

Diary of a quitter

Goodbye cigarettes. Hello cilia.

By CAROL JOHNSTONE

Special to The Daily News

ASHES. Pits ok ashes. I'm cornin' down, but not off junk. Cigarettes. Cold turkey. Because I can't afford it. Because it makes me sick. And, maybe, for my children's sake.

Friday night: Elephants sitting in my lungs. My back, shoulders, neck ache. Stomach starting to burn; sleepless night ahead. My 16-year-old daughter is coming to visit in two weeks. She who once wrote a school paper called Alcohol is Bad for You No Matter What No need to say what she thinks of smoking. Maybe I could quit

Reasons. (I've done this before. I've got it down.) First, it's the bucks. Even I, who only budget intuitively, know that of the \$100 I have left, I'll probably need \$80 for food.

Well, it'll have to be cold turkey. It costs \$120 to buy a two-month supply of nicotine patches. It only costs \$4.50 to buy a pack of smokes at the Hydrostone Groceteria. No wonder poor people can't quit.

Then there's my son. He's very polite about it as the smoke slowly obscures Millennium and Homicide, Life on the Streets. He just twitches his head irritably and waves his hand, quick, so maybe I won't see. One more pack. "Zeb, would you go to the store?" He's 26, so it's legal. "I think we missed Hydrostone. Maybe B&P is open. There's always the Esso. It's open all night."

I count out one twoonie, two loonies, five dimes and five pennies for B&P (what the heck, I can spend \$4.55. It's the last pack). It hurts him to do this for me; it hurts me making him complicitous in my Jonesin' — that's street talk for an addict's state of mind about six hours late for a fix. At least this time he doesn't have to lend me the money

Saturday, Day 1: Not too bad. My back already hurts less, especially if I exercise. I go shopping. Avoid my smoking friends — they don't even know. I don't want to make any promises.

Day 2: I get the "speedies," which feels like downing two dou-



ble espressos in an hour. Sew and cook. Design a database. I start washing the ashtrays and putting them away, one by one.

Day 3: I've hidden the unfinished pack in my bottom desk drawer You know, so I won't have a visual cue.

It's also so the ants don't get me. The soft, invisible ants that tickle my ears and make my toes want to twitch-dance and my shoulders shake like a wet dog. I know my eyes don't actually bobble in their orbits. They just get kinda stuck, round, unblinking, watching a leaf, the television screen, the matchstick curtains on my kitchen window, slowly fade into white static, till click, bick (oh, Bic, Bic, my kingdom for a Bic). I snap back to the present. That's day three after cold turkey

Now's tie time to sing an ode to my cilia. Those are those little hairs in your lungs. After a few days, I can feel them kind of wake up and say to each other "Hmm, do you think we could get rid of some of this junk in here?"

My breathing is erratic, not enough so an outside person could tell, but it feels shallow, sporadic, like pneumonia breath. At the same time, it must be clearing some because I walk into the central fountain zone at Scotia Square and sniff: somebody's been smoking in here.

Day 14: I'm still clean. My daughter's here. She who, when she was little, wanted to make a mutual effort: she'd quit sucking her thumb if I quit smoking. That time, she won.

Maybe this time, we all will. Except, of course, for Benson and Hedges.

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