

APPENDIX 1: FULL TRANSCRIPTS

First interview: Abyss

- Alice Ah, Abyss, thank you so much for helping me with my interview today. Let me tell you a bit about my background. So, I am actually ... I studied in Hong Kong. I studied at the Chinese University. After my graduation, I started working in marketing, coz I studied BBA. So, err ... I have an intense interest in psychoanalysis, which is a stream of psychology. I am studying at a school in England, University of Essex, for a PhD degree, part time. I need to study six, seven years, and I have two more years to go before graduation.
- Abyss OK, six, seven years...
- Alice Yes, it is a long period, pretty hard, but worth it. In this PhD programme, I need to write a thesis, and I have taken an interest in the kind of sensation smoking gives to people.
- Abyss OK.
- Alice Smoking ... What kind of feeling does it give to people? What kind of world do people experience when they are smoking? These are the study areas I am interested in. So, I contacted Soso to find me a few university students to interview. You are one of them. I have found eight, altogether. You are one of the eight respondents who will help me understand the sensation / experience of smoking. In the coming hour, I won't just ask questions about smoking. What I am also interested in is your story. I want to know how you see yourself, like "What kind of a person I am", "How I would introduce myself and narrate my story". During the session, I don't want to speak too much. I want you to speak. Also, I will ask you a couple of questions, just say whatever that comes to your mind even if you are speaking about something else. For example if I ask you about A but B comes to your mind, then just speak about B. It doesn't matter. There is no right or wrong, coz what I am really interested in is your story.
- Abyss OK.
- Alice Before we start, do you have any questions?
- Abyss Not for now.
- Alice OK. Good. I think the first thing I want to know about you is ... can you introduce yourself... Abyss... your name is quite interesting, who gave you this name Abyss?
- Abyss Err ... The name Abyss was given to me by my daddy. Initially, I was called Joe. After a while, when I got to primary school, I began to think it was sissy. Actually the name Abyss (its meaning) is related to the sound of my Chinese name, which is Sum. Moreover, no one uses this name, so that's it, I started using it.
- Alice Very special.
- Abyss I am twenty one years old. I am studying for a high diploma. I'm going to be in year one. I quit school before. I gave up studying and worked. Now I've picked it up (studying) again and am catching up slowly.
- Alice So you didn't want to study back then?
- Abyss Yeah right, right. I wanted to earn money.
- Alice How old were you at the time?
- Abyss That was when I was fifteen.
- Alice Fifteen years old, that was six years ago, quite young.

- Abyss Six years ago, yeah. Why so? There was a time when I broke up with my girlfriend. Well, it is very common with young lads. I was heartbroken, so what did I do? I went out drinking. I went out drinking so much and friends swarmed in to join me. Every time we were in a group of ten to twenty. Once, there was a bartender who talked to me, "Hey, you are so popular. You have so many friends. Let's not waste this opportunity. Why don't you bring them to drink at my place exclusively. I'll pay you a certain amount per head." I said to him "Really? I could earn money just by doing that?" "Yes. We call these people promoters." "OK," I said. Basically, I never had to pay for drinks except for that first time. I didn't need to pay for my drinking just because I picked up the role of "promoter." After two or three times, a party company representative came to me and asked said something similar, "Hey, you have so many friends. Why don't we do something about it? The bar pays you \$30 to \$50 per head. I can pay you \$80 to \$100 per head." I said "Why not?" So I tried it out. It is only too natural that my school results were dropping coz I went out drinking so much. That was OK, as long as it got me money. So, over time, my customer base grew from tens to hundreds. Gradually, when I had more money, I started buying my friends meals. They were wondering how a young person like me had so much money. I said "Yeah, coz I am doing this. Do you want to join?" From then onwards... yeah, I got fifty, sixty people with me. Over time, I set up my own operation and became a party organiser myself. Yeah, I have worked since I was fifteen, until twenty. Yeah.
- Alice This is very interesting. Let me see. So, in other words ... because of your big network of friends and acquaintances, these opportunities just came to you. You took your friends to particular bars, or go to certain party venues, and you made more and more money from it. Those friends you pulled in, were they your classmates or friends? How did you get to know them?
- Abyss Actually I don't really know. I just went out to join gatherings and activities and you meet people. I say to them, "Hey, why don't you come to our party and have fun. Many beautiful girls and boys." Just like that, yeah.
- Alice You used WhatsApp to make contact?
- Abyss It was the SMS era. So I texted them, "Do you want to come out for fun?" Technology wasn't so advanced then, and not many people are familiar with texting messages. Yeah, coz I was fifteen at that time, SMS was just getting popular. In those days, bar owners didn't realise there were any problems with people under eighteen being allowed into bars.
- Alice Ah, right.
- Abyss I was only fifteen, and even I got to host parties. By the time I reached seventeen, eighteen, the police began to take action on this. It happened frequently two, three years ago. A few hundred got arrested here, and another few hundred got arrested there. The people arrested were those under-aged attendants of our parties.
- Alice Oh, what were you responsible for when hosting those parties?
- Abyss Scouting venues, stocking up on alcohol... coz the bars have no idea about these parties. A bar usually caters for forty, fifty people, let's say. For parties like ours, the number is increased to a hundred forty to a hundred fifty. One time, it even went to four hundred!
- Alice Wow, four hundred people in a bar.

Abyss Yeah. So I needed to speak to them about stocking up on alcohol for four hundred people, and then, the most important part when we bought out the entire venue, was that we need to find guests. We made a profit if the number was above four hundred and a loss if the number was below.

Alice Oh. So the guests just come, enjoy the music, dance, make friends and drink.

Abyss Yes.

Alice Wow, you were quite an old hand at such a young age, and you've done it for five years!

Abyss Yeah, lucky, very lucky, especially when I was sixteen, seventeen years old. I earned about ten thousand dollars a month back then.

Alice Wow, so smart. So when you were fifteen... fifteen years old, shouldn't you be in form three? Form three, form four?

Abyss Yes, something like that.

Alice You studied until form three, form four, and you quit?

Abyss I quit school in form four.

Alice So, you mainly worked at organising those activities. What made you think about going back to school?

Abyss I started thinking about what I could do besides that, nothing probably. I knew hardly anything, not much English! Now what? Daddy is really something, he's smarter. He is the Design Director of Disneyland on the mainland.

Alice The one in Shanghai, was it open?

Abyss Yes, yes. He was in Guangzhou, responsible for the product design and fashion shows. All those were managed by him. So it was the time when he was earning almost ten thousand dollars a month, yeah. But my income was not stable. It was no good for me if I carried on like that. Also, it was getting more and more difficult. Law enforcement by the police was getting tighter. For example, the license granted to the bar was for seventy people, and I had one hundred and forty there. Therefore, it was illegal. But if I reduced it to fewer than one hundred people, I couldn't make enough money. The pressure was getting bigger and bigger, so I decided to quit. That's why I'm going back to school... to study design, so I wouldn't get worried about my future job opportunities, given my daddy's network.

Alice And you daddy is in design, so it's the same field. Are there different kinds of design?

Abyss There is image design and fashion design. He is in fashion design. A while ago, he was in TVB and he was the costume designer for the drama series "If Heaven has Love".

Alice Oh, the one with Andy Lau!

Abyss Umm. He was the costume director. The wedding gown was his selection.

Alice Wow, that's really something. You father is quite an accomplished man.

Abyss Oh, yes. He is.

Alice Is he still with Disney in Guangzhou?

Abyss Umm.

Alice At the moment, is he actually in Hong Kong, or in Guangzhou?

Abyss He is in Guangzhou.

Alice In Guangzhou.

Abyss He is divorced.

Alice You live with your father, or mother?

Abyss I live with my mother.

Alice They were divorced, when was it?
 Abyss It should be when I was six years old.
 Alice Six years old, (you were) very little, in primary two only.
 Abyss Primary one, primary one.
 Alice Oh, primary one.
 Abyss It should be when I was three, four years old, they separated. Coz I never saw them together. When I was with daddy, we didn't talk about my mum. Sometimes I was with my granny.
 Alice You have been with your mum from when you were little.
 Abyss NO!
 Alice No?
 Abyss I was with my granny. Then I went back to the mainland to study for two years. So why at fifteen, I went out drinking? I was broken-hearted. I was so stressed during the two years when I studied in the mainland. Studying in Hong Kong actually gives me more freedom, and of course there is even more freedom studying overseas. Up there (in the mainland), the pressure was huge. I was up at six, studying until six in the evening and then it was dinner time. One hour activities after dinner, then back to studying after those activities. Then I studied until nine at night. Sometimes there was no break and I had to study until ten at night. After that, I returned to the boarding house and slept. I was boarding Monday to Friday. When it got close to tests or examinations, I had to stay in school two weeks in a row attending classes on Saturday and Sunday. Wow, I felt so compressed as there was a lot going on, especially for someone from Hong Kong like me. Back then I detested Mandarin, even from when I was in primary one. Mandarin was the first paper I failed in primary one. The first paper I ever failed in my life! I was so afraid to show it to my family. They didn't know about that, coz I didn't tell them until long afterwards. This Mandarin thing is such a big problem for me in the mainland. I had communication breakdown with other people. Teachers were fine, but the classmates, they thought I was arrogant. Sometimes I just fiddled with my hands and made noises. I did that for a year to get used to the situation there, to get used to relationships with people. Nothing else. When I finished my second year, I could not take it anymore. I wanted to go back to Hong Kong. Granny was old and it was no longer suitable for me to stay with her. Under normal circumstances, people her age should be looked after by others, not to look after others. So I went to stay with my mum. Because of what happened when I was little, initially I rather detested my mum, so it was difficult for me. But I got used to it over time...

Alice How old were you when you moved to the mainland?
 Abyss Should be fourteen, fifteen years old.
 Alice Fourteen, fifteen years old, so you were in secondary school.
 Abyss Yes.
 Alice Was that your request to go back to the mainland to study?
 Abyss No. It was ... mostly forced. Ever since I was little, the concept of money was infiltrated in me and my family. At that time, as far as I know, my dad tried out a business venture but he ended up with piles of debt. Our door almost got poured with red paint (loan shark's usual tricks). So my dad said, "OK, I will cut your pocket money if you don't come to the mainland." Wow, I was so scared, I needed pocket money. "You are going to cut off my money supply? No kidding!" So I went back with

them.

Alice Was that your father?

Abyss Yes. Besides threats, there were baits too. He said if I went to China with him, I could live in a big house and drink good wine. He would take me to western restaurants once for a while, and eat like upper class people. Why not? So I agreed to go with him.

Alice Where exactly in the mainland?

Abyss Man Kong. I lived in Fu Men before, but went to school in Man Kong.

Alice Where is Fu Men, in the south?

Abyss No. It is in Dongguan.

Alice Dongguan!

Abyss Schools there are mostly private. The school fees was a few thousand a month.

Alice The schools that have lots of International students...?

Abyss Some. But mainly sons of rich families from the north.

Alice Oh, those schools...

Abyss So, I was in one of those schools. That's why I had communication breakdown. Especially the teachers, their rolling tongue (accent) was completely unintelligible! That (communication breakdown) happened in the first two years when I was new there. Now I have no problem with conversations or any communication in Mandarin.

Alice Also, you were very little. Usually you won't get any accent if you start learning a new language when you are a teenager, and you learn it fast.

Abyss You can say that. Now I am out of practice. After all, I don't live there anymore. The most important thing is to get people to understand you when you talk to them. I think there is no problem at all (now).

Alice And you were in a boarding house when you lived up there. You went back home only on Saturday and Sunday?

