Quitting Made Real by NICORETTE ®: Podcast Episode 6 Transcript: Tegan Quin (ENGLISH)

Runtime: 18:31

SPEAKERS:
Tegan Quin (Left), Cynthia Loyst (Right)

[We open on Cynthia Loyst, podcast host, wearing a brown shirt while sitting in a green chair. Behind her is a white spinnaker-shaped sign with "Quitting Made Real" in dark green, and a NICORETTE® logo in the top right. Plants are in the background, and NICORETTE® products are displayed on her left. A microphone sits in front of her.]

00:00:01:07 - 00:00:20:02

Cynthia Loyst
Welcome to Quitting Made Real by Nicorette, the podcast bringing you real stories about breaking the smoking addiction. My name is Cynthia Loyst and quitting smoking is one of the single best things I ever did for myself. We have a remarkable lineup of guests, and they're sharing their unique stories of how everyone affected by nicotine addiction can help make quitting real.

00:00:20:04 - 00:00:40:12

Cynthia Loyst
Tegan Quin is one half of the acclaimed indie pop duo Tegan and Sara. She's joining us today to share what led her to quit smoking before the age of 30. Thanks for joining us, Tegan. [Tegan appears in frame wearing a brown leather jacket over a black shirt. She is wearing a black beanie.] Tegan, I feel like a lot of people might be surprised to learn that you were once a smoker. I was certainly surprised. I'm always curious, what was it that actually led you to start smoking to start with?

00:00:41:12 - 00:00:45:20

Tegan Quin
So I had my first cigarette in seventh grade.

00:00:46:06 - 00:00:51:08

Cynthia Loyst
Seventh grade is when you started. Like, that's almost my son's age. So you're giving me heart palpitations. Carry on.

00:00:52:12 - 00:01:28:19

Tegan Quin
When I see, like, 12-year-olds and 13-year-olds now, and I think about the fact that I had my first cigarette at that age. It blows my mind. I think things have changed a lot. Obviously, smoking was more prevalent then. I mean, you could still smoke in airplanes. You could smoke at the mall. You know, I had plenty of friends whose parents smoked.

Yeah. So, like, it doesn't feel crazy when I put it in that context, but I still was so young. But I remember a friend of mine stole a cigarette from an older sibling, and a bunch of us went outside, you know, her house and went behind the back gate. And we all took a drag off of it.

00:01:28:19 - 00:01:58:08

Tegan Quin

And I remember thinking it was disgusting. And I had a few, you know, I'd say a handful experiences like that in middle school and junior high, you know, it's such an interesting time because it's like when you start to take risks and you start to misbehave a little bit and you know, I dated, a guy all through high school who smoked. And so I can remember, like, going to Denny's with him. And it started out as like, oh, I just want to drag off your cigarette.

And then it was like, now we're sharing a cigarette. And then it was like, I just want a cigarette. It was an evolution.

00:01:59:22 - 00:02:08:08

Cynthia Loyst

Yeah. Like it is an evolution for sure. Like, was there a point in time where you were like, okay, I thought I could take it or leave it, but I have a suspicion now that I'm actually hooked.

00:02:11:19 - 00:02:56:06

Tegan Quin

So I, like, considered myself a social smoker, which is a game. Clearly we all play with our addictions, you know? But I sort of I had sort of, marked myself as a social smoker for ten years, you know, so from the time I was 15 until I was 25, I rarely bought packs of cigarettes. If I did, it was like, you know, at the bar, and, you know, I come home, put it in a Ziploc bag and throw it in my freezer, not smoke again until I went out to the bar.

You know, I had a lot of rules around smoking. Like no smoking alone, no smoking in the daytime. I was always very clear that smoking was bad. And I was always trying to keep it under control. And I think for myself, calling myself a social smoker and having all those rules was my way of being like, I am in charge, I'm in charge of tobacco.

