

Interview with Sharyn Wakefield & Brad Watson

Interview by Dave Gibson

Part I: Interview with Sharyn Wakefield

How would you describe your smoking status?

Smoker. Yeah definitely a smoker but I don't usually smoke until about 3pm in the afternoon then I'll probably smoke about eight cigarettes a day. If I'm drinking then I'd probably smoke a packet in a night.

It just ramps up?

Yeah as soon as I get into a deep and meaningful conversation I instantly want a cigarette and I'll sit there and just smoke. I'll chain smoke the whole conversation.

Yeah, my smoking used to ramp up in those situations.

Yeah I think I had a few with you.

Yeah I'm sure we did. Do you think smoking is as common now as it used to be?

I still think a lot of people do smoke but I think people are more vocal about not smoking these days. A lot of my friends that have given up smoking will give me shit all the time that I still smoke but I do have a lot more friends that are non smokers now.

Why do you think that is?

I don't know. I think they just grew up and got over it I suppose. Everyone's getting to that age when, you know, it's not cool anymore.

Do you think smoking is seen as cool at a younger age?

Well I started smoking when I was 13 and I just thought I was really bad ass and now 10 years later I'm kind of paying for it. I have to give up a habit that 13 year-old Sharon started to be cool.

When you say you're paying for it do you mean in terms of money?

I'd hate to think of how much money I've spent on cigarettes over the last 10 years and also I'm paying for it because, you know when I was 13 I thought it was cool and now I'm almost 24 and I have to actually go through giving up smoking and going through the withdrawals and all that sort of stuff just because I wanted to be cool 10 years ago. I don't want to quit. I mean I do want to but going through that anxious bit of quitting is going to be the hardest thing for me I think.

I felt that as well. I wanted to quit smoking and I also didn't want to quit smoking.

Yeah, well that's what it is for me. I think the scariest thing for me is that I get anxiety so if I feel uncomfortable in a situation I remove myself from that situation to have a cigarette and calm down and then go back in whereas when I've given up smoking before that's been the thing that's held me back is that I would feel anxious all the time and didn't have that thing to take my anxiety away. That's the thing that's freaking me out the most about quitting smoking.

So have you tried to quit smoking before?

Oh, heaps of times.

How many times do you think you've tried to quit?

Probably like six or seven times. I quit for about three months this year but I just got too stressed out. I was fine when I was happy but then I wasn't happy and I just couldn't handle being anxious all the time.

I know that it can be really daunting when you try and quit and you don't. How do you feel now? Do you feel like these quitting sessions will help you eventually quit? Is that what you plan to do?

Well I plan this time to be the last one that I quit smoking. I mean, just talking about it now I can already feel my stomach going 'errrgh' and starting to feel really uncomfortable just talking about but I know that this time I actually have to do it because I'm sick of just always trying and then not doing it. I'm lucky now that I've got some really good friends around that already have given up smoking.

What is your main motivating factor for wanting to quit now after almost 10 years of smoking?

Probably the main thing is that my grandma asked me to. She has got really bad asthma and she used to smoke all the time and she was like, 'I just wish you'd give up smoking' and so that was the thing. The day that she asked me was the day I seriously thought about it. It was only really when she said it to me that I kind of thought about it and thought, 'I probably don't really need to smoke and I can save more money and be more healthy and not have to rely on something to relax me and all that sort of stuff'. I'm just kind of over it to be honest and I'm sick of my hair smelling when I get home on a Saturday night. You wake up the next morning with that gross smelly hair and it's yuck.

Yeah that's true. Did you ever think when you started smoking at 13 that you would still be smoking 10 years later?

Nah, no way. I didn't think that I would. I don't even know why I did it. I think I just wanted to make friends with people because I'd always been really bullied at school and these girls that smoked were really nice to me and for once I was kind of like, 'Well I smoke too and they wanna be my friends and we kind of bonded over that.' I didn't think I'd still be smoking now. I used to steal my dad's cigarettes when I was little and burn them and put pictures of black lungs in his drawers and stuff so that he'd quit smoking and it was quite funny that I was the one out of all of my sisters to smoke because I was the one that was really anti-smoking.

