



Kansans for a Healthy Future

Prevent to Win: Saving Lives. Saving Money.

Kansans for a Healthy Future (K4HF)

Proponent of SB 233: Increasing rates of taxation on cigarettes and tobacco products. Before the Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee; Chair: Senator Les Donovan.

When the tobacco tax increases, research proves: 1) People quit smoking or never start in the first place. This equates to lives saved and significant health-care savings. 2) Even with tobacco sales decreasing, tax revenue significantly increases.

The Kansas Department of Revenue projects raising the tax by \$1.50 per pack will generate \$71.9 million in new revenue the first year alone.

Other data shows the cigarette tax increase in Kansas will result in:

- 14,900 lives saved
- 25,400 kids not smoking
- \$1 billion in health-care dollars saved

With the adoption of the tax proposal in Kansas, a 20 percent decrease in youth tobacco use is estimated. That proves monumental, considering there are 61,000 youth in Kansas who will die young due to smoking. It's a sobering fact. Our children deserve better than to be targeted by tobacco companies with low prices and shady marketing, such as candy-flavored products and youthful images.

K4HF Written Testimony (See following pages)

- Aide Regalado
- Cathy Porter
- Craig Miller
- Kevin Alderson
- Lisett Lopez
- Marlene Haynes
- Loren Richter
- Jeannie Roberson

Bottom Line

Passing the tobacco tax increase is a common-sense solution – the more cigarettes cost, the less people smoke. Kansas youth win by not picking up a cigarette. Kansas adults win by quitting smoking. The state of Kansas wins with less health-care costs and more revenue.

For more information on K4HF, please contact Tracy Russell at Tracy.Russell@heart.org.

Kansans for a Healthy Future (K4HF) is dedicated to saving lives in Kansas through tobacco prevention; particularly stopping the smoking cycle so kids never try tobacco products in the first place. K4HF supports raising the cigarette tax in Kansas, which is a proven way to save lives, prevent kids from smoking and significantly reduce health-care costs related to tobacco use. K4HF also aims to put a portion of the revenue back into smoking cessation programs. For more information, visit k4hf.org.

Tobacco Costs Influence Quitting

It quickly adds up. A puff first thing in the morning. A smoke to take off the edge. Any time day or night. It suddenly hit Aide Regalado like a ton of bricks. Her addiction was costing her family too much money – about \$2,600 a year.

“I realized what I could be doing for my kids with the cash instead of throwing it out the window,” Aide says. “When I added up the cost, it was like a monthly car payment. So I quit smoking. It’s too much money to waste.”



Smoking to Cope

Aide tried smoking when she was 16 years old, influenced by being around a “cool” aunt who Aide thought looked glamorous when she lit up. She didn’t like the taste of cigarettes and only smoked occasionally with friends. But when Aide’s brother was murdered when she was 19 years old, she started smoking in full force to deal with the nightmare.

“Smoking brought me relief as I went through the trauma,” Aide says. “I couldn’t believe my brother was gone. We were only a year apart and so close. I didn’t want to deal with my grief, so I shoved it away. Smoking a pack a day helped me move through life. I stayed as busy as possible to not think about my brother. While nicotine was calming my nerves and helping me get by, it was also setting me on a path of addiction for more than a decade.”

A New Day

It was a sunny June morning four years ago when Aide woke up and made a decision that would forever impact her life and her three children’s lives. Aide was sick of letting cigarettes control her life. It wasn’t easy. For instance, she normally woke up with coffee and cigarettes for breakfast. But she made a vow to change her ways.

Aide didn’t touch a cigarette for six months. Free from nicotine, she felt great except for one nagging issue – financial concerns. To deal with the stress she bought a pack even though she knew spending money on cigarettes just made the problem worse. Luckily, a few drags made her nauseous. It solidified her decision to quit. She was done.

“I’ll never smoke again,” Aide says. “I wish I hadn’t smoked for 11 years. But I can’t change the past. Now I feel responsible as a mom to set the right example for my children. It makes me upset when I see people smoke because I know if they put their minds and hearts to it, they can quit just like I did.”

