

Anyone Got A Time Machine?

Written by Smoke Signals

Wednesday, 31 December 2014 20:34 - Last Updated Friday, 02 January 2015 01:03

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More than ten years ago, we published a fiction piece (still available at Smoke Signals Online) about a smoking fetishist who built a time machine, so that he could travel back to a period when smoking was not only ubiquitous, but accepted and even encouraged.

It was one of our favorites among the stories we've published over the years; unfortunately the author never submitted the part two that he had promised to write.

If he happens to be reading this - all is forgiven, and this would be a terrific time to revisit that series, in light of the latest smoking statistics released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In 2013, the U.S. adult smoking rate hit its lowest point since statisticians started tracking the figure in 1965: 17.8%, a drop of more than three percent from 2005. "Current smokers" are also smoking fewer cigarettes each day (well under a pack) and fewer of them report smoking "every day." And the age group which had historically had the highest smoking percentage, 18-24, is now actually smoking less than those aged 25-44, 17% to 22%. Teen smoking rates have hit historic lows as well; for example, fewer than 5% of high school sophomores are now smokers, compared to 18% in the mid-90s. Clearly, the "next generation" of smokers is much smaller than the last. Anyone in the fetish community who had been holding out hope that the smoking rate would at least stabilize has to face reality: what we have to look forward to is a continued slow decline in the number of people who smoke - and a continued decline in sightings and encounters with smokers.

If you're up for road trips, the states which still have about a 25% smoking rate among women are West Virginia (27.1%), Kentucky (24.3%) and Indiana (23.9%), with the midwest the area with the highest smoking percentage overall. Native Americans and Native Alaskans (as a combined) group still have a rate of nearly 33% - the only ethnic group above 22%.

There is one interesting anomaly in the statistics; the smoking rate in the LGBT (lesbian, gay,

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bisexual and transgendered) community is markedly higher than the national average at 33%, compared to 20% among straight adults. We'll be interested to hear Vesperae's thoughts on the possible reasons for that large difference. (**Added 1/2**: See below for Vesperae's insightful (as always) thoughts on this.)

Our European readers know that the picture in their region - while still bleak - isn't quite as bad as it is in the States. The war on smoking continues in Europe and the overall EU smoking rate has declined sharply, primarily because of a huge drop in the U.K. But the region is still the heaviest smoking in the world (although those rates are skewed by a number of former Soviet republics where the male smoking rate is enormous).

And if you're looking for "good news," the latest available statistics show that the female smoking rate has actually increased over the last decade in Austria by nearly seven percent, while there have been smaller increases in France, the Czech Republic and Lithuania. Americans with the means to take an overseas road trip might think about Austria this year.

Or maybe we can combine our resources and get to work on that time machine?

Enjoy the January-February issue!

1/2: VESPERAE'S THOUGHTS ON THE LGBT STATISTICS CITED ABOVE:

I tend to take all smoking rate reports with a grain of salt anymore, because I have this strong suspicion that the numbers are significantly under-reported by survey respondents. Simply put, I have a hunch that closet smoking is way up.

As for the elevated rates of smoking in the LGBT Community (which matches my personal experience completely), from least to most important, I think that each of these factors play a

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role:

Higher rate of cigarette advertising in LGBT publications and establishments.

The look of various cigarettes (and cigars) make "gendered" statements about the identity of the smoker, helping to identify how butch or femme the smoker is.

Lower rates of parenting, which translates into lower concerns over second-hand smoke in the living environment, as well as lower concerns over longevity as it relates to taking care of and supporting children. Lower rates of parenting also translates into higher disposable/discretionary income.

Stigma/disenfranchisement leading to stress and higher rates of substance abuse and sexual addiction, with which smoking frequently coincides.

Stigma/disenfranchisement brands LGBT kids as "bad" from a young age. And for many, their escape from the shame and confusion that comes with this happens when they learn to own that feeling of being "bad" inside, and in the way that they project their ownership of that feeling to others. And what better way to project your "badness" than to light up for all the world to see? *Especially* in this day and age.

My \$0.02 ;)

- Vesperae