



Once upon a time, Lucky Strike enlisted the support of Santa (1936), a slender figure (1929), and Gary Cooper (1937) to push its product.



A light refresher cough on cigarette advertising

By ALAN BLUM

Those who look upon cigarette smoking as an inalienable right find it hard to believe that it is not even a time-honored tradition. Whereas tobacco has been used for thousands of years, cigarettes — the only tobacco product which requires inhaling — were not mass-produced until a century ago. Moreover, while about 4,000 cigarettes were smoked for every adult American last year, the per capita consumption in 1880 was 25!

How did cigarettes become a custom? It all had to do with a scientist named Koch, who suggested that spitting — constantly practised by cigar smokers and plug tobacco chewers — spread tuberculosis, the 19th century's most fearsome disease. It followed that a number of "anti-spitting" ordinances were passed. When tobacco manufacturers started fearing lost sales of cigars, they shifted gears into cigarettes.

Even before the concept of mass

media advertising, at least one manufacturer latched on to a daring sales concept. A pretty girl would be pictured on a series of trading cards. In addition to enhancing the image of the previously frowned upon cigarette, she could subtly refute the risk of any adverse health effect: Welcome cigarettes, for instance, were "a light and delicate smoke that you can indulge in continuously without any possible injurious effects." They had "a flavor that no other cigarette has ever obtained" and were "especially chosen on account of the small percentage of nicotine." Sounds familiar?

Even well into the 20th century, cigarette smoking still hadn't caught on — and definitely not among women. But with attractive advertising, the tobacco companies thought they'd be among the very first to give women one version of equal rights: "To Keep a Slender Figure, No One Can Deny, Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet." A well-promoted aura of romance and sophistication made smoking Camels synonymous with being a "social success." And a plethora of our

prettiest people — Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. and Jean Harlow, soon to be joined by Gary Cooper, John Wayne, Bob Hope, Gregory Peck, Rosalind Russell, and dozens of other movie stars — were our cigarette smoking models in the ads.

Oh, the companies did appeal to us to consider our health as well as our looks. They wanted children to learn from reading the Sunday funnies that smoking Camels could give them "healthy nerves." Listerine cigarettes, advertised by the Lambert Pharmaceutical Company, "relieved congestion in the nasal passages." The lungs also benefited from smoking. After all, couldn't athletes like Lou Gherig and Mel Ott say they smoked "as many as they please." Even Santa Claus found Lucky Strikes "easy on my throat."

In the 1940's, Lucky Strike Green went to War! And men in the armed forces also clamored for Camels. Any physician working in a Veteran's hospital over the past 30 years could see that they got them. With cigarettes tucked into krations and sold at 4¢ a pack, the military created an entire generation of

smokers who, far from being able to walk a mile for a Camel, became pulmonary cripples. It was as downright patriotic to smoke Philip Morris as it was to buy war bonds, and little Johnny could proclaim, "Call for Phillip Morris! Nobody ever asked why his growth was stunted."

And how did the industry respond to the early reports in the 1940's which associated cigarette smoking with a variety of chronic and lethal ailments? "More Doctors Smoke Camels Than Any Other Cigarette;" "Many Leading Nose and Throat Specialists Suggest Change to Phillip Morris;" "More Scientists and Educators Smoke Kent;" and "L & M, just What the Doctor Ordered."

These advertising messages appeared not just in print but on every major radio and television program, including most primetime news broadcasts. In the 1950s and 60s, to allay the anxiety of their customers, the tobacco industry came up with all sorts of "scientific achievements."

Kent's "micronite filter" (thought to have been made out of asbestos) led the way, with a material "so safe, so pure, it's used to filter the

air in many hospitals." Camel got a kid sister (with some added sugar and a filter) called Winston, which defied the grammarians by "tasting good like a cigarette should." And the Tareyton smoker, brandishing a filter of "activated charcoal," fought the Surgeon General in the streets rather than switch. Marlboro is our number one brand today, and the one named most by teenagers. With a filter, it's a rugged man's smoke, but without it — back in the 1940s and early '50s — it was a lady's favorite, "Mild as May."

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. The more things change, the more they remain the same. Have we really come a long way in our knowledge of the epidemics of smoking-related diseases, which began in the 1930s and are increasing by leaps and bounds (e.g. 2,000 lung cancer deaths in 1930, 100,000 in 1979)? Or do they still see us coming from a long way off?

They won't bother telling us the names of the hundreds of chemical additives used in cigarette manufacture, or that "tar" means "poison". But at every street corner and retail store and in almost every major

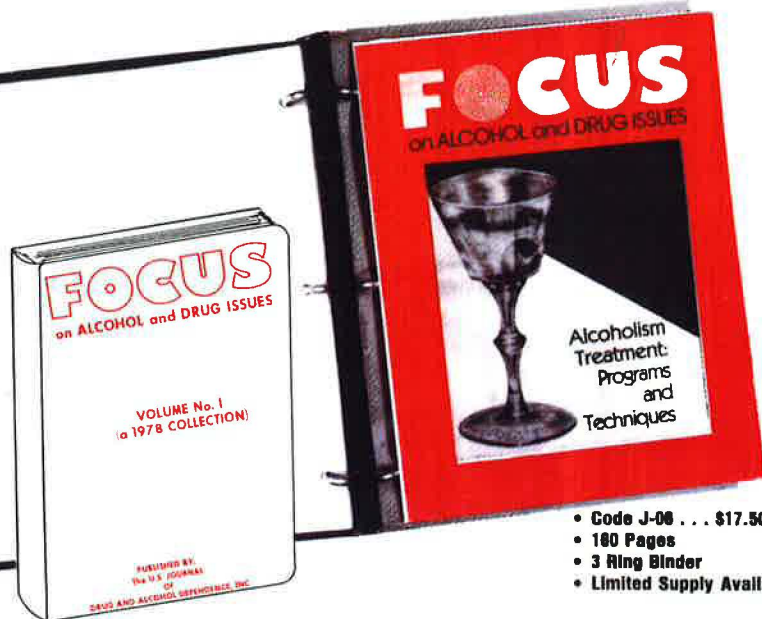
magazine and newspaper, they want us to see how they've co-opted the very words for truth: Fact, Merit, True, Real.

And it is the advertisers, not the editors, who decide where cigarette ads will be placed. Since too many of the old-time celebrities like John Wayne and Rosalind Russell contracted cancer, the cigarette companies arrange to be placed next to today's with-it people. It's cheaper than having to pay royalties, and, since magazine advertising isn't perceived as hard-sell as television, much more effective in the long run.

While an industry is being called to account for its actions by a concerned public, it is responding with more pretty people and more tough talk, more billboards and store displays, and more sponsorship of youth-oriented sports and entertainment events. They might as well use Richard Nixon's slogan, "Now more than ever." But meanwhile the motto of Philip Morris — maker of Marlboro, Virginia Silms, Merit, Parliament, and Benson & Hedges — does the job quite well: "Veni, vidi, vici!" (I came, I saw, I conquered.)

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