Smokers are a Heart Attack Waiting to Happen

Inhale. Pause. Exhale. Slowly and deliberately a cigarette gives smokers immediate satisfaction.

Now picture that swirl of smoke upon exhale creeping around your body and taking hold, like a tight hug. It grips your heart and won’t let go – literally squeezing the life out of you.

Unfortunately Cathy Porter, age 61, can relate all too well. She smoked at least a pack a day for 20 years. It caught up with her the day before she turned 45. She was in Manhattan, Kan., watching her 12 year-old son, Denver, participate in Odyssey of the Mind (an academic problem-solving competition). During a lunch break at a local diner, she thought she had severe heart burn and turned lightheaded.



"I instantly thought to myself, 'This can't be a heart attack. I'm too young. I don't have pain in my arm. Plus, I'm a woman,'" Cathy says. "I had no idea that heart disease is the leading killer of women, and I was almost one of them because I smoked. Nicotine has power over those who use it. Everyone knows there are serious consequences to smoking but thinks, 'It won't happen to me.' Guess what? It does."

Cathy's heart attack was caused by a "crack in the plaque." Hard and soft plaque attaches to the lining of arteries. Sometimes smokers' soft plaque can pull away from the lining, causing a tear that bleeds. In Cathy's case, the blood backed up into her heart resulting in her heart attack.

"It's an absolutely terrifying experience," Cathy says. "In the hospital I didn't want to go to sleep because I wasn't sure if I would wake up. All I could think of were my two kids. I could not leave them. I quit smoking right then and there because I was too scared of dying."

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

The damage to Cathy's heart was done. Five years after her heart attack doctors found scar tissue was causing blood to clot and her heart to swell, ballooning from a football to basketball shape. Instead of a transplant down the road, she decided to have open-heart surgery to remove the aneurysm and scar tissue.

"Facing open-heart surgery was nerve-racking for my entire family," Cathy says. "I was always in control. I had to surrender and realize everything was actually out of my control."

The surgery was successful and eventually she recovered. Routine doctor visits, daily medication and echocardiograms are engrained in her life. It hasn't been easy. Cathy is often short of breath and lacks stamina. She has been through two more surgeries – both to implant cardioverter defibrillators, which regulate her heart's rate and rhythm. Also, she suffered another heart attack in 2012.

"I had dozed off while watching a basketball game with my husband. When I woke up, it was like a slap in the face," she recalls. "I looked at my husband and he immediately said, 'We're going to the ER.' I didn't have any traditional symptoms, but we knew. Thankfully we arrived at the hospital in minutes. Doctors could see the heart attack happening and treat it accordingly, so I didn't have any complications or long-term side effects."

Paying It Forward

Cathy has become a champion for women with heart disease. Her cardiologist asked her to become part of WomenHeart. Through the national coalition, she received extensive training and was tasked with giving 24 hours back to educating her community on heart disease. She did exactly that ... plus so much more. Three major initiatives Cathy started in Kansas City include:

- WomenHeart Support Group – Going strong since 2005, this group allows women to share heart experiences, hear speakers (e.g., cardiologists, dietitians) and receive support once a month.
- Heart Scarves – More than 7,000 women in cardiac rehab programs throughout Kansas City have received a red scarf with information about women living with heart disease. To volunteer to knit, send an email to DCL-Midwest@womenheart.org
- "A Day of Women's Heart Health" – This continuing education program at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kan., occurs every other year and features presentations from leading cardiologists around the country.

Cathy's heart advocacy has shaped a community and taken her to the White House to be honored. Yet she would skip it all to have never smoked in the first place, which would have left her with a healthy heart today.

Cigarettes as a Gateway Drug to Nowhere

It was a frigid winter night when Craig Miller was riding high and flying fast down the highway in the backseat of his friend's car. In a split second on Dec. 12, 2006, his life changed forever. The car crashed. Craig wasn't wearing a seat belt and went flying through the windshield, landing 150 feet away in a pasture in Scranton, Kan. For five horrific hours he was left lying motionless suffering from brain trauma, a punctured lung and broken bones – in 12 degree weather. It took a helicopter with infrared radar technology to finally spot him.



