

Up in smoke

Carr's method changes reasons for smoking into reasons not to

By MARY K. NOLAN
The Hamilton Spectator

To say it was miraculous would not be hyperbole.

That's the only explanation Rita van der Heiden can give for her success at quitting smoking recently after nearly three decades of failed attempts. Patches and gums, drugs and cessation courses didn't cure the former Hamiltonian of the habit she acquired at 15 and was desperate to break, not only for herself but for the two teenage daughters who were constantly harranguing her to quit.

As of today, she's been free of her pack-a-day addiction for five months and is still trying to figure out how it happened.

"I don't know why it works, I can't explain to you why, but it does," van der Heiden says of Allen Carr's Easyway To Stop Smoking, the method that's the latest buzz. "I think about smoking, but I don't want one. I have no desire to go down that road again."

It was 20 years ago this month that Carr, a middle-aged English accountant with a 33-year, 100-cigarettes-a-day habit, decided he simply didn't want to smoke anymore. Self-described as "the worst nicotine addict I have yet to meet," Carr stubbed out his last butt and has spent the intervening years refining what he — and 45,000 satisfied clients in the United Kingdom and Europe — believes is a fool-proof, painless and guaranteed technique to quitting.

His book of the same name has sold millions of copies and come out in five editions since it was first published in 1985. And now, the Easyway method is coming to Hamilton.

Damian O'Hara is Carr's disciple in Canada, a 39-year-old former executive with an international health care company in London. He defected to Carr's camp after attending an Easy-

way clinic four years ago and giving up a three-pack-a-day habit that had owned him for about 25 years.

"If you looked in the dictionary under hard-core smoker, there'd be a picture of me. I was going to go to my grave with a cigarette in my mouth," — and probably sooner than later, admits O'Hara. "My mother bought me the book in 1985. I read the first couple of pages and it scared me to death, so I put it back on the shelf where it stayed for years and years."

But during a serious bout of tonsillitis in January of 1999, O'Hara managed to go an entire day without a smoke and asked his wife to sign him up for one of Carr's half-day clinics in Wimbledon. By the time the course began, O'Hara was better and not interested in attending, "but my wife said 'We've paid. You're going.'"

"I figured if I'm going to sit there for five hours, I might as well listen." And five hours later, he went home a non-smoker.

The method is not mysterious, he insists, and it's not rocket science.

"Being a smoker is like being in a maze. You want to get out, but you don't know how. Allen Carr gives you a map to the maze, and you just walk out.

"We remove the fear of quitting. It's very methodical, very logical, very simple. People just sit there nodding their head because they get it," O'Hara says. "We deal with the illusions that make smoking desirable

and help people understand why they think they want to smoke. Then we shift the momentum from cigarettes as a solution to cigarettes as the problem. Other methods focus on the reasons people want to smoke; we show them that they don't really want to and here's why.

"The method is straight cognitive therapy."

The Easyway system reverses the

thinking that not smoking is some kind of self-denial or deprivation, O'Hara explains. Instead, it fingers smoking as the source of deprivation — of health, of freedom, of money, of self-respect — and gives smokers plenty of reasons to hate it.

"It flips the whole thinking on its head. We make them realize they don't want to do it and they don't need to do it. And you don't need willpower to not do

something you really don't want to do."

O'Hara has conducted about 20 clinics in Vancouver and 14 in Ontario since February 2002, and seen about 513 Canadian clients — only 12 of whom have asked for their money back. The company has never advertised, relying instead on word-of-mouth, doctors' referrals, and interest generated by the book. O'Hara doesn't even like the name, Easyway, figuring it makes potential clients even more skeptical than they already are.

The fear felt by would-be quitters is overwhelming, he says. And it's not fear of failure as much as fear of success, of having to live without "their little friend."

The clinics, which average 17 people, are "as murderous as a dentist's waiting room" when they start, but by the end, participants are thinking "Thank God I don't have to smoke anymore."

O'Hara is scouring downtown Hamilton for a permanent site for the Easyway clinics, which cost \$399 for five hours, unlimited followup if necessary and a money-back guarantee.

