

A smoker's lament

Back porch smokers ponder their addiction

Viewpoint by Carol Johnstone

"SMOKING CAN KILL YOU." "Ah, but WILL it? That's what I wanna know," a friend of mine says to the label on his cigarette package. About half a dozen of us, huddled on a porch getting a dose of fresh air along with our inhaled carcinogens, nod sagely in agreement.

An American visitor shyly pulls a package of Player's Lights out of his pocket with the same slogan printed in bold black-and-white letters and says he's taking it back home as a souvenir. The warning labels on packs in the U.S. are discreetly lettered in small print on the side so as not to ruin the pack-

age design.

A diet-challenged woman says, "They should have a label that says 'cigarettes are fat free.'"

Another man, black curly hair flying in the wind, takes a cigarette from an Altoids case of "curiously strong mints" where it won't get crushed. He says his daughter gave him some stickers he could paste over the warnings. "Oh, what the hell," "So? A lot of things cause cancer," and "Some smokers live to be a 100" are his favorites.

"Sometimes, when I go to the Hydrostone to buy a pack of cigarettes, I get tired of saying, 'I'll have a pack of Benson-and-Hedges-Ultra-Light-Regulars,-with-the-red-stripe-on-top,' I pipe up. "Besides they spend five min-

utes looking for it. So, I say 'I'll take the one that says TOBACCO SMOKE CAN HARM YOUR CHILDREN.'" I add, "That sounds good," with a touch of sarcasm in my voice.

We modern-day pariahs contemplate the clear winter night sky and sip our drinks as we try to decide whether to smoke another.

As the others drift inside one by one, the desire to get warm overcoming a desire for nicotine. I stand alone in my down coat, my lungs feeling as if they're stuffed with cotton, and look at my pack: CIGARETTES ARE ADDICTIVE. I reflect on the gallows humor and wonder if these dire warnings aren't actually saying, "Be careful what you wish for, you might get it."