How did he end up in this near-death tragedy?

“Cigarettes were the root of my undoing,” Craig says. “I wouldn’t have been in the accident and my body forever impacted if I had never started smoking in the first place. Cigarettes served as the gateway drug to all my other addictions.”

Craig was 12 years old, in seventh grade, when he starting smoking with a neighbor and thought it was “a cool way to make friends.” By age 20 he was not only smoking cigarettes and marijuana, but also addicted to crystal meth, crack and cocaine. He tried every drug except heroin.

Rock Bottom

The night of Craig’s car accident, paramedics finally found him unconscious. They didn’t know how much further damage was caused by the five-hour delay to locate him and freezing temperatures following the crash. He was life-flighted to Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital in Lincoln, Ne., which specializes in traumatic brain injuries. Doctors placed him in a medically-induced coma for a month to help reduce brain swelling.

The next thing he remembers is being pushed in a wheelchair to rehab with his parents by his side. It was a long, painful road but eventually therapists helped Craig with his brain and motor functions, such as learning how to walk and talk again.

“I was a drug addict and gave up everything cold turkey because I was fighting just to survive,” Craig says.

When Craig finally arrived home from the hospital a year after the accident, he started smoking again to deal with stress but never touched any other drugs. After two years, he switched from cigarettes to nicotine lozenges and still needs them to “help hold it all together.”

“My body is screwed up for life,” Craig says. “I *must* have nicotine.”

Life Today

Craig knows he was fortunate to live after his remarkable circumstances. Although survival has come at a cost. Most notably, he suffers from short-term memory loss. People, events and conversations in the past few days, hours or minutes can be tough for him to recall. He copes by using his planner and phone as lifelines – making notes of everything. Craig also has balance problems.

“I can walk, but not very straight,” he says. “You would notice something a bit ‘off.’”

Today Craig is making progress as he continues to work with therapists and surround himself with people who don’t smoke. Perhaps his biggest step forward is finding his passion for volunteering and helping kids stay drug free.

“I’m on a good path now,” Craig says. “To get to this point was a real battle. I don’t want other kids to ever have an experience like mine.”



Take Me Out to the Ballgame

“We do three things here – cuss, chew and listen to country music.”

Kevin Alderson, age 38, remembers his college baseball coach's words as clearly as if they were spoken yesterday.

“Chewing tobacco and baseball just went hand in hand,” Kevin says. “I'd chew on the four-hour bus ride to our game. Then for another three or four hours at the game. I was a relief pitcher, so I usually was only in 30 minutes or so. The rest of the time, in the dugout or bullpen, I continued to dip. That's just how it was for most of us players. At that point in my life, I thought I could conquer anything. I didn't feel like I was addicted. But looking back, I was wrong.”

The First High

As a high school sophomore, Kevin didn't drink, smoke or chew tobacco. That changed one sizzling summer day at a park in his hometown of Overland Park, Kan. While playing tennis with friends, he was offered some chew.

“I'll never forget that moment,” Kevin says. “It felt like I was walking on clouds. It was the coolest feeling at first. Some of my friends tried it and started sweating and got sick. I wish that would have been my reaction, too. My life may have been different.”

Kevin chewed tobacco occasionally until his senior year of high school when the habit became routine.

Trying to Quit

Often the first step is the most difficult. Yet Kevin easily quit chewing tobacco the first time he tried in college. His plan was simple – surround himself with people who didn't chew. It worked for seven months.

While watching a baseball game at the College World Series, he heard a familiar noise – someone “packing” chew (pinching chew together in the can to grab it easier). That's all it took to break the cycle. He thought chewing again was “no big deal” because he was planning to only do it every once and awhile. But that day lead to another with more chew, which lead to back-to-back days chewing, which lead to a life-long addiction.

Kevin successfully quit one other time, also for seven months, after he moved to Arizona. His roommates didn't chew and he was working at a golf course in a new environment. When he was transferred to another course, he discovered a lot of his peers dipped. Naturally, he started again. The habit fit like an old shoe.

