



My last cigarette!

I watched my dad's cigarette in the ashtray getting shorter and shorter while he was helping customers at the register in our bookstore. He didn't see well but was able to help here and there by bringing the items very close to his only one seeing and near sighted eye to read the price labels. Most of the time he didn't see his cigarette slowly die on him.



We were both standing behind the counter, an occasional moment with no customers in front of us. Don't forget your cigarette, I reminded him, while I was grabbing it for him. I held the short left over stump in my little hand, observed it closely and asked, "Can I try it?" He looked at his seven year old daughter with his cigarette in her hand and didn't respond immediately. He thought about the moment my mom asked my grandfather to try his cigar. She had to cough so hard, didn't like it at all and never smoked again in her life. Occasionally she would smoke cigarettes but not inhaling it, just for the fun of it. My wise and contemplating dad decided it might not be a bad idea for me to learn that same lesson through my own experience.



Sure he said, but only one time. I brought the cigarette to my mouth and sucked on it. I didn't inhale because I didn't know that was how you did it. I sucked some smoke in my mouth and then copied the adults who stylishly blew out the smoke high in the air. Hmm, that's fun I thought. Can I try again? My dad decided to let me go ahead in the hope I would get sick and learn my lesson this way. Motivated, I sucked again and held my head high while blowing out the smoke. The cigarette was almost gone now. I gave the leftover stump to my dad, he took the last puff and I watched as he crushed it out in the ashtray. What a great new experience I thought. My dad didn't expect me to be that excited about it. He was hoping for the opposite reaction. He was hoping I would think it was disgusting. That was my introduction to smoking.

We didn't sell cigarettes in our bookstore in the earlier days. Once in a while I was asked by my dad to go buy a pack of cigarettes for him in the little shop next to the church building. They also sold a lot of different kinds of candy. Going to get cigarettes for my dad in combination with getting a candy was exciting. The older man at the store handed me the cigarettes and waited very patiently till I had made a decision which candy I would choose to take home.

Growing up with older neighbors who secretly smoked in hidden locations where parents couldn't see, I followed their example. I knew it was something that was not allowed for kids, but I had done it already anyway and wasn't afraid of getting caught. Because I was used to getting cigarettes for my dad and the man at the store knew me, I was sometimes asked by my peers to buy a pack for them.

Yes, I started early. In the 70's and 80's smoking was encouraged everywhere. Magazines (we had lots of them in our store), television, billboards, wherever you looked they showcased how attractive smoking was. I am so thankful that my kids observed the addictive and unhealthy consequences from others around them smoking and chose not to go the same route as I did. Our kids had programs in elementary and middle school about the negative effects of smoking and using drugs in which they were strongly encouraged NOT to start using them.



I smoked all my teenage years and into my twenties. In my mid twenties when I started to become conscious of my own well being and peeked into my future of how I wanted to see myself, I realized smoking was not in my best interest. Lung cancer was also being talked about. I knew I wanted to stop smoking. I had tried two times so far and it didn't work.

And then one day! I was working as a counselor in Ter Linde, a home for mentally disabled adults. I wasn't the only one smoking and many counselors took breaks together to smoke a cigarette. By the way a few of the disabled people also were smoking and many times we joined together for a smoke break.

I had been working there for over a year. One day I was in the office together with a few counselors from all three groups. We were talking about not work related things. Wouter, a counselor from the Brem, says out loud. I would like to stop smoking. Is there anyone who wants to join me? Without thinking I said, sure I will join! I knew I wanted to stop, I also knew from trying a few times that I hadn't been able to do it successfully. Why not, I thought? I will try it again. We decided to motivate each other and keep each other accountable. He said he needed one more day smoking. "Sure, I said, good plan! We will start the day after tomorrow."

And we did! We embarked on our new adventure together. One day, two days, three days, four days. It was not easy! We kept each others phone numbers close by (no cell phones yet!) in case in an emergency moment when we felt challenged! Day by day we were able to convince

ourselves and each other to keep going without smoking. We shared our challenges and if we almost gave in, we did our best to convince the other not to do it. Sometimes it came VERY close that one of us would cave in.