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

Oh no way, no way. Every time you have a cigarette now you're kind of looking around thinking, 'Are there other people smoking?' or, 'Should I go stand over there?' But I wouldn't smoke if I was at a table of non-smokers. I would ask first and I always make sure I'm blowing it the other way or if there're kids around I definitely don't smoke anywhere near any kids or babies or pregnant women or anything. If you do smoke and there're non-smokers around, you get the look and there's nothing worse than that look from a non-smoker. It's horrible because you just sit there and all of a sudden you've got this dagger and you can feel it and you feel really bad and like smoke it really fast or you just feel so uncomfortable that you kind of get up and walk away. I think I'm kind of over that as well, over that non-smoker look.

What else are you sick of as a smoker?

I'm sick of smelling gross. I'm sick of people saying, 'Oh you just had a cigarette' when I walk into the office. There're four smokers in our workplace and if any of us have a smoke it's like, 'Oh you smell like smoke'. I'm sick of having to rely on it, sick of spending money on it, sick of feeling like I need it.

So there are only four people at The Edge now that smoke?

Yeah there's only four of us. We used to have heaps.

Same thing everywhere, like working in the rock 'n' roll community it used to be that everyone smoked, every single band smoked but now smoking is the exception.

I still can't believe that you don't smoke.

I know. I really can't believe it cause I was a pretty good smoker, I was really committed.

Would you go out with a smoker?

My ex-boyfriend was a smoker but then after him I went out with a non-smoker and I felt bad that I was a smoker so yeah, I think people are really turned off by it these days. Yeah, it's definitely not a turn on, you know it used to be sexy but now it's not.

Earlier you were talking about how you feel lucky that you've got supportive friends around you when you've tried to quit.

Most of the times that I've quit I've quit with a friend and the last time I gave up smoking Brad and I quit together and we were both having the sneaky puff behind each others back. I think I had just one friend that would be like, 'Why are you smoking? If you're going to give up smoking, give up smoking. Don't just say you're going to and then have the sly puff.' That was the most motivating thing, was having that one friend that would say, 'Nah no more ciggies.'

Part II: Interview with Sharyn Wakefield & Brad Watson

How do you find it both being smokers when you're trying to quit?

BW: I guess it's just good having someone else because you can say to each other, 'You know you don't need it now, you'll be alright, have a drink of water, go outside quickly, whatever.'

SW: We have tried to give up smoking separately before and it's kind of hard because Brad would go for a cigarette and come back smelling delicious of cigarettes and then I would go for a cigarette when he was trying to give up smoking so yeah it will be better that we're both not doing.

Are you both currently trying to give up?

SW: I'm quitting from Monday.

BW: I'm quitting as soon as I've read the book again so however long that takes me.

So would you think about having someone to quit with makes it easier or harder?

BW: I find it easier, just knowing that someone else is going through it.

SW: I find it harder but I have non-smoker friends around and that make it easier. I tried to quit with my best friend who smokes recently and we were both just not hard enough with each other. We were both like, 'hehehe let's go for a cigarette, don't tell anyone'.

BW: So that's why you find it easier to do it by yourself.

SW: Yeah I just find it easier because if I do it on my own I've got my friends who have already given up smoking that help me rather than someone that is going through the same

thing as me, somebody else making it okay for you to cheat because they're doing it too so it's okay if we're both doing it.

Do you have any advice about what works when trying to quit?

BW: I'd say go with the book. I keep saying that to everybody. The Allen Carr book and just be really honest, don't sneak smokes.

SW: I think that's probably it, don't sneak and when you go drinking for the first time and you haven't been smoking then definitely do the water between because I couldn't figure out why I was getting so drunk when I had given up smoking and that was why, because I wasn't going outside for 10 minutes.

BW: The last time we quit I did a blog about it and I think it got about 10 people quitting, which I was stoked about. It motivated me even more knowing that people were doing it just because of a silly blog on the internet.