“I realized it was bad when I was telling some of the guys how to fix our golf carts,” Kevin said. “I was going through the steps with them. I literally said: ‘The first thing you do is get your chew.’ I didn't even realize I was saying it at first. But that's what I did every time. It was an eye opener.”

Kevin has chewed tobacco for 22 years. During that time, he met his wife, Meghan, and they had a son and a daughter. With the birth of their children, Kevin wanted to quit for his family's sake but was “so entrenched there was no stopping it.”

His son is now 9 and his daughter is 7 years old. Recently he made a new plan to quit. Step one: Transition to Nicorette. Kevin gave up tobacco, but compensated by breaking Nicorette tablets into quarters and using it all day long. He used 15 to 20 tablets daily to help with urges; in part because one typical chew of tobacco has about four times as much nicotine as smoking a cigarette. Kevin had a difficult time moving onto the next stage of his plan. Step two: Transition off the Nicorette. Easier said than done. He was stuck on it for 11 months.

Raynaud's Disease Diagnosis

At first, Kevin had no idea what was going on. It started with his second finger turning white from the knuckle to the tip and feeling freezing cold. Then more fingers and toes followed suit. He finally visited the doctor who quickly diagnosed him with Raynaud's Disease, which causes blood vessels to narrow and restrict blood circulation in response to stress or cold temperatures.

Believing there was a connection with his new condition and Nicorette, he stopped taking the tablets cold turkey and bought a can of chew on his way home from the doctor's office. So in addition to suffering with Raynaud's, his days of chewing are back full force.

"I'm a nervous mess if I can't chew," Kevin says. "In order to really make a run at quitting, I would need to drastically change my environment. It's so routine-oriented for me. I can't imagine doing some things in my daily life, as simple as mowing the lawn, without it. I chew less on vacation, at the lake or anytime I'm away from my routine."

Until Kevin decides the time has come for drastic measures, he will continue to lead life as usual with a can of chew always within reach. Others may be oblivious to his condition. He hides it well. For example, he can spit tobacco juice through the tiny hole in a coffee cup lid while tilting his head back (appearing like he's simply taking a sip of coffee).

"You find ways to get around things," Kevin says. "Hopefully my life won't be like this forever, but it's a tall order to stop something you've been doing most of your life."

Lisett Lopez's Testimony
K4HF Web Site

Breaking the Smoking Cycle

With one puff, 16-year-old Lisett Lopez saw her life flash before her. In that moment Lisett thought of her grandfather, remembering him always with a cigarette in his hand; and her mother, a long-time smoker who eventually quit. She made an on-the-spot decision – one puff would be her first and last. She was going to end up different.



A family history of tobacco use is difficult to break. According to a study by the Harvard School of Public Health, children age 12 and younger are almost four times as likely to smoke if they come from a smoking household versus a non-smoking one.

"I want to do so much more with my life," Lisett says. "Smoking holds you back. It's not easy to say 'no,' but I know it's the right decision. I want to see the world and travel to as many places as possible. I can't wait to go to Rome with my honors class. Even more importantly, I want to be the first in my family to graduate high school and go to college."

Lisett is staying on track with the guidance of her mom and another mentor, Shirley Voran, a Family Consumer Science teacher at Dodge City High School.

"Mrs. Voran has inspired me to become a teacher," Lisett says. "I want to help other kids just like she helped me in so many ways. I can count on her. I could never be a role model to kids if I smoked."

Voran leads her students down positive paths. She helped Lisett become involved with the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, an organization that has motivated Lisett to plan for her future. Lisett wants to attend Stanford University or K-State University.

"It's challenging to stop the smoking cycle in families and a lot of kids never do," Voran says. "Parents' actions speak louder than words. How do you tell a kid not to smoke when you do? You can't tell them to stay away from cigarettes then leave a pack of smokes on the table, just begging to be picked up. Lisett is lucky that she has smarts between her ears. Common sense can be difficult for teenagers. But they have to realize that we all have choices. How we lead our lives is up to us."