Abyss I went back home Friday night, and back to the school Sunday afternoon.

Alice So were you quite excited every Friday, finally leaving the school?

Abyss Yeah, yes.

Alice Home, going home!

Abyss Like being released from prison! The feeling was like "a complete let go!"

Alice Did you have your own room, or did you share with others?

Abyss Eight people to a room

Alice Eight people to a room. So all bunk beds?

Abyss Bunk beds.

Alice Were you okay living like that?

Abyss Not okay. Well, things in the mainland... the bed linen, all are like that... And we must use those provided by the school. So those things from the mainland... lots of room for improvement! Fleas, mosquitoes all the time. No air-conditioning because they wanted to save money.

Alice Wow!

Abyss Yeah. They didn't turn on the air-conditioning even when the temperature got to thirty, forty degrees. Also, there was no air-conditioning in the classrooms.

Alice Wow, people could easily get killed by the heat!

Abyss It's like that in private schools. Just imagine what those public schools are like!

Alice You pay thousands for fees and that was what you got?

Abyss That's right.

Alice Did you eat in the school canteen? Was the food okay?

Abyss To me, it was not okay at all. Yeah, only after 6 months did I start to get used to the food. After that, I just gobbled down the food.

Alice "Gobble" means eating something even if it was bad. You didn't want to get hungry, so whatever was given, you just swallowed everything and be done with it.

Abyss I ate more because I wanted to bulk up, so I wouldn't get bullied.

Alice Oh, but you look slim now.

Abyss Coz I lost weight after I returned to Hong Kong.

Alice Oh. You lost weight after you returned here. So it is true that people put on weight in the mainland. Incidentally, I worked in the mainland for two years, in Guangzhou, sent there by my company. I lived in a big house paid for by the company, but I was not happy. Family, friends, they were all in Hong Kong. So I travelled back to Hong Kong every Friday evening, and took the Monday morning train back to Guangzhou. I made my way from Shenzhen to Guangzhou as soon as the border opened.

Abyss Oh. Did you get up at four or five o'clock in the morning?

Alice Yeah, yeah. You are right.

Abyss Yes, yeah, now that I recall my father was like that too. He was also working in Guangzhou, just like you. Every Friday, he'd come back as soon as he finishes work!

Alice Couldn't wait to rush back home.

Abyss Yeah, rush back home. And no way he would return on Sunday, over his dead body.

Alice Yeah. Same as me.

Abyss He'd return to Guangzhou only on Monday.

Alice I was like that too. Coz I really didn't like working in the mainland. So, before you went up there, did you live with your granny, in Hong Kong?

Abyss Yes.

Alice And you didn't see your father and mother?

Abyss Didn't see them a lot. Mum sometimes dropped by for free meals. That's it.

Alice Free meals?

Abyss Yes, something like that.

Alice How often did you see your mum?

Abyss Then, I saw my mum twice a week, and my daddy once a fortnight or once a month.

Alice Saw him once a fortnight or a month?

Abyss Umm.

Alice Apparently they came to see you at different times?

Abyss Right, they wouldn't cross paths or run into each other. My daddy is very good at socialising and he has many friends. He also likes drinking a lot. So when he came back, my mum... during those days, my mum would not be around. My old man came home at eleven, twelve or even two, three o'clock in the morning. Sometimes, he would wake me up for breakfast, and I would show him my homework. Other times, it was two, three o'clock in the morning when he woke me up from my bed after he came home from drinking. Something's wrong with him!

Alice When you were little, did he hit you?

Abyss He beat me when I got expelled from school. He beat me when I was six, and also before I was six.

Alice Before six?

Abyss Yes. And afterwards, he beat me when I was kicked out of school.

Alice When you got kicked out of school?

Abyss That's when I was in form four.

Alice Form four.

Abyss So why did I get expelled? What happened was that I got half of my class to go out to have fun with me.

Alice Umm... that...

Abyss Yes.

Alice Out, you mean to party with you?

Abyss Yes, and while we were partying, we ran into a few guys, who were no longer studying in our school. They were old boys, seniors. So when they saw us, they knew what was going on and reported it to our class teacher. And I was identified, and sent to the director of students' affairs for questioning.

Alice You only went out with your mates for fun. Why were you sent to the director of students affairs? You weren't doing anything bad.

Abyss Those places would have bad influence on us.

Alice Oh.

Abyss Secondly, we were all minors back then. I was sent for questioning, and then got kicked out.

Alice That was in form four?

Abyss Yeah.

Alice Your father beat you when he found out?

Abyss Yeah. He said, "Fun! Looking for fun, huh? See what you've got yourself into!" Something like that.

Alice So you remember you were beaten when you were six... and no more beating after six when you were in primary one?

Abyss Yes, I still remember that... that year when I was six years old, he beat me. Why? I was given a yellow card at school. We had yellow cards, red cards. Getting a yellow card meant I had broken some rules in class. After three yellow cards, one would be given a red card. Three red cards, one would be given a black mark.

Alice So it was a bit like in football.

Abyss Yes, something like that. I was chatting in class, that's why I was given a yellow card. I pleaded with the teacher not to do that, and said that I was sorry for chatting and there wouldn't be a next time. Oh well, she really had to make an example of me, so I was given the yellow card. Nothing I could do. A parent's signature was required. I could not really ask my granny to sign. Granny's hand shivered like leaves. So, it was either my father or my mother depending on what luck I had, whether mother showed up first or my father. My father showed up first, so I asked for his signature. He gave me a big slap on my face. I was bleeding from my mouth.

Alice A really big slap.

Abyss Yeah. My lip was slit open. I was angry with him for a week. During that time, he took me out and bought me a Gameboy, so I was kind of tamed. Yeah, I was still angry inside, but those treats were tempting. He didn't hit me after that, as far as I can remember. Not until I got kicked out of school.

Alice A beating episode happened when you were six. Chatting in class and you ended up getting a big slap on the face.

Abyss Oh well.

Alice Did your mum ever beat you?

Abyss Oh her... no she didn't. She just nagged, blah blah blah and she went on and on and on. She used five, six different ways to make a point, to say one thing. I always said I got it, OK, OK, I got it, but she is doing that even until now. She seldom hit me. She did it when I was in kindergarten, because I was so fond of making friends with girls. So how did I manage to get the girls' attention on the school buses? Something very simple. I just needed to rise above the rest, do something that others couldn't, like using bad language. The driver on the nanny van (van for students) heard me. When I got off the van, he told my maid, "He used dirty language." And my maid told my mum and my mum gave me a big slap on my face. Yeah, it was something like that.

Alice Kindergarten, you were very little, two or three years old.

Abyss It should be in K two, K three, kind of, as far as I remember.

Alice So, we shouldn't beat kids, as they remember it clearly.

Abyss Yeah, I remember it well, very clearly.

Alice I remember too, my mum and my father... My father never beat me. Quite the opposite to yours. Every time I got beaten was by my mother. She did that to me until I was in form one, I think. Before form one, I still got a lot of beatings, like a big slap on my face, or beaten with a stick, a slipper, or a cane. Similar to other kids, I guess.

Abyss I remember my uncle (my dad's older brother) very clearly... he was very violent in my memory. You know how he beat my cousins? Using leather straps, any weapon (implement) he could get hold of, really serious. He used a thin cane, not a bunch. So painful! I said to my granny it didn't hurt as much if you got beaten by a bunch of thin canes. But one stalk, two stalks ... he used a rubber band to tie them together, "fit" (sound of the strike), got smashed by it, it was really powerful. Two stalks are much more powerful. When we were very little, he was the only one who smoked in the family. I hated the smell of cigarettes when I was small. So I wrote "no smoking" on my door. He took one look and asked, "Who wrote it?" My granny said he went and looked for a weapon, but he couldn't find anything. Then he saw a book, so he rolled it up...

Alice And hit you?

Abyss "Why did you write something like this?" (Uncle said). I broke down in tears and cried.

Alice Did your granny try to stop the beating?

Abyss Granny used to "fit" (sound of thin cane striking) me too.

Alice Oh, so your granny also "fit" (beat) you.

Abyss Yes, my granny "fit" me too. And when she realised she couldn't handle me, she got big uncle to help. Coz my big uncle was just one floor away.

Alice In other words, you lived with your granny, and your big uncle lived with your cousins upstairs. Did you play together all the time?

Abyss No.

Alice No? Do you like them?

Abyss I guess so. Even now, when we get together with my other cousin, we always have fun. It's not that often now... we have fewer gatherings. One works as ground-crew, the other is a flight attendant and in the air all the time. We are not able to get together even during big festivals.

Alice How old is your father?

Abyss Now about fifty seven, fifty eight.

Alice Not too old. What about your mother?

Abyss Fifty four, fifty five-ish.

Alice Are your cousins much older than you?

Abyss My cousins, one is three years older than me, the other is one year older than me.

Alice So, you are pretty close in age.

Abyss Very close.

Alice So now, do you still... you don't live with your granny, do you?

Abyss Now I live with my mum.

Alice Umm, your father comes to visit you from time to time?

Abyss It's not really "visit". We go out for eating and drinking. And if we don't get to see each other for a long period of time, I will go to Guangzhou to see him, and also visit my little brother.

Alice Umm, you have a little brother?

Abyss Yes I do.

Alice But your little brother does not live in Hong Kong.

Abyss Not in Hong Kong. We don't have the same mum.

Alice I see. But basically you don't want to live with (your) mum.

Abyss I'm not bothered anymore. Now I'm older, yeah, nothing really matters. I have a place to live in Hong Kong, let's not think too much about it. Meaningless to talk (fuss) about whom you live with.

Alice Were you living with your mum when you were fifteen to twenty years old?

Abyss Yes.

Alice So you were living with your mum... Did she have any objections to what you were doing (at work)?

Abyss No. How could she stop me? How ... dad and mum, if the children insist on doing something, grown-ups can't really stop them. Say if I had turned my back on them, run away from home for three days or seven days, they would be the ones who got really scared. I had had that idea for a long time already. They could call the police... go call the police! I am fine with that. So if I went missing... missing, so what? I would get caught, right? And if I really got caught, it would be them who wouldn't get to see me anymore!

Alice So they really couldn't do anything about what you do.

Abyss No.

Alice Your little brother has gone back to the mainland recently or ...

Abyss No. He was born in the mainland, but he has got a Hong Kong ID.

Alice Oh. So is your little brother is from the same mummy, or born to another mummy?

Abyss Another one.

Alice So, he is a step brother?

Abyss Yes.

Alice Do you have a good relationship with him?

Abyss Good.

Alice OK, isn't it?

Abyss He is still very young.

Alice Umm, good. Now let's talk about smoking. When did you start smoking?

Abyss Around fifteen.

Alice So that was the time you came out to work?

Abyss No, a little earlier than that. I went to study at an international school. At the international school there I came to know a group of western boys, and some Hong Kong people, alleging to be American Born Chinese, that

lot. When we were out, we all smoked and drank. Everyone smoked, so there was no reason for me not to smoke. I was part of the circle, and I thought I had to smoke. So I tried one puff, and I coughed, and coughed so hard. I thought it didn't suit me. So I stopped. But the thing was when I went out (for fun), everyone smoked, so there wasn't anything I could do. Every one of them offered me a cigarette, so if I kept turning them down, they wouldn't be friends with me. So of course, I followed and smoked, right? Slowly, gradually, I got addicted, started buying cigarettes myself, yeah, something like that. Started smoking, something like that. Then I smoked more and more. Very funny ... back then people taught me how to smoke, and now I am the one who teaches people how to smoke, coz people started hanging out around me, and not me hanging out around them. "Right... smoking, does it really taste good? Give me one..." So in the end, everyone smoked. Half of my class smoked. I do think I have brought harm to many people. So why didn't they catch me then? The school kept a watchful eye on us. My home was very close to the school. So I told my classmates that they could come to my home to smoke in order not to get caught in school. They couldn't catch us if we smoked in the back staircase. There would be a very strong smell if eight or nine people all smoked at the same time, so I took them all to the back staircase of my home. What could the class teacher do about us? The class teacher was the wife of the director of student affairs, so I knew what was coming, especially with that incident.

