

## **Michele Hart Diary**

### **Friday 20th November 2009**

**3pm** – Frantically driving around Manchester trying to find the offices of Ford Campbell while smoking my last fag!

**3.15pm** – Arrive in the room a bit flustered and late to be greeted by a sea of male suits and a couple of female faces. We get the introductory chat and have the chance to ask questions. Most (not all) of us have read the manual in advance so there are no real surprises although it wasn't 100% clear that we couldn't have an alcoholic drink while under-going the treatment. I did have an inkling about this however and knew for certain that I was off the caffeine for three days which, despite enjoying far more red wine that is healthy for me, was far more of a concern for me than not being able to have a drink or two.

However the threat of a Friday night out in Manchester without a drink was enough to see the first three suits fall by the wayside and walk out. They did, however, promise to return at 9am the next morning to give the treatment a go, having persuaded Joe and Lorne to meet them a couple of hours earlier than the rest of us. "It's just that I simply can't go to this important event and drink bloody Coke," explained one of them. "I don't mean to be rude!" (One night with Rio eh?!).

**4pm** - I line up and go third to have a small patch of hair shaved from behind my ear. Most nerve racking! Then I'm wired up. At first I feel nothing but am encouraged to turn the intensity up and after a while I feel a slight tingle/crawling feeling behind my ears. The tingling is weirdly pleasant. I'm encouraged to turn it up or down depending on what feels best; given a few tips about not getting it wet and how to detach myself if I need a shower and then I'm asked to record (on a level of 0-3) how I feel against a set of different criteria such as irritability, headache, low energy and shakiness etc. I score quite low on all the criteria and wonder if some of these might go from 0-3 within 24 hours of being off the nicotine!

**5pm** - Drive home and notice how filthy the inside of my car is. Might just have to give it a bit of a valet over the weekend. Head to the shops to stock up on juices, diet ginger beer and decaff coffee plus some healthy snacks in case I need to feed my face every five minutes. Do decide to treat myself to a KFC on the way home. Yum, a well deserved treat!

Head up to the in-laws to see the kids who are staying there this evening while Martin and I go to a gig. Haven't told the boys about my plans so they're a bit freaked when I walk in with wires hanging down from behind my ears! (Not that they're that noticeable, especially with a scarf on). I explain the treatment and they both punch the air with delight in the hope that mum is never going to smoke a cigarette again. After trying to quit so many times I really hope I'm not going to disappoint them again this time.

**6.30pm** – Home and Martin has kindly cleared all smoking debris from the house, washed the ash trays etc and is now partaking of his own fags in the greenhouse (it's his favourite place anyway!). Not feeling too bad about the cigs. I think about them all the time of course. As a heavy smoker this is going to be one hard habit to break. But realise that's all it is. A habit. And an addiction. But I'm confident the N20s will help the addiction side of things. I know breaking the habit is down to me.

**8.30pm** – Realise my clothes and the house stink of smoke. First mini cravings kick in but more fleeting thoughts and habit rather than that real gnawing ache and wanting to cry that I normally get when I try and stop.

**9pm** – Drive to Manchester to see the Alabama 3 completely straight. No fags. No booze. Not even any caffeine. And you know what. They were fab! I even had a bit of a dance! Cast my mind back to the last time I enjoyed myself so much at a gig without booze, fags or indeed other mood enhancing substances and realise it was when I went to see Depeche Mode at the age of 14!

Trainspotting author Irvine Welsh once said: "This is the first band I could ever dance to in the daytime hours without chemical assistance...and that says a lot". Hear, hear Irvine – it was night-time but I managed it without booze, caffeine or fags either!

**11pm** – Gig over and we walked out of Manchester Academy through a stinking fug of cigarette smoke (Martin, naturally, lit up the minute we walked out of the main entrance as it seems did every other smoker in there). Yuk! It really stunk. Can honestly say the revolting smell was stronger than any urge I had to have a cigarette. Drove home (what a novelty this no drinking is! Suspect if I'd been drinking and smoking we'd have been backstage saying hello to our old mates and well up for a party!) and started craving a bag of chips. All chippies shut so decided to go for a plate of oven chips and ketchup washed down with ginger beer when I got home. Lovely! And didn't feel too guilty since I'd only had a mini fillet burger and three hot wings at 6pm.

**Midnight** – headed to bed and slept pretty much straight away.

### **Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2009**

**8am** – Woke up feeling fine and refreshed and had a glass of mango juice to start the day along with porridge. A change from my usual coffee and two fags. Did make a decaff after breakfast though.