A Silent Voice for Tobacco Prevention

This former smoker shares her shocking story even though she can't speak

It all started innocently. Marlene Haynes just wanted to fit in with a group of kids when she was 11 years old. So she took the cigarette offered to her by the preacher's son behind her church. A puff here, a shared drag there, but by the time she turned 12, she was hooked. Little did she know then that her tobacco addiction would become the unwanted focus for the rest of her life – causing her to struggle with cancer four times, endure countless painful chemo and radiation treatments, have several complicated surgeries and literally lose her ability to speak.

Marlene has suffered more than anyone should, and it's truly a miracle she still is alive today to tell her story. She is triumphing through tragedy, but at a huge cost. All because of tobacco addiction.

A Father's Choice Backfires

Marlene never knew her mother. She was initially raised by her older brother, Bob, and his wife. When Marlene was 12, her dad got remarried and came back for her. She moved from California to eventually settle in Kansas to live with her dad, stepsister and stepmother who was "the jewel" in her life. Marlene soon learned her father never seemed to be without a smoke, and found bumming cigarettes off him and others proved easy.

"Tobacco turned me into a sneak, liar and thief right off the bat," Marlene says. "I even stole money to support my habit."

Her dad never missed the stolen cigarettes, until one day he caught Marlene red handed. Instead of a traditional lecture or consequence, Marlene's dad sat her down at the dining room table and made her hand roll 20 strong cigarettes and smoke every last one. No food. No water. Just constant inhaling and exhaling until the last cigarette was smoked a few hours later and she felt as sick as a dog.

"I still remember my dad telling me, 'You proved you can handle it so you have my permission to smoke. But if I ever catch your sister smoking, I'll give you the beating you thought you were going to get today,'" Marlene says. "That experience was horrible. I wish it was handled differently. But after it, I could smoke anywhere I wanted without restrictions and that's when I became truly hooked."

Addicted to Tobacco

Days revolved around smokes. The addiction was relentless for 39 years. Although Marlene would never admit it at the time (even when doctors asked her) she spent 30 years smoking at least two packs a day. With the havoc it was reeking on her body, she landed in the hospital several times with severe bronchitis and breathing problems. She was put on breathing machines and medications.

"As soon as I would get to where I could breathe freely again, I would light up," Marlene says. "Is that insane or what?"

This was Marlene's life until she was 50 years old and developed a sore throat that would not dissipate. After trying cold medicines, lozenges and throat sprays, she finally saw a doctor and landed on antibiotics for several months. She never imagined what was in store. Her life was quickly beginning to turn upside down.

A Life or Death Decision

The turning point came when Marlene was sent to the hospital for a throat biopsy. She had a bad feeling after the procedure. The doctor left a prescription for strong pain medication, instructions for her to go home and rest her voice, and come back to the office the following day at 5 p.m.

"It seemed like the longest wait of my life," Marlene says. "I was dreading the trip back to the doctor's office. I wanted to run the other direction. But I didn't. The doctor told me flat-out: 'You have cancer and it's the worst kind. It spreads rapidly. We need to operate as soon as possible. I want to perform a complete laryngectomy on you. The good news is I think I can get it all. The bad news is you will never talk again.'"

Telling the doctor she would get back with him, Marlene left the office completely in shock. While driving home, and almost wrecking her car several times, she kept thinking, "no way they will cut open my throat and turn me into a freak."

Marlene Haynes' Testimony, cont.

Picking up the phone, Marlene broke the grim news to her sons, Terry and Bradley; and daughter, Carol. She proclaimed she wasn't going through with the surgery. They adamantly disagreed knowing it was a life or death situation. Terry and his family drove 500 miles to try and change her mind.

"My daughter-in-law started crying and said, 'Mom, I can't believe you don't want to see your future grandchildren,'" Marlene says. "I couldn't sleep that night. Her words kept echoing in my head. I think that's what finally changed my mind. She was right. I wasn't ready to leave this world without seeing my grandbabies. My greatest wish was to be a grandma."

