

# Secrets / Cigarettes

*by* Jowell Tan

We gave our cigarettes names.

David's Viceroy was, well, Roy. Jacky's Marlboros were christened Marks, and my Dunhills didn't have a name, because hey, no name with a D in it could have been cool enough in my book.

Although we were old enough to smoke, it was still hard for us to have a decent smoke break between lessons - we had to take the lift down and walk 5 minutes to the smoking point outside the school gate. So, being lazy bastards, we would sneak off to the restroom to get our nicotine fix. We had a code of some sort - David would shout "*Dude, I'm off to meet Roy!*" Jacky and I, upon hearing it, would slink off quietly out of the classroom, or project room, or wherever, and rendezvous outside the restroom door, and after a quick surveillance of the area for any hidden security cameras, retrieve our cigarettes and light them up.

I am more than certain that everyone knew exactly we were doing, and just never ratted us out. That was just how it was. No one sold anyone down the river.

In our quiet corners of the "smoking point" we would shoot the breeze. Moaning about project mates, laughing over funny incidents, films we'd just seen, anything. All was fair game, and all was discussed with equal amounts of humor and seriousness. Once we stayed behind till late to finish up our work, and while smoking the topic of our futures came up. David wanted to work in the media field, Jacky wanted to be the WSOP world champion (although he was always joking around, leaving the veracity of this statement in doubt), and I wanted to be a writer. We discussed the pros and cons of each field, defending our choices vigourously and in such deep conversation until we almost got caught when the security guard came in to take the leak. Luckily, he hadn't sniffed us out, or we'd have been expelled, destroying all chances at fulfilling our destinies.

Soon, graduation came and went, we took photos with each other, we promised to hang out with each other, play cash games whenever

we could, and never leave each other cold. However, of course, such promises were quickly forgotten, in the face of the difficulties of adulthood and working society. Now, the quiet nights when I light my cigarette still bring me back to those times, accompanied by the guilt of being unable, or rather not bothering, to keep my word to those two. The ash falls to my feet, as does my heart, longing to return to an earlier time, when it was simpler and easier to get through, and being an adult was still far away from us. But despite all that, I've still never called them up, or even texted them on their birthdays. And I don't think I ever will.

However, I do know that Jacky was being serious about his ambition - He appeared on the newspaper a few days back, as the first Singaporean to hit the final table of the WSOP. I suppose some dreams do come true.

