

March 8, 2013, WTE Column. Editor's Headline: "Smoking still a health crisis"

Jeffrey Wigand will be at LCCC on March 11 for a 7 PM talk. Even if his subject matter doesn't seem pertinent to your personal life, I urge everyone to attend this presentation. Dr. Wigand, a former top executive within the tobacco industry, became its most famous whistleblower when he spoke out (first on television, then in law suits) about the industry's disregard for its customers' health and safety.

"My brother is twenty years into the grave," I wrote in a 2011 WTE opinion headlined "Smoking stole her brother." Karl took up the habit in imitation of his dad, who did not smoke until he worked with a road-construction crew in post-WWII (1949) Germany. I still remember Dad's comment that workers could step aside from the backbreaking work by initiating a smoke, whereas merely resting on your shovel was castigated.

Our dad continued the habit after he opened his own business, a bread bakery, into which fourteen-year-old Karl was soon conscripted. Dad beat up on my brother for imitating his smoking, which only hardened the boy's resolve. While Dad rolled his own and in retirement disavowed cigarettes altogether, his son in the U.S.—Karl immigrated at eighteen—became habituated to the much more lethal "modern" American cigarettes. He died a premature death after years of fighting insidious cancers, leaving behind three young children who find life difficult indeed.

Modern cigarettes are only two-thirds tobacco; the rest is a witch's brew of additives and chemicals that include arsenic, asbestos, and antifreeze. Today's cigarettes are the deadliest artifacts in the history of human civilization, designed in such a way that they end up killing many more people than they need to, writes Robert Proctor in his 2011 "Golden Holocaust." Further, they are designed such as to create and sustain addiction. Cigarette deaths in the U.S. amount to "two jumbo jets crashing *every day*; the global toll would be an entire fleet," he writes. It's easy to trivialize or ignore cigarette deaths because most people are older when they die of smoking-related diseases. Yet tobacco now kills six million people every year, more than AIDS, malaria, and traffic-deaths combined. Proctor seeks nothing short of abolishing commercial cigarette-production, saying individuals should be left to grow their own smokes.

Judging by family history, smoking is intimately linked to poverty and malnutrition. To alleviate the former, we must address the latter, both at home and abroad. This is urgent, for American cigarette makers aggressively promote their products in Third-World countries, in collusion with the U.S. government. The result? Boys begin smoking at eight or even younger. Smoking kills hunger pangs; as such, it actually maintains continued world poverty and malnutrition.

The fact that smoking alleviates hunger also makes it attractive to young women who wish to remain slender despite the ubiquitous American diet of fat- and sugar-laden fast-food fare. The industry's extensive campaigns to lure women into using their product make females seem "cool," "emancipated," "individualistic," "sports-oriented," "vital and active," and so forth whenever they put the death sticks into their lipstick-tinted mouths. The trope of vitality and

action-oriented lifestyles is especially insidious: The industry sponsors many sports events, from car racing to women's tennis, where its logos are pervasive.

The tobacco masters are notorious for deception. They want us to believe that smoking is a "free choice," but the fact is, the amount of nicotine in today's cigarettes makes the product addictive. Proctor argues that tobacco is not a recreational drug: 80 to 90 percent of cigarette-smokers become addicted while only three percent of alcohol or marijuana users do.

Another urgent reason to focus on tobacco concerns the ecological disasters that accompany the health tragedies. We don't often hear about tobacco's contribution to climate change, but it is considerable. Cigarettes have caused major fires, including forest fires and industrial disasters. Then there's "the cutting of forests to make new land for planting or charcoal for flue-curing; the spraying of pesticides on the soil and finished leaf" and many others. Just sixteen unsmoked filters in a liter (roughly a quart) of water release enough toxins to kill fish.

There now exists a Cigarette Butt Pollution Project. An estimated 6.7 billion butts are discarded annually in the streets of Sidney, Australia, clogging drains and polluting its harbor. The city passed an ordinance that fines \$200 for every violation. In Singapore, the fine for tossing a butt is \$300.

Tobacco manufacturing is a significant cause of deforestation. "A 1991 estimate put the amount of cultivation for tobacco at 5.3 million hectares, making it the world's leading non-food crop," writes Proctor. The displaced land could feed an estimated 10 million to 20 million people.

Six trillion cigarettes are produced worldwide every year, "a thousand for every man, woman, and child on the planet." That's enough to "stretch to the sun and back." One cigarette brings 10 milligrams of tar into the lungs of a smoker, which means that sixty million kilograms of tar go into smokers' lungs every year, "a train of six thousand boxcars filled with tobacco tar . . . every year." 400,000 babies are born every year to mothers who smoked during pregnancy. Smoking causes horrifying numbers of abortions.

Ten trillion packs of cigarettes have been smoked over the past century; "we are talking about 50 billion kilograms of packaging waste . . . a heap that would make a mountain 2.5 kilometers wide and 2.5 kilometers high, or enough to cover the island of Manhattan with a layer about 25 meters thick." That doesn't include, says Proctor, the trillions of ads printed in magazines and newspapers, the billions of square feet of billboard space, the billions of coupons and mail offers, and so forth.

As concerns the LCCC presentation, former Attorney General of the State of Mississippi says of Jeffrey Wigand that he was the first insider at the corporate-officer level to tell the truth about the industry. "We will be forever grateful for Jeff's great personal sacrifice in our effort to save lives. He was and is a great champion."

Please take note of Mr. Wigand's impending visit to Cheyenne. From his LCCC talk on March 11 we stand to learn important information.