On Dec. 24, 1996, Marlene underwent a complete laryngectomy where her larynx was removed. The larynx plays a critical role in breathing, swallowing and speaking. Once the larynx is taken out, air can no longer flow into the lungs. Marlene's surgeon also performed a tracheotomy by making an opening in the front of her neck so she could breathe.

"When I woke up in intensive care, the first thing I saw was Bradley holding my hand with his head resting on the bed rail, crying so hard he was sobbing," Marlene says. "I naturally opened my mouth to console him but nothing came out. I felt so helpless. I wanted to assure him everything would be okay, and I couldn't say a word. My voice was gone forever. It must have been a horrible sight to see your mother with her throat cut from ear to ear."

Finding a Voice

Eventually home from the hospital, Marlene had to learn from nurses how to care for herself, such as how to manage her feeding tube and clean the trachea site. Life was an "emotional rollercoaster."

A speech therapist came to Marlene's home to teach her how to "talk" with an instrument called an electro-larynx. The therapist took it out of the box, inserted a battery and showed Marlene how to use it – instructing that she sit in front of a mirror and practice until she could be understood. As soon as the therapist left, Marlene promptly packed the device right back in the box and thought, "I wouldn't be caught dead talking with that silly thing."

Without a form of communication, Marlene and her family set up a tapping signal system so she could answer questions from them on the phone. One tap meant "no." Two taps, "yes." And three taps was "I love you." After one of these phone calls and hearing her daughter say, "I love you too, Mom," Marlene changed her mind about the electro-larynx. She reopened the box and started practicing on her own and later with a speech therapist. The first words Marlene said with the help of the electro-larynx was "I love you" to her kids.

Far from over, the next step of her battle included 33 radiation treatments. Weak and fragile, she put one foot in front of the other throughout the ordeal with the help of her children and a lot of prayer.

"I don't know how I got through it, but I did," Marlene says. "It's a good thing I didn't know then all the hardships I also would face down the road."

Losing a Voice Permanently

Marlene would go on to battle cancer three more times. She had nose cancer in 1998 that required surgery, but it was a walk in the park compared to her next two experiences years later.

In 2006, her throat cancer returned with a vengeance. Marlene spent that summer at Wesley Medical Center, in Wichita, Kan., undergoing two chemo and radiation treatments a day. Talk about gritting it out and fighting every day, literally, for your life. Somehow she made it through with faith and family support. She also joined Victory in the Valley – a cancer support group in Wichita – that she says was instrumental in her recovery.

The most recent cancer occurrence dramatically changed her life, yet again. This time the cancer went undiagnosed by doctors for a year. During this time, Marlene suffered deeply in pain and was unable to swallow. In 2010, she finally switched doctors and learned the cancer was back in her throat and now her tongue. Marlene was sent to KU Medical Center in Kansas City, Kan., to have a surgery to rebuild her throat and tongue by using skin grafts from her left arm and left leg.

"The surgery was my only option and thankfully a success, but I have not spoken or eaten whole foods since then," Marlene says.

She now communicates via text, email and Boogie Board (a writing tablet).

Rebuilding a Life

Marlene has been cancer-free for almost five years. Her greatest joy in life are her five grandchildren. She lives near four of them and loves to babysit. She is active in her local library, historical society and Heartland Doll Club. Perhaps most importantly, Marlene is a forum manager for the Web Whispers site, the largest support group for those who have undergone laryngectomy surgery. She helps new patients and communicates with others in situations like hers.

Marlene's life has new meaning and perspective. Recently she married Logan Grayson, a fellow laryngectomee. They connected through an online cancer support group 16 years ago, then finally met in person at a conference for laryngectomees in 2011. They took their time being engaged for three years before tying the knot in Nov., which seems quite fitting since it's the month to give thanks. She is thankful to be right here, right now, in the present moment.

If Marlene could do it all over again, she would go back and tell her 11 year-old self not to take that cigarette from the preacher's son. Of course, life is a series of events. Who knows how her life may be different today if she would have just said, "No."

Her mission in life now? Tobacco prevention.

