

I Want Freedom!

For all but the last year of my smoking career, I wanted to quit. I knew it was a nasty habit that smelled bad and made me more susceptible to all kinds of health problems from allergies and colds to heart attack, stroke and cancer. How can any of us not know all that? It's being pounded into us from all sides. So, like any other intelligent person, I kept planning to quit.

However, in the last year, I changed my mind and wanted to continue to smoke, for political reasons. I am angry that people are demanding, and that laws are being passed, to ban smoking anywhere in public - even outside. In my opinion, we already have too many laws dictating our personal behavior and this is just another maker along the path we are following toward fascism.

"Fascism: A system of government marked by centralization of authority under a dictator, stringent socioeconomic controls, suppression of the opposition through terror and censorship, and typically a policy of belligerent nationalism and racism."
See: answers.com.

America is about individual freedoms! The Constitution was written to guarantee our rights! The whole point was to protect private citizens from having the government dictate what we can and can't do and how we can or cannot do it!

Last year, when my Mom was in Shadyside Hospital, I was pretty darn stressed and headed for the smoking area, an alley between the hospital and the parking garage. Having accepted banishment to the outdoors and odd corners years before, I was satisfied with the arrangement. The people out in that alley were friendly and accepting. Everybody was willing to share a lighter and friendly smile and comment. Their companionship comforted me more than people in most of the inside waiting rooms did. However, the employees I met there informed me that as of the first of this year, that little outdoor haven would be, by law, closed off.

Even as a smoker, I didn't like to eat in smoky places so I don't see any problem with public places having smoking and nonsmoking areas. That allows people to have a choice. I don't see why businesses shouldn't have the right to choose whether their establishment is smoking or non-smoking. That way, patrons can choose whether they wish to go there and employees can choose whether to work there or look for another job.

If a building owner chooses to allow smoking in his building that should be his right. Non-smokers should not rent apartments or offices in smoking buildings. If a businessperson chooses to smoke in his own office in a smoking building, then a non-smoker should find another provider of those services. That is the nature of a free market. If smoking establishments start losing profits because people no longer want to be in that environment, then they can choose whether to change the policy or close the business. But it should be an individual choice.

I really enjoyed the hotel I stayed in during my visit in Portland, Oregon, last spring. There were four bar/restaurants on the premises. Two were smoking and two were non-smoking. Frankly, I enjoyed my right to have a cigarette with my glass of beer without being glared at or lectured by sanctimonious strangers. When eating with

my cousin whom I was visiting, we met at the non-smoking restaurant and enjoyed a lovely meal.

By mandating things that are relaxing to some people be taken away, government is raising the stress level of others. So, think about this a minute: Coffee is not good for us either. If the government outlaws coffee, how much worse will freeway road rage become, in the mornings?

I just read an article in a New Yorker magazine about a group of people who are trying to have drinking beer on the commuter trains abolished. The author claimed to be a rather inattentive and laid back person who is forced to have to speak up to argue this point. After work, he and his friends buy a beer from the vendor at the station and sit back and relax during their ride home. Why shouldn't they enjoy a beer while heading home? They aren't driving the train or forcing anyone to drink who may not want to. If some folks find the presence of beer offensive, then those folks have the choice to move to another part of the train.

In most situations, anything in moderation is acceptable to our bodies. In excess, even good things can hurt us. Sunshine is good for us. Our bodies need it to create certain vitamins and enzymes that maintain good health. However, in excess, sunshine will damage the skin and, in some cases, cause skin cancer. Should the government legislate how much time each of us can spend outdoors because some of us do not educate ourselves - or believe what we read - and make poor choices? I get sun poisoning and have to be very careful in the sun, but I do not want patios or sun porches outlawed.

If non-smokers are that concerned about breathing smoke, they should stop driving cars, using their back-yard barbeques and their lawnmowers. ANYTHING that burns creates smoke full of toxins. Maybe we need laws about those, too.

It is un-American to take anybody's right to make any choice away from them. We should have the right to make our own choices - even stupid choices - and accept the responsibility of living with the consequences of those choices, whether it's good bad or indifferent.

I think we would all be much better off if everybody paid more attention to their own lives. Educate yourselves and your children, and then live according to your personal standards. If you think your way is better than others, then teach by example instead of demanding laws to make others conform.

Patricia Kenworthy January 2007