

Interview with Jaquie Brown

Interview by Dave Gibson

So welcome Jaquie.

Thank you Dave.

We'd like to start off the proceedings by asking you to describe your current smoking status.

100% smokefree.

Have you smoked before?

I think when I was about 12 or 13. I grew up in Southland and it was really cool to smoke and so I tried it, but of course I never inhaled, I'd just get the cigarette, put it in and then push the smoke out of my nose to look cool.

Yeah.

And it tasted just disgusting. It's wrong. Anyway, just as an aside, like where we used to do that, the school found out and they cut the bush down so we had nowhere to go.

That's quite smart of the school. Just get rid of the bush.

Yeah, get rid of the bush then the girls will have nowhere to hide.

Cos we had a bush...

Did you?

In my primary school at the top of the hill, we used to always go up there and get up to crazy mischief.

Yeah. I remember we got found out by the school for doing that cos we thought we were so cool and rebellious, even though I hated every minute of it and the teachers were basically going to send letters home to tell all our parents what we've been doing. So of course I beat them to it, and I remember going and telling my dad that I had been caught smoking and mum, and just the absolute disappointment because mum's a nurse and totally anti-smoking and to find out that I'd been doing that, it's almost like me saying, 'Mum, I'm pregnant and I'm 12' you know? Just the absolute disappointment...

Do you think that stopped you getting into smoking? The look on your parents' faces?

Yeah, definitely. And just knowing that it was something that upset them so much because it was so wrong for me, so unhealthy for me. When you're that age you don't know what's right or wrong really, you just want to try a few things out, test your limits, you know, push boundaries.

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

No, thankfully. I've noticed a real change in peoples' attitudes towards it. So if you go out now, it's wonderful that it's smokefree in bars and restaurants and things like that. If you go somewhere and you notice a group of people are sort of shifting off and going outside, I think, 'What are they doing? Oh that's right, dirty old smokers having to go outside', you know? Yeah, it's definitely less I'd say.

Got any views on why that is?

I think people are more aware of how unhealthy it is and how it makes you smell. It's disgusting. We're more health conscious now as a nation I think, I hope. Do you reckon? I reckon.

Yeah.

I'm excited cos we're living in a time now where things are changing. We're really aware of global warming. We've got to look after our planet, be careful, not put toxins and poisons into it and at the same time, humans are doing the same thing. We're realising that it's important to look after our bodies and not poison them with things like cigarettes. Actually it's funny because so many people spend more time on recycling and getting organic eggs and then they go out and have a cigarette. It just doesn't make any sense. Why would you poison your body but save the world?

You're not going to live long enough to see it.

Everbody's obsessed with saving the planet but it shouldn't be just the planet, it should be our bodies as well. Why would you bother saving the planet and not saving your body?

Do you think it's as socially acceptable to smoke now as it used to be?

Definitely not and I'm so grateful. I actually... this is a terrible thing to say but it's true...if I meet somebody new and find out that they're a smoker, instantly my respect for them just drops a little bit, and I think, 'Oh, I don't reckon we could really be best friends.' Isn't that bad? It's just because I know that we don't have the same values and ideals and we're not going to be at the gym together talking about how great it is to sweat it out, you know?

I'm really at a stage in my life now where I just want to live a clean, beautiful, fresh, strong life. I want to have big healthy lungs and run and if you smoke, it says things about you as a person, that you don't care about yourself, that you're trapped, that you're chained to this habit that's doing you no good, that you don't have power over your own actions. That's quite harsh isn't it? But that's true. It really is. Like for example if I found out that you were a smoker, I'd still love you but I'd be like, 'Oh, I wish Dave would quit.'

It's like, 'Oh, that person's, you know, got a problem.'

Yeah. It almost is like that. It's like, 'Oh that's a shame.' That's honestly what I think when I see somebody that smokes. If I see some young kids walking down the road smoking, I think, 'Oh that's a shame', you know, they don't know any better.

Why do you think some young people are still taking up smoking?

