

# Preface

WHEN U.S. SURGEON General Luther L. Terry's historic—and today virtually enshrined—report, *Smoking and Health*, was released in mid-January 1964, I had just two weeks before been made chief editorial writer for Newspaper Enterprise Association, a newspaper features service in Cleveland, Ohio.

There had been scuttlebutt for some time that the SG was going to drop a bombshell on tobacco but I'd paid little attention to it. When it actually happened it was as a bolt from the blue to me. Sure, I'd heard about "smoker's cough" or "smoker's hack" for years and we frequently referred to cigarettes as "coffin nails," but that was just joking. I was innocently unaware that there had ever been any really serious concern within the medical establishment about any possible health dangers from smoking.

Thus the report shook me—a little bit. Heck, I'd already been smoking at least a pack a day for 18 years and "coffin nails" had never hurt me or anybody I knew. They'd never even so much as made me have to clear my throat.

But 18 years was a lot of years and a lot of cigarettes. And this was, after all, a verdict bearing the imprimatur of the nation's highest medical authority, *the surgeon general of the United States* no less: smoking causes lung cancer (and other bad things).

I liked to smoke. It was not welcome news.

Not for a second did it enter my mind that the report could be anything but the product of rigorous research and careful analysis by dedicated and disinterested men of science, many of whom were smokers themselves for all I knew. Not for a second did I consider that their findings could be anything less than unassailable fact.

At 36 I was still just a snot-nosed kid, journalistically speaking, and although I had written editorials before as a staff writer for NEA, this was one of the first in my new capacity. Yet so little importance did

I attach to the report that I ran the editorial about it as the second of two I wrote that day to fill my column. (The lead editorial was about the latest crisis in Panama over ownership of the canal.)

Anyway, I sat down at my typewriter and lit a cigarette and tried to think of something meaningful to say that the editors of our 800-some subscribing newspapers could use. All I knew about the SG's report was what had come over the United Press teletype machine that day. (It was not until 1996, 32 years later, that I obtained the actual report and saw for myself what it said.)

Rereading that editorial now after more than three decades, I am struck by what a lightweight treatment it was of what turned out to be a truly watershed event in American social history. It was only about 250 words in all.

"Human beings are sometimes more rationalizing than rational," I intoned in my opening sentence. "They usually find excuses for doing what they want to do."

Those who want to smoke will do so, I elucidated, despite release of the government's report. "They will seize on the fact that there is still no 'absolutely proved' cause-and-effect relationship between smoking and lung cancer and other diseases. There never will be such 100-percent proof, for medical science is not that exact nor cancer that simple. Smokers are now officially on notice, however, that they puff at their peril."

I predicted that the report would probably result in an overall decline in cigarette usage, a severe dip at first, a slow recovery later, which is what happened during the first year after the report. But I never conceived that within the next few years tens of millions of smokers would give up the habit (or even less conceivable, in the face of what the report eventually set into motion, that millions of others would take it up).

My most naïve statement was, "Tobacco men can be happy about one thing: the worst is over. It is to be hoped that they will now cease blowing up statistical smoke screens to try to prove that cigarettes don't hurt anyone and concentrate their resources on finding out just what it is in tobacco that is injurious."

There I displayed not only my poor predictive ability but an ignorance, albeit a forgivable one, of the chemical complexity of tobacco smoke, which at latest count is supposed to contain some 4,000

individual constituents, give or take a thousand, of longer or shorter duration and greater or lesser carcinogenicity.

I take no pride in the fact that I may have been one of the first writers in the country to use the words “smoke screen” in connection with the tobacco industry—a phrase that to this day continues to be belabored in a never-ending stream of newspaper and magazine articles on smoking, along with an infinite number of variations such as “up in smoke,” “blowing smoke,” “snuffing out,” “no butts about it” and so on ad nauseam. I do not recall having had any grounds for such an allegation against the industry. Whether I did or not, it was essentially a cheap shot intended to demonstrate the “independence” of my views on the issue.

I concluded with: “Men have been comforted by the weed for several hundred years. They will beat a path to the door of anyone who can give them a healthy smoke.”

Again I was too naïve at that time to realize that the tobacco industry dared not admit to trying to design a “healthy” or “safe” cigarette, for that would be tantamount to conceding that the cigarettes it had been peddling for decades were *unhealthy* and *unsafe* and be an open invitation to the plaintiffs’ bar to “Come sue us.”

“*The worst is over.*”(!) I certainly did not foresee that over the coming years the surgeon general’s report would launch an accelerating stream of indictment after indictment and attack after attack against smoking, each more damning than the last . . . the growth of a veritable industry devoted to helping people stop smoking . . . the mandatory placing of health warnings on cigarette packages and printed ads . . . the banning of cigarette commercials from radio and television . . . the “secondhand smoke” hysteria and resulting smoking bans in restaurants and workplaces . . . the attempt by the Food and Drug Administration to regulate nicotine as a drug with the goal of banishing cigarettes entirely . . . the publicly applauded mugging of the tobacco industry by 40 state attorneys general, and on and on. In sum: the transformation of a congenial and well-nigh universal pleasure into a socially unacceptable practice with, ultimately, the relegation of smokers to an outcast minority, alternately despised and pitied—but nice to have around as easy and convenient prey for exploitation by tax-and-spend politicians.

Least of all—*least of all*—did I foresee the emergence of a powerful and militant antismoking movement, whose cutting edge is led by

an extremist fringe of fanatics who are not above the use of fear, fraud and mendacity in their crusade against smoking and smokers.

Now, 32 years later, in retirement, I light yet another cigarette and reach again for whatever editorial skills I ever had and begin what will be a highly personal journey into the past, present and possible future of smoking—for two reasons: to examine for myself, in the light of my own observation and experience and common sense, the evidence against smoking and, more importantly, to raise a voice against the fanatical antismokers and their ilk and the danger they pose to the rights and freedoms of all Americans, smokers and nonsmokers alike.

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UPDATE: The foregoing was committed to my word processor in late 1996, when I began the actual writing of this book and at which time I lived in the greater Atlanta, Georgia, area. The original subtitle I planned for it was “America’s Insane Crusade Against Smoking (And Why It Will Fail).”

Shortly before the book was ready for press, wiser heads prevailed upon me either to eliminate the “Insane” or to substitute some milder adjective for it, like “Misguided” or “Misdirected.” Something not so “in your face” that would not alienate potential nonsmoking readers.

I resisted the idea. The antismoking crusade *is* insane. Anyway, I’d used the words “insane” and “insanity” several times in the text and I wasn’t about to go back and tone them down. But then it occurred to me: the crusade is also a monumental scam that the antismoking establishment has perpetrated on a trusting public—a pseudoscientific con game of the worst kind because at least some of its leaders fervently believe it themselves. Thus I finally decided on the present subtitle. It is both a play on the American Cancer Society’s annual “Great American Smokeout” and an accurate characterization of much of the evidence that undergirds and fuels the ongoing and never-ending crusade against smoking.

“Scam” also suggests that this book is some kind of exposé—which it is.

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