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Why Can't My Grandparents Stop Smoking?

1. Why I Need an Answer to this Question.

This paper has been a cause of major stress for me. Not because of the assignment, but because of the emotions I would be required to face in order to really get the answers to my question I was looking for. Ever since I was a young girl, I have been forced to keep my opinions and questions about my grandparents smoking habits within me. Any small comment of disapproval from my part would mean severe punishment from my parents. Now, as a college student, I finally have the opportunity to get the answers that I have wanted, more like needed to get. I have ultimate freedom and a huge variety of resources available right before me, yet I am finding it immensely difficult to inspire myself to actually jump in and start shuffling through everything. My mind is in a state of chaos. I keep trying to convince myself that taking this risk of opening myself up to finding answers could ultimately bring me the peace I needed to fully understand my grandpa's death, and how after several warning and pleas from his doctors, family, and friends, he could still not bring himself to put down his cigarette. I am scared. I am not worried about what I may find in my search to answer this question or even about what may happen if I never fully understand the aspects of my grandpa's addiction. Instead, I am scared of coming face to face with the reality of what killed my grandpa and the idea that I, along with my siblings and cousins, was maybe not enough of a motivation for him to finally quit.

2. What I already know about this topic.

As an alumnus of a public school system, I was required to sit through almost a yearly health and safety class in order to get my diploma. Sadly, I can tell you from my personal experiences that these classes are failing to communicate the true dangers and powers of addictions. Each one was a dull repetition of the same information the previous one had already told us. Smoking, drinking, eating disorders, and unprotected sex was bad. We got it already. Why did the school board find it necessary to bore us with the exact same information each year? The least they could have done was throw in a new activity or at minimum provide a snack if they really expected us to listen. The health and safety classes had become such a joke that even the teachers tried to get us out of them. They complained the presentations were pointless because hardly any students paid attention. To them, precious classroom time was being wasted.

I am not a person who is anti-educating students about the dangers of addictions. Actually, I am the complete opposite. I believe that students today are unaware of how powerful an addiction is. Young people of my generation have an invincible belief to the probabilities of something bad happening to them. I know that education is the key to communicating with these kids. But, boring presentations and pointless classes are not working. Instead, students need a first-hand account of what the reality of an addiction looks like. Students can only see the true dangers and powers of an addiction if nothing but the plain truth is laid before them. The school systems of today are in desperate need of a first-hand curriculum that can finally reach beyond the false beliefs of this generation.

The current curriculum of health and safety education is not entirely bad. I have gained some concrete information about the power of addictions from participating in them. For example, the fact that every day someone dies from cigarette smoke has been drilled into me since I was a little kindergartner. By fourth grade, I knew that each cigarette a person smokes

takes off eight minutes of a person's life. This is the exact fact that made my mind shift to the extent of the damage my grandparents smoking habits were having on them. I began to become very concerned for their health. In attempt to make them stop, I left them little cards and pictures repeating to them what I had learned in health class and asking them to please stop smoking. The whole idea of an addiction was still too big of a concept for me to understand at that point.

It wasn't until my junior high and high school classes did I begin to fully grasp the depths of my grandpa's and grandma's addictions to smoking. However, I did not see the power of an addiction as an excuse for my grandparents to continue to chose to keep smoking. I thought this decision was weak. As a daughter of a pharmacist, I was well aware of all the new medical breakthroughs available for those who wish to quit. Patches, gum, medication, support groups are just some examples of the large variety of resources out there today. I felt my grandparents were making selfish choices and consciously deciding to waste away their lives with each inhalation they took from their cigarettes. Only recently have I begun to allow myself to openly look at the alternative aspects of addictions.

3. The Story of the Search.

Silly me thought I could find my answer through the large library of books, journals, and articles that are available at the University of Northern Iowa's library. However, I learned quickly only a small part of my answer could be found in research and literature. The rest needed to be found within me. I needed to allow the bundled up hurt I felt over how my grandparents could still not quit smoking come to the surface where I could finally make reasonable sense of it all. To do this, I needed to speak to my grandma.