Rebellion. And boredom. You think, ‘Noone can control me, I can do what I want to do’, but you don’t realise that what you’re actually doing is getting yourself trapped into a cycle of shit, aye? On the other side, you’ve got people that say no to smoking and they’ve got power over their own lives and that’s really good. I’ve always known who I wanted to be and being smokefree was just part of that decision. I think it’s so important that you follow your own path.

What do you think smoking says about a person?

Weak. I think you’re weak. Why can’t you just stop? I think it’s a shame that you’re smoking because you could do so much more. You’re draining your money. You’re making your teeth yellow, your breath smells, your clothes are horribly stinky. I don’t want to kiss you. You’re not sexy. That’s what I think.

Do you think smoking affects people’s work and their ability to perform?

If we’re shooting a scene and I’m with actors that smoke, we’ve got to take a break and they’ve got to go outside, they’ve got to have a cigarette break for five or ten minutes, which holds things up and they come back on set and they smell bad. I’m thinking ‘Why? Why are you doing that?’

Yeah, it holds things up aye?

It holds things up and I’ve been at bars before and you’ve been having a conversation with somebody and they’ve gone, ‘Um, I’m just going to go outside and kill myself for another ten minutes, I’ll be back.’ It definitely divides people doesn’t it? And the division is getting bigger now. There are more people that don’t smoke that are staying in and then just a few of the straggly ones staying outside.

As a non-smoker, you obviously have to consider the impact that smoking would have on your flawless skin...

Thank you. There’s only one of me and I have to take very good care of it. It’s my most treasured possession. Smoking will never be part of my future because I know that that will give me wrinkles, make my teeth yellow, give me bad breath, all those horrible things and it’s just not what I want to achieve, not what I want to do. Not what I want for my life. Being smokefree makes your skin glow. Being smokefree is brilliant because you can run faster, you can enjoy life, you can breathe big beautiful deep breaths of fresh air. You’re great to kiss because you taste like strawberries...I do anyway. You’re just able to enjoy life more and you’re not trapped by this little horrible crutch.

So you never felt uncool for not smoking?

I felt proud of myself and strong for not smoking because I knew that I was forging my own path in a way. As I got older and more confident I didn’t mind sticking out and doing what I thought was right for me. I think it’s important to remember that you are a unique and wonderful human being and you don’t have to do what everybody else does. In fact it’s important that you follow your own path. You don’t need wear the same stuff that all your friends wear, do you? Why would you do that? You’d just blend in. I think it’s important to stand out if you want to stand out, and by not conforming, it makes you even cooler.

Would you consider quitting smoking a real achievement?

Yeah. Absolutely. From what I've heard from people that have smoked hard out and tried to quit, it is a huge achievement. It's hard. When your body is craving something, going, 'Give it to me, give it to me, give it to me, give it to me, give it to me' and you overcome that desire then hats off to you, gold medal. Yeah, it's a huge achievement. You should be very proud of yourself.

Do you have any advice for people trying to quit?

Tell people you're doing it and get support. I think it's really important that your friends know what you're going through and they can help you.

Do you have any advice on how to support that person who is trying to quit?

Try and put yourself in their position and imagine what it would be like. It's hard because I've never been a full-on smoker so I don't know that true feeling of addiction. If your friend's trying to give up, don't hassle them, support them. Don't tell them they can't do it, it's the last thing they want to hear, you know. Tell them they can. Tell them you're there for them.

Do you have any views on the tobacco industry?

Well their ultimate goal is just to make money and they don't care, do they? They're scrupleless. It's up to us to be the strong ones to try and resist it really. It's up to us to be strong and forge our own pathway and try to block it out and resist it. You don't have to buy it. The choice is yours what you do with your money. Why would you give your money to a big company that's trying to take you down and trying to kill you?

What do you think it would take for New Zealand to become a smokefree country?

I think it would be wonderful to be able to hide all cigarettes in dairies. Put them behind the counter so they're not on display cos they're gold and silver and all these beautiful Christmas colours and everyone thinks, 'Oh cool, that's exciting.' And there are sweets and lollies and things on display, it's almost like they're treating it like this wonderful little prize, you know. But if it's out of sight, out of mind, like me and my chocolate, if it's not at home, boom, I won't want it. So yeah, keep it out of eye line.