

INTERVIEW WITH LANI PURKIS

Why don't you smoke now?

When I found out I was pregnant I gave up smoking straight away and it was a lot easier than I ever imagined. I wanted to give my child every opportunity and the right to make his own choices in life. I hope he makes the right ones. I should have stopped for myself ten years earlier because it was a lot easier than you'd think. It makes it even easier once someone else is involved. It is just a decision and everybody should make the right one. Especially for our children, they're our future.

I always thought quitting would be really hard but it's totally just in your mind. People have said to me before, 'it is just a decision and you can just stop' and I've been like, 'no I'm addicted and it's really hard.' But it's not. It's very easy.

What did you dislike about smoking?

You have to wash your clothes all the time. Now that I don't smoke and there's no smoking in bars, I can wear clothes out and hang them up again. It took me a while to realise why that was. I thought, 'why don't I have to wash my clothes?' Then I'm like, 'oh there's no smoking in bars now.' It's awesome now. I don't have to worry about taking gum around with me. Well, I hope not - I probably still do.

Also, the damage I have done from smoking is my biggest regret. I've just aged. My mum and I have the same skin but she has never smoked. She never drank or smoked or anything really and she has great skin and I don't, cos of smoking.

I wish I could take that back. I mean, I don't care about the smile lines and stuff like that. I just ruined my skin by smoking. I spent so long trying to look older and now I just want to look younger again or at least just look my age. My skin is definitely an older woman's skin. My sister is a makeup artist and she always hassles me about it. She knew I smoked the whole time because she could see it in my skin.

What do you think about society's change in attitude towards smoking in the past decade or so?

The percentage of people who smoke is definitely smaller than the people who don't smoke. But I'm in a group of heavy smokers - both of my bands are heavy smokers. Now I'm one of the only ones who doesn't smoke. I've found that when you're on the other side, you realise how few people do smoke and how big a deal it is to smell it, and be surrounded by it and how invasive it is. Now that I have myself and my son to worry about I smell the cigarettes and I'm like, 'that's horrible!' But it's not as often as you'd imagine, it's only when I am around my friends. They'll go outside of my house and have a cigarette and come back in and I will be like, 'man that stinks. You stink', and that's what I would have smelt like for so long, for years and years. It's definitely much cooler to not smoke.

Tell us about your first experience of smoking.

My first experience with smoking was stealing my friend's mum's ciggies and it tasted disgusting. I don't know why you keep going when the very first cigarette is disgusting and you cough so it tastes even worse.

Actually before that I think we smoked teabags because we were too scared to steal cigarettes. The teabags stunk. I think we pretended to have a shower and smoked out the window. I don't know why we kept going.

It's funny cos when you're a kid you just want to grow up, so you do things like smoke and you spend ages trying to look and feel older. But then you get older and you spend all your money trying to look younger again cos you've ruined yourself by smoking and stuff. That's my biggest regret: the wrinkles.

Why do you think you experimented with smoking when you were young?

Boredom. It was definitely boredom. It was something to do. It wasn't peer pressure. I don't remember anyone saying, 'have a cigarette - try it.' In fact, I remember all I cared about was sports so I was like, 'I'm not going to start smoking because I won't be the best cross-country runner anymore.' I reckon it was just something to do to make my day more exciting because I had to hide it and hide the smell from my parents.

Why do you think some teenagers perceive it to be cool?

Because it's naughty. I reckon you definitely start because it is naughty and because of boredom. It tastes disgusting at first so it's not because it is nice and you enjoy it. It takes a few years of smoking before you actually start enjoying it and you think, 'oh a cigarette would be nice.' For the first while you've got to learn how to smoke so you're coughing and it's horrible and hot but it gives you something to do and makes you feel naughty.

Smoking is just rebelling like you do with everything else. You want to freak your parents out, so you start smoking, drinking, dressing strange, wearing weird makeup, piercing yourself and getting a tattoo. That's the only reason I can think of now. There's like a thousand reasons to stop smoking and none to start.

Do you think there is a perception out there that smoking is a normal part of growing up?

I don't think that smoking is as normal as it used to be. Some of my family won't even know that I ever smoked til they see this probably. You know, I hid it from my parents like forever. No one in my family smokes at all and I was the only one, so I hid it. It's very abnormal to be a smoker and I think parents should try and stop it as much as they can.

It is very uncool because everyone knows what it does to you. It was normal a hundred years ago before they realised it was killing you and that it dries your skin out. Kids would smoke and it wouldn't matter. But yeah, now it is not cool and it stinks.

What would you say to someone thinking of starting to smoke?

If you're gonna smoke, you've got to deal with the consequences later and you're gonna regret it. I tried to tell my friend who's seventeen, 'don't smoke' but it's hard to tell teenagers not to smoke and it's hard for them to listen.

What're the effects of smoking in the music industry?

Smoking definitely affects your ability to do most physical activities, including performing. It just means you can't last as long while you're on stage. In a band like Elemeno P, we're very active on stage. We like to move around and stuff. Since I quit, I've found it easier and although I was pregnant the whole time I found I could breathe easier than the boys.

It's good not to have to worry about cigarettes. We were on tour, up a mountain and there were no shops to get cigarettes. Someone drove all the way to Queenstown and back just to buy some. I was the only one who didn't have to order three packets of cigarettes. I found that gig really easy.

Smoking definitely affects getting the sound out when you're singing. In the morning when I wake up, I can breathe and not have to spend that first half hour coughing, which is good. That was the gross part.

As a mother now, are you worried about being in a smoky room with your baby?

I probably wouldn't take him into a smoky room. But everyone in my bands smoke and at band meetings I can't say, 'don't smoke around my kid.' But they're all good about it and they wouldn't anyway. I am still aware of it though and I have to make sure we have our meetings outside.

What smoking did to me is pretty bad so I don't want him to be exposed to cigarettes at all. I am lucky that my family doesn't smoke and I know that I can take him to my mum's house and not have to worry about it.

What do you think about mothers who smoke while they're pregnant or around their kids?

It is a really horrible thing to do to a child, to force them to do something. I think it is unfair not to give a child the freedom of choice and they can't choose at that age. You don't know what the kid is going to come out like anyway so you have to give him every chance he or she has.