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## Tobacco's Faceless Victims

This year tobacco toxins and carcinogens will claim roughly 5 million of us. God forbid that it should be you or me. But what if we should be diagnosed with a terminal condition? Would it cross our mind during dark days of deep despair that the lives of thousands of struggling smokers might benefit greatly, or even be saved, by being touched by our parting hand, thoughts, insights, concerns and, yes, even our death? What if killed by a smoking induced stroke or heart attack? Would our families bear witness as to why we had died?



You'll find no tobacco use celebrations here at WhyQuit, nor anyone made to feel guilty for having become hooked as a child, teen or adult. What you hopefully do feel is deep admiration for the victims and families who braved sharing their nightmare, some while looking death squarely in the face.

The [Glykos family](#) let us sample their love and pain during Noni's final embrace of six months of motherhood. Bobbie Curtis shared the loss of her husband [Bryan Lee Curits](#) and returned to tell us about Bryan Jr.'s first Christmas as he looked to heavens to show dad his new toys. The ebb and flow of [Kim Genovy's](#) two year journey picked us up and drop us hard. How could we not feel the massive hole in sister Kelly's heart. And [Deborah Scott](#) bravely chronicled her daily cancer battle as we prayed she'd succeed.





Imagine the thoughts going through Kim's mind as she posed for the photo of her lung removal scar, knowing it would be shared and hoping it would help motivate others to avoid a similar fate. Imagine the courage of [Gruen Von Behren](#), [Brandon Carmichael](#), [Chris Andrews](#) and [Sean Marsee](#). Selfless and caring, these victims and their families may not fit the mold of the traditional hero but among the millions who annually have an opportunity to reach out, their

bravery and humanity stands tall.

Is it fair to expect the world's youth to obtain an accurate picture of nicotine addiction's impact upon life when this year more than two million middle-aged tobacco users will die very privately and very quietly? "Death with dignity?" Where's the dignity in allowing one of the most purposeful messages in our life go undelivered? Where is the dignity in not fingering our killer in hopes that others might avoid a similar fate?

The World Health Organization tells us that unless something changes, that 1 billion tobacco users will be claimed by century's end. But to the world's youth such statistics are just faceless numbers.



The evening news bombards students with almost daily automobile accident stories showing seriously injured or deceased victims being carried away in

ambulances. So why show them auto accident victims while ignoring those killed by nicotine addiction?

Instead, students will walk into their neighborhood convenience store where their brains will be bombarded with the message that they have not lived, tasted real flavor, known true pleasure, made enough friends, rebelled, acted adult or been cool and true until they've smoked or used oral tobacco.

Whether here or elsewhere, tobacco's true story must be told. It isn't easy reminding terminally ill smokers or those living with serious damage that there's still time to fight back. It's only an opportunity but like organ donation, unless the moment is seized it's



opportunity lost.

It's ironic but once we learn we have cancer most of us fight with every ounce of our being to beat it and stay alive. Clearly, we didn't appreciate how truly destructive each puff was. It's time that those truths were shared and known.

Breathe deep, hug hard, live long,

**John R. Polito**

Nicotine Cessation Educator

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