00:02:56:21 - 00:03:13:11

Tegan Quin

And I think it was probably when I was 25 or 26 that I went through a really bad breakup, and I moved into a place on my own, and I was I was really like what I would call unsupervised for the first time, you know, like I didn't have anyone to justify it to. I could go buy cigarettes and I could change the rules.

00:03:13:11- 00:03:33:20

Tegan Quin

And I think it was around then that I started to be like, oh, like I am a smoker. I still didn't wake up and have a cigarette. I still didn't, you know, I wasn't like have three cigarettes with coffee in the morning kind of person. It was always sort of something I did later in the day, a nighttime, a reward for after a show, a reward, you know, for after a long day or socially at the bar.

00:03:33:20 - 00:04:09:08

Tegan Quin

But yeah, the rules started to change and I started to be like, oh, look, I'm not in charge. And it was that negotiation that was happening on the inside of like, well, tonight I'm not going anywhere and I'm not doing anything. I'm just at home watching TV. So I'm not going outside to smoke. There's no smoking tonight. And then it would be like, oh, I'm having a really interesting text conversation with this girl, that counts as social.

I'm going to go outside and have a cigarette. And it was just like, you know, I would just that like exhausting negotiation over how much and when that I realized, like, oh, I'm at war with myself or, not with myself. I'm at war with nicotine.

00:04:10:14 - 00:04:41:18

Cynthia Loyst

Yes. Well, it's almost like you're bargaining with the devil, right? You're just trying to like, well, maybe this works. And maybe if I do this, it's okay. And meanwhile, like, there's a little voice, it's probably behind that knowing that, like, ha, we got you. But there is this kind of idea around, music. And, like, the rock world, you know, that that you think about musicians in bars during a particular time, that the cigarettes were often like, just go hand in hand with that.

So was that part of the mystique that you feel like drew you in as well?

00:04:42:11 - 00:05:39:22

Tegan Quin

I think I was always really sensitive. Like I didn't want our fans to know I smoked. I didn't want to like, like I never smoked on stage, for example, you know, I would actively go out of my way to keep, you know, me smoking a secret not because I was ashamed of it, but because we had a lot of young people in our audience.

So I certainly didn't want to be the person that's like out in front of the club smoking. And we were so young when we started touring. I was 18 when I started to tour, and so yeah, venues still had smoking. Like, you know, most of the clubs we played the first 5 or 6 years, the whole club was a smoking section and so I didn't I didn't necessarily feel like a stigma or embarrassment about smoking, but I understood that it was not a good thing.

I understood it was bad for me, and I certainly didn't want to make it seem like I thought it was cool. Like I would have never gone outside of venue and bummed a cigarette off of a fan, you know. But it was a

reward. It was a reward at the end of a show.

00:05:39:22 - 00:06:05:11

Tegan Quin

I wasn't a big drinker. And I think cigarettes just became this reward for me. Like, oh, well, when it's all done and the crew is packed up the trailer, everybody goes and stands out by the boss and has like a beer and a cigarette, and I really looked forward to that. And so that was, that was more of my relationship to smoking when we were on the road was it was just like this thing I could look forward to at the end of the day, because there really wasn't that much to look forward to.

00:06:06:03 - 00:06:31:21

Cynthia Loyst

I totally relate to that. Like when I started out working in television, I was a producer and I was going around you, travel around you, interview interesting people, and then it became this kind of punctuation, a reward, a moment to myself, which makes it extra hard to kind of like get rid of at some point when you decide it's no longer your, you know, friend or your like, you know, your moment to yourself in a, in a good way.

So did you find that challenging?

00:06:31:22 - 00:08:08:03

Tegan Quin

So I feel like I'm really lucky because I was not a get up in the morning and have a cigarette person. I wasn't, if I'm having a coffee, I must have a cigarette person. So some of the associations that a lot of people have with smoking, I didn't have you know, my current partner, we've been together ten years, and she quit a few months after we started dating, and she had a three hour commute to work when we were living in LA, like an hour and a half on either side of this eight hour workday.