- Alice So, mmm...
- Abyss I was sent for, got kicked out from the school.
- Alice When you first started smoking, what brand of cigarettes did you smoke? Do you remember?
- Abyss Marlboro menthol lights
- Alice Marlboro menthol lights, the green colour one, isn't it?
- Abyss Umm.
- Alice The white and green Marlboro lights. Are you still smoking them now?
- Abyss Black Marlboro now.
- Alice It's menthol, right?
- Abyss Menthol.
- Alice Stronger menthol, that's the difference?
- Abyss Umm. Strong menthol taste, coz once you get into menthol cigarettes, there is no way back. It seems that the smoke of menthol cigarettes is more appealing. And about the feeling, mild cigarettes have a bad smell. I wonder if it is because of the memories from my childhood; menthol cigarettes are fragrant, like minty gum, Green Arrow (brand), so menthol cigarettes' smell is not so bad. This thought just infiltrated my mind ... menthol cigarettes' smell is not so bad, the smell is not too strong, kind of... I know it is kind of like this, yeah.
- Alice Very interesting, isn't it? In Hong Kong, four out of ten cigarettes sold are menthol, four to five (out of ten) cigarettes sold. What about in the mainland? Who would smoke menthol cigarettes?
- Abyss Yeah. I recently noticed an interesting phenomenon. Before, I could only see menthol cigarettes in Lowu, Shenzhen. Apart from there, I haven't seen them in other places in the mainland.
- Alice Really?
- Abyss But, they have it in Guangzhou now!
- Alice They have them in Guangzhou... Starting to...

Abyss They have them in Guangzhou. Even 7-11 sells menthol cigarettes.

Alice Are they Marlboro's?

Abyss Marlboro.

Alice Kent too, should be.

Abyss Kent is not available usually, but now they even have M3.

Alice Right... it was launched.

Abyss So strange. Yes, it has been launched and I only discovered that two weeks ago. Those street stalls are really something, they even got "Made in Japan" cigarettes, those from Japan... from Japan, like those double capsule, two capsules, from Japan. Now these new products are really something. Can't find them in Hong Kong even. It's quite interesting.

Alice So you haven't seen them in Hong Kong, only seen them in China?

Abyss Umm.

Alice Smuggled ones?

Abyss Someone got some for me from Japan, so I did try it. But you said they sell it in Hong Kong. I haven't seen them. So interesting.

Alice How many cigarettes do you smoke a day?

Abyss One pack a day.

Alice One pack a day, twenty sticks.

Abyss About twenty sticks. Sometimes when I have many things on my mind, I could smoke up to two or three packs a day.

Alice Oh, two, three packs? Chain smoking?

Abyss Chain smoking.

Alice You bite on the cigarette filter? Some people bite on the filter when they smoke. They think it's more tasty that way.

Abyss No, no. Actually I am not that into smoking, but I just can't get rid of the habit. As soon as I am on the phone, or when things get into my head, then I want to smoke. Even now, I want to smoke, but ...

Alice No, you can't.

Abyss Quite so, quite so. Whenever I have things in my head, I just want to hold a cigarette in my hand.

Alice Umm, can you talk about it? Twenty sticks a day... for example, yesterday, can you talk about yesterday? The most satisfying smoking moments?

Abyss The first cigarette in the morning.

Alice The first cigarette in the morning.

Abyss The most satisfying cigarette is the first one in the morning. Describe the feeling... it's like... possibly during my sleep, the desire is the strongest (grow stronger and stronger), like the first three, four sticks. Then when the day goes on, it just becomes a habit, like when waiting for buses or when pressing phone (buttons). When my hand's got nothing to do, I would light a cigarette. I'd light one when I get off the bus, light another one when I finish meals, light another one when I am on the phone. The ones I desire the most are those first few in the morning. I don't know how to express the feeling. I just want it, desire it, and can't do without it. So, if there are no cigarettes at home, I don't care if I've brushed my teeth or not, I don't care if my hair is washed or not, I'd just rush down to the street to buy my cigarettes. Yeah, it is an impulse, the first cigarette in the morning.

Alice You smoke on an empty stomach, before breakfast?

Abyss Yes, on an empty stomach. I can go without water or food, but I can't go without my cigarette. Say I haven't eaten the whole day, it doesn't matter.

I just want my cigarette.

Alice Quite interesting. The cigarette you smoke...what kind of feeling does it give you? In other words, what kind of a world are you in when you smoke the first cigarette every morning?

Abyss What kind of world... something like, for example, like someone who is used to his morning coffee, more or less like that. Like if I don't have that cigarette, I don't think I have energy to last the day, to do any business. I think it is like this ... this ... of course I did try, but I just couldn't get my head around. My head is just pre-occupied with the idea that I've got to get my cigarette. I have to go and buy some. How can I get it? Whatever brand will do. Just give me one!

Alice Coz it is a menthol cigarette, is it like chewing gum, something that can pick you up instantly. Is that cigarette a wake-me-up in the morning?

Abyss Yeah. That is a wake-me-up cigarette. Not to do with the menthol cigarette. I can do with even a stick of Panda. Even "17(mg)", the one the old guys smoke. Give me one "17(mg)" and it will do. If you just give me "1(mg)", no problem, but it must be a cigarette. Of course if I am given "1(mg)", then I won't be just needing one stick. I'll need three, four sticks. Yes, something like that.

Alice When you smoke, do you feel... do you feel you're in a room of your own?

Abyss Umm. No. No.

Alice So, you sleep in the living room, or you share a bedroom with others?

Abyss Sleep in the living room, with the blinds down.

Alice Oh, with the blinds down. Does your mummy know that you smoke? Won't she object about your smoking at home?

Abyss In the past, during the time I lived in Amoy Gardens, I had my own room. So I smoked discreetly in my room.

Alice Discreetly? How? Do you have the window opened?

Abyss All windows opened, and I stuck my whole head out.

Alice Quite discreetly indeed!

Abyss Yeah, yeah. Once I was drunk, I pulled the window bars off with my bare hands. I was much stronger at that time. I removed them, and smoked with my head outside the window. And of course, sooner or later, the truth would be revealed! In those days, I smoked three, four sticks a day, then half a packet, and the room had a smell. When the door was opened... "Who's smoking here? Please, no smoking here, no smoking at home!" Hey, you are not making me smoke at the back staircase, no way! I had my own room, so I just locked myself inside and nobody would know what I was up to! So they began to accept it, accept the fact that I smoked at home... not totally though. As soon as they smell cigarette smoke in the living room, they would say "Oh don't smoke, it's not healthy. You will get lung cancer!" I said, "OK, OK, yeah." Now I have moved here, and there is no window in the living room, just the door. I know the cigarette smell gets trapped. Especially for those who don't smoke, it is quite hard for them to keep breathing in the cigarette smell. I know, so I smoke on the balcony.

Alice That's better. So as soon as you are up, before you brush your teeth, you just go to the balcony to smoke. It's like 'don't talk to me before I have my cigarette!'

Abyss Yeah. Otherwise, I will never really be awake. At night, even when it's three, four past midnight, and I am very sleepy, but if I know there are no

cigarettes left, I would go down to buy some, no matter what! And I would go to bed after that.

Alice The 7-11's, they're not far? What about Circle K?

Abyss I don't really care if it is far or not. I must go and get them. I usually have enough, but sometimes when I am on the phone, I underestimate my consumption. I know if I have enough for the day, roughly get me to the next morning, as I can keep count. But when I am thinking about many things, or when I talk to my partner, then I will need more, I will dash out to buy more cigarettes.

Alice So can you... why don't you talk about... let's not talk about yesterday... let's talk about recently... Is there an occasion when you felt you had smoked an ideal cigarette? Not necessarily the taste of the cigarette, it could be just a feeling, could be happenings before or after, which made you feel that cigarette was the most ideal one you ever smoked.

Abyss Ah. Let me put it this way. The time of smoking... mostly... the feeling would get magnified by the time of smoking. Is it the most satisfying one? I believe the satisfaction is not from smoking itself. I just have a desire to smoke. If you are happy at a particular moment, something must have happened to make you happy. Coz you don't really talk much with people when you smoke. When you smoke alone, you won't be watching YouTube, you just wouldn't be so focused on one thing. Your mind must be thinking about something else. When I thought of some happenings that made me happy, my mind was probably thinking about the happy event that just happened a while ago, so I thought that cigarette really tasted good. So when you fall out of love, you probably smoke three, four packs a day. Those three, four packs smoking time in here (mind) makes you think that those cigarettes taste very bad. The feeling I have is that smoking magnifies my emotions.

Alice Magnifying emotions. So you don't smoke at the same time you are doing something?

Abyss No. No. Even though I say I smoke at the same time I work... but smoking is not allowed in most eating and work places. In other words, in the past... in the past I would feel odd when I'm not smoking. I would no longer be cool or tyrant-like. I speak louder when I am holding a cigarette. I need to look like a member of the mafia, otherwise I will get bullied. I must hold a cigarette in my hand.

Alice Can you recall any happy occasions, or can you give me an example how the cigarette has magnified your emotions? When did that happen and how did it make you happy?

Abyss Sure. Just recently. I am studying for a Foundation Diploma in fashion design in the Open University. My result was not released after a long time. They called me on the joint enrolment day on July 11th, and informed me that I got admitted. That's great, but I hadn't got the scores yet. Then I went online and checked. All other colleges had already released their results except mine. Now what? So I started calling the school, calling the examinations authority, sent them several emails. No replies from them. I had a kind of a provisional score sheet. I called here, and called there. It was so annoying. Until some days in July, I finally got the result score. Wow, I was so happy. I went over there immediately, so worried that my enrolment was cancelled coz the program was quite popular. I went there, and got admitted officially. That moment... that cigarette, and my classmates, we were so happy.

Alice So you smoked together with your classmates?

Abyss Yes, outside the school, when I went to pay the deposit.

Alice Outside the school.

Abyss The one I am going to study in the coming year, outside that school.

Alice What was the world like when you were smoking? Any feeling or imagery you can describe?

Abyss Not from the smoking. It was from the view in my mind when I was smoking. Wow, I felt the world was so perfect, all in a sudden. Wow! Wow, I feel it again! Anyone who studies fashion design, Foundation diploma or complete DSE, nine out of ten of them will crave to get into Hong Kong technical Institute. So at the moment I knew I got in, I wanted to thank god. That very cigarette (made me) so happy. Yeah.

Alice That was the ideal cigarette.

Abyss Yes.

Alice Do you remember... what about your worst cigarette experience recently?

Abyss The worst cigarette...

Alice Could be the one that made you lost your temper?

Abyss I do, I do. The one I just had a few hours ago.

Alice Wow, so recent.

Abyss Yeah. I was thinking about how to pay the balance on my credit card. Minimum payment. I don't even have enough money for the minimum payment! I was thinking, I won't get money till next week. So I called up a few people, asked them to lend me one thousand five hundred dollars, and I would pay them back with 10% interest. I said it would be only be a week's time. I made a few calls. Wow, the cigarette tasted really bad!

