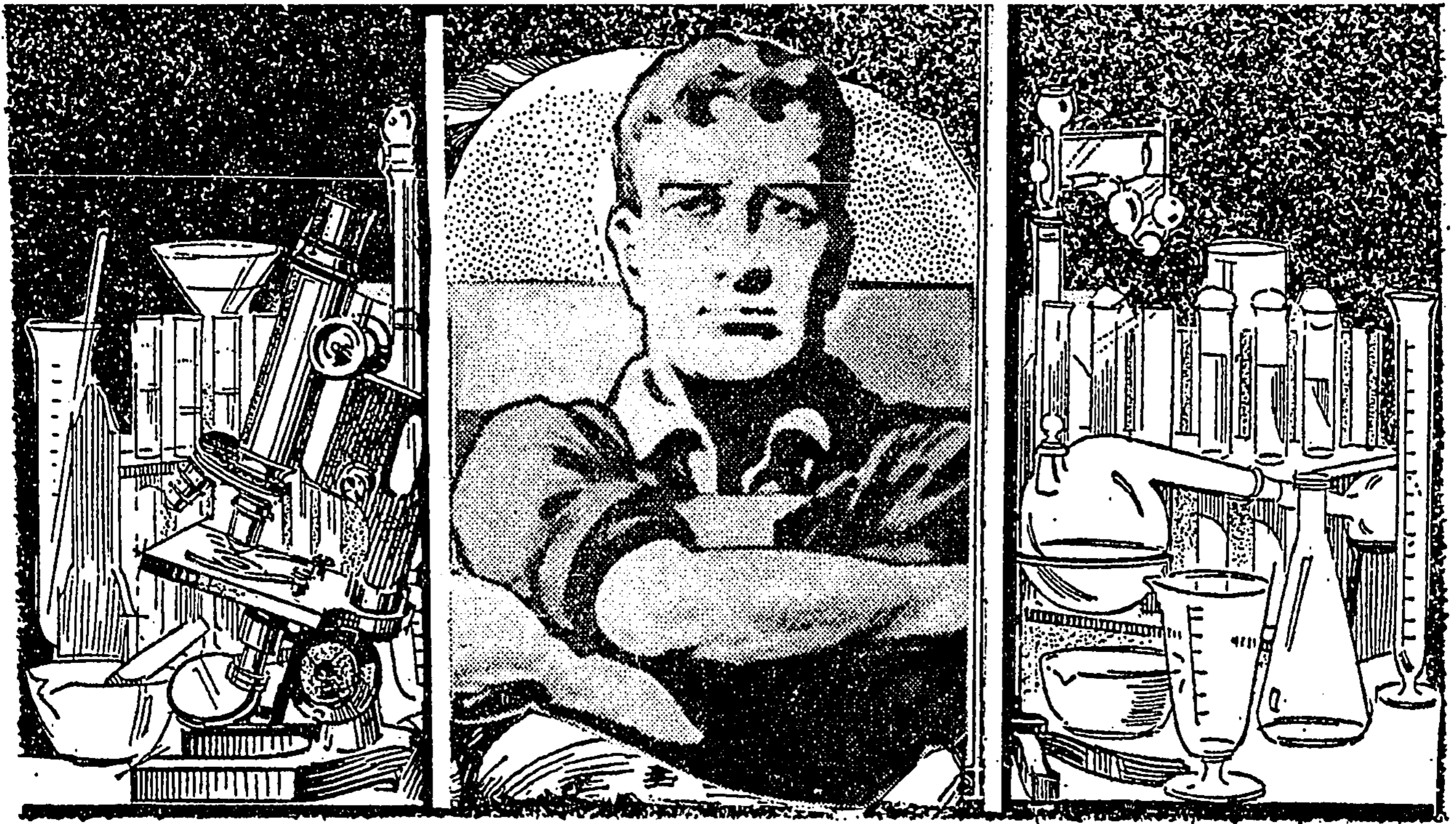


An Ex-Smoker's Own True Facts



By Tom Bartel

LONDON—When, after 12 years of smoking, I quit last year, I congratulated myself both on my self-discipline and the lucky accident that allowed me to substitute the taste of pencil erasers for cigarettes without too much discomfort. I never stopped to wonder why I had finally quit; it was enough for me that I had.

I had not, after all, given much thought to why I started smoking. I smoked because Charlie, the old man who racked balls in the poolroom where I spent most of my ninth grade summer, smoked. I started on his brand, Old Golds, and stuck with them until I learned that filter cigarettes are for kids.

I acquired that bit of knowledge from reading James Bond books in 10th grade. I immediately switched to Chesterfields, which Bond smoked when he couldn't get Players. I couldn't get Players either.

Eventually I worked my way through Camels, Lucky Strikes and Pall Malls before tapering down with filter brands and even some low tar and nicotine varieties. When I finally quit, the only reason that I could think of was that most of my short-sleeved sport shirts had no pockets. And who wants to walk around all summer smashing cigarettes in a pants pocket?

So, given all that, it was with some amusement that I read of the recent decision by the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare to step up its spending in the war against the weed.

Spending all that money to make people do something they really didn't want to seemed to be just another example of the United States Government's determination to be forever expanding the limits of common sense.

But then I reconsidered. Although my own experience told me that quitting "cold turkey" wasn't really so

difficult as to inspire Government intervention, I allowed that it might be necessary for some. I began to re-examine my own 12-year acquaintance with the habit and its end.

I picked up a few magazines and began thumbing through them for the cigarette advertisements. The promises of glamor and prestige were so time-worn that they had little effect. The suggestion that smoking a certain brand would get me into bed with some luscious model bore even less scrutiny.

Finally, as I began to notice the ads for the newer low tar and nicotine brands, the reason I quit became clear to me. I didn't quit to save my health. I didn't quit to save myself enough money for a trip to Europe. I didn't quit to save all my shirts, pocketless or not, from all those little burn holes. And I didn't quit to please my mother.

I did it out of spite for the tobacco industry.

I'd always been able to accept the fact that the Government was spending millions on subsidies for tobacco farmers at the same time it was spending even more on cancer research and antismoking schemes. I didn't hold that against the cigarette makers. Who

doesn't line up at the trough when one has the chance?

And while I've always thought it was a bit unrealistic for the industry never to admit that smoking shrivels one's lungs, I figured that they have as much right as anyone else to cater to people's death wish.

But those ads for the less deadly cigarettes were just too much to take. Visions of executives deciding that low tar cigarettes were a good way to keep people alive longer so they could buy more cigarettes passed through my head. I could hear legions of advertising copywriters humming "Killing Me Softly" as they composed campaigns for cigarettes with air-injected filters and laser-aided designs. When can we expect the first overhead-cam cigarettes, I wondered.

The ads for the first "all natural" cigarette were the worst, though.

Mother Nature cereal and Herbal Earth shampoo are bad enough, but to carry the commercialization of ecological concern so far as to assure smokers that the stuff they will now be inhaling is guaranteed to have nothing artificial added is getting downright insulting.

Don't those people realize that they're now going to have to explain what unnatural ingredients have been going into cigarettes all these years? Don't they know that anyone who inhales smoke intentionally probably isn't really all that concerned that he might be getting some obscure petrochemical along with his other poisons?

Perhaps they think that people who contract lung cancer or emphysema from these "real" cigarettes can take heart in the fact that they are dying a "natural" death.

Tom Bartel, former editor of a small Minnesota newspaper, is now a London-based writer.

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