

Interview with Daniel Kereopa

Interview by Lewis Whaitiri

How would you describe your smoking status?

I am a non smoker. Never have and probably never will smoke.

Have you tried it?

Yeah, I've had an inhale I guess and that's about as far as I got, ohh yuck.

So why don't you smoke?

I have no interest in smoking. Nothing about smoking appeals to me. It's that straightforward for me in black and white. I just don't do it. It doesn't come across my mind, 'Oh maybe I should go and join those guys or girls in their groups over there'. It's not a part of me. It's not a part of my life and you know I do get a little bit bummed out when my friends that smoke go away from me to go and have a ciggie and it's like, 'You're leaving such a great conversation and we may never get this chance again', and they come back and they're like, 'Oh hey, what were we talking about before?' I'm like, 'Sorry bro, you missed it man.'

Do you think smoking is as common now as it used to be?

I'm not too sure whether smoking is more common now or not cos I've always been surrounded by really healthy outgoing people that have never needed to smoke so I haven't really had that chance or that choice to go and smoke with someone because we were always doing something else. We were looking after our bodies and our mind and spirit before we did anything else and smoking was never part of it. For me and my family we've always been about healthy mind healthy body healthy spirit and smoking was never part of that equation.

What about say your whanau? Is smoking as common now especially amongst Maori and Pacific Islanders?

Yeah, for our people, for Maori people and Pacific Island people you know it's a generation where I reckon now we make the changes for the future of our children. I see that because my mum and dad, they smoked for 20-30 years since they were 13 years old and they've been saying, 'You know it's the best thing we've done in our lives is give up smoking'.

Do you think it's socially acceptable to be a smoker now?

In general it might be but in my world it's not acceptable at all.

Why is that?

I just really don't like smoking at all. I don't like how it looks and if it's our people, our Pacific Island people or our Maori people or just whoever in general, it's never been a part of our lives and you look at the whakapapa and you go, 'Oh you know, are you really smoking for your people?' You know you should be quitting for yourself, making changes and let's just change the future for our children.

Why do you think young people take up smoking?

I don't really have an answer for that. If there's a blame, then it's probably on the parents or the cousins and aunties because they haven't made the changes yet. I'm a father now so everything that I do is going to be enhanced by my children so if I play fair and play hard and train hard, my kids are going to do that. If I don't smoke, they're not going to smoke. But if they choose to smoke then that's a mistake that I've made.

So it's really about leading by example aye?

I'm a professional surfer and people put me on the pedestal, so if you want to be like me, lead by example. I'm there for the people and I will just not smoke.

How do you think smoking would affect your image?

I guess as a sports person, I have an image and something that the public looks at and goes, 'We want to be like DK, you know, surf big waves, he looks healthy and I want to be a part of that' and all I just have to say is smoking is never a part of it.

How do you think smoking would affect your performance?

You know when we're out in the surf there's one place you need oxygen the most and that's under the water. Why would I do something that would hinder that you know? Something that would block out my lungs and make it hard for me to breathe because when you're under the water that's the only place where you need your oxygen the most and I would never sacrifice that. I like to live.

What do you think smoking says about a person?

If I look at someone and they're smoking cigarettes it is definitely a turn off for me, female or male there's an issue there that they need to address. What it is they need to figure it out for themselves.

So just imagining you were still single, would you go out with a smoker?

If I was single and I met a person that smoked cigarettes and she was like everything I could see to be a part of my world it would be very very hard but I could take her but I'd definitely try and get her to make changes.

Do you think you can tell a smoker from a non-smoker?

Yeah, I work with a guy that smokes and I knew straight away he smoked. He just had this smell of nicotine and because we work quite hard he just perspires and he's just sweating and it's like, 'Bro you stink'. You can tell for sure when you go to a powhiri and you go down the line and kiss someone, you can tell straight away if someone's a smoker especially if they've been smoking just before the powhiri, it's like, 'Come on cuz, what are you doing?'

Have you ever supported friends to quit?

Yeah I've known a few people that have tried to quit smoking and weren't successful at it and I know some that were. I guess what I've done is every time I see someone I know that is trying to give up and they're looking around saying, 'I need to put something in my mouth and in my hands', that's when I say, 'Have some food cos at least it will taste better'.

So support is a good thing?

Yeah if I can, if they ask me for support I'll be there for them and if I can encourage it then I'll be there for them to quit smoking.

Do you have any advice for young people who might be thinking of starting to smoke?

Um, just to all the people out there you know we've got a beautiful country that we live in. New Zealand is clean, it's fresh and it's amazing when you walk outside your door on a fresh winter's morning and you take a deep breath. It's the cleanest, purest breath of everything. Don't put a cigarette in your mouth you know. You're just going to miss out on those beautiful things if you keep doing that.

Any advice for people who are trying to quit?

If you're trying to quit, get yourself some good friends and tell people that you're quitting. Get as much support from your whanau and just go, 'Guys help me' and ask for that help and give it a go. You might not quit straight away but I believe if you smoke like 10 cigarettes a day or like a whole pack a day or end up working it down to less cigarettes a day then you're doing real good. And to me you're trying to make a change and that's a great start. But eventually you'll do it and if you fail...like my dad says, 'If you fall son, you stand back up and you try again. Give it another go.'

What are your thoughts on how much money people spend on smoking?

Oh it's just a shame you know that we as people can go to a shop and spend \$10 or \$20 on some cigarettes and some of our kids aren't getting fed at home. Some people are so selfish that they'd rather indulge in their little habit and not really treasure the things that are most important and that's the kids at home who don't have enough food.

What are your thoughts about smokefree maraes?

Oh smokefree maraes would just be absolutely fantastic and something I'd love to see in the future but it's going to take a lot to change it. As long as people you know acknowledge you can't smoke in this area but you can smoke somewhere else it's a start. And hopefully by the time you know 2020 or 2050 comes around, there are less people walking out of our maraes to go for a cigarette and they all stay inside and talk stories.

What do you think are the benefits of being smokefree?

The benefits of being smokefree is just everything you know. It's just a better way to live. It's a habit that we don't need. I reckon every smoker knows that smoking isn't good for them. I truly believe it but they just can't help it, they are just caught up in it like gambling. It's like being an alcoholic. Put something else in your hands and change it. It's a free life and we get one shot at it, do your best.

What do you think about the nicotine replacement patches and gum that you can use to quit?

I think if I was a smoker and I was going to try and do something like that, like get the gum, being a Maori male we don't often ask for help or want to show that we need help cos if you need help then that shows a weakness. It's probably why so many of us have trouble communicating.

I definitely think it's a good thing to use them if they're available. If you want to go and get those packets of gum and do things so that you can quit smoking you should but I think we need to make it easier for our people to have access to them.

Do you think it's always socially acceptable to refuse a cigarette?

People who refuse cigarettes, good on them man. You got to have a lot of courage to say 'no' just to one of your friends giving you a cigarette. There's

all that peer pressure but stand on your own two feet and be the man or the woman that you are and just stand up.

What advice would you give to young surfers who smoke?

The advice that I can give to the young surfers that are out there is just think about that one time, the worst wipe out you've ever had and exchange that wipe out for a few cigarettes, get wiped out then and it could be the last time that you actually come back up.