Alice You smoked while you were walking.

Abyss Yeah. Tomorrow is the due date. Only one day left, yeah.

Alice Would you ask your mummy for money?

Abyss I try not to. The money is my own responsibility.

Alice And you won't ask your daddy for money?

Abyss He told me to call him if I have problem paying up. He is concerned that my flat purchase plan will be affected, coz it will bring down my credit rating. That will be a real problem. So, no late payments, no matter what, not even if I die.

Alice It's like that? The bank will check your credit card, and then give you a credit rating?

Abyss Right. It's also no good if you pay only the minimum payment. Your credit rating will fall.

Alice Oh.

Abyss But still, it is better than not making minimum payment. Some people just don't care. They keep spending. Nowadays, the banks are getting quite civilised. They will get a few gangsters to knock on your door, bluff for a while, and that's about it. In the past, they (the gangsters) would pour red paint on your property. Now that is a criminal offence. Initially I didn't know it. It was my old man who warned me about it. I asked him how he knew about all that. He said that he saw it happen to other people.

Alice Can you talk about the time you smoked the bad cigarette? How bad was it?

Abyss Actually one cigarette... let me give you an example... at a meal, when you are down (depressed), no matter how delicious the food is, you wouldn't really care. Yes, something like this. So in other words, I take it (cigarette) as my mental food, it's really like food.

Alice How do you feel when you are smoking? When you draw a puff and blow it out, what does it feel like?

Abyss It's like a mouth of bad air getting in...

Alice A mouthful of air.

Abyss A mouth of bad air. I know it's bad air and it sometimes tastes strong. I have a dry throat after excessive smoking.

Alice You know it is bad air, but you don't mind.

Abyss Smoking is hazardous to health, everyone knows it. But the number of smokers in Hong Kong is still on the rise, not dropping at all. As always, the rise of smoking rate is higher than the quitting rate. Everyone knows it. Just as people say, everyone knows that it is a mouthful of bad air, but the demand is still there!

Alice So now you are no longer a beginner in smoking, what does smoking give you?

Abyss Stress!

Alice Smoking gives you stress?

Abyss Stress about money. Actually it is quite an expense. Initially when I started smoking, it was thirty dollars a pack, then thirty five, thirty nine, forty nine, fifty, and now fifty five. I didn't think too much about it back then. Nowadays I begin to think about it, smoking costs me... one pack a day, one or two packs when I have so much in my head to sort out sometimes. So it's almost two thousand a month, just on smoking. I haven't taken eating into account, not even transportation. I use a student Octopus for transportation.

Alice Do you work part time?

Abyss I really want to. I have a company now, selling alcohol, had an office, but not anymore. Now doing business on the Internet, saving up some capital to open an office. I didn't earn too much then, not much. The first few months I was losing money, now it's getting better.

Alice So, it really can't help much with your expenses on smoking.

Abyss Right, doesn't help.

Alice I remember it was thirty dollars (a pack) the time my daddy smoked. Before that, it was ten dollars, then jumped to thirty dollars. My daddy smoked Kent when I was little. One day, when he was still smoking the ten dollars brand, ten dollars a pack, suddenly the government raised the tobacco excise by 200% or 300%, boom! The price went up to thirty dollars. Overnight to thirty dollars. Afterwards, no excise increase for a few years, then it rose again slowly.

Abyss Yes, why does the government care to raise the excise? Nobody is quitting.

Alice Some may or some may go to buy smuggled ones.

Abyss Yes, 90% of people will buy smuggled cigarettes. The rest can go to mainland to buy them in person, even cheaper. I thought about it.

Alice Now each person is only allowed to bring nineteen sticks of cigarette in, right?

Abyss Not really. I have eight, nine packs with me every time I cross the border.

Alice Aren't you afraid of being searched?

ABYSS Search me? I have something interesting to share. I did smuggling before. So, there was a time, no one would hassle you when you are caught the first time. The second time, you pay a fine. The third time, those electronic products... if you carry excessive quantities... well, they will catch you only if you exceed a certain quantity. Then the punishment will

get heavier each time. It has never happened to me yet. So, I'm not too worried about it.

Alice What did you smuggle? Electronic products?

Abyss iPhones.

Alice Smuggling iPhones...

Abyss That time I was with my friend ... we went together, each of us carried tens of thousands of dollars in cash. Then we went to queue at IFC (where the Apple shop is) to buy iPhone 6. After that, we took the phones to Hua Qiang North (China) to re-sell.

Alice Did you manage to get any profit?

Abyss Only on the first three days.

Alice Only on the first three days!

Abyss Only on the first three days. I quit on the fourth day. Yeah, just took the profit on that first run. My friends were in this short-selling game too. But it is difficult. I went to Hua Qiang North (China) by myself. My prices were being undercut so badly, really very badly. After all, I was a stranger in that place. I only managed to sell them on the first day ... no business at all after that. So I scratched my head to get close to the people. Within one day, I got to know twenty six, twenty seven guys who were phone brokers. So slowly, well not really slowly, I got close with them, went out for dinner, drinking. The next day, my iPhones were sold much easier. The third day no problem at all. On the fourth day, only so so. Well, if you didn't mind the risk, you would definitely get profits if you take five iPhones there. We really didn't want to be caught, so we hired someone to smuggle the iPhones for us. They only agreed to take one unit since they also didn't want to take too much risk. Just did one run; crossed the border, got it done and returned. We paid them four hundred dollars each phone, each person, yeah.

Alice Did you speculate in Apple Watches?

Abyss No. I wasn't sure about the margin on Apple Watches.

Alice Yeah. Nobody expected that Apple Watch could be worth speculating.

Abyss Right, nobody expected that.

Alice In those days, I didn't know that there would be margin in speculation. I... I didn't know how to do it. I ordered the watch for myself, and when I received the product, I paid three thousand for it. Then my secretary saw it (it was an open office, so she saw the parcel containing the Apple Watch) and she said, "Alice, sell it, you will earn money!" "Are you sure?" I answered. "Yes, sure." So I blindly listened to my secretary's words and took it to Sin Tak (a shopping centre for buying and selling phones etc in Mongkok). Meanwhile, My secretary made a call for me as she knows some salespersons there. There was a shop just opened for business, ran by a female assistant. So I sold the watch for five thousand five hundred dollars. Who would have expected such a thing to happen?

Abyss Who would have expected Apple watches to be worth speculation! Our phones are so big, and I think the screen of the Apple Watch is very small. The screen of the Apple Watch is just that big, and it is so fiddly. Don't tell me that it has a market (demand)!

Alice Really weird. That was the only time. After I sold it, in no time, I reserved another one, coz I really wanted one. I got a new one a month later. It is the only time I was in the bootlegging business.

Abyss We don't call it bootlegging. Bootlegging is to cross the border. Yeah, we call it speculation.

Alice Speculation! Oh, really, speculation is not so good. Actually, I don't know much about speculation.

Abyss Quite fun.

Alice Quite fun, but there won't be a next time. One time (is enough). It was all the bad friends, egging me on. No more next time.

Abyss Not really. One buys, one sells, supply meets demand, no demand, no selling right?

Alice Yes, you are right. Actually, it was bought for my own use.

Abyss If there is demand, and someone is willing to pay the price, no problem at all. Don't say that it is such a bad thing. But this practice is really popular in Hong Kong.

Alice Coz there is demand in the mainland, causing such a situation.

Abyss Yes, yeah.

Alice I guess there's not much time left for this interview. So, Abyss, let me talk about what I am going to do. After today, I will go back and listen to the recording. The listening will lead to some follow-up questions that I want to ask you, so we will call you in again. Soso will make another appointment with you. Then, I will ask questions that I wanted to ask but missed out, or those missed out in your talking but I want to know after listening to the recording. So those questions will be asked again (in the next interview). It may be after one week. Soso will contact you to come back to chat again. I will need you to help me on this. Up to now, do you have any questions?

Abyss No.

Alice So, no. So, okay.

Abyss It is more important to ask "Do you have more questions for me?"

Alice I do. When I go back and start writing them down, I will have (more questions).

Abyss OK.

Alice Among young people your age, you are quite mature.

Abyss Thank you.

Alice Perhaps it is because of your years of working experience. Hardly anyone has your kind of working experience. Most of them study, just study. The lucky ones will go on studying until aged twenty one, two.

Abyss That kind of lifestyle is very boring.

Alice I think I am one of those boring ones, from childhood to now. So embarrassing.

Abyss No, not really, not really. Everyone's course of life is different. I am thankful to those years. Now, wherever I go, I am able to make friends quickly, very useful, coz I wasn't shy in those years.

Alice Mmm, quite good, quite good. Thank you Abyss. So I look forward to seeing you one more time next week.

Abyss Sure, sure.

Alice Let me ask you this. Do you feel uncomfortable with this interview?

Abyss No, I don't.

Alice Quite OK then? I need to learn from you, really. (You are) Relatively flexible, relatively adaptable.

Abyss Coz you see, when I was fifteen years old, I started smoking. Besides going out with friends, I also participated in the School Hunk (beauty contest) organized by YES magazine.

Alice Ha, what is that?

Abyss Beauty contest (voting), to elect the school babe and school hunk.

Alice Oh, I remember. The magazine developed by Joe Nieh!

Abyss Yes, yeah.

Alice Is it still going on now?

Abyss Now, no.

Alice Oh.

Abyss They've stopped publication.

Alice Yeah, Joe Nieh and Simon Siu.

Abyss I don't know about Simon Siu, I only know Joe Nieh.

Alice Joe Nieh... Oh, so you participated in the contest. Did you get elected?

Abyss Got in the last twenty. After that, I was in the training programme and got sent to the mainland to participate in a New Year Performance ... singing, singing on stage, live broadcast by two television stations.

Alice You love singing?

Abyss Love it.

Alice Do you play any instrument?

Abyss I did. But no more now. Can't make a living out of it. Mmm, don't do it (anymore).

Alice Can't earn a living, but (you play) for your own enjoyment, right?

Abyss No, I don't want to get into too many things. Hong Kong people are very practical.

Alice What instrument? Is it the guitar?

Abyss Before, I played the harmonica, guitar and piano.

Alice That's great. Did your father teach you?

Abyss No. I learned from teachers.

Alice You learned from teachers. Did your father encourage you to have proper lessons?

Abyss No. Mostly mummy. Daddy said those things are no use and I should learn something useful, like drawing and fashion. Daddy said that.

Alice Mummy got you to learn music.

Abyss That's what she wanted. Coz she thinks people who play the piano look really cool.

Alice Actually they do.

Abyss She actually said to me that it would be good if she had a piano, and that she would definitely learn if she did. I said, "Why didn't you tell me earlier?" Then I thought when I have saved enough money to buy her a piano, she could play it at home coz she said she would learn it. I think my mummy is a rather interesting person. After she finishes work in Wanchai, she would go to dance class, singing class....so interesting, so fun.

Alice So she's learning dancing and singing?

Abyss Yeah.

Alice Your mummy, has she been working all the time, from your childhood to now? Or she just stayed home and nursed you, then went out to work after you got older?

Abyss She has been working all the time. She is also in the fashion industry.

Alice Ah, I see. Your family are all in the fashion business coz even you are studying fashion design now.

Abyss Yeah.

Alice So the whole family is involved in the fashion industry.

Abyss Yes.

Alice That's quite good. Abyss, thank you so much. I have learnt so much today.

Abyss Please don't say that, please don't. I am only a child (compared) to you.

