

Missy Lambuth  
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### Molly's Journey to Living Smoke-Free

*I am hoping to help people in understanding, dealing, and coping with the stress that comes along with quitting smoking. I have changed the name and identities of the actual clients involved in Quit Coaching to protect their privacy; each story actually involved a different client. I have created a fictional character, Molly, to help us explore the process of quitting. Molly knows just how dangerous smoking really is to her health. Molly recently had the painful experience of watching her grandfather as he died of emphysema. The sad fact is that there are over 400,000 deaths in the United States every year due to people smoking cigarettes. Many people are unaware that the number of smoking-related deaths is higher than the number of deaths caused by alcohol, risky sexual behavior, homicides, illicit drug use, or even car crashes (Proudfoot, 1998).*

Molly and I were having lunch the other day, and she expressed to me that she was extremely stressed out because even though she was working full-time now, she just could not afford to do the simple things that she enjoyed doing in life. Molly loves going to the movies. She likes being able to buy new shoes, and she really has been feeling lonely because she never could afford to go do anything fun. I could tell that this was really bothering her. Molly was telling me the story of her friends who had just gone to a Madonna concert. I could see the frustration in her eyes as she explained how they had asked her to go along to the concert, and at the time, she just did not have the money to purchase herself a ticket. Molly's friend Jan had

offered to purchase her ticket for her, but Molly ultimately refused her friend's offer because she was unsure of when she would be able to repay Jan. While I was listening to her, I carefully decided how I could show Molly that by saving the money she was spending on cigarettes, she could reward herself with doing these types of things that she loved doing so very much.

I got out my notebook, and together Molly and I figured out that she smoked about a pack, and sometimes more than one pack, of cigarettes every single day. The brand of cigarettes that Molly purchased every day cost just over \$5.00 per pack. I told her, "Ok, let us just look at the cost of just one pack of cigarettes a day." This cigarette addiction was costing Molly over thirty-five dollars every week. I added the amount Molly spends in a month, and when she saw that it cost her over one hundred and fifty dollars, she chimed in with the most excited voice, "I could have gone to the Madonna concert!" I smiled and thought to myself, exactly! Seeing the excitement in Molly's eyes, I chose to take this exercise a step further. I quickly jotted the numbers in my notebook and saw that Molly's tobacco spending averaged eighteen hundred dollars a year. Even more surprisingly, it added up to about thirty-seven thousand dollars in a 20 year period! I watched the gleam in Molly's eyes as she realized that she could be buying a new home with the very money that she was spending on cigarettes alone (Richmond, 1998). I knew how hard Molly was trying to quit smoking. She had quit for several weeks and relapsed; that was the reason we were here at lunch in the first place. Molly thanked me for helping her to realize how serious her addiction really was. We ended lunch and Molly quickly hugged me, anxious to get back to her busy life.

That day as I watched Molly walk away, I sat quietly and thought about how our lunch had unfolded. I really hoped that I could help Molly quit smoking. In my heart I knew that in the

end, only Molly could quit smoking for herself. I sat and thought about all the millions of dollars that people spent every single day on such a deadly habit. I thought about all the people who mindlessly spent the same \$5.00 every day as they stop at the corner store on their way home. I thought about Molly and said a silent prayer, hoping that she would win her fight against such a deadly addiction. I sat there and with a single tear on my cheek I thought about the reason that I was Molly's smoking coach in the first place. Molly and I had one thing in common: I myself had held the frail hand of my grandfather as he slipped into a death caused by smoking. I reminded myself as I silently sat there that it really was possible to quit smoking. It was only seven years ago that I myself was a smoker. I wiped that single tear from my cheek and smiled. I had faith in my job; I knew I was doing the right thing, and I knew that when Molly needed me the next time, I would be there. As I left the restaurant that day, I wondered when I would get the next frantic, stressed-out call from Molly. One thing I knew for sure was that when that call came in, I would be ready and willing to help in any way that I could.

On Tuesday I finished up my work early, so I was sitting in my office chair trying to decide what I wanted to do with the rest of the evening. As I was admiring how nice the weather was outside, my cell phone rang. Before answering my phone, I noticed that it was Molly. I took a deep breath and realized that what I was going to be doing with the rest of my evening was helping Molly through another crisis. I had not heard from Molly in almost two weeks and was wondering how she was doing in her attempt to quit smoking. I answered my cell phone, and we agreed to meet at a nice Italian restaurant in North Denver. I loved this little restaurant because we could relax on the patio and enjoy the lovely weather.

