

Not to smoke? Not to smoke? Not to smoke?

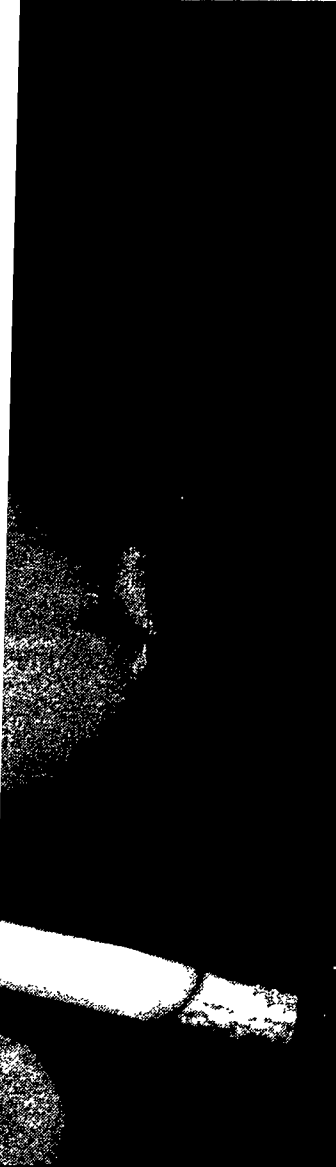
"It's gotten to the point where it's freezing cold and I'll still go outside for a cigarette. If I didn't need one, why would I go out into below-zero temperatures?"

Jane Jackson, 16

That is the burning question we're kicking around this week.

Story by Staff Writer Mike Latona

Illustrations by Photographer n Wilkin



Here, teens' viewpoints on smoking range as widely as the brands of cigarettes they may have used — or considered trying — or staunchly refused to try.

It's an issue as prevalent among teens as dating and driving. And let's face it: Lots of teens start smoking sooner than they go out on their first date, or get behind the wheel of a car. All you have to do is sneak up to a cigarette machine when no one's looking, or get an older brother or friend to buy you some smokes. Or, simply bum a cigarette off someone else.

No fearing the risk of being turned down for the prom. No having to bug mom and dad to let you get your learner's permit. With one flick of a Bic, instant gratification.

For Brian and Deanna Moroni, the process was even simpler. In fact, their father introduced them to the world of smoking in the same way your parents might tell you to eat your vegetables. At an age where you've barely left behind your doll-house and toy-truck phases.

When Brian was 9 and Deanna was 7, they were each instructed by their father to have their first cigarette — and inhale the smoke. Then their mother warned them to immediately wash their mouths out, or their tongues would fall

off. "Believe me, all the mouth-wash was gone. We didn't want to have anything to do with that again," Brian recalled.

Indeed, there was method to this madness. Brian, now 18, and Deanna, 15, have never touched a cigarette since. For that matter, their father even dropped his 20-year habit a short time later.

"He always said it was a real bad habit," said Deanna, whose family belongs to St. Cecilia's Parish in Irondequoit.

On the other hand, some youth-group members at St. Michael's Church in Newark aren't sure if their current practice of smoking will be temporary or long-term.

"It's a habit, but I'm trying to quit. I stopped for three weeks," said Taylor Powell, 14.

Both Matt DeHimer, 15, and Kay Kehoe, 15, said it's quite possible they'll no longer be smoking when they're adults.

Adam Ross, 14, is hoping to quit "because my family has a long line of cancer."

While these people seem to be aware that smoking is not the healthiest of activities, there's still something so powerful about cigarettes that they find it difficult to stay away.

And it's not only an addiction to nicotine: The social pull can

be just as strong, if not even stronger.

Shannon Ross, 16, also of St. Michael's, said she started smoking two years ago because her ex-boyfriend did.

Kay describes herself as an occasional smoker who lights up only "when I'm in groups of people."

"Everybody who I hang out with did it, so I tried it," Adam added.

Matt Mann, 16, hasn't smoked for two months. He

agreed with his St. Michael's peers that "it was more like an atmosphere kind of thing. I never really had a habit. I guess I didn't really see a good reason (to keep smoking)."

"This is, like, a stage that teenagers go through," reasoned Cathy Napoli, 16, a parishioner at Church of Christ the King in Irondequoit.

Cathy and Jane Jackson, 16, also from Christ the King,

are two other teens who got started with smoking through their peer group.

"It was a year ago last November, in our little circle of friends," Jane said.

"My friend taught me how to smoke. I asked her to teach me," Cathy added.

What began as a social exercise, however, has turned into a strong addiction for Jane. She used to participate in cross-country and softball in high school and realized cigarettes were slowing her down, yet opt-

ed to drop her athletic activities instead of her smoking habit.

"It's gotten to the point where it's freezing cold and I'll still go outside for a cigarette (she's not allowed to smoke in her house). If I didn't need one, why would I go out into below-zero temperatures?" Jane remarked.

Matt in Newark said he originally became a smoker because of peer pressure, but now "it's just a habit."

It's obviously easier said than done, but the best way to avoid this habit — the same would be true for any vice — is to never get started.

"Every single one of my friends smokes, but I don't feel a need to," said Matt Tyler, 15, of St. Michael's in Newark. "It's a waste of money, if you ask me."

Larissa McKenna, 17, from St. Patrick's Church in Victor, agrees that you don't have to conform — even if you might be tempted or pressured to smoke.

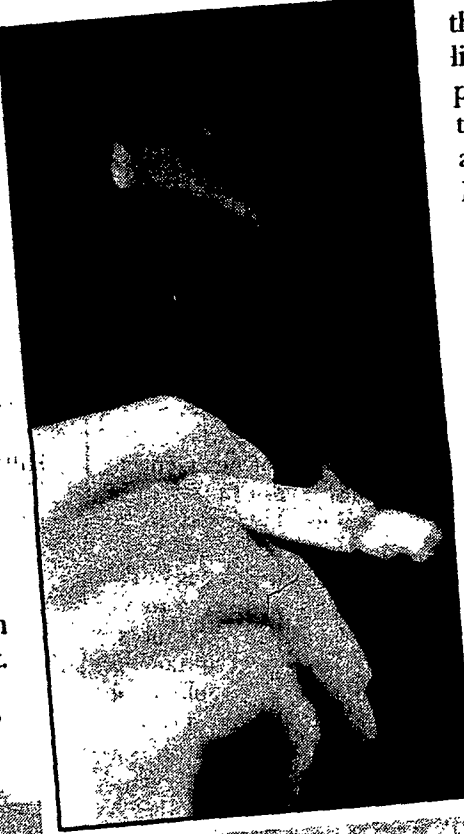
"I think people start in bunches. If there's a bunch of people doing it, you feel like you want to be part of it," Larissa remarked.

She said smoking for her "just doesn't seem like an option," even if she were the only person in a room who wasn't smoking.

"I think I could hold my own ground," Larissa stated.

Dave Judson, 18, has never been a smoker, even though both his mother and father smoke. While he said he doesn't clash with his parents on the subject, he's never been tempted to acquire their habit.

"Smoking certainly looks appealing, but at the same time I don't think I'd try it," said Dave, a parishioner at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield. "A lot of my friends say, 'Don't start smoking.' They've tried to quit because none of them really like it, but they do it because they're addicted."



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