

Kick Smokin'

One Butt at a Time



Paul Rallion

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Illustrated by Robert Henry

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Dedications

To All Who Encouraged Me To Quit Smoking

To my dad, who will always live in my heart. He did not push me to quit smoking, but told me that I would know when to kick the habit. To my mom, who bugged me almost daily to quit smoking. In addition, I dedicate this book to my wife Mary, and my daughter Anaïs, for the happiness they bring me cannot be put into words. Last but not least, to my brothers and sister: André, for his efforts to convince me to quit smoking; Jay, for his guidance in my college years; and Marie-France, for her love and support.

I wish to express my appreciation to my wife, Mary, and my daughter Anaïs, for their support with this project, which took away countless hours of family time. I wish to thank my wife Mary, and my good friends, Chuck Wong and Frank Palacio, for proofreading this book's drafts. I would like to thank Robert Henry for the illustrations and for working on the book cover.

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Introduction

Quitting is usually associated with losers. When it comes to quitting smoking, though, nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, when you become a non-smoker you gain a plethora of benefits: You gain back years of life, you gain a healthier life, you're in better physical shape, you breathe better, your heart becomes healthier, etc.

Quitting cigarette smoking is a very difficult feat, and I think the ones who have achieved it can attest to it. This book will not rid you of your habit of smoking. You are the one who has to do the quitting. These pages will show you how I did it, and how you can do it, too.

My oldest brother, Andre, constantly reminded me about the effects of smoking cigarettes. It helps if you have a close friend or relative who encourages you to quit smoking. Once you are determined that you want to kick the habit, you can develop and carry out a reduction-elimination plan, like the one I described in this book.

The story in this book has been modified with the purpose of helping people to gradually quit smoking. I wrote this book to show people how I successfully developed and followed a method to quit smoking. This method, which does not involve the use of drugs or chemicals, worked perfectly for me the first time I used it. I have been smoke-free for more than twenty years (as of the time of this writing). The only regret I have is not having published this book earlier. This book is also available in Spanish, entitled: *Deja de fumar, un cigarrillo a la vez.*

This book is divided into three parts:

I. Why Do You Smoke?

Most smokers I know, don't have an answer to this question. Before a smoker is convinced to quit, he needs to find a reason why he smokes. Not being able to find any real benefits to smoking, it's easier to start the process to quit.

II. Being Determined To Quit

If someone is not convinced to quit smoking and has not made the decision to quit, that person simply will not quit. A sick person going to the doctor will most likely not get healed if he is not convinced that what the doctor prescribes will work.

III. Developing A Plan To Quit

Having a plan to quit is like an itinerary to a vacation. We don't just prepare suitcases with three days worth of luggage and other items to get in the car and see where we end up. You have to have a vacation destination, based on a timeline and budget. Likewise, before quitting the habit of smoking it is essential to have a plan to quit and execute it.

As you read this book, consider the following:

- If you're a youngster:

A few middle school students and many high school students try smoking for the first time. If they go on to become regular smokers, they may find it hard to quit the habit later on. My advice to you: Do not to start to smoke! If you are pressured to start smoking, learn to say "No." You don't have to be rude, just be firm. Cigarettes are a very addictive drug. I know, I've been there. I started to smoke when I was in middle school. Once I was hooked on smoking cigarettes, it was very difficult to quit at first. However, with determination and my reduction plan, I was able to kick smokin', one butt at a time.

- If you're an adult smoker:

While you still smoke, avoid smoking near youngsters as they may look up to you and pick up the habit of smoking. Unless you are convinced and determined to quit smoking, chances are, you won't quit. However, no matter how many times you've tried quitting, or no matter how many methods you've tried, there is hope. Consider using my plan, which is a long-term, slow-but-steady, mental conditioning.

- If you know someone who smokes:

It's important to understand that a smoker will not quit unless he is convinced that he wants to quit. The trick here is to help the smoker become convinced to quit. Focus on the commitment to quit in the near future, rather than attempting to quit now. From then on, it's important that he slowly builds the determination to quit, following the plan described here.

Disclaimer:

This book is not guaranteed to make you quit smoking. In fact, without your being completely convinced and determined to kick the habit, no book can do that for you. In addition, helping the reader with addictions other than smoking is beyond the scope of this book. Nothing herein should be interpreted as personalized or medical advice. None of the information in this book is guaranteed to be correct, and anything written here should be considered subject to independent verification. The author does not take any responsibility for any opinions or ideas expressed in this book. The author does not assume any liability as a result of the use of the information presented herein. Under no circumstances will the author be responsible for incidental or consequential damages or direct or indirect damages that result from the use of the information in this book. Based on real situations, many events have been modified to improve the flow of the story.

Part I

Why Do You Smoke?

Chapter 1

How I Started Smoking



“Hey Paul, remember when we used to go on those fun bicycle rides?” my cousin Peter asked me, between coughs, showing his yellowish, nicotine-stained teeth.

“How can I forget?” I said with a nostalgic look on my face, holding back my tears. I felt sorry for my cousin. He tried to quit smoking a few times, but he never did.

