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## Around Town

### Doctor: A smoking Svengali

January 16th, 2008 issue

By Dominik Jůn

FOR THE POST

The first time I heard of Rostislav Prokopjuk was when a Czech acquaintance mentioned that he had managed to stop smoking for six months following a visit to a Prague clinic run by a Ukrainian doctor.

"I just went in and was made to smoke two cigarettes in a row while the man said things like 'disgusting weed' over and over again," he recounted. "Then I came out and just didn't want to smoke anymore."

It sounded too strange to be true. What was the secret?

Prokopjuk says his work is quite straightforward, based on what he calls "faith in an ability to change" and bio-energy. My concerns that Prokopjuk could be some kind of charlatan were largely dispelled as we talked. It costs 3,000 Kč (\$170) for the procedure, which includes a one-year guarantee. He told me that about 10 percent of the people he sees end up coming back.

I sat down on a sofa, right next to a horrible-looking ashtray overflowing with cigarettes and abandoned packs of all kinds of brands of cigarette.

Prokopjuk sat very close to me, right in my personal space. He looked me deep in the eye and told me to light up. I felt rather self-conscious and silly with each puff I took.

"Do you like yourself?" asked the doctor.

"Err ... yes," I replied.

"Have you ever smoked before?"

"Of course," I said, missing his point.

"Could you manage to tell me that you had never smoked a cigarette in your life?"

Ever the cynic, I replied, "But I can't lie and say 'yes' and really believe it."

The doctor smiled and nodded, understanding my dilemma.

"OK, I have never smoked before." I finally said, going along with the game.

All the while, I was hearing those subconscious verbal stabs that I had heard about. With each puff of my cigarette, I heard the words "disgusting weed" "horrible, foul, toxic fumes" and so on.

I nervously stubbed out my cigarette, but Prokopjuk soon asked me to have another one. Of course only the worst kind of chain-smoker wouldn't find that a bit disgusting.

So I lit up, really not wanting to smoke the damn thing at all.

Prokopjuk's deep stare was making me feel horribly self-conscious and ridiculous each time I drew the weed toward my mouth.

About halfway through, I stubbed the thing out, my mind convinced that I had been doing something truly pointless and insane. I placed my pack of cigarettes next to the ashtray, determined to leave it behind.

After we said our goodbyes, and I received my guarantee card, I made my way outside. I really had absolutely no desire to smoke at all.

Several hours later, a rather sneaky thought enters my mind. What would happen if I did smoke? Would I feel sick? Would I go crazy? I was determined to get the better of my programming — yes, I fully concede that this was a completely stupid and ridiculous way of proving a point.

So, I lit up. In fact, I really forced myself. I didn't even enjoy that cigarette, but the sad point was that, after that, it was back to smoking again for me.

I really should take Prokopjuk up on his offer of a return visit. I guess that's a matter of will power.

I can't really describe Prokopjuk's procedure as a miracle, but nor will I describe it as a fraud. If you want to stop, Prokopjuk's techniques seem designed to really make you believe that you should and can kick the habit.

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