

REMEMBERING

Barb Tarbox

"I could sit on my couch and I could cry and feel sorry for myself. Or I could help change the life of another. And by God, I'm not standing still"



On September of 2002, Barb Tarbox received the dreadful news that she was suffering from stage four cancer. On May of 2003, this terrible illness robbed her of her life. But in the intervening months between her diagnosis and her untimely death, she managed to be one of the most inspiring Canadians of her generation. She was able to impact the lives of tens of thousands of people, and convinced many of them to stop smoking. Perhaps more importantly, she persuaded many children to never start!

Barb set an almost unbelievable goal for herself, she wanted to meet with 50,000 students to tell them firsthand about the dangers of cigarette smoking. She managed to reach that goal, and she made a lasting impression on the lives of the kids she spoke with. Many of these kids

walked up to Barb in tears at the end of her presentation and handed her their cigarettes, promising that they would never smoke again.

People coping with an addiction often want to share their life story with others - and this holds true for many smokers and ex-smokers. They feel so strongly about their own mistakes that they want others to learn from their example. They believe, perhaps naively, that if others know what a terrible price their addiction has taken they will never want to go down that path themselves.

If it was that simple, there would be one person who died from lung cancer caused by cigarettes, and a planet full of people who never took up smoking because they learned from that

individual's mistakes.

Tragically, it's not that simple. People have a tendency to want to make their own mistakes. They also believe that illness and death is something that will never happen to them - until it does!

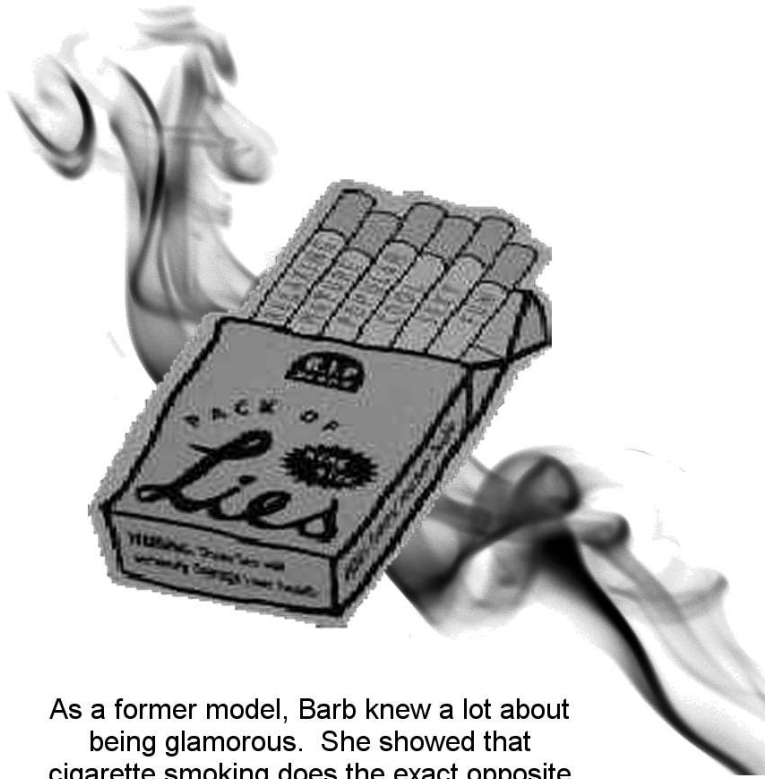
What is the single most effective way to get people to stop smoking? Have them suffer a heart attack or be diagnosed with lung cancer! Sadly, that's the kind of massive shock to the system it takes to scare people out of their complacency and get them to realize that cigarettes can kill.

It takes an extraordinary person - a person like Barb Tarbox - to cut through the apathy and denial and really convince people of the dangers they face. Barb was willing to use whatever arguments and shock therapy it took to get her point across. She had an "in-your-face" approach that conveyed just how serious the subject was.



What is it that gets youngsters to try smoking in the first place? Perhaps they think it will make them look more mature - or perhaps they are doing it to rebel against authority.

Children are very vulnerable to cigarette advertising campaigns that tell them which brands will make them look more rugged or glamorous. A lot of girls assume that cigarettes can help them stay slimmer - and they feel that smoking can help them fit in with an older crowd. They start to equate cigarettes with being glamorous.



As a former model, Barb knew a lot about being glamorous. She showed that cigarette smoking does the exact opposite when she compared photos of herself in her modelling days to the frail and ravaged woman that kids saw in front of them. When she was doing presentations, she would rip off her hat and show how all of her hair had been lost to chemotherapy. She would roll up her sleeves and show where the bones were sticking out of her arms. She told kids about how her legs were turning blue and becoming cyanotic - and how her tissues were starting to die. Then she told them of the horrible smell that was associated with this process, and let them know that there wasn't a perfume on the market that could hide that smell. Suddenly cigarettes didn't seem quite so glamorous!

**Take the power
away from the
cigarettes and
give it back to
yourself!**

Statistics tell us that 85% of smokers started smoking before they were eighteen. Barb started in the seventh grade when she was only eleven years old. She knew from first-hand experience that the younger you are when you start smoking, the harder it is to give it up. That's part of the reason she felt it was so important to spread her message to junior high and high school students across Alberta. Barb hoped that if she could reach these kids **before** they started smoking she could convince them that this was a risk that they didn't need to take with their lives.

Teenagers have extremely unrealistic expectations about how easy it is to quit smoking once they start. In a study done some years ago, high school students who smoked regularly were asked if they thought they would still be smoking five years later. Only 5% thought they would be using cigarettes - but in reality, a whopping 75% of them were still smoking after five years.



Barb Tarbox herself was the perfect person to illustrate this point. Her own mother was a heavy smoker who died of lung cancer in the 1980's. You would think the shock from that tragedy would have been enough to induce her to quit - but Barb continued smoking heavily. She simply couldn't beat the addiction. Even when she herself was diagnosed with lung cancer, Barb didn't give

up cigarettes. That might be part of what made her message so powerful - all the pictures that showed her as a fragile wreck still puffing away on the very cigarettes that cost her her life.

"How do you know this won't happen to you"

Most youngsters want to have families of their own someday - and they want to live long enough to raise them. They got the point when Barb told them that her biggest regret was the fact she would no longer be there for her husband and daughter.

Maybe that was the decisive factor that made Barb's presentations so successful - she was appealing to the love we feel for others and not just to a sense of self interest. She would ask people in the audience to look at somebody close to them and imagine life without that person. Barb put it best when she told us that if you die as a result of something stupid like smoking cigarettes, the people you love are going to have to go through their entire life without you.

Your body is not an ashtray.