Second interview: Abyss

Alice So, after the interview we did last time, I listened to the recording. Now I have a few follow-up questions. But before that, I would like to speak to you about one thing, I have to say this... it's about the subject I'm studying, psychoanalysis. It is to analysis a person's mental state. In this subject, there is a big topic, called dream interpretation, i.e., dream analysis. We believe that a dream reflects one's desires in his unconscious, something that your conscious mind isn't aware of. Now I want to tell you something. After my interview with you, the night I went home, I had a dream. I cannot quite remember the dream now because I woke up from the dream at about three, four o'clock in the morning. I remembered it quite clearly back then, but I was too lazy to pick up a pen to jot it down. But at 7 o'clock that morning, I went to get a pen and jotted it down. It was an interesting dream. In the dream, there was a zombie and my mum. My mum is still alive. Mum and dad are still alive, but they are quite old, seventy something. Anyway, in my dream, a zombie and my mum were in the same room. There was another room, separated by a door. I was on one side, and they were on the other side, with the door between us. The zombie looked like those on TV, or those on TV games. I don't know why it looked like them. Anyway, there was a door which separated the two rooms. In the dream, I needed to feed my mum, which means I needed to send food to my mum to eat. Since the zombie and my mum were together and I was too scared to open the door to send the food to my mum, I negotiated with the zombie through the closed door. "Hey, I can't get through. Can you take the food to my mum for me?" The zombie agreed. He said, "Ok. I can get the food to your mum." He promised to take the food to my mum. I was so scared. I was still very afraid of going into the next room to see my mum, coz the zombie was there. It is very interesting. I have no idea what message there is in the dream. Professors say you need to pay attention to your dreams because dreams indicate something you don't know (can't explain) but they are very illuminating. You don't know why your mind is actually thinking something like that, but they are illuminating. I don't know why I had this dream, but I just want to tell you this.

Abyss OK.

Alice Now you have heard about my strange dream. Since our last interview, have you had any weird dream, any feeling in particular, that you want to tell me about?

Abyss Nothing in particular. I don't have many dreams. Just sometimes. Let me tell you an interesting thing in return. I have been dreaming of flying. I want to fly, don't know why. So, fine. I really want to fly. But I won't be able to do that in the real world.

Alice Flying, you mean really flying?

Abyss Yes. I can't do that in the real world. I keep saying to myself I want to fly. So, I had a dream, but I couldn't fly in the dream. I didn't know that I was in a dream. For the second time, I tried (but failed). For the third time, I was jogging, jogging, jogging, and suddenly tripped over. But I didn't feel the pain. I was on a foot bridge, with a thoroughfare down below ... busy traffic. I just jumped down into it. I said I wanted to fly.

Alice You flew in that dream.

Abyss Oh yes, I flew.

Alice Did you have wings? Something like that?

Abyss Yes, I had wings.

Alice Had wings...

Abyss Had wings. Then I woke up. I was so happy.

Alice Oh! Quite interesting. When did you have that dream?

Abyss Should be when I was fourteen years old.

Alice You still remember this?

Abyss I still remember it, even until now. Is it possible that my will power is so strong that even my dream knows about it? I just thought it was so amazing at that time. Why don't you go and ask around and see if it is possible to get into a dream?

Alice Umm, quite interesting. So, you want to fly very badly in the real world?

Abyss Oh yes. I really want to feel the flying sensation. Wow, so high up, so nice, I can go wherever I want. I have always been crammed on buses and the MTR (underground trains) since childhood...

Alice Wouldn't it be it like Superman?

Abyss You can say that. You can say that.

Alice Is that because you watch too much TV or films?

Abyss No, it's not like that, not like that. I was not really interested in those superheroes in the movies. Even when I was a kid, I didn't watch Superman. It's so fake. I've been like that since I was a kid, I desired it so much, so every day when I was asleep, I wanted to fly, to fly, to fly.

Alice Have you tried that? I don't dare to ... like bungee jumping or paragliding?

Abyss Oh, I do want to try that! But I don't really have a chance to be away from Hong Kong. There are some problems in my family... problems in my family... my daddy was in debt, see?

Alice So, you couldn't leave Hong Kong?

Abyss No, I couldn't.

Alice What did his debt have to do with you?

Abyss I needed Daddy to help pay for some things. So, when I was in Hong Kong, I had to work and solicit customers. If I took a day off, I got no customers, it made a big difference. That's why I didn't have a chance to go away.

Alice No opportunity.

Abyss Not really. I didn't go out (of town) much. Macau, maybe. No time for bungee jumping ... going to a casino is more tempting than bungee jumping.

Alice You've been to a casino. Wow! You were not old enough for that!

Abyss Back then there were no restrictions, so I could get in. There weren't even regulation on age (twenty-one or above). Back then I was eighteen, I could get in. Yes!

Alice Did you gamble?

Abyss Yes.

Alice Only slot machines for me.

Abyss Already busted my card (cash withdrawn up to the card limit).

Alice Oh yes.

Abyss I used up all my cash. Oh well, I was gambling at one table, and there was a cash machine next to me. So, I could easily withdraw money from one side and gamble again on the other side. I reached the upper limit. No more gambling. Game over.

Alice The (daily) withdrawal limit is pretty low. It is something like six thousand or eight thousand.

Abyss Ten thousand.

Alice Oh. Ten thousand.

Abyss Oh yes.

Alice The year you were eighteen?

Abyss That was when my cousin got married. I went over, and I dropped by and played a few rounds and went home. I started to lose money in the second round, which was impossible! So, they had two consecutive rounds of "small". After that, I betted on "small", and then it turned out to be "big". I was so upset. But then I won, won a few thousand dollars in subsequent rounds. After that, my bets got bigger and bigger, and finally I lost all the money.

Alice Was it your first time gambling?

Deep. No.

Alice You had gambled before.

Abyss Like Mah-jong and Big 2 (card game).

Alice I guess you have more experience in the casino than I do. My first one was only with slot machines. I lost something like ten dollars. I got so upset, so I left.

Abyss No. I am a greedy person.

Alice Oh. You are quite smart. You quit right after you've used up your cash. Some people are not like that. They borrow from loan sharks there and ended up with piles of debts when they go back to Hong Kong. I pity them.

Abyss Those people (loan sharks) are really bad! They came close to me and said, "It looks like you are not doing so well."

Alice Really? So it happened!

Abyss Oh yes. "Looks like you are in deep shit," they said. Did I look like I was in deep shit? I just thought as soon as I borrow money from you, I would really be in deep shit. Even when you are winning just a little, they would say, "You are winning! Why don't I give (lend) you some more?" I was thinking, "Once I take your money, I will lose."

Alice So, you didn't take their money.

Abyss No, I won't take it. It made me so scared.

Alice You are such a good boy. Good! Let's get down to business now. About something I have picked up when I listened to the recording. Something I want to know more about, so I need to ask you again. About the smoking moment. You said a few times that despite having a strong desire to smoke, you never felt satisfied even after you've finished the cigarette. Can you tell me more about it, about the kind of desire, and how it could satisfy you?

Abyss What kind of desire... let me put it this way. Everything, every single incident... when it happens, there is always a beginning and an end. Just like jogging, or running one hundred metres. You are at the starting point, you run and run to the end of the one hundred metres. Once you've reached the end you would feel satisfied. But smoking is not like that. I desire to smoke, but when I finish smoking, I would smoke a second one, a third one, a fourth one, a fifth one. So, smoking will never fulfil the desire for satisfaction. It won't ... unless smoking can give me a great sense of success... I think smoking could give me satisfaction only under one condition, when I stop smoking! Right, if I want to get satisfaction from smoking, I need to take this step, and stop smoking!

Alice So, if you succeed in quitting smoking, you ...

Abyss Will have a sense of success. Yes, a great sense of success, really. I did

try, and I failed. My addiction is quite severe. I don't know if you have heard about it. I would grind my teeth if there are no cigarettes, or if I have no money to buy the cigarettes.

Alice Grinding teeth!

Abyss Grinding teeth. Severe addiction, really serious. One time I ran out of money. I just had thirty dollars which was not enough to buy cigarettes. Back then, the price was thirty-nine. I asked a guy on the street for a cigarette. This cigarette was the most humiliating one for me. I knew it.

Alice When did it happen?

Abyss That time, I can't really remember. I only remember that I ran out of money, then ... yes.

Alice How old were you then?

Abyss I can't remember. Thirty-nine dollars is the only thing I remember of that moment.

Alice Thirty-nine dollars.

Abyss Thirty-nine dollars ... that should be when I was aged fifteen, sixteen.

Alice Were you working?

Abyss Not really.

Alice Not started (working) yet.

Abyss Not yet. That was before I worked

Alice Would you have a runny nose, and feel very uncomfortable if you don't have cigarettes?

Abyss No, I won't.

Alice You won't show any symptoms, you just get anxious and frustrated and feel a strong desire to smoke?

Abyss Oh yes, oh yes.

Alice Nothing can replace it Can chewing gum replace it?

Abyss No, it can't. For a while, may be for a while. Just chew it, chew, chew, after ten minutes, it won't work anymore. I have to smoke. As a substitute, it is not too bad. But, not for me. It works for others, things like chewing gum or Tic Tac, or the candies for tooth-cleaning.

Alice Oh, the "Professional" chewing gum, that type.

Abyss Yes, that something "Xylitol" one.

Alice Yes, give and take. Oh, Xylitol. With artificial sweetener ... it's carcinogenic.

Abyss Oh yes, oh yes, that's the one. Many people use it as a temporary substitute. Among the people I know during my time in the party business, when my contact list grew to three, four thousand, there was only one successful case in quitting smoking. Every smoker says he wants to quit, but only one of them has actually done it. Yeah, but then he got addicted to drinking. Drinking a lot and (the addiction) got really serious.

Alice In other words, they are compensating, finding other things to replace smoking.

Abyss Quite so, quite so.

Alice My daddy put on a lot of weight after quitting. His health was getting worse coz he smoked far too much. He was getting old, and mum kept nagging at him, and I didn't like him smoking. So over time, he smoked less. He only smoked from time to time. But then he ate more, that's why he put on weight.

Abyss Oh.

Alice Something to occupy his mouth with.

Abyss Oh yes, something to chew on.

Alice You just said earlier on that smoking has not given you satisfaction, coz you can smoke one after another, on and on, which doesn't give you satisfaction. So, after smoking the second one, would you feel better than the first one, and would you feel the third one is better than the first one? As you smoke more, would that one ...

Abyss No, it won't get better. I would say the cigarette I desire most is the first one in the morning. After that, it's all the same to me, the feeling.

Alice How many cigarettes have you smoked the most in a row, one after another?

Abyss One after another, actually you could smoke the whole pack.

Alice Of course, you could, but did you stub it out half way, or did you smoke the whole cigarette?

Abyss Smoked the whole thing.

Alice Smoke the whole thing?

Abyss When I fell out of love... when I fall out of love, I know what would happen. I would buy three packets. Those are for one day ... three packets for one day, and I would stock up for two weeks; three packets a day. Those two weeks, I smoked and smoked, one after another. Just imagine! I smoked sixty sticks a day, about five minutes each stick.

Alice Five hours, non-stop smoking, it only takes five hours.

Abyss Smoking non-stop.

Alice Won't you get tired? It is quite tiring.

Abyss Not tired, not tired.

Alice So, smoking is not tiring.

Abyss Smoking is not tiring. Right.

Alice But, wouldn't you get light-headed and want to throw up, when you are smoking too much?

