

The Deadly Effects of Smoking
by Evan Trask

“Was he your father?” the paramedic asked me after they had bagged Ed’s body and threw him into the ambulance. Personally, I wish they had thrown him a little harder. The guy was a hard-headed failure, he could take it. He never stopped smoking or yelling or drinking. I know it’s bad to say, but I am glad the guy wasn’t around anymore.

I always corrected anyone who assumed he was my dad, “Stepfather. Thank God there is no blood between us.” I never going to shed a tear about his death and I decided not go to the funeral even though I’m sure that I was supposed to say some words about what a great guy he was. I thought just skipping the darn thing would be better than saying what I really felt about him.

“So I’m guessing that you two weren’t too close?” I don’t know why I even called 911. I certainly would not have I had known this EMT was going to be so interested in my personal life. I guess I felt it was my responsibility to see if there was any chance for him to be saved. Plus, I knew that I would feel guilty if I didn’t try to do something. Well, maybe I wouldn’t feel *too* guilty. He never felt any guilt when he abused my mom or came home drunk and trashed the place. I never got the revenge that I wanted to get on him for any of the horrible things that he did to Mom and I. Luckily, he killed himself all on his lonesome, so I was off the hook.

“Nope,” I was completely honest. “We were about as close as parallel lines.” There were many reasons that I felt his strongly about him. Everyday when I got home from school, he was either drunk or out at the bar getting drunk. I was trying to cope with my real dad’s death, and when he first married Mom, he promised he would always be there to talk about it. But he was never there, and when he *was* around, he was

completely dysfunctional. I never got the one-on-one time that he swore he would devote to me, so it didn't take long for me not to want it anymore. I gave up trying to be a good son when he gave up trying to be a good stepfather, and that didn't take him long to do.

"You know, my mom is also dead. What does that mean for me? Where am I supposed to go?" I asked him, half sarcastically. My mom really was dead, but I didn't care what he had to say about it. I really didn't want to be in this old apartment with such bad memories. I just needed someone to point me to my next destination in the roller coaster I call my life.

"Wait, your mother is dead as well?" the interrogating paramedic was really caught off guard.

"Yep. She got hit by an ambulance, ironically enough. She probably could have gotten out of the way fast enough, but the week before, she broke her leg when she tripped over a wheelchair at the hospital where she worked as a nurse. Maybe you were the guy driving the ambulance! Now *that* would be ironic!" I burst out laughing. The paramedic didn't find it as funny as me.

"How can you be okay with your step dad *and* your mother dying? You don't seem to be hurt at all."

I really did love her, but I had gotten over it. So I was able to say in a joking way, "Traumatic things like this shouldn't happen to a teenager, but I've learned how to deal with it all. I thought Mom's death would mean more drinking for "Dad", but the only time that I saw him cry about it was when they told him how much the funeral was going to cost him. It wasn't until Mom died that I really started to doubt Ed's devotion to her. Ya' know?"

“Mark” is what it said on his uniform, but he had no remark to what I was saying. He was speechless, probably horrified. I decided to keep on going and break the awkward silence.

“I had always felt the passion between the two, so I never could completely hate the bum, because he made Mom happy. But when I saw how little he cared that she died, he lost all of the remaining respect that I had had for him. That was the one thing that he had going for him, he made my mom smile every once and a while. His lack of emotion at her passing explained a lot of things though, like why he would hit her and yell at her on a daily basis. What took me a while to figure out was why he married her in the first place. It obviously wasn’t for the love, and it certainly wasn’t for the money.”

Now Mark was getting really uncomfortable, “Okay, I get it...um, all we need you to do is come down to the hospital with us to sign a few papers, and...”

I wasn’t done talking, and even though Mark didn’t seem to be interested, I cut him off and continued. “It’s not like my mom and I were rich. When Dad died, we had to move to this single bedroom apartment. I eventually just chalked it up to a loser looking for a place to crash. And boy did Ed crash our place. On top of going to school and working a job at a fast food joint to pay rent, I had to clean up the apartment everyday, because he would leave it as dirty as a sailor’s mouth. I know that if Mom came home to a messy house after a hard day’s work, she would fall apart, and I just couldn’t bear to see her like that. I never wanted her to feel the same pain she did after Dad died.”

It was just getting more and more awkward for Mark the longer I kept on rambling. He knew I wasn’t going to stop until I was finished, so he asked, “How long ago did she pass?”

I knew he would come around. “Well, thank you for expressing an interest. It must’ve been...about...seven months ago. Believe me, life with just Edward and I (I refused to call him “Dad”) was a lot worse than when Mom was around. He complained everyday about working, something he didn’t have to do when Mom was around because she was too nice. He burned all of our money on beer and cigarettes. I knew that we wouldn’t be able to get by with all of the money being wasted on his “necessities” as he called them. I bought a few packs of nicotine gum so he could kick the disgusting and, with the size of our combined income, expensive habit.”

Noticing that I wasn’t crying or showing any emotion whatsoever, Mark said, “Don’t you feel even a little sorry for the guy? I mean he took care of you for seven months all by himself.”

“Nope,” although it wasn’t apparent, I did have feelings. Just not for Ed. “And I would hardly call bossing me around and calling me names can be considered ‘taking care of me’. So what did he die from anyway?”

Mark held out a sticky, white glob. “It looks like gum. He choked on it and it clogged his esophagus so he couldn’t breathe. He was in bed when you found him, correct?”

I stared at the gum for a few seconds and then I figured it out. “What an idiot! That was the gum that I gave him to quit smoking. He must have gone to bed while chewing it and forgotten to spit it out before he went to sleep. Dude! I thought he committed suicide because he was so pitiful, but this is much better! And it is almost as ironic as how my mom died.”

Inside I was laughing, but I decided it probably wasn't a good idea to express that for Mark to see. Unfortunately, he did notice me smirk a little bit.

"I'm sorry; I don't see how this could be considered amusing." He said, disgusted that someone could be okay with a "loved" one dying.

In actuality, I had been trying to save my late stepfather's life for years; he just wouldn't take my advice. "What? I told him smoking would kill him."