

## RESOLVED TO STOP SMOKING? MY MOM CAN HELP

My mother thinks you smoke too much.

Actually, she may have already told you so in person. A spry woman in her mid-seventies, she seldom has a problem saying what's on her mind.

For some reason I have been hanging on to a copy of an e-mail she sent me several years ago, relating a couple of her attempts to help smokers quit. Here's what she wrote:

"The first time was last year in Florida. I was at a drug store when this really nice-looking clean-cut college-age kid was buying two packs just ahead of me in line. It just popped out, 'You know, those things will kill you.'"

"He looked at me like, 'Where did you come from?' but didn't say a word. Then, not leaving well enough alone, I added, 'Not right away, but later on.' He paid for those cigarettes and fled."

"The last time was two weeks ago, at your grandmother's retirement home. This kind of scruffy young guy dressed in a white shirt, white pants and a white apron (obviously kitchen help) was sitting out in front of the service door with his elbows on his knees, puffing away."

"He gave me some sort of greeting, or I wouldn't have been tempted to say anything. I did it again. Didn't mean to. But I said something like, 'Those aren't good for you.' He agreed, and said he wished he didn't smoke.

She continued, "Then always with the last word, I said, 'My sister-in-law just died of lung cancer, and she couldn't give it up either.' I wished him a good day (ha!) and left. I don't know what came over me. Just a compulsion to do good, which –of course – I am not doing."

My mother's well-meaning but misguided impulses have been passed down to at least one of her offspring – me. I cling to the belief that if smokers

receive enough positive (or is it negative?) reinforcement, their resolve will eventually achieve critical mass and they will quit.

So far, my own helpful interactions with smokers are somewhat more tactful than my mom's, but I'm beginning to care less about that as I get older.

Meanwhile, it looks like members of the Iowa Legislature are going to help out the only way they know how - by raising the cigarette tax as much as a dollar higher than its current 36 cents per pack. I suspect they are less interested in saving people from their own self-destructive habits than in the extra \$150 million the tax would generate each year.

Iowa may as well join the sin tax parade. 42 states and the District of Columbia have increased cigarette taxes since January 1, 2002. During that time the average state cigarette tax has more than doubled, from 43.4 cents per pack five years ago to 96.1 cents this month when tax increases in Hawaii and Texas took effect.

According to the Texas chapter of the American Cancer Society, there are 3.3 million smokers in Texas, which exceeds the number of Iowans in Iowa. The group estimates that 143,000 Texas adults will quit smoking and 284,000 teens will never start, due to the state's new \$1 per pack tax increase.

I know, cigarette tax increases are inherently regressive, they drive tobacco sales to the Internet and neighboring states, and they possibly encourage smuggling and gang activity.

I don't care. Anything that reduces the likelihood of a child taking up smoking and causes adults to quit has got to be a good thing. As the cost of a pack of cigarettes approaches \$5 in Iowa, you have to think that the price is becoming so punitive that many smokers will simply give up.

But why stop there? I'd also support enacting legislation like Canada has had since 2000 that requires at least 50% of the labeling on cigarettes to consist of warnings, including really disgusting color photographs of diseased lungs, hearts and gums.

Hey – I'm just trying to help. If you feel like you need that little extra push to quit, e-mail me with your name and phone number. My mother will be happy to call and nag you directly.