“Now I can’t even breathe on my own,” said Peter adjusting his oxygen mask, looking at his breathing monitors in this cold, light yellow wallpapered, hospital room. The sound of his monitoring medical equipment and the periodic beep served as reminders that Peter was in trouble, all for not quitting smoking.

“But you’re going to be OK, and we’ll play basketball and ride our bikes again,” I said, with a forced smile. I just couldn’t conceive how someone who had a tough-looking physique and who had been a good-looking guy in his twenties, now was fighting for his life in his sixties.

“Just this time be careful, don’t break another rib,” Peter said with a brief laugh interrupted by another cough.

“Oh, that fall was bad,” I said, as I remembered it: *Ahead of us were these two guys riding their green and gray mountain bicycles, both going at full speed. Peter and I were riding our red and blue eighteen-speed mountain bicycles and our cool helmets to match. Our bikes were sporty, equipped with front and back shock absorbers and black rubber handle grips. Peter and I were tired, although the bikes were light and we hadn’t been bicycling for a long time. We arrived at a dirt road with a rusty rail that ran along the sides. Here there were many bicyclists and joggers. A steep mini-mountain, about eight feet high, caught our attention. The two guys that were riding ahead of us went up the mountain on their bikes. Not only did they both go up and back down without much effort, Peter followed them and did the same thing, although it did not look as easy for him. I went up reluctantly. As I made it to the top, I ran out of steam and got stuck. I was desperate; I wanted to continue but I couldn’t. I had no more energy left. I lost my balance and started falling off the mountain. The sensation of helplessness was overwhelming. There was nothing for me to grab to avoid falling off. So down I went, and then my bike. I landed hard and flat on my back and broke a rib. I was so out of shape (and out of breath) that I couldn’t climb up that mini-mountain. I hated myself for smoking.*

“What were you thinking right now, Paul?”

“Oh, I was just thinking about how I fell from that mini-mountain and broke my rib.”

“I was scared to see you fall flat on your back from such height.”

“Yeah, I thought I had punctured a lung or something.”

“That’s how my lungs feel now.”

“But they’ll improve. Be strong, Peter. I have to go now. I’m behind with a class that I’m teaching online. I have many virtual classroom posts that I have to comment on, and several projects to grade.”

I paused a few seconds to pull up the retractable handle of my blue laptop suitcase with rollers, and continued, “Follow the doctor’s orders, OK? I’ll be back tomorrow or Friday after work.”

“Yesterday I was thinking about how we started smoking. And look at me now, after smoking for forty-five years, lying on my deathbed because I never kicked the habit. If I had won that bet with you, I would probably be in good shape.”

“Don’t say that; you’ll get better,” I told Peter as we shook hands with a strong grip, as usual. As I was walking out of the hospital I began to re-live how I started smoking cigarettes.

It all began forty-two years ago when I was fifteen years old and my cousin Peter was twenty-one. Peter was a regular smoker, going through a pack of cigarettes a day. Sometimes I would ask him for his cigarette and take it like kids who pretend to be adults smoking, except using a pencil. I would take a puff and exhale the smoke in a silly way.

“Just don’t bite the filter,” said Peter slowly shaking his head no.

“I won’t,” I said, as I imitated his way of exhaling the smoke, but more like blowing birthday cake candles in a slower motion.

Late in the summer, one Thursday right after sunset, Peter and I were in my backyard still enjoying the extended afternoons with plenty of sunlight. We had an apple tree, an orange tree, and a lime tree, among other plants. The greenery and the fresh air made it feel like the perfect environment to smoke in. The more I watched him smoke, the more I wanted to do it. I loved the smell of cigarette smoke.

“Let me see,” I said to Peter, pointing at his cigarette.

“Just don’t wet the filter,” said Peter handing me his cigarette turned around, filter toward me.

“I won’t,” I said. What was going through my mind was, *I really want to smoke like him!*

“Just smoke one by yourself; you can learn better.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Here,” said Peter opening his pack of cigarettes. He flipped the top open and slid one cigarette out halfway for me. I pulled it out of the pack and put it in my mouth. He let me borrow his cigarette to light up mine. *I am smoking my own cigarette*, I thought in disbelief. I then closed my eyes to avoid the smoke, took a puff, and got it out of my mouth, wet with saliva.

“Inhale the smoke,” said Peter while waiting to see my reaction.

I did inhale it, but quickly exhaled it, with a violent cough. My face blushed and I ran out of breath. I must have looked very distressed as I put my hands on my knees in a forward-bent position. I coughed some more. I threw the cigarette on the ground.

Peter said, “It’s OK, you’ll feel better after the first cigarette,” while picking up my cigarette and drying the filter with the bottom of his blue T-shirt. I could barely finish that cigarette, and it was not so cool.

“You’ll be fine,” Peter said. I kept quiet. For fear that my parents would smell my cigarette breath, I cut an apple from the apple tree, the first thing that came to mind. I took a bite out of the red, crispy apple and started munching on it.

