

Nonsmoker defends rights

As a student in Theater Appreciation 101, I was required to attend all plays produced at UNLV. One production, *Peyote Jokes*, almost put me in the hospital as I tried to fulfill my required assignment.

The actors in the play smoked tobacco almost continuously within the confines of the tiny blackbox theater, pumping the place so full of smoke that my respiratory problems were aggravated and I had to head to the emergency room.

Smoking is a serious health problem, but a voluntary one. No one has to smoke unless they want to. Except, that is, for nonsmokers who must involuntarily inhale second-hand smoke. That creates a health problem that is in no way voluntary.

The fanatics who would make cigarettes a controlled substance are out of line, because such an action would force smokers into a radical lifestyle change.

Such an act would violate the ideals of personal freedom which the Constitution of the United States protects.

So, in the interests of personal choice, smokers are usually given designated areas in which to indulge in their habit.

The nonsmoking majority gives up some measure of its space and freedom in order to accommodate the

minority. This custom is in keeping with the philosophy of democracy.

The problems occur when one group seeks to infringe upon the rights of the other.

Smokers are free to indulge their habits in so many places, both public and private, that it is amazing that they want still more.

Smokers want to be accommodated at work, in others' cars and—most offensively—around other people's children.

Smokers do not seem to understand the suffocating feeling of being a nonsmoker trapped next to an eternally burning stream of cigarettes.

Besides the proven health risk, second-hand smoke can make concentration difficult, aggravate chronic health problems such as asthma and allergies and rack up dry cleaning bills.

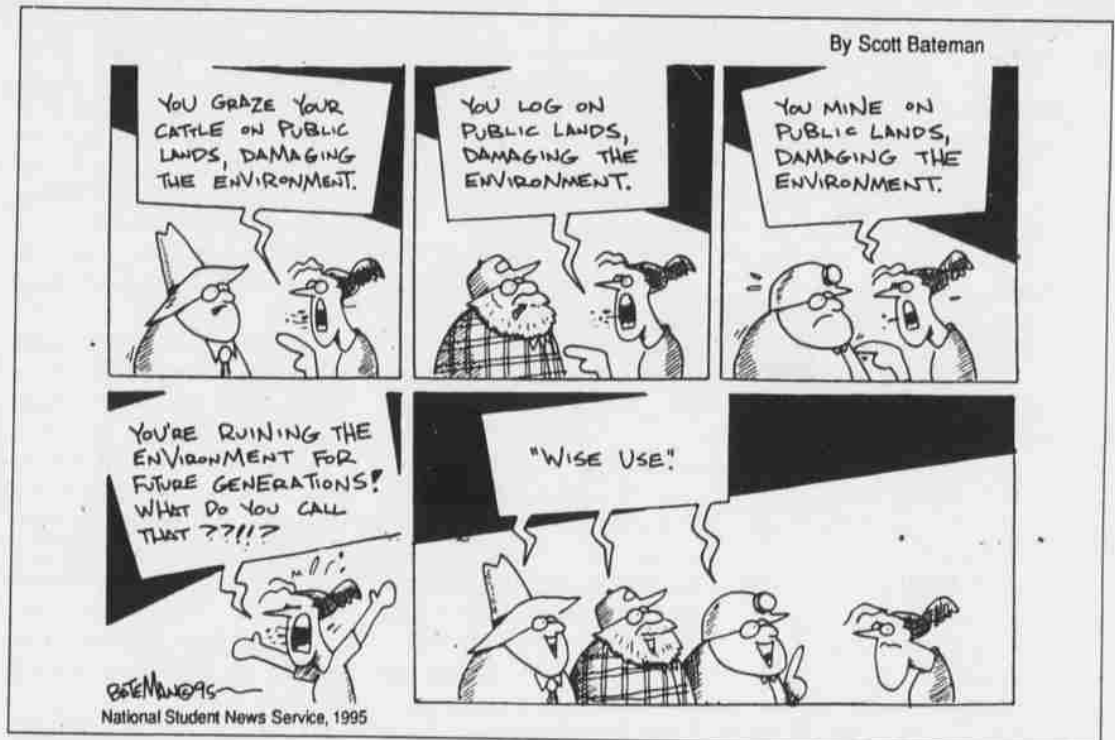
The problem comes down to balancing the rights of smokers and nonsmokers. By insisting on clean air, nonsmokers are not infringing on the rights of smokers.

The choice not to smoke has more validity than the choice to smoke because of the added weight of the health concern.

April Partridge is a staff news writer for The Rebel Yell.

Guest Column

APRIL PARTRIDGE



For smokers only

"You're not going to light that in here!" my co-worker whined. I looked at the unlit cigarette I had pulled out of my pack to take outside with me.

