

INTERVIEW WITH ANGELO MUNRO

Do you think that the 'smoking is cool' attitude has changed now?

Definitely. I guess the awareness about the effect of smoking has changed people's perception of it. I think people got sick of looking at their pack of cigarettes and seeing someone's rotting gums, or someone with gangrene. A lot of role models now are against it and it's making young kids think it's not the thing to get into. A lot of sports stars especially don't smoke and they're the biggest role models out there.

What was your first experience of smoking?

I first tried smoking when I was twelve years old. I'm from West Auckland so plenty of scumbags out there put kids on to smoking. Riding skateboards, there were always older people around and it seemed cool. So I tried just bumming cigarettes off other people and started smoking on a regular basis when I was about fifteen.

When did you decide you were over it?

I was seventeen, so I quit pretty young. I realised that it was try hard. You get into it because it's the 'in' thing and people you look up to are smokers - people that you think are role models but really they're not, they're just losers. You realise 'this is stupid man.' I've had family die of lung cancer, so you look back and go 'this is stupid, I've got to get this out of my life really quick smart.'

Was it hard to quit?

I left school in the sixth form and I was working at a supermarket in the butchery, and all I did on my lunch break was drag cigarettes man, and I did get addicted. I was smoking a packet a day and the only way I quit was cold turkey. I didn't smoke for the whole weekend, I had the shakes, and I felt horrible but I knew if I could get through the weekend... On the Monday morning I just didn't even feel like a cigarette and I've never touched one since.

That's awesome because the average amount of times people try to quit is actually quite high.

You can't quit, if you say, 'oh I'll cut down or I'll just have one cigarette, this is alright.' If you're going to quit you have to quit. It's a mental issue, people are addicted and there's cravings but at the end of the day it's inside your head, it's about being mentally tough about your goal.

So you think it's okay to be smokefree these days?

It's totally OK not to smoke. The perception that you've got to smoke or you're uncool only exists with teenagers. I think older people do respect you if you're not smoking. The

people who sit around in the social scene are not really worried if you smoke or not. I don't smoke and no-one's ever judged me, no-one's ever tried to give me a cigarette and say, "yo, smoke this" That belongs in the school yard.

What would you say to people who try to quit and who need support because it's not working?

If you're trying to quit, make sure that it's really, really in your heart. If you really want to quit and you don't believe in smoking any more, just do it. Just quit and say, 'from this day forward I'm never going to smoke ever again' and when you have that craving just do not give in, no matter what, no matter how sick you get, how bad you feel, just stick it out man. Seriously three to four days of not smoking a single cigarette and you'll feel really good.

What can people do to help their friends give up smoking?

Just be really supportive, really encourage them. When people feel like they want to have a cigarette when they're trying to quit they need that friend to give them crap. It's not about bullying and peer pressure, but I think if your friend wants to quit and you want to help them out the best thing to do is just to be on their back about it. When they're about to light up a cigarette, just say, 'what are you doing? Have a think about what you're doing. It's not worth it.'

What would you say to one of your friends who smoked?

I'd just say, 'man, what's the point?' It's a pointless exercise, it's costing you lots of money, money you can spend on more valuable things than smoking like a chimney and destroying your lungs. I'd just say to my friends and people I know that do smoke: 'I think anyone with half a brain should realise that it's a destructive thing and there's nothing positive you can take out of smoking cigarettes.'

What would you say to someone younger than you who is past the experimentation stage and is smoking regularly?

Seriously, I'd just say, 'what's the point?' You've got a long future ahead of you, why taint that with such a stupid act like smoking cigarettes? It's only going to cause you damage. It makes your breath stink, makes your fingernails yellow, it wears you out. Heavy smokers always seem to age quicker than everyone else and you look all haggard. You're thirty-five and you already look like you're fifty. Think about your future, think about your family and friends and the people you could upset when you're not around.

A lot of musos talked about how things really improved for performing after smoking in bars was banned.

It was the best thing that happened to the live music industry. When you're a musician and you're on tour playing twenty-five shows in thirty days, there's nothing worse than

spending your work time, your job time, surrounded by a cloud of smoke and coming home stinking of smoke from inhaling it all night. I've had that typical cigarette hangover thing and I haven't even smoked. I'll wake up and I'll smell of smokes and my head will ache. Since they've got rid of that it's just really, really good and bars are way better to perform at. My singing quality is a lot better. That's definitely improved and I think the best thing about the bar thing is just the longevity, being on the road for periods of time and night after night you don't have to step into that smoky bar. That's a big difference I noticed when I went on the first tour after that rule came in.

Do you see lots of smokers around you in the music industry?

In the music industry smoking goes hand in hand with partying. It's kind of retarded when you see people who are thirty years old and they don't normally smoke, and they pick up a cigarette and smoke to fit in. It's like, 'dude, are you thirty or are you fifteen, you know?' The music industry is all about being cool, and smoking's the least cool thing you could possibly do, you know? Not my cup of tea at all.

What keeps you from smoking these days?

I basically don't smoke because I think it's a complete waste of time, waste of space, waste of energy, waste of money and there's nothing positive you can gain out of smoking cigarettes.