“I’m feeling weird, Peter. My stomach is acting up and I’m feeling dizzy.” *Oh man, this is not cool*, I thought, trying to rewind time, *I should have never done that*. I felt everything around me spinning, like those tunnels at the fair that dare you to walk in them and all you see is a spiral driving you crazy. I was saying to myself, *I’m not doing this again*.

I sat down on a two-foot tall planter along the back wall, grabbed the edge, and a moment later turned around to throw up.

“What’s going on?” Peter asked.

I started to feel a knot in my stomach and said, “Oh crap, this is not happening to me,” shaking my head. Peter put his hand on my shoulder to try to comfort me, but I was upset for having tried smoking. After two minutes, which felt like ten, I got up and walked toward the garden hose. With that disgusting after-taste in my mouth, I unreeled the green garden hose to wash the vomit away. As I shot a jet of water at it, I thought, *That’s it, no more cigarettes*.

My older brother, Andre, was 5’ 7” tall, a few inches taller than I, about the same height and age as Peter. He was thin with black hair. He was watching me from his bedroom window, which overlooked the backyard. He came out and said,

“Paul, why are you going to start doing that? You’re only fifteen years old; you just finished middle school. You’ve even thrown up! Mom and dad are going to punish you,” he affirmed as he brushed his thick, black mustache with his fingers.

“Andre, I start high school in the fall. Look at Peter. He looks cool. I think you should smoke too.”

“Oh no, I don’t want to have ashtray breath,” said Andre with a brief chuckle.

“C’mon, Andre, don’t be a party pooper. Try it,” said Peter.

“No, I’m OK being a non-smoker. I’m going back inside, it’s getting late.” He then turned around and started walking back to the house. I remained with Peter and told him, “Smoking is no fun. Now I have a bad after-taste from the cigarette and from the vomit. This stuff is gross, man.”

“Don’t worry; the same thing happened to me when I started smoking, except I didn’t eat an apple. I chewed some gum and brushed my teeth. It was all good after that. But Andre is right, go to sleep, I gotta go. Tomorrow is Saturday and we have to go to Robert’s party, remember?”

“Of course, I do. I want to go.”

The next day, Peter came to our house. I opened the door, and there he was, a buff guy with his pack of cigarettes on his shoulder under his sleeve. He looked like a football player in his uniform.

“¿Qué dice el hombre?” (What does the man say?) We would greet each other, shaking hands and then bumping fists.

“Are you ready?”

“Let’s go,” said Andre, doing one last brush stroke along his hair.

“Let me have some cologne,” Peter said.

Andre turned around, “Sure, I’ll be right back.”

“Hey, don’t put on too much cologne!” Andre told Peter.

“Just a bit more, I want to smell good for Carol.”

Andre, Peter and I headed to Robert’s party with a chuckle. Robert lived two blocks away, so we walked. We got to Robert’s house, a one-story level home built on a raised foundation, with two palm trees on the front lawn. By the door were Robert and his sister Carol. Robert was turning thirteen years old that day. Robert was still in middle school, about 5’ 4”, dark eyes, with the beginnings of a mustache. His lower jaw was somewhat protruding, and was the reason we used to make fun of him.

“Robert, close your drawer,” we would tease him, but he didn’t like it, of course. Carol had just turned nineteen years old, was light-skinned, petite, with black hair. There were a few guys in the neighborhood that liked her. Peter was no exception.

“Happy birthday, man!” we wished Robert. “From all of us,” I said, handing him his birthday gift.

“Thanks, you shouldn’t have.”

Gathered outside, Peter started to smoke, trying to impress Carol. Now Peter was smoking in style and said to me,

“C’mon Paul, you’re not gonna die if you smoke another cigarette.” I noticed that he was getting the smoke out through his mouth into his nose. I was impressed.

I did try it and it wasn’t too bad after all. In fact, I liked it. This time I didn’t throw up.

“Hey, how do you get the smoke out of your mouth into your nose like that?” I asked, while rubbing my eyes from the smoke.

“Take it easy, Paul. You’ll learn one trick at a time. For now you just control inhaling the smoke,” said Peter, while taking another puff.

“Peter, let me take a puff from your cigarette,” Carol begged, as she extended her hand with her index and middle fingers sticking out, moving them like rabbit ears.

Peter held Carol’s hand and slowly put his cigarette between the fingers she’d been moving. I could tell he was on cloud nine, but a little nervous.

“Let’s go inside,” suggested Carol, cigarette in hand.

The music was rocking Robert’s place. A few couples were dancing inside. Robert’s parents were in the living room drinking beer and munching on some chips with a few guests. They were laughing; it looked like they were having fun. I looked at the deejay with his earphones over his head. The guy had light-brown hair, a goatee and was wearing a yellow T-shirt. I noticed that he had one of the earphones off his ear. It looked like he was preparing the next song to play. I was watching him. I even forgot about my cigarette. Most people at the party were dancing. They were all excited, all moving like robots. At least it looked like that with the strobe light. I was pumped up. All I was thinking was, *I like the music this guy is playing. I want to be a deejay one day.*

“Hey Robert, I like that guy’s job.”

“Who, the *deejay*’s job?”