And she smoked on her commute. So when she quit, I mean, she was just like, what am I going to do during that three hours? I mean, she had severe depression. It was truly like she'd lost her best friend. She stopped drinking coffee. She stopped drinking alcohol. Like she just was like, what's the point? It was like at times I felt very dramatic.

But the longer I was a part of watching her go through that, it was my first time watching someone intimately go through that experience. I will say that I learned that my experience was not the same. I was tortured and negotiating with myself all the time, but I just I didn't have the same kind of relationship to smoking that, say, someone like she did, but I had the kind of relationship with smoking where it was really reward based and it was really social, like it was really tied in with my social behaviour.

I think that I understood that part of my process of quitting was going to be rewiring those interactions and rewiring those parts of myself, and to understand that while smoking hadn't been a part of my full

identity, it was a part of a very specific, you know, part of myself.

00:08:10:00 - 00:08:29:16

Tegan Quin

And to not have that cigarette, it definitely took some getting used to. It was like really awkward to be standing with the smokers and not smoking or going to the party and not having to do anything with my hands, like not have anywhere to go and like, I felt very exposed getting rid of smoking, you know.

00:08:29:16 - 00:08:42:19

Cynthia Loyst

Yeah, I can relate to that. So you're talking about rewiring. So what did some of that rewiring look like, especially while you were juggling touring or writing, or hanging around with people who were smoking?

00:08:42:20 - 00:09:22:09

Tegan Quin

I mean, the first big step I think I took was even just using language like, I'm going to quit smoking. I remember the first time I was like, I'm going to stop. And that was in 2007. I was, you know, at the beginning of the year, Sara and I had, booked a house in Portland, and we were going down to make an album, an album called The Con, and we were going to be there for three months, and nobody in the house smoked and nobody who were making the record was smoked.

And so I was like, this is the perfect time. Like I was like, I'm not going to drink. I'm not going to smoke. I'm going to go there. I'm going to make the album and just break this sort of weird habit, you know, like, just like it's a habit. It's a social thing, you know? But I was clearly I knew better.

00:09:22:10 - 00:10:17:21

Tegan Quin

And I ended up quitting for eight months, and I didn't find it hard. Honestly, at first it really wasn't hard. It became part of my identity that I didn't drink and smoke. I mean, these days we have so much language around, you know, abstinence and, you know, addiction and, and health. And, you know, I know so many people that are sober.

And you know what? No one I knew was like that. So it was like it became my identity. I started hanging out with a lot of straight edge people, and I was like, I do not smoke, I do not drink. At first it was really easy. But then the second we put the album out and we got back out on tour, of course, you know, a couple weeks on tour, everybody going outside to have drinks and smoking.

I was like, it was just it was so easy to get back into it. Now. I definitely had as many rules, if not more, than I'd had before. So again, it didn't turn into a thing where I was smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. You know, I think I at most I was only smoking five cigarettes a day, but it didn't matter because it just, it just took so much time.

00:10:17:22 - 00:11:11:16

Tegan Quin

Like, I was just always thinking about when and how and with who and how many and, so that that feeling came back right away. I was also very lucky because right around that same time, I started dating someone who smoked, and I'd also never dated a full-on like get up and chain smoke in the morning kind of smoker.

And I did find that helpful because I was like, I don't want to do that. Like, I don't want to be controlled by my cigarettes, like, you know, and she couldn't get cigarettes. She was very hard to be around. And I remember thinking, okay, like the goalposts are here, like for a reason. Like I am, you know, controlling this because, like, I don't want to be that.

So I think even though it took another couple of years for me to fully quit, I never came back from that first quitting with the same, like carefree, I'm a young person and I just go out and have cigarettes. I was like in the back of my mind. I was like, this is bad. I have to stop doing this. This only gets worse.

