

Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

"How did we survive back then?"

A few weeks ago I went to a night White Sox game with a friend and his nine year old and five year old sons. The game was good, the weather was great, and the Sox were victorious. It should have been a very enjoyable experience. One factor, though, made this a less than perfect evening. One man, just one row behind us and a few seats over and one young woman, two rows ahead of us, were smoking. Here we were in an outdoor stadium with only two people smoking in our entire section. A section of probably over 100 people. It seems like it should have been a minimal exposure. Somehow though, every time they lit up, the smoke came right at us. For those few minutes when either one of them was smoking a cigarette, my throat burned with every breath I took. I thought maybe it was just me, but then the nine year old turned to me and complained that the smoke was really burning him too. A few times when they both lit up simultaneously, the smoke got so bad that I got up with the nine year old and took a walk through the concession area so we could avoid the irritation. I wondered how many of the other 100 or so people not smoking around us were having similar experiences created by these two smokers.

Some people may have left the game bitter with the feeling of resentment that two people could be so selfish and inconsiderate, interfering with the enjoyment of so many others. I didn't think that. I truly believe they had no idea that their smoke was irritating adults and children all around them. Even if they had been told, I don't think they could possibly believe it made us feel as bad as it did. They would think it was just another fanatic trying to infringe on their right to exercise a private practice that delivers a few seconds of personal pleasure. It is not my purpose in this particular letter to debate the fact that the smoker is not really feeling pleasure, rather, just alleviating the pains of withdrawal. It is also not my intent to belabor the point about how two people could ruin the evening for so many others.

To the contrary, these two smokers heightened my awareness as to how far we have come as a society. If this was 30 years ago, over half of the men and over a third of the women would have been smoking at any given ball park in the country. If two people could produce enough smoke to make me and the people around me feel so bad, it must have been 10 or 20 times worse back then. How did we survive back then? I do

remember when I was a child having to leave certain events because the smoke exposure was so concentrated and irritating. You couldn't find a place to walk around to avoid the smoke for a few minutes because the smoke was everywhere. You couldn't even say anything about it—back then it would have been considered terribly impolite to raise the issue. It is only by remembering how terrible it was that you can start to appreciate how far we have come.

With the exception of two people, here we were virtually surrounded by nonsmokers and ex-smokers. These people were not restricted from smoking by rules or regulations. Each and every one of them had a choice. They could smoke like the one man or the one woman, or they could not smoke like everyone else. Ninety percent of them were choosing not to smoke. Those who had never smoked just took it for granted. Even most of the ex-smokers were not sitting and thinking how fortunate they were to be able to sit through a game without needing a cigarette. They, too, just took it for granted that they didn't smoke anymore. And the two smokers were probably oblivious to the fact that they were the only ones smoking in their immediate vicinity.

I think we can see the day coming where no one will be smoking in an outdoor stadium. Wrigley Field already eliminated smoking in the park except for rest rooms. It is also becoming apparent that indoor public smoking will soon be gone. Most will not be smoking by choice. A few will have it regulated from them. We will sit and watch a game, go to meetings, eat in restaurants, stand in theatre lobbies and not think about how no one is smoking. We will just take it for granted that people do not expose other people to their cigarette smoke anymore. Children will no longer be irritated by adults around them having to feed a physical craving. They will never know what it used to be like to be assaulted by secondhand smoke. We, on the other hand, should never take it for granted that we are no longer assaulted by the smoke of others. We should think back to the days when a lot of people smoked in these places, or even back to the time period that we are in now when only a few people were smoking in public. We will feel very appreciative that we no longer have to be exposed to the risks and annoyances posed by other peoples' smoke.

You should also think back to the days when you were the smoker affecting people around you. Even though you never realized it at the time, you were hurting yourself as well as the young and old all around you. You can't do anything today to change that past—but your focus should now be on never exposing yourself and those around to such discomfort and possible dangers. So that you may never again have to face such personal risks or feelings of guilt again, always remember, to stay smoke free - **NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!**

Joel

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