

EDITORIAL: Feeding my 'little monster' no more

I've been smoking since I was 14 years old.

My obsession with cigarettes began by watching my mother gleefully puff away on what we called 'her bitch sticks'. They were 100's and seemed very cool to me.

My mother could smoke an entire cigarette and seemingly never ash. She could also smoke without removing the cigarette from her mouth. Puff in on one side, exhaust from the other. The image this gave me was one of sophistication and elegance. I wanted to be an adult so badly, and smoking seemed the natural way in.

I started stealing my mother's cigarettes when I was 13. She would leave open packs all over the house so getting my hands on them wasn't a problem.

I would take 'the bitch sticks' over to my friend's house (she was a closet smoker, hiding her 'non-addiction' from her mother with whom she lived). We would go for 'walks' and puff until we choked. It was great fun. She was the first of my friends to get a car, and her new car provided us with the perfect privacy in which to indulge our cigarette fantasies.

I thought I was so cool, so mature, so sophisticated 'just like my mother.

I didn't know it at the time, but I was signing myself up for a lifetime of regret. The cigarette 'the delivery vehicle' for my new nicotine addiction 'started to rule my life.

At 37, it still does.

Two weeks ago, I was pondering the fact that it will be five years since my mother passed away from lung cancer. She would have been 65 on August 30th, but instead she lives in a box in my bedroom closet.

My mother and I still have heart-to-hearts. I feel her presence and I respect the advice she gives me 'which comes in the form of gentle whisperings in my subconscious.

She told me that the best gift I could give her for her 65th birthday would be to stop smoking.

When my mother found out she had cancer, it was already too late. The cancer had already metastasized from her lungs to her bone marrow and the small-cell cancer took over her entire body.

She died at RVH Hospital the day after Mother's Day, 2008. She was ready to go, as she had 'no quality of life to return to', or so she said. Even if chemo and radiation had been an option 'my mother, Carol Soloduik, had Multiple Sclerosis for 20 years and was physically exhausted from that battle already.

Before my mother died, I asked her if she missed smoking. She said 'no?'. She was finally rid of the filthy weed, laying there, half dead, waiting for the angels to take her to Heaven.

After she died, my sister and I went to the crematorium beside Georgian Downs to identify my mother's remains before she was cremated. She was cold, and very dead. I kissed her on the forehead and tucked a cigarette and lighter into her clammy hands. Like the mummies in Egypt, my mother would be buried with her prized possessions.

I quit smoking after that. Disgusted that I had ever started in the first place.

The quit was easy for me and I enjoyed my new sense of smell, taste and the freedom from worrying about where my cigarettes

were (would I run out before the stores opened again in the morning? ? as I lived in Tottenham at the time, and there were no 24-hour convenience stores); Would I forget my lighter and have to use the toaster? (and then run outside as quickly as I could, since smoking inside my own apartment was off limits); How many cigarettes could I get into me before I went into the movie theatre, grocery store, a friend's home that wasn't a smoker... These issues were no longer my problem.

On a vacation to Mexico two years later, I started smoking again. It started with one puff, and by the time I got home I headed straight for the store to buy two packs.

My addiction and my disease grew from that point. The way my body processed and metabolized nicotine became more efficient and I needed the weed more and more to keep from feeling the pangs of withdrawal.

Today, I smoke about 20 ? 30 cigarettes a day. I am obsessed with them and have built a life of ritual around them.

Going back to my conversation with my mother two weeks ago, when she asked me for my most precious gift for her 65th birthday, I have begun to read Allen Carr's 'Easyway to Stop Smoking'.

Carr encourages his readers to continue smoking while reading his book, a book that has sold over 13 million copies worldwide.

Carr says that he will not 'use scare tactics' to get you to stop smoking ? all the while repeating that smoking is dangerous, filthy, and a money pit. He also repeats the messages he wants you to learn, over and over again. This repetitive method of delivering the information you need to stop smoking may be just what I need to finally stop. For good.

As of this morning (Tuesday) I am on page 185 of 219.

Apparently, when I hit page 219 I have to quit. Timely, since August 30th is fast approaching.

I won't give away Carr's secrets, but his message is quite clear. There is never a better time to stop smoking than NOW!

Having been controlled by filthy cigarettes for the better part of my life, I know that both Carr and Carol are right. There's no time like the present to quit and Friday is as good a day as any.

Happy birthday mom!

By Wendy Soloduik