Ironically, until he finds a place, sessions will have to be held in hotel suites — "Attendees are welcome to smoke throughout the clinic, but nowadays, you can't find any place that allows smoking."

Need to know: Allen Carr's Easyway To Quit Smoking clinics start in Hamilton this summer. Information is available at www.allencarreasyway.com or by calling 1-866-NO NIC 99 (1-866-666-4299)

mnolan@thespec.com or 905-526-4689.

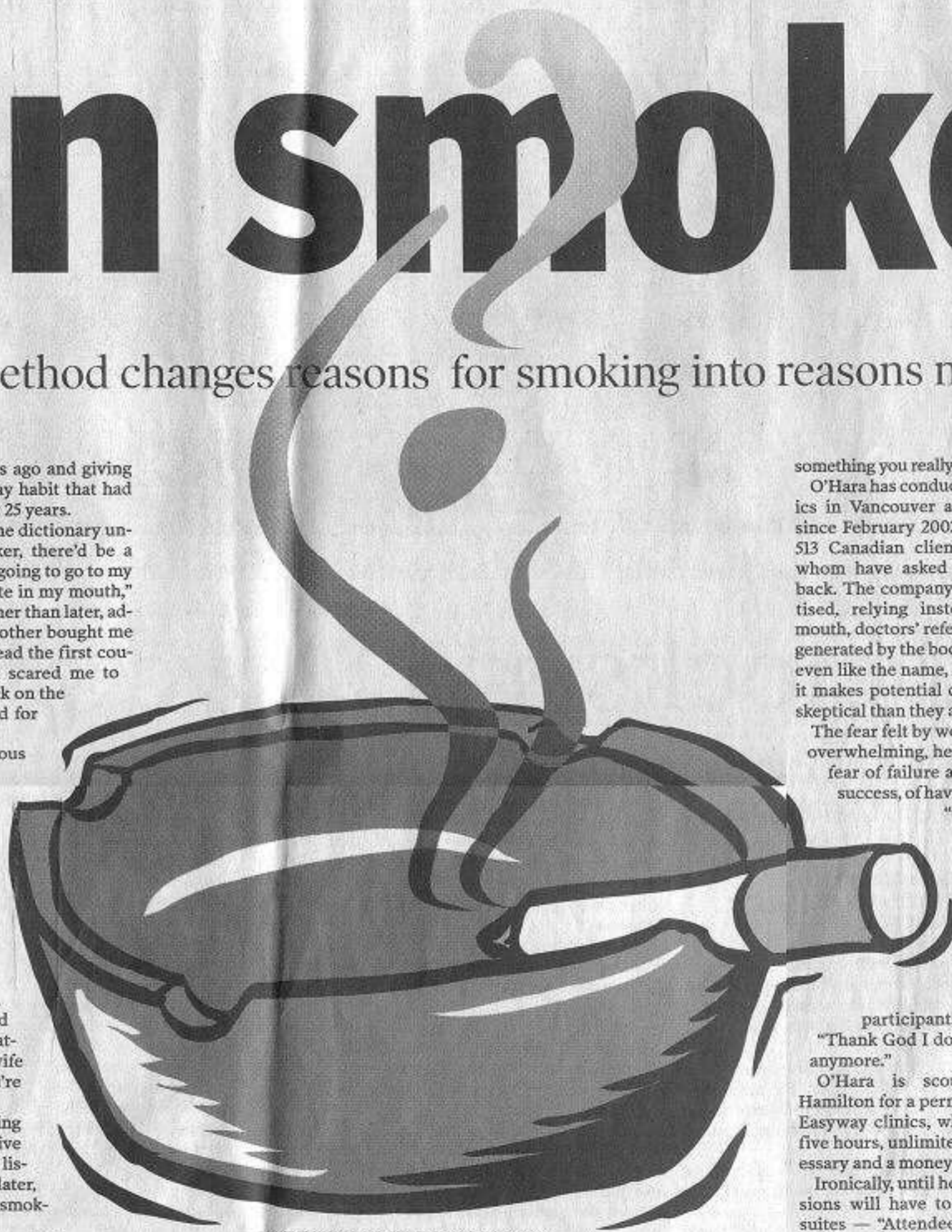


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