

Lifestyle

HALLE OF FAME
PAGE 19



BREAKING TOBACCO'S SPELL

Long-term smoker **David Parsley** didn't feel like he was putty in the hands of hypnotherapist **Diana Pedersson**, but the result has so far surprised him

► Health

YOU'VE got young children, a good job and a good future ahead of you. So why are you doing your best to cut that future short by puffing away at a packet of fags a day?

It's the question I'd expected, but the question I could never answer. I know smoking is anti-social. I know it's costing me a small fortune. I know I might not see my kids graduate from college if I carry on. But carry on I always have.

Smoking has never made much sense to me, yet for 13 years I have been utterly committed to the nicotine habit. Apart from the odd three- or six-month stint of packing it in, I have always returned, usually more committed than when I tried to give up.

So, with an open mind, I thought I would give hypnotherapy a shot. It's something I have never really believed in, to be honest, but nothing else has worked, so why not?

I went to visit Diana Pedersson, founder of QUITMasters UK, to see if she could manage what the patches, inhalers and will power had so far failed miserably to achieve. Diana has treated some big names in the business world and was about to attempt her toughest test yet — me.

BRAINWASHING BY ANY OTHER NAME

Pedersson brought her hour-long treatment over from her home country, Sweden, in 2002. Her approach is a blend of hypnotherapy and neuro-linguistic programming — otherwise known as brainwashing. She claims 95 per cent of her clients give up smoking after just one session, which is not cheap at £295 for the hour-long appointment.

Sceptical, but ready to be convinced, I opened myself up to everything she could throw at me. We started the session with a chat about why I smoke and whether or not I really wanted to give up — she admitted even her treatment would not work if I was not determined. She explained how pathetic smoking is, how my life would be so much better without it. But, as well as all the expected comments, she made me talk about why I needed to give up. It was the first time in my life I had voiced my concerns about smoking. I have always known I should give up, but never actually discussed it with anyone. This, even before the hypnotherapy, was something that had an



Committed to the nicotine habit

Picture: REX

effect on me. It was, to be perfectly honest, more psychotherapy than hypnotherapy — something I had not expected.

Then came the time to lie on the bed and fall into the deep relaxation I was told I should expect. Pedersson claims the technique at QUITMasters UK is different from others offering a cure via hypnotherapy.

"The hypnosis technique makes it so easy that after only one hour you'll leave a happy non-smoker — not feeling deprived, not feeling that you made a sacrifice and not feeling any pain," she says. "Instead you'll have a huge sense of relief and elation that you have at last achieved what most smokers take a lifetime to achieve — you'll have become a happy, permanent non-smoker."

RELAXED? YES. UNDER HER SPELL? NO

Pedersson says her techniques entirely remove the need and desire to smoke without the use of smoking substitutes such as gum, patches or inhalers.

Before I was sent "under" I was told to think of three healthy things to do more of after the session. I opted for drinking more water, eating more fruit, and more exercise — not exactly original but if I manage to stick to my guns I'll never have time to smoke anyway.

I started counting backwards from 100. She told me I was getting "deeper and deeper", but I felt very little. Relaxed? Yes. Under her spell? No. Throughout the entire three quarters of an hour or so I never once felt I could not get up and walk away. Indeed, I felt I was giving her the answers she wanted to hear for fear of the awkward situation if I

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didn't. But, then, how do I know that for sure? I did not give more awkward answers to questions such as "Do you feel more relaxed than you ever have before?" — perhaps because the hypnosis made me give the answers I was supposed to. Perhaps that is how it worked.

SHE WENT BALLISTIC

I do remember it all very clearly, especially when she began to yell at me. Pedersson told me to repeat what she was about to say over and over in my head. Then, suddenly, she went ballistic. "I AM NOT A SMOKER. I WILL NOT SMOKE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE. I AM NOT A SMOKER. I WILL NOT SMOKE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE." This went on for about two minutes, over and over again. I found it hard not to laugh.

Shouting over with, I was raised from my slumber. True, I felt very relaxed, but then I had been lying down with my eyes shut for 45 minutes. Did I feel a miracle cure had been gifted to me? No, not at all. Of course it was not going to work. Nothing really happened, did it?

It's three weeks since my session with Pedersson. I have not smoked. It's been easier than anything I could have imagined. So why is that? I cannot explain it, but despite my scepticism and not, at any point, feeling "under", something clearly did happen. Whether it was talking openly about why I wanted to pack it in, or the hypnotherapy, I just do not know.

But I feel more confident than ever that I will crack it this time.

TREATMENT PAYS FOR ITSELF

Is it worth the £295 — or one month's supply of fags? Well, look at it this way. If I only manage not to smoke for two months I have saved money. If I never smoke again I will save a fortune and live longer. So, yes, it's almost certainly worth it. And if I ever begin to struggle, I get free back-up support for seven months after the treatment.

It was a strange experience but while I'm not smoking it was worth every second and every penny.

CONTACT

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