Abyss No, I wouldn't. On the contrary, I would get light-headed when I smoke after not smoking for a long period of time. I don't know why. If I haven't smoked in the morning, my whole body would get so lazy. I'd toss and turn in bed, then I would go and find something to chew. When I really can't bear it, I would go out and drag a big puff. Then I get dizzy.

Alice Umm, that's interesting. And you said last time, you smoke every time you have so much in your head, so much to think about. So, cigarettes help you think. They give you ideas, is that so? Can you chew bubble gum when you have thinking too?

Abyss Chewing bubble gum and thinking, I can do that. But, I don't know how to say it, maybe I should say, it doesn't really matter. Other people may not be like that, but maybe I look more "man" if I smoke while thinking. The idea inside my head is like that. Many reasons come to my mind as we speak. Other people are not like that. I can think of things even without the cigarettes. But yeah, I quite like it. I look younger than my age, so I like being seen as more mature (with a cigarette in my hand).

Alice Oh, I guess so, you look quite young.

Abyss In game centres, my ID still gets checked.

Alice Oh, your ID is checked!

Abyss Well, it is one thing I feel happy about. Maybe I want to feel more mature, so I smoke when I am thinking. It's given me a pleasant sensation at the very beginning. Then it became a habit. Something like this.

Alice When you're doing your thinking, how do you smoke, like this, like that?

Abyss Looking out.

Alice Looking out, like looking out of the window.

- Abyss Looking outside. Oh yes, my hand is placed here, like this.
- Alice Smoking non-stop.
- Abyss Oh yes. One after another. I am not aware of how many sticks I have smoked. Right.
- Alice But you won't bite the filter, no matter how much you chain smoke, right?
- Abyss Definitely not. Coz I know once I bite the filter, the cigarette will not taste good anymore. So bad. If you bite the filter, the filter will get wet, and you would feel like you are not drawing anything in, yeah.
- Alice I saw something funny when people smoke. My ex-boss also smoked... those days in Guangzhou, I worked for him for two years. Well, the company sent us to Guangzhou. Coz we both are from Hong Kong, and at that time our Chinese partners were in Guangzhou, and we worked together on a project. Some of our colleagues were Guangzhou Chinese. We worked as consultants, like advisers, and we transferred marketing knowledge to them and gave them suggestions. So, every time in the meeting, if there were difficult questions coming from the Chinese partner, my boss would always light a cigarette and smoked. I didn't ask him, "Boss, why you are like that every time they ask questions?" He usually wouldn't do it in meetings, but he would light a cigarette only at those difficult moments.
- Abyss Ah. There is an explanation! Most thinking is done during the question-and-answer time. The action of lighting a cigarette, drawing a puff, it takes time, yeah, and it would have been more than two seconds after the question was asked.
- Alice Oh yes. You are like my boss at that moment. He had used more than two seconds, quite long. It turned out that it softened the pressure, gave him time to think.
- Abyss Oh yes, right!
- Alice Also, I felt that when he blew the smoke out, the smoke got murky, and the cigarette smoke worked like a shield, separating the people (from him), letting him be alone, like a protection, so that he was alone in his world to think and think. Then he went back to answering the questions. So, what do you feel about the smoke that gets blown out?
- Abyss Me, I don't have that feeling. In my circle, I don't need to protect myself. Coz they think I am quite offensive, aggressive, they won't argue with me, yeah.
- Alice But, I feel you look like a mild-mannered and cultivated boy. How come your friends feel that you are aggressive? You are really gentle and cultivated, soft-spoken, unlike those rowdy and rough boys.
- Abyss They did say so. Yes, they feel that I am genteel, but quite dominating at the same time. Two friends have said that. Especially when I am at work. I'm totally different ... very intimidating, before they started working for me.
- Alice So, do you shout at people when you light up a cigarette?
- Abyss I won't. I don't shout at people. But through my words, they can feel the pressure. They would really want to leave me for a safer place.
- Alice So, sharp words, to an extent that every word is like a needle, pricking people and making them very uncomfortable. Or like a sword, hacking people, making them very uncomfortable.
- Abyss Oh yes. Oh yes. I am quite good at that.
- Alice That's quite you. You need this when you come out to work. I want to say it though it's something outside the scope of this interview - You need it.

Abyss I think you've heard about AP, BP, haven't you?

Alice No, not really. AP, BP ... tell me.

Abyss Those ... those AsiaWorks training courses.

Alice AsiaWorks, oh! I know! Is that the one that you need to participate for five days, every day 6pm - 9pm after work. Oh, AsiaWorks, I have been there. They give you a lot of pressure and make you get very emotional.

Abyss They drive you nuts.

Alice That's right! My mum actually went nuts. I asked her to go. I was so disappointed, so regretful that I did. Did you go?

Abyss Yes.

Alice Before, it was called "life dynamics".

Abyss Yes.

Alice And then it's become AsiaWorks.

Abyss After that, it has now become something like APBP.

Alice That particular one, how many days did you do?

Abyss I did two levels. Seven days for the first level. It was half day, after six, from six to eleven o'clock. Then I went to the second level, took a day off, fourteen to fifteen hours, even sixteen hours.

Alice So, no sleep.

Abyss Very tiring. I had to write stuff after I go home. I went to sleep after finishing the writing. Slept three to four hours, then returned (to the class). If you were late, you got told off by every one of them, yeah. After I attended that course, I read people much better. Even just by one look at his facial expression. Recently, I have a friend who is in the finance industry. Just a glance, "You have quite a lot of friends," I said to him. He said he did. Afterwards, he invited me to dinner at his home. I looked around, and there was a girl. I asked, "Your girlfriend?" "No, flat mate only. She doesn't have a home. She is looking for a place. So, I asked her to stay with me."

Alice So interesting.

Abyss Oh yes. Then I asked him. "This is so strange. You have so many friends around you, but you are not happy." Then he told me about his work. After our chat, he resigned the following day. I asked him why he did it, he said, "Well, after the chat with you, I realized that I only did it for a friend. I don't really earn money for myself. I worked (there) because of a friend. So, after our chat, I found another job."

Alice The course you went to, how many years ago was that?

Abyss Two years ago.

Alice Quite recently. You friends asked you to go?

Abyss My cousin asked me to go.

Alice Are you still in touch with those people on the same course?

Abyss Yes, yes, yes.

Alice Those from that course?

Abyss Those people ... my instinct told me that... well, I made the first move to contact them. So smart, those people, very smart, should be quite famous.

Alice Oh. So, they are relatively well known in their field.

Abyss Let me put it this way. This person...the people who worked for him are all well-known. They help him. They are the team in his company, including this singer, that singer...

Alice So, he is the head of those singers. Umm, so you think he is really smart. How many (course) levels are there? Level one, level two, and is there a level three?

Abyss There is Level three. I didn't attend. Insane.

Alice Oh. Insane, the third level.

Abyss It is like a drug addiction. There is a flow of positive energy constantly, but it is irrational. They run and run forward, no turning back, no stepping back, going to the extreme, the ultimate. Just like this, jump from this building to the other. How? You can't say "no way" as you haven't tried. They are like that. Insane! I did get something useful. Those smart guys, really smart guys, they quit after they got to Level two. Even my friend quit. Those stayed remained, mostly, those being controlled in level three, are irrational and have completely lost their minds. They had gone mad when they got to Level three. I just think they are insane!

Alice Did they get violent or have suicidal behaviour in there?

Abyss They would stir up that kind of emotions. I believe you have the experience.

Alice The first three months was quite something. Six months later, I lost interest. I didn't contact my classmates, and I didn't go back.

Abyss But you have got something (useful) out of it, quite a lot.

Alice Oh yes. I have. I know more about myself.

Abyss Yes, reading yourself, be more accurate in reading others. Yeah, you do understand, yeah, quite interesting, quite fun.

Alice It's an experience. Quite expensive. That time, the first level cost five thousand, five thousand dollars ten years ago. Then nine thousand for level two. Five thousand and nine thousand.

Abyss No inflation on this programme.

Alice Really? Five thousand and nine thousand all along.

Abyss It was four thousand and ten thousand at my time ... not much inflation.

Alice The programme took place in Trade Centre in Kowloon Bay, coz there were too many people. They are in Wanchai... their office is in Wanchai.

Abyss They should have one hundred to two hundred people in level one, right?

Alice Yes, they did. It was much less in level two.

Abyss How many were left in level two?

Alice Twenty something to thirty.

Abyss One fifth (of level one).

Alice Oh yes. About thirty. Afterwards, they looked for more people in level three. In other words, they had to do recruitment.

Abyss Oh yes. One was required to get more people in. Otherwise they would fail you.

Alice That's right, pyramid scheme. That's good. You also did that?

Abyss Yes, quite fun.

Alice I think I have asked many of my friends about this and they did end up going. Good, now, the coming subject is rather special. You said that when you smoke... in our last interview... when you smoke, your feeling would be magnified, like rewinding a tape, rewinding to a recent incident. Then you also said you had smoked the ideal cigarette and the most disappointing cigarette, and what the situations were like. You mentioned that when smoking the ideal cigarette, the world seemed to be perfect to you. So, what I want to know is, what is a perfect world like?

Abyss Perfect world...

Alice It doesn't matter if there isn't one.

Abyss I am the power (dictator), yes, (to have a) very strong sense of control, have money, yeah, around those things.

Alice So, it is like, such as Kim Jong-un, all power in his hands.

Abyss Kim Jong-un.

Alice No one can overrule him. He can do whatever he likes.

Abyss You can say that. You can say that. But he is disgusting.

Alice His appearance is really disgusting.

Abyss What he does is also disgusting. He is so pretentious, testing missiles, firing it on others. Really bad. Barbarian, really.

Alice No checks and balances. Unlike in other countries, they are open, and bad people get punished. He is behind closed doors.

Abyss Completely closed. Yeah, being someone like him. But being the most hated person is not what I want. So yeah, it's money and power.

Alice In the surroundings in that perfect world, what kind of people would you prefer to have around you?

Abyss Nobody...

Alice Oh, nobody?

Abyss No need. You should only come over when I point at you.

Alice So, if you are not needed here, you'd better go away.

Abyss It's better that way.

Alice How about Daddy? Do you need him by your side?

Abyss Daddy ...

Alice Or, Mommy by your side when she is free?

Abyss Daddy, I want Daddy, for dinner. Granny, Granny is most important.

Alice Granny and daddy. Do you want mommy in that world?

Abyss I may go and visit her when I am free.

Alice So, you don't need her around unless there is something in particular, right?

Abyss Visit her when I am free.

Alice In that world, how far away does your daddy live? Where does granny live?

Abyss It's better if Granny is just next door. Yes. Daddy also next door, so that he can take care of Granny. I am in power and I won't have time to look after her.

Alice Of course, coz you have too many things to handle.

Abyss Oh yes. Oh yes.

Alice Umm, so Daddy looks after Granny.

Abyss It's quite good, even if it's just an idea. It's so exciting!

Alice Like when you have lots of power and money, then this world will be perfect for you...

Abyss I believe having power doesn't mean you would have money and having money does not necessary mean you have power. But if you have power then you don't need to worry about money. I'm absolutely sure about this.

Alice OK. Good. Understood. So, this is your perfect world. Now talking about the most disappointing cigarette, or the cigarette that made you feel bad when smoking it. You said to me it's like drawing in a mouthful of polluted air. So what kind of a world it is? Can you describe it? Is it like every smoke you draw in is polluted air?