00:11:12:16 - 00:11:21:11

Cynthia Loyst

I mean, that's great, but it's it must have been hard to be in a partnership with somebody who you're kind of like, oh, I don't want to go there. Was that a thing in your relationship at all? Was that tricky?

00:11:22:07 - 00:11:24:16

Tegan Quin

That's probably another podcast.

00:11:24:20 - 00:11:25:21

Cynthia Loyst

[Laughing] Okay. All right. Fair

00:11:25:21 - 00:12:18:09

Tegan Quin

Like probably lots of play there, but I will say that like my current partner, who I've been with for ten years and is a wonderful human being, when she and I started dating, she smoked and she was like, oh, I'll just quit. I would never like, why would I put you through that? Like, you're an ex-smoker and it's so disgusting.

Like, you know, I don't want to be your disgusting new girlfriend that smokes. And I was like, damn. But, you know, internally. Yeah. Like, I remember one time her being like, come with me outside for a cigarette. It was like midnight. And I was just like, yeah, I don't want this. Like, not for me, you know?

So I do think the position I found myself in was very helpful. And I also think that, you know, I've had the fortune of, you know, knowing people who smoke their whole lives, you know, and it's not great. It's not

great. What happens to you is not great. What happens to your lungs? Like, I've seen the facts of that.

00:12:18:09 - 00:12:58:06

Tegan Quin

And I, I don't think fear and shame are helpful tools for quitting anything. I think addiction, your body can override that. Like when people would say to me, you need to stop smoking. It's so bad for you. You're going to get cancer and die. All I wanted to do is smoke. If you don't understand how addiction works, you don't understand how nicotine like leaves your body, your system, and all you care about is nicotine. Like that is the most awful strategy to get someone to quit.

And so I yeah, I think it was a combination of many things that led me to a place where I started to look into the near future and say, what's my strategy? Like how do I get out of this?

00:12:58:07 - 00:13:13:02

Cynthia Loyst

Well, let's talk about that because, okay, so Nicorette's 30 Day No Smoke November. It actually challenges people to set a timeline. And you mentioned that one of your timelines was really wanting to quit before you turned 30. Why was that?

00:13:14:00 - 00:14:18:09

Tegan Quin

Yeah. Somewhere along the way, like in my late 20s, I read somewhere that, you know, if you quit smoking by the time you were 30, that your whole body just magically repairs, like your lungs will go back to, like, you know? Just like some weird article like that crossed my path and it just became this marker in my brain, like, be done by the time you're 30.

I just think that, yeah, there was a trend towards quitting. And I think nowadays obviously we have these, you know, people not drinking, you know, for a month and doing these challenges. But like that was so that was so not something that anyone was doing when I was in my 20s.

And so I didn't necessarily say, oh, I'm going to take a break from do this or that, but I just started to look toward the future and say, don't you don't want to be doing this when you're in your 30s. [Cynthia interjects: Yeah.] And so I kind of think I just held on to that article as a marker, as something to like, as a goal. I didn't increase my smoking, I didn't decrease my smoking. I just was like, this is something that has an end. I could be a nonsmoker.

00:14:18:09 - 00:14:52:17

Tegan Quin

I didn't have to be an ex-smoker. I didn't have to be a quitter. I could be a nonsmoker. And I felt very active. That felt like a choice. And, that's where that I held onto that, where I was like, I'm going to, I'm going to not be a smoker anymore. I'm going to not smoke. And I'm not going to smoke by the time I'm 30.

So it just became this language. I talked about it with everybody and I talked about it all the time. And like I said, I didn't increase it. I didn't decrease it initially. I just was like, this is when I'm stopping and it's going to be a choice, and I'm in charge and I'm in control of it. And I know that that is not how it works, but that's how I thought.