This realization was not one that I welcomed. To be honest, it freaked me out. My grandma has had to overcome so much within the last couple years. After my grandpa's death

four years ago, my grandma was forced to figure out how to live on her own for the first time in her life. Her entire life consisted of going from the household and control of her father straight to the household and control of her husband. Grandma was never allowed the chance to be on her own and find out who she was at a younger age. Instead, she found herself suddenly by herself for the first time at an age where she shouldn't have to start over.

After much procrastination and worry, I finally got the courage to call my grandma. To my surprise, it was topic that she was really open to discussing with me. She told me that her decision to quit smoking is one that she is the most proud of herself for making. By sticking to it, she feels like she is getting the opportunity to prove to herself how strong she is. The decision to quit was one she made on her own, on her own time, and without much outside help.

The fact that she is quitting smoking without the aid of much nicotine addiction resources really surprised me. I was under the impression that my grandma was taking the new prescription drug, Chantix, to help her with the cravings. Chantix is a drug that helps people stop smoking in two ways. First, Chantix provides some nicotine-like effects to the brain to ease withdrawal symptoms. Second, Chantix blocks the effect of nicotine of the brain if a person should restart smoking. The idea of Chantix really interested me. I started my research about the new prescription drug and ended up on its homepage where it explained to you the basic facts and overall opinions of this new breakthrough. I decided that my dad, a pharmacist for Walgreens, would be a great resource to talk to about the basic principles of this drug and about its' popularity in the Des Moines area. He told me that Chantix is becoming overwhelmingly popular. On average, he fills over forty prescriptions for Chantix a week, which is very high. He feels like Chantix is a huge step into the scientific development of ending the control of this addiction.

My grandma and I also talked about her motivation for staying committed to her decision to quit smoking. She told me that the progress she has made is a chief aspect of motivation that keeps her going. To her, the worst thing she could do is fall into the urge of having another cigarette after all of her hard work. The decision to quit smoking is an accomplishment that my grandma is extremely proud of. Smoking has been a key part of her life for the past sixty years. Often, it served as an item of comfort and allowed her to relax during times of tension and stress. Grandma also told me that smoking was something she had done since she was sixteen years old. It was no longer a habit, but rather it was an embedded aspect of her life. For sixty years, grandma was trapped under the control of her addiction, and no matter how many times she tried to stop, she always found herself unable to stop.

On top of interviewing my grandma and dad, I decided that I also needed to research some background information within different journals, articles, and books. I was completely overwhelmed with the amount of information I came across. I had no idea how I was going to narrow the information down into a readable amount. I decided that the best way to narrow my search down was to focus in on the medical factors that prevent people from being able to quit smoking. During my search, I found that there are currently studies being conducted to try to find a connection between genetics and a person's ability to, or to not, quit smoking. These studies are very new and are highly limited and difficult to find. However, I did find an article in the *New York Times* called *A Patch to Match Your Genes*, by Eric Nagourney, that did focus on how the success of the nicotine patches on women has begun to show a connection with their individual genetic backgrounds. Doctors found with this new research that brain receptors were the transporting subjects for the chemical Dopamine. Dopamine is believed to play a key role in the severity of a person's smoking addiction. Therefore, this new finding supports the idea of a

connections between the genetic susceptibility of an individual to the chemicals in a cigarette and the probability of obtaining success or failure when attempting to quit.

4. What I learned (or failed to learn) about my topic.

By exploring the idea of my question over my grandpa's and grandma's addictions, I gave myself the chance to come to terms with the factors and reasons that controlled their inability to quit. I learned that my grandpa and grandma both had a strong desire to quit, yet they felt extremely trapped by the depth of the clutches these addictions had on their lives. Time and time again my grandparents found themselves falling back into the darkness of addictions after yet another attempt to quit. For my grandpa, time wasn't on his side. Smoking caused him to die all too early in his life; yet my grandma still had time. Faced with the need to start her life over, my Grandma made the brave decision to quit smoking once and for all. She has begun to free herself from the control of her smoking addiction. Now, almost five months later, my grandma has kept true to her decision to quit. She has been a true pillar of strength and dignity, and I could not be any prouder to call her my grandmother. The progress she has made over her smoking addiction fulfilled all aspects I ever have needed or will need to know in order to answer my question. Thanks to her openness to discuss her story with me, I was able to receive closure over all the hurt I felt as a young child.

Works Cited

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