Had slept really well and felt refreshed. Slight craving for cigarettes but the biggest urge I have is for a proper coffee.

Drive into Manchester to get my wires checked and see Starbucks and Costa signs everywhere!

**10.30am** – Arrive feeling very gungho. It's no miracle cure but so far I've found being off the cigarettes relatively easy and certainly nowhere near as hellish as on previous quit attempts. Am told my wires are in good shape. Joe takes my scores again (all still quite low – he puts the feelings of slight fatigue and the mild headache down to caffeine withdrawal) and I'm free to go.

Find I want to hang around and chat to the others about their experiences. (In fact this is one area where I personally would have liked a bit more support – swapping numbers, encouraging us to talk on facebook perhaps or having our own closed online forum to share feelings/experiences not just throughout the treatment but going forwards as well).

Am shocked to discover the three suits never showed at 9am this morning despite making special arrangements to come in early. They didn't even call. Rude? Yes! Scared? Very! And to be honest their failure to face up to their stopping smoking fears really spurs me on.

**Midday** - Enjoy a busy afternoon, first at St Ann's Hospice Christmas Fair (my client) with my youngest and my mum in law then a hospital appointment (bizarre Saturday afternoon annual check up with specialist). Got drenched walking back to the car after the hospital which put me in a very bad mood! Home and my decaff coffee did NOT hit the grumpy spot. Was suddenly very irritable and started craving a cigarette quite badly. Snapped at the kids. Wanted to raid the fridge (but didn't). Worst I've felt in 24 hours.

**6pm** - We were supposed to be having dinner with friends this evening but it's off. Probably a good thing with me not being able to have a drink. Also am really looking forward to my usual Saturday night routine of Pizza and X Factor with the kids (but will seriously miss my bottle of red wine that is part of the usual package!).

Suddenly it seems like I have a very long night ahead of me. Find myself playing a two hour game of Monopoly with Martin and the kids which they loved. After about an hour I even found myself secretly enjoying it instead of enduring it like I usually do (when all excuses for a game of Monopoly have finally run out!).

**8pm** - X Factor! (Ollie disappoints tonight!) followed by I'm a Celebrity plus pizza and chips with salad.

**10pm** - Get through the evening and still enjoy it but have found it quite hard going tonight. Getting sick of ginger beer, varying fruit juices and am so not impressed by the non-alcoholic spritzer I picked up in Aldi even if it does look like a bottle of white wine!

Find myself short-tempered and irritable and the cravings for a cigarette are quite strong - but certainly still bearable. Again nothing like as bad as before and nowhere as bad as eating Kangaroo balls and cockroaches like Katie and Kim on I'm a Celebrity. Every time

Martin heads out the back door I know he's gone to the greenhouse for a smoke and kind of feel jealous but also smug. Does that make sense?

Think about my lovely boys. Think about those awful adverts on TV at the moment ('Mum, I know you're watching and I really don't want you to die') and remind myself why I'm doing this. Think about people in St Ann's Hospice. Think about my Dad and the sad and frightening way he died because of cigarettes. Think about the promises I made him and myself. Think about how scared I get sometimes when I wheeze and cough in bed. Think about getting emphysema myself and being wired up to oxygen 24/7 like Dad was.

Sit and think of future parties, nights out and holidays and have the usual feelings of sadness and mild depression that I'll never be able to enjoy myself again without a cigarette. Realise this is just stupid. The occasions will be just the same without nicotine! It's only the withdrawal/addiction which is giving me these harmful messages at the moment. Think about all my non-smoking friends (most of them) and realise they can enjoy themselves perfectly well without smoking. They can dance, they can laugh, they can drink, they can talk, they can chill and I realise I can too!

Martin is great. He praises my efforts and says I might think I want a cigarette but I don't otherwise I wouldn't be trying so hard to stop smoking. Again I realise it's just the drug addiction that's talking to me. The little monster on my shoulder who wants me to stay hooked.

**11pm** - Feel a bit sad and shaky but okay really and decide to go to bed with my book. Read for about five minutes then fall asleep straight away.

## **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2009**

**7am** – A restless night. Woke very early and couldn't get back to sleep. Kept thinking obsessively about decorating the lounge and rearranging furniture in readiness for Christmas (so not me!). Decided to get up in the end and started my day again with porridge and mango juice followed by decaff coffee. One of the boys already up watching last night's I'm a Celebrity.

Quite restless and agitated this morning and the urge for a cigarette still there and certainly stronger than on the first day. Still bearable though.

