

# Quitting Cancer Sticks

Category: Addicted

written by Marilyn Barton | July 10, 2018

Fifty years ago, smoking was socially acceptable, and I purchased my first carton of Kools for only three dollars. Liberated and away from home in college, I could inhale freshly lit tobacco whenever I wanted. Ah, heavenly.

Smoking was fun until the cool taste of menthol turned afoul. Then it became a drag, imprisoning me. Cancer sticks yellowed my teeth and reduced my breathing capacity. Disgusting smells.

Data in the 1970s about cancer and death alarmed me. It seemed unconscionable that tobacco companies were adding tar, nicotine, and cyanide to cigs and advertisers were misleading me about the dangers of smoking. I couldn't believe I paid \$3,500 per year in today's dollars to ruin my health.

When my addiction reached a pack of coffin nails per day, I wanted to blame someone else: my peers, the sophisticates on TV, Willie the Kool penguin, anyone but me. But as soon as I accepted sole ownership, I planned to kick the habit. One obstacle was dating a guy who smoked a pipe and cigarettes. He mocked me: "Smoking isn't that bad for us. They're exaggerating those reports. Besides, you'll never be able to quit. You're too hooked."

The challenge from Mean Boyfriend was on. I smoked my last cig and quit the next morning. But options were limited: no lozenges, patches, medications or classes. It was either *cold turkey* or keep smoking. I got through the headaches and cravings by munching a bag of baby carrots. Withdrawl was tough and, to this day, I recommend crunchy vegetables.

The harder fight was staying quit, especially during stressful times. I resisted temptations to pick up nicotine weeds again, even when Boyfriend broke up with me. *Grrrrr, I can do this.*

Well-intentioned besties offered, "Let's have a smoke and chat."  
Kool cigarettes beckoned me, "We'll help lessen your pain. Try us."

As a nurse, hearing Kool was part of a **\$7.1 billion** sale from Reynolds to Imperial strengthened my resolve. How dare those companies profit hugely from my patients with heart and lung disease.

Initially, my goal succeeded for health reasons. However, my motivation to stay quit over the long term has been atypical – the image of bumping into my old boyfriend and re-experiencing his arrogance. "Were you ever able to quit smoking?" This spurred me on.

In my fantasy, I hold my head high: "Why, yes, and good riddance to both of you. Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

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