Abyss Well. At that time (of the disappointing cigarette), I wasn't able to think of anything. My brain was at war, topsy-turvy, like in The Legend of Three Countries (Chinese classic novel). Completely, my brain was in a mess. Anyway, my brain kept blinking. "Wow, you are so unhappy now, or is it merely your imagination? If I had done it like that, things wouldn't have ended up like this." So, stuff kept blinking (appearing)... Things that had happened before that person (who made him sad) or about that

incident (which troubled him), all the related unhappy emotions would spring out in one go. So many things, boom, boom, boom, all came out. Yeah, that world (with the most disappointing cigarette) is none of my business anymore, I just wanted to leave, don't think (anymore), just jump over it.

Alice Does that world make you feel pain?

Abyss I wanted to find a hole to wiggle in, yeah, wanted to find a hole to wiggle in.

Alice When you wiggle into the hole, everything becomes none of your business. Anyone wants to fight, so be it. Those troubles are not your business anymore?

Abyss There was no sense of security, I felt insecure at that time, just wanted to find a hole to wiggle in, or crawl under my blanket in bed. So, in a word, just don't let me have any contact with the (outside) world.

Alice What does the polluted air do, when it's drawn into this horrifying world?

Abyss (The drawn in smoke) made me feel decadent, feel sorry for myself.

Alice Makes you feel decadent and sorry for yourself...

Abyss Decadent... that made me feel so insecure. Just like suddenly shut down from the outside world. Yeah, so I drew one more puff, I knew that it wouldn't give me any particular sensation (satisfaction), anyway, I just couldn't think of anything at that moment, I was so scared and insecure, I just didn't want to be in contact with the outside world.

Alice I have experienced a similar world.

Abyss For me, all the time.

Alice So, smoking, smoking can't help?

Abyss Can't help.

Alice Will it get worse if you don't smoke?

Abyss Will it get worse if I don't smoke? On the contrary, not necessarily. It may actually get better. So, one cigarette, two dollars and thirty cents! If it's not too bad, better finish it. If I only get to half of a cigarette, I will be thinking, maybe if I finish smoking it, I may suddenly calm myself down." But while I'm smoking, I may still want to find a hole to wiggle in. It's like this, more or less like that.

Alice So, when you are not happy, you would smoke one after another, non-stop, one after another?

Abyss Yes.

Alice On the other hand, would you also smoke one after another when you're happy?

Abyss Won't smoke one after another when I am happy... Well, maybe I will.

Alice So (you) will.

Abyss Yes, I will. Only today!

Alice Today? Can you tell me more about it?

Abyss Yeah, now I am working on my alcohol business but something new is developing. I see a trend coming, coz there is one on Facebook already. People kept sharing it. It (a new product) is beautiful inside as if it has movements. Good, so I went to find that one (product). And then somewhere, I found a health product, not health food ... it's a health supplement... I never realised something like that really exists. So, when I was on the phone talking to my girlfriend, and she said to me, "Why don't you try it out? It improves potency as well as helping with anti-aging." I said, "Is it really possible for this kind of drug to exist in this world?" She said it is. So, I went to find out, and I did find one. I found out that there is

one I could buy in Hong Kong. It's legal and natural! That's good, coz it's a new business opportunity. Wow! I was over the moon. I said, "Do you have any more ideas to tell me?" What a pleasant surprise. My girlfriend was the one who introduced my business partner to me. Of course, at the beginning, she didn't expect him to become my partner. And now she told me this (business opportunity). I was so happy that I smoked and smoked. I was late for ten minutes today because of that!

Alice Oh! So that was the reason. It was because of this incident. You got so excited, and you smoked and smoked. Were you at home?

Abyss At home, smoking and smoking. Oh yes, because of this, I completely forgot that I should be over here. Then, yeah... Oh blast, I had to quickly take a shower!

Alice Oh! How many sticks did you smoke... chain-smoke?

Abyss Three, four sticks.

Alice Quite a lot.

Abyss Three, four sticks. I was very happy, really very happy. I was over the moon.

Alice So, you are still happy now?

Abyss Yes. I think you need to create a trend no matter which industry you are in, and especially in the trading industry. You have a chance to be successful if nine out ten people don't know about it (new product). And I've got two ideas now. Wow, I am so happy!

Alice Is that the ideal world to you?

Abyss Sort of. It feels like going up a mountain and seeing the summit. I was probably at the bottom of the hill before, and couldn't really see the top. And suddenly, the summit doesn't seem so far away, and I can see it!

Alice Pretty good. I feel happy just by listening to you. Okay, so I was actually quite shocked in our first interview, when I asked you what smoking had given you. I didn't have much expectation when I asked you that question. I thought you would say "feeling relaxed or comfortable", something like that. But you didn't. You said smoking gave you pressure, pressure about money, and these are the only things smoking offers to you. You said you didn't want to go on (smoking), but you can't quit. That was amusing. I have interviewed a few students your age. They all said to me, "I am not afraid of death. If I can't do what I want, it's useless even if I live a long life. I'd rather do what I want, and live a short life. But now I have a full life, I don't want to quit (smoking). We can talk about it later, maybe after I get married and have babies. But not now." That's how I see the difference.

Abyss Perhaps I am a petty-minded person. I have been thinking ... if only I had used the cigarette money I've spent all these years to invest, to do business... but because of this (habit of smoking), I have missed so much. I think it is money (expenses on cigarettes) wasted and this thought gives me pressure. My ex girlfriends always nagged at me for not going out enough. Are you serious? Four hundred odd dollars for a small piece (of food) like this? I can cook you something similar at home. I buy an old A5 (Apple phone) and OK, it's this big! So why bother eating out? But they think eating out is more romantic. I don't think eating out is value for money. I mind spending money on things like this.

Alice You also did say that your family folks impress the money concept on you since you were a kid. Was that your dad who told you about how important money is?

- Abyss No. It's some past episodes... it's my mum. That time when my old man was in debt, owing one million dollars, and we thought the loan sharks would pour red paint on our gate. The two of them had a row in their bedroom. Being their son, I went to check out what was going on. They had gone into their room as if nothing was happening. But when I went outside their room to eavesdrop, I heard that things were not going well. My dad was worried that our home might not be safe, so it was better to take their son to stay with granny. My mum said something like it was Lee's (dad's family) business, nothing to do with us (the Yip's). Wow! Boom! It felt like I was being hit by a bomb (a strike). Nothing (bad) really happened after that and this incident disappeared from my memory, but I believe it made an impact on my mind. This incident re-emerged when I participated in that programme (Asia Works). Suddenly I felt a cold shiver and I was very angry. Yeah, perhaps because of this episode... nothing is left. Everything is gone. Even when the personal safety of their son is at risk, and they couldn't even ensure the safety of their son.
- Alice So, after that incident, they got divorced, and you went to stay with your granny. And your mum hasn't really taken care of you from then onwards?
- Abyss Yes, that's about it.
- Alice You have said that when you were a kid, your mum had done something that really upset you?
- Abyss That was it.
- Alice So that's the incident. Did you speak to your mum about it afterwards? About why she acted like she did?
- Abyss No, not really. Things are different now and it's unnecessary (to talk about the past). We have just started to get along again. Scars are no good for the relationship. Now she treats me well, and I treat her well too. So why bother? Otherwise, it will make her... it is unnecessary to make her feel difficult.
- Alice Or maybe you have forgiven her?
- Abyss You may say that. No complaints. Not forgiving a person is hard, I think.
- Alice If you don't forgive a person...
- Abyss Actually, It doesn't matter if you forgive, or you don't. It has already happened. You can't change it.
- Alice Whether you forgive someone or not, the scar is already in the heart. It is for life, so it's more about learning to live with the scar.
- Abyss Agreed. I completely agree. So, I seldom get angry with anyone, even when they have conned me (for money) before. It doesn't matter.
- Alice Was that the most upsetting incident?
- Abyss Yeah, the one that emerged from my subconscious memory. The most upsetting moment in my life.
- Alice At that time, only three of you lived in that house, dad, mum and you, right?
- Abyss And Granny.
- Alice Did Granny know about it?
- Abyss Yes, she did.
- Alice Granny knew... did she and you eavesdrop together, or you told her afterwards?
- Abyss My old man told her. My old man's side doesn't keep secrets. If one person knows, the whole family knows. So, one day my memory emerged, and I went to ask my dad about it. He said it did happen. Then my granny told the world that I remembered the incident. Then everyone started

talking about it ... "Yeah, your mum was a bad person and her sister was very bad too." (I was told) When I was born, she said I was an idiot. My palm (lines) was broken. She insisted I was an idiot.

Alice Oh! So, when you were a new born, because your palm lines were broken, she said you were an idiot? Just because of that?

Abyss Coz, the doctor said it first. When the doctor came out, he said "It is possible that your son has Down's syndrome." He said I had some similar symptoms. Then my aunt said, "I can tell he is an idiot!"

Alice How old were you then?

Abyss A little baby.

Alice She said something like that when you were only a baby?

Abyss I was a new born. I don't know. I only know coz my folks told me.

Alice Granny told you all this?

Abyss Yes. I didn't actually hear (her say) it. You said I was an idiot, so be it. It's no big deal to me.

Alice But it is not the case. You are a normal child. On what grounds did they say this nonsense?

Abyss The doctor said it was possible because there were similar symptoms, but we needed to wait and see how they developed. I was kept in the hospital. Also, I was very small. I was kept in an incubator.

Alice So, your weight was below average?

Abyss Yes

Alice How long were you in the incubator?

Abyss Don't know. Didn't ask. I suspect I am so short because of this.

Alice Maybe that was because of sleeping in the incubator at first. Maybe you looked ok initially but on the safe side, they had to keep you there to observe for a while before they released you.

Abyss Yes. It was a private hospital. Then nothing really happened to me. My mum's family really have bad mouth, such bad mouth.

Alice Wow! Your granny or your dad may beat them up if they heard what they said!

Abyss Very angry. Up to now, I still cannot get myself to like them. So irritating. Like when we are eating vegetables, she would say that she won't eat cheap vegetables, only organic vegetables costing thirty something dollars. Oh, come on, they're just vegetables, no need to show off!

Alice That auntie?

Abyss So, I thought, "You want to show off about eating vegetables. Fine!" I didn't say a word, just continued to eat. Then she asked me, "Have you started working?" "No!" "Are you studying?" "No!" Of course, I am studying. I just didn't want to tell them anything.

Alice They came to eat at your home or you ate outside?

Abyss Ate outside. Then my mum said, "Don't be like that!" I said "Oh!" Then I started playing on my phone. Now it's better. I do talk to my cousins.

Alice Cousins, the sons of your auntie?

Abyss Yes. Not close. I don't think they even remember my name.

Alice Oh! Same age as you?

Abyss More or less.

Alice You live far from them?

Abyss Far away. Almost at different ends of Hong Kong, one in Western District, one in Kwun Tong, quite a long distance.

Alice That is, no need to see each other.

Abyss That's right.

