is a note of encouragement from Linda to a woman who contacted a COPD internet support group regarding her smoking mother.

“Dear ‘Joan’,

I can certainly relate with your mother as far as fear [of quitting] goes. I was afraid to give up cigarettes as they were my best friends, I thought, and an hour without one seemed impossible. I learned to do without one for five minutes at a time early on. You have a desire to smoke, but it goes away whether you smoke or not. That’s how I got through it. I agree with [Betty] who said if it were easy, everyone would quit. It was the hardest thing I ever did, but that keeps some of the guilt in check... I think she [your mother] is so lucky to have a caring and considerate daughter like you. Remember that she will go through many emotions and she should feel free to express them. Don’t let her keep her fears to herself... Good luck to both of you.”

Linda in Pittsburgh

John's Story

John quit smoking three times before his success would last. "The first time, I threw my cigarettes out the car window. I just threw them out. And I went through all the cravings for about six months. The second time I took a Smoke Stoppers class through work. The third time, I went out and bought a pound of candy. You know, all the mixed candies you buy in bulk. Every time I craved a cigarette, I'd have a piece of candy. I never really liked sweets. About half way through the second pound, I just quit. That was it. I quit for good."

An open letter to all new quitters

This is a letter to all the new quitters in a COPD on-line support group. The cheerleader is Janie in Sacramento, CA.

"Hello Everyone,

"It has been a week now since you had that last cigarette. And this isn't the letter that I had prepared for the first anniversary week for new non-smokers. The original was pretty typical jargon, you know, the 'atta girl and 'atta boy routine.

"Then yesterday I heard the results of a Pulmonary Function test from one of my best friends who recently celebrated her 60th birthday. Due primarily to not being able to stop smoking, her [lung] volume had dropped 10% in the past 2 1/2 years. She had felt so guilty about smoking that she canceled checkups with her pulmonary doctor until she stopped three months ago.

"It made me wonder how highly intelligent men and women could fall prey to a tobacco leaf that only an insect would eat. It made me wonder how easy it is for us to say, 'I'll think about that tomorrow' or 'I'll stop as a New Year's resolution *next* year.' It made me wonder why we ignored the warning signs. It made me wonder about a lot of things we would rather not confront.

"For all of you out there who are 'hanging in there,' you should be very proud of what you are doing for yourselves and for your families. If you temporarily fail, dust yourself off and get back up again. *But don't stop trying!*

"Playing solitaire in your bathrobe 24/7 is better than O₂ 24/7. Eating carrot sticks, lemon drops, jellybeans, or carrying a glass of water everywhere is better than having a cigarette. I once knew a CEO who ate toothpicks after he gave up smoking. He nibbled them and then spit out the little pieces of wood during board meetings. Disgusting to eat wood? And okay to ingest tobacco smoke? Well, you decide.

"Just don't give up! We are cheering for all of you... those of you who were brave enough to come out and admit to everyone that you were trying to quit, and those of you who are quietly trying to stop in your own way. We are here to help you to find a better life than tobacco can give you. Remember, it is fine to drop us a private note if you feel the need for instant support. We're listening!"

Janie in Sacramento