Keep myself busy by cleaning out some kitchen cupboards and the windows, feeding the kids breakfast, sorting out all the washing and putting away clean clothes etc. Stop for regular decaff coffee breaks. Managing quite well on the snacking front and not been stuffing my face as much as usual.

**11am** - Getting rattled because bored with doing housework and Martin is still in bed despite being called several times. Kids start to play up so make them clean their bedrooms and then have a big row with the oldest (10) over his homework project. Works though as he eventually gets on with it!

Do have a few problems with the machine this morning as I'm still wearing my jim jams so have no pocket to put it in – keep dropping it or it comes unplugged so I decide I need to have a bath and get dressed. Unplug, have a nice soak, get dressed and plug myself back in!

**Midday** – Sit down for a healthy lunch with the kids (beans, toast and scrambled egg with grapes and fresh juice). Martin doesn't want any as he's only just up! Never realized scrambled eggs tasted so yummy!

**2pm** – Still keeping myself busy. Peel the veg for tonight's roast dinner, sort the kids pocket money out and decide to let Alfie go to the shops for the first time alone to buy Match Attack cards. Martin running around doing various errands. Dylan chilling in front of 'How Clean is Your House' (Strange child!).

**3pm** – Update online diary. Kids now playing football in the house. Might get rattled again soon but realise I would anyway with or without the cigs. About to stop typing diary and realise this is the hardest thing about stopping smoking. Am so used to 'rewarding' myself with a cigarette when I finish a task that I kind of don't want to finish doing something as I won't know how to reward myself when I do. Decide to read the News of the World!

**4pm** – Game of Cluedo and a cup of camomile tea while waiting for the roast chicken to cook. Yes - Mrs White, Spanner, Library. I won! And I didn't think about a cigarette once apart from when it was Martin's turn and he was in the greenhouse – again! Felt a bit sorry for him. Planning a big soggy dog walk after dinner.

**6pm** – Lovely Sunday Roast dinner. Took the dogs out straight afterwards despite the rain and they got a longer walk than usual. Kind of enjoyed it! Home and another decaff, felt fine about not having a cigarette. Still thought about one but didn't bother me not having one.

**7pm** – Spent the rest of the evening watching TV with the kids and Martin. First James May's Toy Stories, then X Factor then I'm a Celebrity (once kids gone to bed). Enjoyed another decaff coffee and some Terry's (Dylan's!) Chocolate Orange,

**9pm** – Slight headache but no major cigarette urges. Thoughts but not urges and no climbing the walls, even when Martin slips out to the greenhouse.

**10pm** - Camomile tea and news before bed. Tried to have a sofa snuggle tonight but Martin stunk too much so returned to the armchair! Looking forward to getting unplugged in the morning and to a life of freedom from cigarettes at long bloody last! Not to mention a big fat Costa and a nice glass of red or two with maybe some pasta tomorrow evening.

**11pm** – Lay in bed thinking about never smoking again. Felt like I was in the process of reinventing myself. Thought some more then realised what a load of tosh this thought was. Am giving cigarettes far more status than they deserve. I do not need to reinvent myself. EVERYTHING about my life will be just the same apart from the fact that I won't have a piece of paper with tobacco inside it in my hand or mouth all the time. Realised it was the power of the drug which was making me think I needed to reinvent myself. Am just fine as I am. Stupid bloody nicotine. Why give it any more thought?!

**Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2009**

**7am** – Slightly unsettled night with a couple of unpleasant dreams which woke me but nothing too horrific and managed to drop back off to sleep again quite easily. Up and ready to start the week. Mango juice, decaff coffee and porridge with sultanas for breakfast then sat in rush hour traffic for ages to go and get unplugged! Felt strangely emotional/almost on the verge of tears but in a nice way during the drive in.

**9.30am** – Met with Joe and Lorne again and got unplugged. Had a nice chat about how I felt. Kind of didn't want to say goodbye but realised it's all down to me now so shook their hands, promised to continue to write about my experience and said I would only feel confident that I was indeed free of the addiction to nicotine in 12 month's time.

**10.30am** – Back home and at my desk. Had a proper coffee (didn't actually taste that great!) and a couple of slices of toast and Marmite when I got home before starting work. Determined to eat healthily and avoid the usual trap of stuffing my face to feed any cigarette urges (how can food feed an urge for a drug?). Past quit attempts have failed as the weight has piled on rapidly. Having strange thoughts about going for a run tonight!

**11am** – About to go and put the kettle back on – and believe it or not I want a decaff coffee not a normal one. What have you done to me?!