- Alice Ah, quite good. They said you might have Down's syndrome. Now, you are so successful, so you can tell them that they were all wrong!
- Abyss It doesn't matter anymore.
- Alice Something I want to know, it's about cigarettes... I watched a cigarette advertisement. I like watching advertisements very much. There is one advertisement, for Lucky Strike. It should be green Lucky Strike in Hong Kong. There is a red colour pack, the advertisement was (filmed) in Germany or somewhere else. That advertisement is very interesting ... very quiet, pitch dark ... then there is a lighter, swipe-lit a Lucky Strike cigarette, and then a close-up shot on the burning part of the cigarette. There is a guy smoking the cigarette, then the burning cigarette starts to recede in absolute silence, leaving just the sound of cigarette paper burning. I think I must be a very weird person because I think it's so romantic. The sound... it's almost like the sound of waves. You hear nothing but the sound of paper burning. So, I am interested to know the smoking process from people like you. You would light up the cigarette, slowly ... the cigarette lights up, it gets shorter, then only the cigarette tip is left. When you see this burning process of the cigarette, do you feel anything in particular, associate it with anything?
- Abyss From time to time. It does not happen to me all the time, only occasionally. I don't know why, but sometimes it's just, like what you said, so quiet, there is no sound around me. Then comes the sound of burning paper. But not every time. I would take a second puff ... it worked. The third puff, no, it didn't work. Sometimes it's like that. Very interesting.
- Alice So, it leads to a question ... what is the role of cigarettes to you?
- Abyss (A cigarette is like) a drug, yeah, as an analogy, and of course to me, stopping drugs is easier than stopping smoking.
- Alice Oh, so quitting drugs is easier! I think you need Methadone.
- Abyss No need. Not everything will go to the extreme. I think stopping smoking is much more difficult than stopping drugs, right.
- Alice Right. Drugs are like objects. They have no life. They're something like food.
- Abyss Yes, coz I can't think of any other analogy. Let's say it's like pork belly. If you roast the pork belly, it would get charred, but that's not the case. It (a cigarette) is something you draw in, something useless and harmful to you, so I can't find any analogy other than drugs.
- Alice And you have to puff it out after you've drawn it in. But with drugs, you just take it in and that's it!
- Abyss Drugs can be excreted through hair.
- Alice Oh, so the hair would get dry?
- Abyss Oh, not really. Just pluck a hair... Nowadays most countries run drug tests (on hair) instead of urine. Hong Kong is so backward. They know whether you've taken any drugs after they've run a hair test on you.
- Alice Oh, that's quite interesting... so it (a trace of drugs) comes out from there.
- Abyss Let's say that you have long hair, like it's three years old. A drugs test on your hair can still detect if you've taken any drugs.
- Alice Is that possible?
- Abyss Yes, that's possible. From a particular position (in the hair).
- Alice Quite advanced.
- Abyss So, Hong Kong is very backward, still using urine tests!
- Alice So, they can tell when you smoked, as the cigarette residue will show in your hair.

Abyss Basically, there is no need to check smokers.

Alice Because you can see?

Abyss Besides seeing, smokers show signs, look here, it's tainted yellow.

Alice The fingers.

Abyss The fingers get yellow. Those who smoke at home, you can smell it from their clothes when they come near you. Sometimes when you've smoked a lot, not only the clothes, but the body also carries a smell. Some of my classmates told me that I have (a smoker's) smell on my body.

Alice I am familiar with that smell, coz my dad has that. He used to smoke a lot, one pack one day. I can detect the cigarette smell in his breath.

Abyss Oh yes, oh yes.

Alice So, there was a time when I nagged at him.

Abyss When I came in, did you detect that smell?

Alice No, I didn't.

Abyss I was in a rush, so I didn't smoke downstairs before I came up.

Alice That's why you didn't smell. I didn't smell it on you. I am quite sensitive, I can smell that. For example, if my dad stole out for a smoke, even when he told me that he has quit, I can guess he smoked one or two sticks secretly. Then I walked over and sniffed him. Then I asked my dad, "Did you just smoke?"

Abyss You should leave him alone, just one or two sticks.

Alice If it's just one or two sticks, why not just quit totally?

Abyss Better than none, one or two sticks.

Alice No. Every time, he just said, "No, I didn't smoke." I said, "You smell of cigarettes."

Abyss (He should say) The smoke is from other people.

Alice He kept denying it. I asked mum, "Has dad started smoking again?" Mum said, "Oh yes. I have suspected that for a while." But dad said "No." I was getting a bit amused. Ok, you said the first cigarette in the morning is to wake you up. Do you actually want to wake up?

Abyss Let me put it this way... What do you mean "Do I actually want to wake up"? You mean does the body want to wake up?

Alice Once you wake up, you need to face the world again.

Abyss No, I won't have that feeling. I am very positive. I might get negative from time to time, but then I come out of it very quickly.

Alice So, you do want to wake up?

Abyss Yes, but if I don't want to wake up at a particular moment, and I don't have a cigarette, I will definitely fall asleep again, even if I go for a walk and watch some TV, I will definitely fall asleep after 15 minutes.

Alice Huh, I see. Do cigarettes give you warmth?

Abyss Probably not... perhaps in winter.

Alice Because it feels warmer to hold a cigarette?

Abyss Yeah, there might be some warm feeling when you light up the lighter, probably... but the cigarette itself doesn't make me feel warm.

Alice Because cigarettes are toxic.

Abyss It's something very annoying. It shouldn't exist in this world. I don't know who invented it ... such an evil person!

Alice Cigarette smoking was invented by the Indians. It became popular during World War I. You should blame the American and British governments for distributing cigarettes to the army, which led to its popularity. Okay, the enjoyment level of smoking seems to be related to your mood. You feel that the cigarette has a good taste when you are happy, and vice versa.

- How would you describe your love hate relationship with cigarettes? Just say whatever that comes to your mind. It's okay.
- Abyss First of all, I don't think I have any emotional attachments to cigarettes. It's my own emotion, something that happens in my brain that triggers this kind of feeling inside me. In other words, I don't have any feelings towards a cigarette. I love it when I want to smoke it. I hate it when smoking causes me to cough to death. In fact, I am not sure if my cough is caused by the flu virus, or by smoking. I don't have asthma... but I have difficulties in breathing sometimes... my ex-girlfriend has asthma, so I took her anti-asthmatic drug. It did help after two to three minutes. And then I hate it (smoking) more and more.
- Alice Because you had to use that spray?
- Abyss It makes me have asthma!
- Alice The asthma spray contains steroids. They help to expand your airways.
- Abyss Yes, it contains steroids.
- Alice You hate it (smoking) more and more, but you can't get rid of it, so you continue to hate it?
- Abyss Right. You are right.
- Alice But you won't hate yourself, only the cigarettes?
- Abyss Yes, I hate cigarettes. It's the cigarettes' problem!
- Alice Okay, I understand.
- Abyss That's human nature.
- Alice I am like that too! Also, you told me something very interesting. You said you had to learn how to smoke in order to blend into your ABC friends' social circle. But then when you were in high school, you felt that it was your classmates who had to blend into your world, and they must learn to smoke, just like you did. Can you tell me more about your feelings about this? Was there a feeling of victory, a kind of retaliation and proof to others that finally, others have to blend into your world?
- Abyss Not really. It's like a centrifugal ball. It goes where the force is. So, when the force of my ABC friends is bigger, I got pulled over by them, and I had to do whatever they were doing; but when I had the bigger force, the others would be pulled towards me, and they had to do whatever I did. It's as simple as that.
- Alice When you were in high school, what do you think was the force that drew others towards you?
- Abyss I was a bad boy! I studied in a boys' school and took part in the 'YES School Hunk' competition. That was the time I got to know the girls. And of course, all the participants in the 'YES School Babe' and 'YES School Hunk' are pretty good looking. Some of them are filming movies now... so yeah, there were always different girls who picked me up after school...
- Alice Oh, and they were the 'YES School Babes'?
- Abyss Yes, and more than that, many people recognised me. I was over the moon and I felt like a celebrity. Some people even asked for my autograph! I was so happy. Yeah, and then many girls just clung to me after knowing that I was the 'YES School Hunk'. I was already highly sought after by girls when I was fifteen, sixteen years old. I was really somebody... especially my first love... yeah, it was very messy as I had so many girlfriends. I drank and I smoked, and people would feel that... well, in the time of my high school years, people felt bad boys were most attractive and masculine. Good boys don't have any friends because their friends are

teachers! Bad boys and play boys are always the ones who have the greatest number of friends, and I am that bad boy!

Alice So that was very attractive!

Abyss Yes!

Alice So even the boys would get drawn to you. Was that an ideal world to you?

Abyss No, that wasn't an ideal world... well I was very hot and popular. But it was not an ideal world because there were teachers there!

Alice So, teachers shouldn't exist in that world?

Abyss That's right! At that moment, teacher shouldn't exist in that world. In the end, I still don't understand why those teachers didn't even bother to discuss with me about... they should have discussed with me before they decided to kick me out of the school! They should have asked me not to do this and that any more, and that if I continued to do this, then they would kick me out of the school. But they didn't even bother to say these things, and decided to kick me out straight away. I guess they really hated me!

Alice Shouldn't they have given you a demerit before they kicked you out from the school?

Abyss Well, they never did. That was why I was so shocked. They didn't even give me a demerit when they caught me smoking. I was wondering why they were so easy on me. That seemed totally impossible. I didn't believe in Jesus Christ, so I didn't pray. They shouldn't have let me off, but now I know why. They had wanted to kick me out of the school. Of course, they had a very good reason on paper. They said I voluntarily decided to drop out from the school, yeah.

Alice We don't have much time left. Let me ask you one last question. You mentioned before that your dad loved drinking, and sometimes when he got drunk, he would wake you up in the middle of the night to ask you for your homework. How often did you see him when he was drunk?

Abyss Not so frequently when I was little, but a lot more nowadays.

Alice A lot more nowadays?

Abyss I drink with him, so we get drunk together!

Alice Oh, so both of you would get drunk together!

Abyss Getting drunk together makes me feel very happy. I vomit on his pants and he vomits on mine.

Alice How do you go back home when both of you are drunk?

Abyss We go back home by ourselves when we are drunk, and then we have breakfast the next morning. If he was still around, we would go for lunch. And if he was still there after lunch, we would go drinking again. A while ago, I went drinking in China for four consecutive nights. Wow! That was awesome! We ate and drank, and ate and drank. We could drink from 6pm to 6am the next morning. But he (his dad) couldn't take it anymore, so he left at 2am, and I continued to drink with his friends until 6am.

Alice Did you guys go to Guangzhou? Did you drink red wine or brandy?

Abyss Red wine, white wine, no beer, and then there's Chinese white wine, Moutai, XO. Anything you can think of, yeah, something like that.

Alice He didn't drink that much when you were little?

Abyss He did, maybe I just didn't see it.

Alice But he wouldn't beat you up frequently after he got drunk, except that time?

Abyss Yes, but he wasn't drunk that time. It was in the morning, yeah, and he

even took me to play in Kowloon Park.

Alice So, he simply got angry and out of control that time.

Abyss Yes, that's right. I think he wasn't happy with his work. He tried to start all over again for a few times, but he didn't get anywhere. So I think he wasn't happy at that time, so he beat me up like that.

Alice I see, like that time when the loan shark almost sprayed red paint on your door...

Abyss Almost.

Alice Not get to that stage yet.

Abyss We were scared, only scared. I don't think it would have happened

Alice And then he settled that loan?

Abyss He asked for help from a friend to settle that loan, and he is paying his friend back by instalments now.

Alice He has got friends who can help. That's a blessing.

Abyss He has a lot of friends, and he has very strong social skills. He taught me how to drink when I was twelve, and also how to chat with those uncles and big brothers.

Alice Okay, I think I have no more questions. Do you have any questions for me?

Abyss I have no other questions, unless there are other things you want to know?

Alice I think that's about it. At first, I was going to ask you something about your mum, but I guess you've already told me your unhappiest moment with your mum, and that you didn't get to live with your mum until recently. Or when you were little, you told me that you were in the infant incubator after birth, so you had a period of separation from your mum after birth, and that you were not brought home directly from the hospital by your mum after birth. So that's about it. Thank you very much for your help, Abyss, I have learnt a lot about you today. Thank you!