"If you smoke, please get whatever help you need to quit because eventually it will kill you," Marlene says. "Pledge to stop for a week ... go on walks; smell the fresh air; wash your clothes, body and hair; and talk with a friend for support. Remember my story. Don't end up like me. You CAN do it! Your life depends on it."

Loren Richter's Testimony
K4HF Web Site

Social Smoking Leads to Addiction

Loren Richter was 16 years old when he studied abroad in Ecuador. He was surrounded by vibrant people in a different country; immediately immersed in the culture and a new way of life. Through the experience, Loren learned life lessons and made friends who would make a lasting impact. Unfortunately a habit he started overseas also made a lasting impact and still haunts him today, nine years later.



"Everyone I met there smoked. It's a way of life. I picked it up right away," Loren says. "Shortly after arriving in Ecuador, I had to get a physical for school. The doctor was literally smoking while conducting the physical and asking me questions. At the end, he added, 'Oh yeah, you shouldn't smoke. It's bad for you.' Talk about ironic!"

Loren thought smoking was simply something he did socially while hanging out with friends. So when he returned to the States and went to college, he continued to light up. He was "partying too hard," which led him to transfer schools and take stock of the situation.

"It doesn't take a genius to figure out my problem," Loren says. "Drinking and smoking go hand in hand. The more I go out and drink, the more I smoke. It's an endless cycle. I also hate throwing money away on cigarettes. The cost alone makes me want to quit."

As Loren prepares to go into business with his brother, he would like to quit smoking – for good – but it's much harder than he ever envisioned. In the last five years, he's kicked the habit four times (each lasting for about six months).

"My last smoke was three months ago," he says. "I would like to think this is the time I will finally quit for good, but I know my track record. I'm hanging out with a cool group of friends who don't smoke. It's easier for me if I'm not surrounded by it. But it's a battle. I never thought something I did just for fun with friends would have such a grip on me."

Turning Around a Life

Sometimes Jeannie Roberson has to pinch herself to remember this is her new life. A healthy, happy, active, non-smoking life. It's a complete turn-around from her lowest point six years ago struggling to breathe in the shower.



"That morning I didn't know what was happening to me," Jeannie says. "My breathing went from bad to worse and my doctor sent me to the hospital right away. I had pneumonia and was showing signs of COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease). My doctor said if I didn't stop smoking I would need oxygen for the rest of my life. I decided, right then and there, I was too cute and too young to haul around an oxygen tank. I quit cold turkey during my five days in the hospital."

Jeannie's husband, Sean, was also a smoker. They decided to be successful long-term they both needed to quit. Learning the facts about tobacco withdrawal symptoms and reminding each other to think logically helped the process.

"It may sound funny, but we focused on the numbers," Jeannie says. "Sean knew he was going to have a cigarette craving about every three minutes. The goal was to get through those cravings for three days when our research showed the nicotine levels in his body would begin to decrease. We kept building on our goals. The next step was getting to three months without smoking. It wasn't easy. But we kept plugging away together."

The couple felt great about their new smoke-free life. But Jeannie started to gain weight after she quit. She toyed with the idea of working out, but had never done it before. Her parents were both smokers and her dad died of lung cancer. Exercising was foreign to her.

Jeannie decided to start small by simply joining the YMCA in Wichita, Kan., and walking around the track. Eventually, she worked up to the elliptical machine. The more she worked out, the better she felt. Breathing became easier. In fact, Jeannie improved her lung function by 40 percent. Instead of displaying COPD symptoms, she now just has asthma – a palpable difference she feels with every breath.

"My resolve to quit smoking and the YMCA saved my life," Jeannie says. "The mind and body connection is powerful."

Jeannie now serves as the membership services coordinator at the same Wichita YMCA where she began exercising.

"When I quit smoking, it was like mourning the death of a friend," Jeannie says. "I had turned to cigarettes for 21 years when I was stressed, happy or sad. Thankfully I got over it and gave the 'new me' a chance. I'm never going back. I'm blessed to work at the 'Y.' Everything in my life has brought me to this point. I'm exactly where I need to be."

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