I arrived at the restaurant before Molly, and the waiter sat me outside on the patio. I enjoyed the next few minutes with my eyes closed, just relaxing. This was something my life seemed to be lacking. I heard Molly's laugh and opened my eyes. Before Molly even got settled, she started telling me that she just did not think that she was going to be able to quit smoking. Trying to save the money that she was spending on cigarettes was not working. I calmly told Molly that if her if desire to quit smoking was still there, we could work on finding another technique--one that would work. I told Molly that it was incredible that she had the strength to even call me and talk about it. I listened to Molly as she explained that everything made her think about smoking. She wanted to smoke when she woke up. She wanted to smoke when she got finished eating. Molly blushed as she told me that she could not even have sex without having a cigarette. As I sat quietly and listened to Molly, I realized that the best approach to helping Molly might actually be to refer her to her doctor for nicotine replacement therapy. I explained that there were some good FDA-approved therapies to help with nicotine withdrawal. Doctors can prescribe certain medications; people can also buy nicotine replacement patches, gums, and inhalers.

As I began to talk to Molly about seeing her doctor, a large gust of wind swept through the patio. The wind was causing things to blow in every direction. Molly reached out to grab the plate of rolls and her glass of water flew directly into my lap. I jumped up and my chair fell over backwards. Molly and I looked at each other, and all of a sudden out of nowhere it started pouring rain. We both grabbed our purses and ran inside. Once inside the doors, we both began laughing. Once we were seated at a table, both of us resembled drenched rats. I took this as an opportunity to tell Molly that life is just not always easy. Sometimes what is supposed to be a

relaxing sunny moment turns into dark ugly storm. It is when you can learn how to deal with each storm as it comes that life becomes less stressful. Molly agreed to see her doctor and get something to help her in her attempt to quit smoking, and we scheduled another lunch in two weeks.

Five days later, Molly called me and told me that she had seen her doctor and decided to try Nicorette gum. The gum was working rather well for her; however, the only problem was that she was eating uncontrollably. Molly described to me how she was acting crazy when it came to food. She was eating instead of smoking. I explained to Molly that this was a normal human response that happened to a lot of people when they tried to quit smoking. I told her that on average, most people who quit smoking gain about 10 pounds. I explained to Molly that there are some good ways to combat gaining weight as you quit smoking (Richmond, 2001). The most important was for Molly to not substitute food for cigarettes; doing so would consequently cause another addiction, which we did not want. I gave her a list of techniques to avoid eating, including sugar-free mints, toothpicks, and a rubber band to snap on her wrist as a reminder.

I explained to Molly that there were some other things to watch for so she would be prepared if they happened. Common problems when people attempt to quit include cravings that seem impossible to get through, depression and anxiety, insomnia, fatigue, constipation, stress, and last but not least, gaining weight (Slothower, 2002). We decided to set another lunch date for the end of the month; this would give Molly time to see how the nicotine replacement therapy and her new plan would work. I told Molly that she would have everyday

temptations. I also made sure that she knew not to panic if she slipped, but just to call me and we would work through it.

Surprisingly, I did not hear from Molly the rest of the month. Two days before our scheduled lunch, she messaged me wondering if we could possibly reschedule later into the next month. Reluctantly, I agreed. I hoped this change in plans did not mean that Molly had given up. In this line of work, that is often how my clients fail their quit attempts. They just put me off, eventually not calling at all. I have learned to not take this personally and to always keep hoping for the best. Most people usually quit several times. It is all part of the process, and everyone's journey to quit is much different, as no two people are alike.

This time, when the day of our scheduled lunch arrived, I was delighted that she had not canceled. I met Molly at our favorite little Italian restaurant. We decided to sit inside, recalling how the weather was last time we were there. I was rather surprised that Molly had not had a cigarette in over six weeks and was even off the Nicorette gum. The look on Molly's face was priceless when she thanked me. I told her she did not owe me a thank you. She needed to thank herself! Molly smiled, because she was, after all, the one who did all the hard work. We really enjoyed our lunch that day, and our conversation barely touched the topic of smoking. It was nice to see Molly so happy.

That day, as I watched Molly walk away again, I said a silent prayer. This time, I prayed that Molly would have the strength that it took to remain smoke free. Quitting smoking can be the toughest thing that someone will ever do. I knew that; I see it over and over again. Some people will never find the strength that Molly found. I have people dear to my heart who smoke. If only I could help them like I did Molly. I felt a little tear slide down my cheek; this time

it was because I so dearly wished that the most important people in my life would only try to quit. My father, my mother, and both my sons smoke. I can't seem to reach them. I won't give up hope that somehow, someday, I will help them also. For today I will be happy. After all, I was just a part of Molly's amazing journey to living her life smoke-free.

#### Afterword

*If you or someone you know is interested in peer counseling for smoking cessation, please visit [www.rccc.edu/quit\\_tobacco/](http://www.rccc.edu/quit_tobacco/).*

#### References

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