

An Old Admonition (With a New Meaning)  
from Non-Smokers: *Live!* and *Let Live!!*

February 28, 1973

In this age of the usually clueless alphabetic clusters we call acronyms, GASP is uniquely appropriate and pronounceable. GASP stands for the Group Against Smokers' Pollution. I support its attempts to put right the imbalance of justice which presently prevails against the non-smoker.

Numerous studies have suggested that the harmful effects of smoke are shared by smoker and non-smoker alike. Whether this is due, as suggested many years ago by workers at General Electric, to an ionization effect, or simply to the effect of an interior equivalent of smog, I really don't care. Whatever the cause, respiratory damage second-hand is a singularly unappealing fate! It is like being hanged by mistake, or being crushed by an effenestrating suicide.

Having given up on appeals to common courtesy, members of GASP have decided that offense is the only defense. GASP-ers accept the obvious fact that smokers are plainly beyond the reach of reason.<sup>1</sup> Even the supposedly un-annihilable human instinct for self-preservation does not operate in the case of smokers. They are, like drug addicts, hooked. I understand that the National Cancer Panel has also given up any hope of convincing people to stop smoking. They intend, instead, to support research on a "natural", less carcinogenic cigarette. This will not, however, solve the problem of interior air pollution.

Theological, philosophical, and legal discussions of suicide do not, as far as I know, include as yet consideration of the long-fuse, delayed-action variety represented by smoking. (I often wonder how Camus would handle the subject.) Be that as it may, however, the average smoker's side-swipe *assault*, his off-hand *battery*, his non-chalant *mayhem* of gasping bystanders deprives him of any moral protection under traditional concepts of individual freedom. In the near future, I am convinced, legal precedents will be established in favor of the non-smoker. If the smoker doesn't care for his own health, GASP says he must be made to respect the rights of others to care for their own. Smoking in public is a privilege, not a right. One realizes how values have changed when contemplating recent attempts by smokers to establish equal "rights" on airplanes, trains, and so on.

I find it somewhat ludicrous that smokers should react in such a manner against growing restrictions and against programs like that of GASP. I've yet to encounter a smoker actually suffering from withdrawal because of an enforced hour or so of restraint. In theaters, for example, you will notice that the severity of the smoker's withdrawal syndrome has nothing to do with the length of his abstinence; it is inversely proportional to the interest and excellence of the presentation. One observes the fidgeting and finger-tap-

ping, but generally smokers can hold out when they must. One can sympathize with an enjoyment of tobacco—the aroma of a good cigar or pipe, like the scent of garlic, can provide a pleasant accent. But neither is tolerable as an atmosphere. Both can produce allergic and other reactions in me and many others.

I vividly recall a train trip with a now deceased colleague who suffered from pulmonary emphysema. We boarded a one-car train that was marked “No Smoking” at the front end. We did not know that at the rear end there was a “Smoking Permitted” sign. By the time we got to our destination, my friend was in agony; his situation had been aggravated by a standing-room-only crowd, and the smokers were ignoring the “No Smoking” sign in the front by simply facing the rear of the car.

GASP was founded about two years ago, and publishes a newsletter, *The Ventilator*.<sup>2</sup> Last year, GASP presented its first “Ventilator Award for Distinguished Service on Behalf of Non-Smokers’ Rights” to the then U.S. Surgeon General Jesse L. Steinfeld.

Since many GASP-ers are scientists, CC® readers may expect to see GASP’s anti-smoking posters at coming professional meetings. Polluters may also be handed a small yellow slip that informs them that there are people nearby trying to breathe. The slip reads: “*A Polite and Reasonable Request: There are some of us at this gathering who suffer discomfort and annoyance from tobacco smoke. We will deeply appreciate your refraining from smoking until adjournment, or stepping outside to smoke. Thank you*

*for your consideration. GASP.*” GASP-ers try to be courteous, but they are resolved to be firm. A sign in my own office says: “*No Smoking—Oxygen in Use.*”

At the present time, it is for the most part only safety regulations that prohibit smoking, because it constitutes a fire-hazard. Courtesy once required that one ask permission to smoke, especially in the presence of a lady, or at the dinner table, or in the house of one’s host.<sup>3</sup> Since courtesy has gone up in smoke, GASP is doing what it can to protect those of us who don’t smoke and prefer to die by our own efforts—from over-eating, prolonged stress, and the effects of those other debilitating human excesses that smoking is said to relieve.

1. It is depressing to think of the millions of wasted dollars, hours, and words that went to produce the Surgeon General’s report on smoking, and the innocuous and useless “warning” which is as a result printed on packages of cigarettes. Smokers are irrational. I have heard of a scientist who stopped smoking not because of any likely damage to himself, but because he had learned that his cigarettes might be the source of the tobacco mosaic virus damaging his prized tomato plants.
2. GASP was founded by Mrs. Clara L. Gouin. She, and *The Ventilator*, may be addressed at: GASP, P.O. Box 632, College Park, Maryland, USA, 20740.
3. It is of historical interest (another case of Eve and the apple) that cigarettes were introduced, as were cocktails, for the use of women. No nineteenth-century gentleman would have smoked his cigars or drunk his hard likker in the presence of ladies; nor would he have (unlike advertisement’s rugged Marlboro Man) been caught dead by fellow he-men smoking an effeminate cigarette or drinking an effeminate cocktail. Women’s-Libbers, take note.