

The curious
legacy of
Conrad Black
Too liberal for
his own good

Christopher Grimes and John Lloyd

IS IT WORTH IT?

Smoky bandit

I met my now close friend Rein on a hotel balcony in the Hunza valley, where he was hiding from an American tourist who did that irritating hand-flapping thing every time she spotted a smoker. "Fascist!" we hissed, merrily lighting up and admiring the view through a cloud of smoke. Well, the years have passed and, rather like Americans choosing to vacation in Pakistan, self-righteous smokers are thin on the ground.

It was time to give up. Again. I have tried everything: patches, gum, acupuncture, herbal tablets and fags, those strange Tampax-like substitute cigarettes, audio tapes, hypnotherapy, an audience with Alan Carr himself, and, most bloody of all, willpower (my God, what rows!). So it was with not a huge amount of confidence that I took myself off to QuitMasters UK, whose literature boasts, "Stop Smoking in One Hour".

I think I secretly thought, "Not this sucker baby". I really did want to stop smoking, but without the pain and temper tantrums (I need to keep my job). I couldn't see how it could work. "It" is hypnotherapy, combined with neuro-linguistic programming. This, apparently, helps to transfer the smoking urge to something more useful, like a desire to take more exercise. Or indeed, some.

The woman charged with getting me off the fags in an hour was Diana Pedersson. At this stage I think I still thought that in just over an hour I'd be over the road having a quick smoke outside the tube station before stomping home in a temper. I'm not sure how it happened – yes, you sit in a reclining chair, close your eyes and count backwards etc – but I have not had a cigarette since. At the time of writing, that is 21 days ago, a period that has seen me through new year celebrations, assorted social occasions and office provocations that would normally have sent me scurrying to the lepers' corner that is the FT's back door.

Weirder still, I have not wanted a cigarette; nor do cigarettes bother me. I seem to have stopped thinking about them. QuitMasters says that if you do lapse you can have free back-up sessions, even two years later. Nothing personal, but I'm confident I won't be seeing Diana again. I do miss the camaraderie of the back door though.

Sue Norris

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