One week, two weeks! We did great! I came up with my own internal mechanism to handle it. I called it "switch the channel". When my mind focused on smoking, or I saw others smoke or saw a cigarette somewhere I told myself to switch the channel and forced my thoughts to be thinking about something else. It worked. Many times I had to do this. Over and over again. Switch the channel I told myself and forced myself to be thinking about something else. To distract myself from the subject. I visualized myself in my life as a non-smoker. I learned to focus on what I wanted it to be.

About four weeks in as non-smokers, Wouter announced he was changing jobs. We promised each other to keep it going and call each other in times of stress and when we felt challenged.

I was on a roll, it worked. I had not been smoking for a month now! I felt accomplished and also supported knowing I was teamed up with Wouter. One day I called him up to ask how he was doing and if he was still going strong. He said he had a very emotional situation going and did smoke again.

I had to make my own decision at that moment. Shall I feel weakened now, knowing that he gave in and I don't have my buddy anymore as partner and support. Can I stay strong and keep the course myself?

I came so far already! I felt so accomplished and decided that I wouldn't give in anymore for anything. I had to keep switching channels many times day and night, but I did it! I kept going. I was the only one of my smoking peers that quit. I kept it going.

Even in my dreams I was challenged. I dreamed many times that I was tempted to smoke. I battled full on in the dream, feeling the inner desire to smoke and the fight of my mind trying to prevent me from smoking. Many times in my dreams I gave in, and smoked. I felt so disappointed in the dream that I gave in. I felt mad and frustrated that I wasn't able to say no.

Then I woke up, still feeling mad and disappointed in myself. Till the moment I realized it was just a dream. I hadn't given in in real life yet. I was still going strong. Those dreams went on for years.

I did it! I never smoked again. I kept switching channels for a long time. Also those smoking dreams kept popping up even many years after I quit smoking. It felt like I was testing myself in the dream to see if I would cave in. Well, better in the dream than in this conscious life.

I was 27 when I quiet smoking. Twenty years after I tried my first cigarette. When people share with me they want to quit an addiction but don't know how, I share with them the "switch channel technique" I used. I also let them know they can count on me as a buddy. The process is easier to carry if you know there is someone walking the path with you. Someone to communicate with and share the challenges and triumphs.

Life is easier when you know you are not alone on the journey to healthier living! **You are not alone.**

Picture 1: 14 year young Mieke at a ski camp in Switzerland. Dressing up evening party.

Picture 2: My mom's sister Rosie working at the bookstore.

Picture 3: 7 year young Mieke

Picture 4: 19 year young Mieke

Mieke's Voice 2019©Mieke Benton
Starshowerusa@startmail.com

(Sharing permitted with my name and email included)
(With a simple email let me know if you like
to be added or removed from this list).

Mieke's Voice - Part 1

Week 1 - Introduction - My early life

Week 2 - A Rough Start

Week 3 - Vision

Week 4 - History Lesson

Week 5 - Bookstore Caecilia

Week 6 - Invisible Hand

Week 7 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 1 - My parents Anny & Hugo

Week 8 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 2 - My brother Jeroen

Week 9 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 3 - My sister Kathleen

Week 10 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 4 - Something about myself, Mieke
Week 11 - Encounters with extraterrestrials
Week 12 - The Movie E.T. - The Extra -Terrestrial
Week 13 - What happens after the body dies?

Mieke's Voice - Part 2

Week 14 - Introduction - Relationships
Week 15 - Expressing my authentic nature
Week 16 - Sexuality - part 1 - Unity
Week 17 - Sexuality - part 2 - Separation
Week 18 - Sexuality - part 3 - Menstruation
Week 19 - Intimate Relationships
Week 20 - America - part 1 - Newspaper Article
Week 21 - America - part 2 - Stepping into a movie
Week 22 - Another taste of freedom as a college student
Week 23 - Riding the waves, both high and low
Week 24 - A Holistic approach to healing
Week 25 - Overnight resident counselor in a high school
Week 26 - Mieke the younger in action - Part 1
Week 27 - Mieke the younger in action - Part 2
Week 28 - Totem Initiation
Week 29 - Extra Freedom and Independence
Week 30 - First Wake-up call
Week 31 - Second Wake-up call
Week 32 - Home Ter Linde

Mieke's Voice - Part 3

Week 33 - Introduction - Learning to Love myself
Week 34 - My last cigarette!