00:14:52:17 - 00:15:33:03

Cynthia Loyst

But I like that. I like that a lot because it's like you came up with an identity that, that, that you wanted to be and you were going to step into that. I also like this idea of timelines to say like, okay, by the time I'm 30, I'm going to be quitting. Any time you sort of decide, like, okay, on a timeline, I'm going to give myself until a certain age, certain day.

It helps anchor, I think, that decision in something. I definitely know for me it was it was a lot of like, experimentation. I also utilized the patch, I utilized gum. I'm so grateful to have had those kinds of crutches for my quitting smoking journey.

What would be your advice for young artists who are starting out and like you, they can't imagine what it would be like when they're 30, 40, 50. What advice would you give to them?

00:17:33:50 - 00:16:56:15

Tegan Quin

My advice to all people is just like, we're living in a really complicated world, and social media, you know, exaggerates some of the worst qualities in people. And, it makes us contrast and compare all the time. And, like, ultimately, all you can do is really, like, sit with yourself about what you're looking for and what you want and what you need, and for me, I knew I was in trouble with smoking because I was negotiating with myself all the time, and I became fatigued.

I became exhausted, and I think my advice would be, if you are doing that about anything, your weight, your body, your mental health, alcohol, drugs, smoking, a relationship. If you are constantly in a cyclical conversation with yourself and you are exhausted by that, that is the first step of like being like, okay, I have a problem, or I need to fix this thing, or I need to stop doing this thing, and I need to reach out to somebody and get resources and get help knowing when to say that to the people around you, to yourself. Like that's key. So just when that negotiating starts, that's the flag.

There's so many good reasons to not do it, but it's like also okay to just accept that sometimes we are not perfect. I'm not embarrassed to say it took years for me to figure out my plan to evacuate that plane. And when I did, I really haven't looked back.

You know, it's been really easy 16 years, almost now, 15 years of not smoking like I don't I don't miss it.

00:16:57:01 - 00:17:02:13

Cynthia Loyst

So I'm curious, why was it important for you to be a part of this podcast and share your quitting journey?

So I'm curious, why was it important for you to be a part of this podcast and share your quitting journey?00:17:03:09 - 00:18:02:08

Tegan Quin

A lot of our work with the Tegan and Sara Foundation, where we raise funds for LGBTQ organizations, so much of the sentiment of these amazing, grassroots, community driven organizations is saying, we are normal. We are human. We need each other. Community's important. We just need to provide these basic necessities for each other. It's like they've been healing me, like for ten years.

I've been like, right, I don't have to be an icon. I don't have to be a spokesperson. I don't have to be the lucky one who made it. I can just be me. And me is flawed and complicated and I can just be honest about that, you know? And I think that's why I said yes to doing this. When my manager emailed me about it I had no info, just was like, hey, there's going to be this, would you be open for a conversation about quitting smoking?

And like before I knew anything, you know, I was like, yeah, I think I would. I've never talked about it. So I feel like it would be really cool to talk about it. I've never talked about smoking, so let's talk about it.

00:18:02:50 - 00:18:20:22

Cynthia Loyst

Well, we're so glad you did, and you are iconic. So. Hold space for all of that. Thank you Tegan, so much for being here. [Frame focuses on Cynthia] This has been the Quitting Made Real podcast by Nicorette. Thank you so much for listening. And if you're thinking about quitting, remember it is never too late to make quitting real.

00:18:20:30

[Against a green background, white text appears reading “More Quitting Made Real Stories Coming 2026”. Below are two website URLs; Nicorette.ca/quittingmadereal and Nicorette.ca/fr/ArreterPourDeBon. The NICORETTE® Quitting Made Real is across the bottom of the green background.]

[Against a green background, the following white text appears: Guest appearances do not imply endorsement or partnership with NICORETTE® unless explicitly stated . All guests have been compensated for their time.” Below it is the NICORETTE® Quitting Made Real logo, with the Instagram logo on the left accompanied by @nicoretteca, and the YouTube logo on the right accompanied by @nicorette.canada]