

My story ends on two happy notes. First, I quit smoking all over again. It took me a couple of tries. And it wasn't easy. I still carry nicotine gum around with me, just in case. But I haven't needed any for almost two years now. Since I quit, I feel better about myself. And I feel better physically.

The second happy news is that I'm able to use my legs again. I won't be running in any races soon, but at least I can walk around the house now. I don't know if quitting smoking helped me to walk again, but my doctors say it couldn't have hurt.

What lessons have I learned from all this?

- Smoking doesn't really help with stress. It just gives you another problem to worry about.
- Even if the worst happens, smoking just makes it even worse.
- Do whatever it takes not to start smoking again. Think about your family-I know I did.
- But if you do start smoking again, don't give up. Keep on trying to quit.

Thanks for listening...
And good luck to you.



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1 (877) 954-2548

Projectease@MOFFITT.org

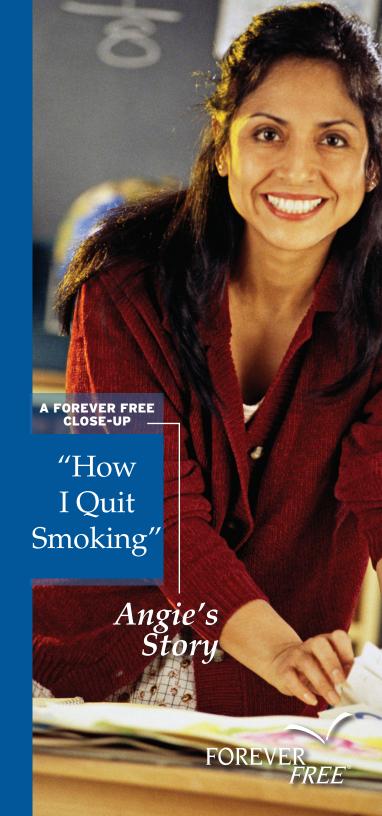
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The people depicted in this series were inspired by real individuals, but the particulars were changed to protect their privacy.



My Old Life as a Smoker

Hi, my name is Angie. I am a middleaged grade school teacher, am divorced, with two little girls, ages four and nine. I started smoking when I was 15, and I smoked roughly a pack a day. Although I had stopped smoking while I was pregnant with each of the girls, I didn't make a serious effort to quit until my mother died of breast cancer. The whole cancer thing just scared me so much.

So I tried to quit smoking. And I tried again, and again. Each time I would make it a few days or even a few weeks. But something would happen at work or home to stress me out. Then I would feel like I needed a cigarette to make it through the day. And so I'd give in.

I started to think that I just couldn't quit smoking. But I kept on trying every few months.





Quitting Smoking

The time I was finally successful was right after I was watching my older daughter play in a soccer game. I stepped away from the other parents to have a smoke without bothering them. When I got back, I learned that my daughter had scored her first ever goal. And I missed it!!

I decided at that moment that cigarettes were not going to cause me to miss any more of my kids' lives. After the game, I dropped by the drug store and picked up a pack of nicotine patches. The next morning I put on the first patch and threw out every cigarette and ashtray in the house.

It wasn't easy. I was tempted plenty of times. But this time I made it. First a day. Then a week. Then a month. Then three months, four months, six months. By that point, it seemed easy... I was no longer a smoker! I knew that I could do it at last.

An Instant Life Change

I won't give you all the details, but just when life seemed to be going good, I got into a really bad car accident with a pick-up truck. They had to cut me out of the car. Thank goodness the girls weren't with me! But, I lost the use of my legs. The doctors said I'd probably be in a wheelchair for life.

I didn't take this well. I got very depressed. I felt alone, angry, and hopeless. And I called upon my old friend who used to be there for me when I was down—my cigarettes. Smoking just didn't seem that bad anymore, compared to spending my life in a wheelchair. At least not at first. And so I worked my way back up to a pack a day.

The funny thing is, after a year or so, I realized that, despite the wheelchair, I was still the same person. But now I was a smoker again. And I hated that just as much as before.