"Do you see a lighter in my hand?" I asked. "Do you see an ashtray anywhere in the room? Do you smell smoke?"

As far as I knew, no one had smoked in this office since 1992, but I wouldn't put it past this complainer to still smell four-year-old smoke in the room.

"I'm allergic," she explained.

How many militant non-smokers have those of us who still puff heard claim "severe allergic reactions" to cigarette smoke? Now, I think it's just an excuse of convenience in almost every case, but those who really suffer should see a doctor for it.

Have you heard this one: "You shouldn't do that, it's bad for you?"

Really? When did they find that out? I don't think there is a smoker alive who won't admit that smoking is bad for them. Who can ignore the surgeon general?

We know the risks. We don't need some sanctimonious twit reminding us of our early graves. It's impossible to find a smoker in the '90's that isn't smoking by conscious decision.

For many it's a habit that we'd like to quit.

Some of us are constantly quitting.

I've been quitting on and off for some time now.

Smokers have suffered the escalating war against tobacco use for years, and I think, not totally without cause. I don't want to see or help any teen-agers begin smoking. Yes, I wish I'd never started.

But in a supposedly free country, we're still subject to the changing winds of public opinion.

And to conveniently changing standards.

For example, now that smoking has reached unprecedented heights of unpopularity, why do the people who manage the student union say that smoking in the building (other than the "approved" smoking lounge) is a "fire risk," instead of just telling the truth and saying "the people around

you don't like it?"

It didn't seem to be much of a fire risk five years ago, when people working in the building could commonly be seen smoking at their desks.

So times change. We have, for the most part, changed with them.

Record numbers of adults are quitting smoking. Those who still smoke have become,

by and large, sensitive to the discomfort that cigarette smoke causes non-smokers.

We have become "considerate smokers" for our non-smoking brothers and sisters,

declining to light up anywhere and everywhere that we might have in the past.

We have come to respect the changing mores of smoking in these United States, even though calling something as large as the Astrodome an "enclosed space" is stretching the technicality.

We no longer smoke in malls, many restaurants, even some casinos, though most of us can remember a time when you could walk down the aisles of grocery stores trailing a cloud of smoke behind.

Those times have changed.

More than anything, it's the hypocrisy of many non-smokers and their taking utter advantage of the changing times that bugs me.

I flew into a large city in the Southwest that had recently reduced its smoking areas to one tiny bench with ashtray near the baggage-claim. That was okay; I could watch for my bags and replenish my nicotine levels simultaneously. Moments later, another plane disgorged its load of passengers, which included an entire college women's volleyball team. Well and good.

Until, that is, one of them plops down on the bench next to me, immediately launching into that fake, histrionic coughing that we've all heard at one time or another.

"Hack! Hack! Hack!" all the time fanning a disdainful hand frantically in front of her face.

Did I feel the guilt of a smoker caught with exposed cherry? Did I feel bad at all? Not on your life!

"Babe," I said, "if you choose the only one percent of a non-smoking airport to plant your

behind in, and find yourself sitting next to someone smoking (and the "Smoking Area" sign!) you should expect to breathe a little smoke." I felt not at all sorry for her.

Neither do I empathize with militant non-smokers the world over who feel justified in pulling similar pranks, exposing themselves to cigarette smoke just to make a point.

That's like an environmentalist placing himself under a falling tree. Timber!!

And what makes these people think it's cute to spray fire extinguishers and the like into the faces of smokers? That is assault, plain and simple.

Sure, the IDEA of making that type of dramatic statement is appealing; haven't smokers thought of cramming a carton down the throats of vociferous non-smokers a time or two? But we show restraint. So should they.

I also don't understand that cigarettes aren't for sale on campus. As adults we can all make an informed decision whether or not to smoke, we don't need administration or politically correct nay-sayers to save us from ourselves.

Chemically dependent or not, we are aware of our addiction. We are equally aware that 7-11 gets the revenues that some campus vendor could benefit from.

President Harter, how about a two-cent cigarette tax to pay for that long promised student parking garage? While you're at it, have preferred parking spots for smokers, so we don't have to wheel our oxygen bottles as far.

It's hard to find a smoker who won't admit that their habit is a nasty, disgusting one. We know the dangers. We accommodate those who choose not to. We suffer rising prices, rising taxes on our favorite vice.

I, for one, intend to be a more militant smoker. If you smoke, you also need to shed the mass of guilt associated with smoking heaped upon us from all sides, and light up with nothing more than courtesy concerns for those around you. Be a militant smoker too! After all, we're a dying breed.

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A Closer Look

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