

# The Cool Choice

Category: Smoking

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | August 1, 2021

Throughout my adolescence, I yearned to be a member of the in-crowd. However, as a self-defined nerd who preferred hot Ovaltine over a cherry Coke or typing my school notes over watching *American Bandstand*, I wondered if I would ever meet the criteria for being cool: mastering the jitterbug; being pretty, perky and petite; and smoking.

My two left feet and genetic lack of rhythm compromised my dancing ability; my average looks, shyness and Amazonian height eliminated my chances of meeting the three “P’s” requirements; and my inability to light a match or lighter, as well as my innate fear of fire, made smoking an impossibility.

As I aged, I thought little about smoking until my thirteen-year marriage began to crumble. A stressful divorce, which led to the challenge of raising two teenagers while trying to earn a living as a teacher, increased my level of angst. When a daily Wendy’s frosty and bags of M&Ms failed to calm my frazzled nerves, I contemplated smoking as a cure for all that ailed me.

Then, I met a single woman who shared my interest in theatre, Chinese food and reading. She and I became friends, spending weekends indulging in cultural events and restaurant dinners. I enjoyed her company and conversation, but I soon realized that her smoking habit was getting to me. Her hacking cough often disrupted her ability to speak—and embarrassingly disturbed those sitting near us in theaters and restaurants. To make matters worse, I began to develop sore throats from second-hand smoke. After each social outing with her, I had to wash my clothes to remove the lingering stench caused by her cigarettes; unfortunately, I could not afford to dry clean them.

Not only did her smoking eventually lead me to end a valued friendship, but it also forever and always removed any thoughts of smoking from my brain.

After clever, enticing cigarette ads were banned from television, and after the Surgeon General declared smoking dangerous to one’s health, I realized that I had made the right choice. A habit once associated with sophistication—watch any old movie to see how the stars always lit up—now became an act linked to cancer and death.

Ironically, by not smoking, I am now a part of the in-crowd—the massive population that understands the foolishness of lighting up.

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