Considering that you're both in the public eye, and role models to young people, do you feel an added pressure that you smoke?

BW: I think so aye, cause when we're hosting concerts or just events at schools, if you're seen smoking it's really bad because you're hiding away and just the looks you get make you realise that the kids are like, 'Wow, I didn't realise you were a smoker' and they get disappointed.

SW: It's no way to live, hiding out the back of a hall.

So what do you think are the key factors to quitting successfully?

SW: Not sneaking and, you know, you guys are the only ones that I've told that I'm giving up on Monday cause some of my friends would be like, 'Let's go for a cigarette' 'Do you feel like a cigarette?' 'Do you want a cigarette?' and people at work would just be like, 'How's the quitting going?' 'Do you feel like a cigarette yet?' every time they walk past. The best thing you can do is be supportive but not in their face about it. Like I don't want to be reminded every five minutes that I'm giving up smoking because that makes me think about smokes every five minutes.

BW: Yeah, I don't have any key tips I'm just going to see what happens again, try my hardest.

SW: I'm just not going to get so drunk that I need a cigarette.

What are some of the things that don't help when you're trying to quit?

SW: People that think that they, not people that think they know everything but people that tell you how to do it instead of giving you the space to just deal with it yourself. Like I hate being told that I'm doing it wrong or I shouldn't do it like that and I should do it like this and I'm kind of like, 'well this is working for me at the moment', so yeah. Whatever works for you when you're trying to quit is the right way to quit.

BW: Yeah I guess the unsupportive friends around you and the situations you could find yourself in. Like Dave said the people egging you on saying, 'Ha, ha you're going to have a smoke soon', that is really really annoying. If you've got support it sort of eggs you along and makes you feel good about doing it and proving a point to people, and to yourself that you can do it.

Have you ever thought about how much money you spend?

BW: Hell yes. I reckon I'd have a house by now. I'd have a sweet house and a car that's got a warrant and a rego.

SW: Do you not have a warrant?

BW: No I got a \$200 fine the other day all because I smoke.

If you could go back in time would you start smoking again?

BW: No way. Hate it.

SW: Nah.

BW: No way. I remember having my first smoke and wish I didn't.

Do you have smokefree homes and cars?

BW: Yeah, definitely, even though I smoke my car has to be smokefree. I hate people smoking in it and at home my flatmates are all smokefree. I just don't want that smell in there aye.

SW: I have a smokefree house but I don't have a smokefree car. Yeah last time I gave up smoking I got my car valeted so it didn't smell anymore.

BW: I just hate it when my car smells like my nana's car. Like smokers' cars just remind me of my nana's car.

Did you have a lot of people in the family that used to smoke?

BW: Yeah both my parents smoked. My dad doesn't anymore so I guess that's probably why I now smoke.

SW: My dad smokes and my mum has never even had a puff of a cigarette before.

Do you think their smoking influenced you to become or continue to be a smoker?

BW: I think in a way it probably has.

SW: Growing up, as I said before, I was really anti it and would burn my dad's cigarettes and stuff but now it's like, 'Shall we go for a smoke Shary?' 'Alright'.

BW: I'm kind of gutted my mum still smokes. She went to hospital recently for something and couldn't smoke for about six weeks and I really hoped that would stop her and I sort of said, 'You've done it for this long, try not having more'. And I've got a younger brother who's about 13 and it kind of guts me that he's growing up to possibly be a smoker, seeing mum doing it and me and my brothers do it so yeah. I hope he doesn't.

How do you deal with smoking cravings when you're trying to quit?

SW: The best way that I found to deal with my cravings was to eat lollies and I made a playlist on my iPod that every time I was feeling annoyed with somebody or the times I'd have a cigarette, instead I'd just listen to that playlist.

BW: Yeah when I got cravings I just sort of thought, 'this is awesome, I've got a craving, I'm not going to have one because in five minutes it's going to be gone' and if I keep doing that I'll be sweet basically. I didn't replace it with anything, I didn't want to. Just wait, your craving will pass and it will become easier.