

INTERVIEW WITH PHIL BOSTWICK

What was your first experience with smoking?

Don't tell my parents this, but my first cigarette was when I was twelve and my industrious mate stole some from a supermarket and we went down the back of my place and down in the bushes and had a cigarette. I still remember the smell and taste of the cigarette, which at the time was horrible, and we were like 'what's all this about?' But it wasn't until I was sixteen when I had more friends around me who started smoking, and some Swedish friends particularly - those Europeans are very, very bad at smoking or very good at smoking, and I kind of dabbled a bit more. I've never been a 'proper' smoker but up until the last year or so, I definitely have been a social smoker and these days I still occasionally have one but I really do have to be quite drunk to do that.

So why do you think it is that when you're not drinking you don't want to smoke?

I couldn't think of anything more disgusting to be honest. When I was talking before about occasionally having had one at a party it's really only if there's someone around who's got some ciggies and if I'd had lots of drinks but even then, if I've had lots of drinks and the smoking isn't around, which is actually very often, then I won't even think about it and I won't have a cigarette. As far as smoking during the day and buying a big packet of Marlborough Reds, shit, urgh, that's just ... I mean, ever got up in the morning after a big night and gone 'want a ciggie?', that's pretty disgusting.

What's the thing you hate most about smoking?

The worst thing is probably the smell and the taste of it. If you have a friend who has smoked, a girlfriend for example, and you haven't smoked and you go to kiss her it's really not the romantic experience that you're really looking for and that's happened before.

What do you think the general vibe about smoking is out there?

I truly believe that the 'cool' thing isn't really an issue anymore. Is smoking cool? Is it not cool? Does it matter? It's not really a big deal, but I don't think it is cool, even for people who do smoke. I spoke to a few people, friends and people I work with (some of whom smoke although not very many fortunately), but those who do smoke said if they could go back and not have that first cigarette or not get hooked in the first place there's no way they'd be smoking now and if they could they'd get off it straight away but they're hooked and that's what happens. That addiction thing is the major issue. It's not a cool thing. It's the reason that you get addicted and you can't help yourself.

Do you think it's normal to be a non-smoker?

It is totally OK not to smoke. This strange little mindset that we get in that we think, 'oh yeah, I've got to smoke if I want to go out and talk to those people who are smoking outside'

or 'all the slightly cooler people at this party have gone outside and they're having a ciggie' - sometimes you get into this frame of mind where you think in order to have a really good conversation with someone or to hang out with certain people you have to smoke, but just because they're smoking doesn't mean you have to as well. You can be with them, you can hang out with them, you can laugh with them, you can do whatever with them, the same as them, and not smoke, that's fine.

Being in the entertainment industry, do you notice a lot of smoking?

In the workplace I've definitely seen it decrease and especially when you start working with people who are in their mid-30s or whatever. I've worked with lots of people who have been very, very hardcore smokers, smoking every thirty minutes while they're at work you know, and then they get to this age where they're like thirty-two or something and they start thinking about families and thinking about life a little bit deeper and that's when they start quitting. They don't always succeed, they don't always quit, but at least they start thinking about it, and I've definitely seen a lot of people around me go from being full-on smokers to not smoking at all.

What would you say to a someone younger who was thinking about trying smoking?

I have a niece actually who's a teenager, seventeen I think, and she's started smoking occasionally. I don't really approve of it but I've told her not to do it and gone into a few little details. I think that's a really, really tricky situation because sometimes, and I remember from being a kid, the more people tell you not to do something, the more likely you are to do it. So when it comes to her, when I'm around her, I just make sure that I never smoke around her. It makes it sound like I'm a smoker but I just try and set an example for her, you know.

It's a health thing for me, that's the most important side of it. The biggest aspect of smoking is that it's really, really bad for you and I tell her that it's really unhealthy and disgusting and I say 'just don't start, don't go there' ... although even that's kind of tricky because I'm the type of person who likes to try things at least once, just to see what it is.

Is there anything you would say to her, seeing as she probably knows the health risks, that might make her think about the reasons she's smoking?

That's a good point actually. I've often wondered about how to get through to people who smoke and I reckon possibly a good way is to go, 'let's look at the pros and the cons'. The pros are that it may feel good for some reason, I don't know actually, the pros pretty much end just there. As far as the cons go it's a health thing, it's a social thing as far as people around you think it's disgusting, it smells really bad, and it just doesn't look as cool as people think. If I've had some ciggies the night before, the next day I definitely feel it in my throat and I start spitting up disgusting globules of black stuff and wonder 'why did I do that?' The cons totally outweigh the pros when it comes to smoking.

So with your friends who smoke but say they wish they'd never started, do you see them trying to quit?

It's a tricky one. I've got quite a few good friends who are smokers and it's a little bit disappointing to be honest. You really want to ask them, 'why are you doing it? Why are you smoking?' But it's a personal thing and I think, like I said before, the more people tell you not to do something, the more likely you are to do it so I think it's really a matter of letting them understand that not only is it not good for them, it's not good for anyone around them. They just have to work it out for themselves and when they do they'll be able to quit. I do have quite a few friends who do smoke and who do want to quit and ultimately it's just a mind over matter thing and it's hard. I think that's the key thing. Quitting is probably the hardest thing you'll ever do but it's worth it.

So what would you say to someone who's trying to give up smoking and has failed?

I'd say listen to that inner voice that's telling you to give up because that's the voice that speaks the truth. It's really hard to do it, to actually go through with it, but you know what you want to do, you know you want to give up. Listen and follow that voice, it's going to be hard, it's going to be one of the hardest things you'll ever do in life but just follow it through. Be strong.

Do you ever have cravings?

I go through stages. I don't really have cravings, which is lucky because I can look a person and see them smoking and go, 'urgh, that's disgusting, why are they doing that? What are they getting from it?' If I do have cravings, when I've had a drink or whatever, it's just a matter of controlling my mind and switching off those cravings and it's not an easy thing to do but you just have to put it right out of your mind and just think about something else, think about something important.

What are your thoughts on the tobacco industry?

I don't know a great deal. I think it's horrible actually that it's still allowed. I know it's a big call but I think that smoking should be banned. I know there'd potentially become this, like, black market for smoking if that did happen, but I just don't really see why we've come so far and we're so intelligent in so many other ways and yet we still allow these big corporates to market cigarettes. Although technically they're not really allowed to market them, but they're still out there, they're still easy to get hold of just like that. It seems stupid that we allow that as a society, it's just pretty dumb.

What does not smoking mean to you?

I'm a big fan of the old outdoor pursuits and sports and appreciating the world and the environment and all that kind of stuff. You can enjoy life a whole lot better if you don't smoke. Why do people think they have to smoke to enjoy life or to enjoy certain aspects of life? It just doesn't make sense?

Why do you think that people still smoke then?

The addiction thing. I realise there're different kinds of addiction and there's the physical side of it, there's the nicotine, there's the mental side of things. I don't know how it works but I do know that when I see people who are in that completely addicted state I know that it looks stupid, they look stupid and I wonder what went wrong in their head to make them think that every ten minutes they need to go outside and have a ciggie. I also wonder why smoking is an accepted excuse to go outside, you know, ten times a day during work for ten minutes, that's an hour and a half or whatever, how comes that's allowed? It just seems pretty dumb.