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Why We Smoke*

Early warnings of damage from cigarette smoking are so subtle as to be almost entirely missed or ignored by persons involved . . . They put up with a chronic cough, and a drizzly nose-and-throat, and a gravel voice, and a bird cage mouth. The gradual increase in wind and a little bit duller feeling in the head from day to day are met with genial equanimity until the growing cancer, failing heart, and destruction of lung tissue are all too solid an established fact. . . . "I'll smoke until I get into trouble and then I'll quit, and be okay." This is truly a fool's solution since the worst harm from smoking gives no alarm until it is far too late to make a recovery—this is the secret of the danger. . . . The smoker who waits for an unmistakable warning has, for the most part, waited too long. . . .

And why is extra pressure put on you to start smoking by advertising? To put it in the cruelest possible way, each of you, like a slave on the block many years ago, is worth up to a cool \$8,000—the amount that the privilege of smoking will cost you in a lifetime, provided you live to a reasonable age. You are worth that if you get started—hooked solid between now and the time you are 20 and to do this the advertising bends every effort.

Tobacco today brings in about \$8 billion a year and you are expected to

pay your dues to the smoker's club which, interestingly and significantly, runs to about the same amount as does the national bill for all doctors' services. To get you contributing in good style, the best in U.S. advertising skills are concentrated on you; and to succeed they use an interesting theme.

The gimmick? You guessed it. Smoking makes you manly, not old-manly: fliers, cowboys, hunters, professional athletes, young executives, great lovers and even beautiful girls. But you seldom if ever see a brand advertised by showing grandma or grandpa lighting up, because the emphasis is on you, not grandpa or even dad. They are hooked now (or never will start). The bait is for you.

May I remind you again that the quota in young people—in you—is 4,500 of you fresh, new "fish" each day, even though the packages now must show that "smoking may be dangerous to health," in clear print. This little sign doesn't say how, or when or how much—and it never will and I might add that by law no further truth can be added until 1972; this sign can't be changed until then.

The worst part of it all is that you not only pay for the cigarettes, to be mature and glamorous, but you also pay for entrapping advertising. Socrates had nothing on you when he had to pay for his poison. Indeed, you pay the whole thing if you let them make a sucker of you and the final statement on your bill reads: "Debit: your health and perhaps your life."

*Excerpts from a talk to students of Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, January 19, 1966, by Frank P. Foster, M.D., Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts.

