

BIOPHILE 11 – November 2008

WHAT I DIDN'T LEARN BEHIND THE BICYCLE SHED

In the Glyn family, smoking goes down about as well as a Mexican wave at a funeral. Many were the times when my sister and I were told that apart from being a health hazard, smoking is what 'common' girls do. Just as only 'common' girls sit on their boyfriends' laps. Or use paper serviettes rather than linen table napkins.

Having given you these insights into my upbringing, dearly beloved Biophiler, I am relying on you to keep the following information from my mother. Not only have I used kitchen roller towel at my supper table, but I've done far more libidinous things than merely sit on a boyfriend's lap. And – horror of horrors – I have S-M-O-K-E-D!

And *how* have I smoked! How have I gleefully sucked a Camel cloud into my luckless lungs. I am not a nicotine addict so much as a smoker by association. I smoke a) when I'm heartbroken, b) when I'm *very* pissed, or c) when I'm around a camp fire in the great outdoors.

So it is that my sister happened upon me at about 4pm one weekday afternoon, sitting in my garden, naked as the day I was born, blubbing uncontrollably over the cad who'd just dumped me, and sucking on a fag.

So it is that my friends happened upon me at about 4am one morning, dancing on their dining room table, skunky drunk, and attempting to suck on 10 fags at one time. Truly! I have the photo to prove it.

And so it is that my hiking buddies happened upon me recently, lolling contentedly in a camping chair after a great day under huge skies, chuckling deeply over the love of wilderness, and rolling a skyf.

Ja, ja, ja I know – smoking is a revolting habit. It's smelly, unhealthy and (yes, Mum!) decidedly unladylike. But it's also most pleasurable on occasion (at least for some of us). And because it's a habit that has never savagely overtaken my life, I have never felt impelled to give it up. Until 10th October this year.

On that day I received an email from Toni Brockhoven, one of South Africa's tireless campaigners for animal rights and in particular for the cessation of the despicable Foie Gras industry. It was titled:

“Are you still smoking? And still consider yourself an animal lover?”

Well, that sure caught my attention. And the rest of the mail caught my heart. It outlined the quite disgusting experiments that the US government sponsors *to this very day* in order to – wait for it - analyse the effects of nicotine on animals. Millions of dollars are granted to the NIH (National Institutes of Health) to establish what smoking does to the lungs and fetuses of monkeys, rats and mice. I'm not going to ruin your day by detailing these experiments, but if you have the stomach for them, go to www.idausa.org And even if you don't go there, please won't you sign a petition to stop this practice? You'll find it at http://gaO.org/campaign/NIH_nicotine

This stuff makes me incandescently mad. I mean, how much more do we need to know about the harmful effects of nicotine? As they say on the site, we know so much about it that “Big Tobacco's best attorneys couldn't talk their way out of the landmark \$209 billion Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) of 1998 between 46 states and the U.S. tobacco industry.”

Further, we have also long known that it's a very dangerous thing to extrapolate results from clinical trials on animals to humans – that's why the final stage of testing is always on us. Animal experiments, for instance, have routinely failed to demonstrate that smoking causes lung and other forms of cancer in *them* – but we know all too well that it does in *us*.

What's happening in these labs (and of course many others around the globe) is both futile and outrageous. And the most obvious way of protesting against these experiments is – well, obvious.

But the site also provided me with a most effective piece of aversion therapy. Take a look at this photo. Take a long look at it. I did, and you can call me anthropomorphic if you dare, but those two pathetically vulnerable, terrified monkeys stopped me smoking immediately – and for ever.

Brickbats and bouquets welcome at patriciaglyn@wol.co.za