

Why Jim Stiles Isn't Normal:

A Story That MUST Be Told

By Scott Thompson

You should know that I'm a relative newcomer to *The Canyon Country Zephyr*. For me it started when Jim Stiles published several of my letters beginning in 2007, including one in which I more or less accused him of being crazy. But I didn't write my first story until late in 2008.



At the time I was researching and writing that story Jim had recently published "The Greening of Wilderne\$\$...Part 2" in the *Zephyr*. And was getting hammered in all four directions for it by the mainstream greens, because he'd pointed out in scrupulous detail their hypocrisy in taking fistfuls of money from wealthy donors with business interests that were antithetical to the heart of the environmental mission. Their overall response strategy, because they couldn't criticize the substance of what he said, was to attack him on a personal level. Undeterred, Jim responded with energy, determination, and humor. The take-away message (for those with a plugged in pre-frontal cortex to process it with) is that when it comes to wads of money, political liberals – maybe I should say neo-liberals - are as inclined toward hypocrisy and scape-goating as anybody else in politics.

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In early 2007 I had, for 17 years, been a devoted alcohol and drug counselor, and for the previous four years had been editor of *Professional Contact*, the quarterly publication of the West Virginia Association for Addiction Professionals (WVAADC). We had a strong state association going and were garnering praise and recognition from our parent organization, the National Association for Addiction Professionals (NAADAC). They saw *Professional Contact* as exemplary.

And then it happened. NAADAC accepted two "unrestricted educational grants" from pharmaceutical companies in an amount equal to over 83% of the total dues it received from its own membership that year. The purpose of the larger grant, much larger by far, was to finance a series of workshops nationwide to instruct alcohol and drug counselors on how to get their clients to take certain brand name pharmaceutical medications as part of their treatment in getting clean and sober - one of which was manufactured, lo and behold, by the company that funded the larger grant.

The pretense involved in this exercise was that NAADAC was in a unique position to present "unbiased information" in these workshops. Despite research available at the time (hint: this is the punch line) demonstrating that where a pharmaceutical company funds medical education, the workshop is likely to be biased in favor of the company's brand name medication.

This nutso situation presented an exact parallel, except on a smaller scale as I said, to mainstream environmental organizations taking wads of corporate cash while pretending to maintain their idealism and objectivity in protecting wild lands and ecosystems.

Compared to Stiles, though, I got off easy. In response to my professionally worded this-is-bullshit letter to the NAADAC President, Executive Director, all the Board members, and all the state-level associations, I only received a scornful, pissed off e-mail from NAADAC's President, a few polite, empty responses from some of NAADAC's other leaders, and of course the massive silent treatment (one alcohol and drug counselor in North Carolina did e-mail to tell me I was right on). By contrast, Stiles was publicly attacked and denigrated on a personal level: I suspect to satisfy the ire of certain donors or members who were asking questions.

The take-away message (for those with a plugged in pre-frontal cortex to process it with) is that when it comes to wads of money, political liberals – maybe I should say neo-liberals - are as inclined toward hypocrisy and scape-goating as anybody else in politics. An eerie parallel to this, on a smaller scale, had been going on in my own life.

Jim's fortitude in handling this situation made a deep impression on me. Sixty years old at the time, I was all too familiar with the way otherwise decent, competent professionals habitually turn a blind eye to hypocrisy and injustice when confronting it would mean taking on a truly powerful individual or organization. Once I told a psychiatrist whom I had greatly respected that the practice of pharmaceutical companies buying behavioral health professionals lunches in order to hawk more of their pills was bribery. His response? "Now Scott, you don't want to be known as a trouble maker." That's what I mean.

This psychiatrist was a normal person. Unfortunately.

So it was easy for me to see, in reading "The Greening of Wilderne\$\$...Part 2" and then watching how Jim responded to the flak he got for writing it, that he is anything but a normal person. Exactly because he has the strange and fortunate proclivity to stick up for what he believes almost regardless of what happens. And because he's set the tone, the *Zephyr* is like this, too.

While adapting to the norms of the mainstream may open up financial and social opportunities for people, it can also imply embracing, or at least tolerating, behaviors and ideas that many a perceptive junior high school student - and I've done counseling with more than a few - can see are mean-spirited and absurd. And that's what nutso is: an absurd notion or set of circumstances bolstered by narrow self-interest and backed up by social and financial pressure; usually a lot of it.

Flattening nutso notions is a priority at the *Zephyr*, particularly where they endanger the wildness of the land. We can do this because as writers we have no investment in being normal and because somebody needs to do it and because we aren't being muzzled by advertisers or wealthy donors and because we're not shy about pissing people off.

A primary example of grist for our mill is denial of climate change, which may be the most catastrophic example of nutso camouflaging as normal ever. Consider this: even though 97% of

the credible scientists have long been convinced that humans are causing climate change, and have repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly said so, more than half of Americans still deny it. If you look into our archives a bit you'll see that from early on we've been ardently covering this issue. As opposed to the typical half-hearted coverage in the mainstream media.

Finally, because it so often includes creativity and humor, I think crazy is normally a good thing.

Why I Happily Share My Husband, Scott, with the Z

By Gail Kinsey

I am Gail Kinsey, married to Scott Thompson for over 20 great years and his willing partner in our collection of travels to the sacred lands of the American West. Before we made our relationship legal in October, 1992, we had already taken our 'honeymoon' trip backpacking through the Gila Wilderness Area in New Mexico; a memorable and interesting test of how well we would get along in my small dome tent, proving our endurance with heavy backpacks, starting our early morning hikes while our breath was a mist of freezing fog and ending each day tired and happily shedding layers of clothes as the bright sunshine and clear blue skies filled our view from high mesa trails. I'm excited to report that we

passed that test and it has only gotten better and more amazing. Since then planning and exploring new, and sometimes revisited, favorite places out there has helped us create a solid foundation of shared reverence for our earth and the fragile environment.

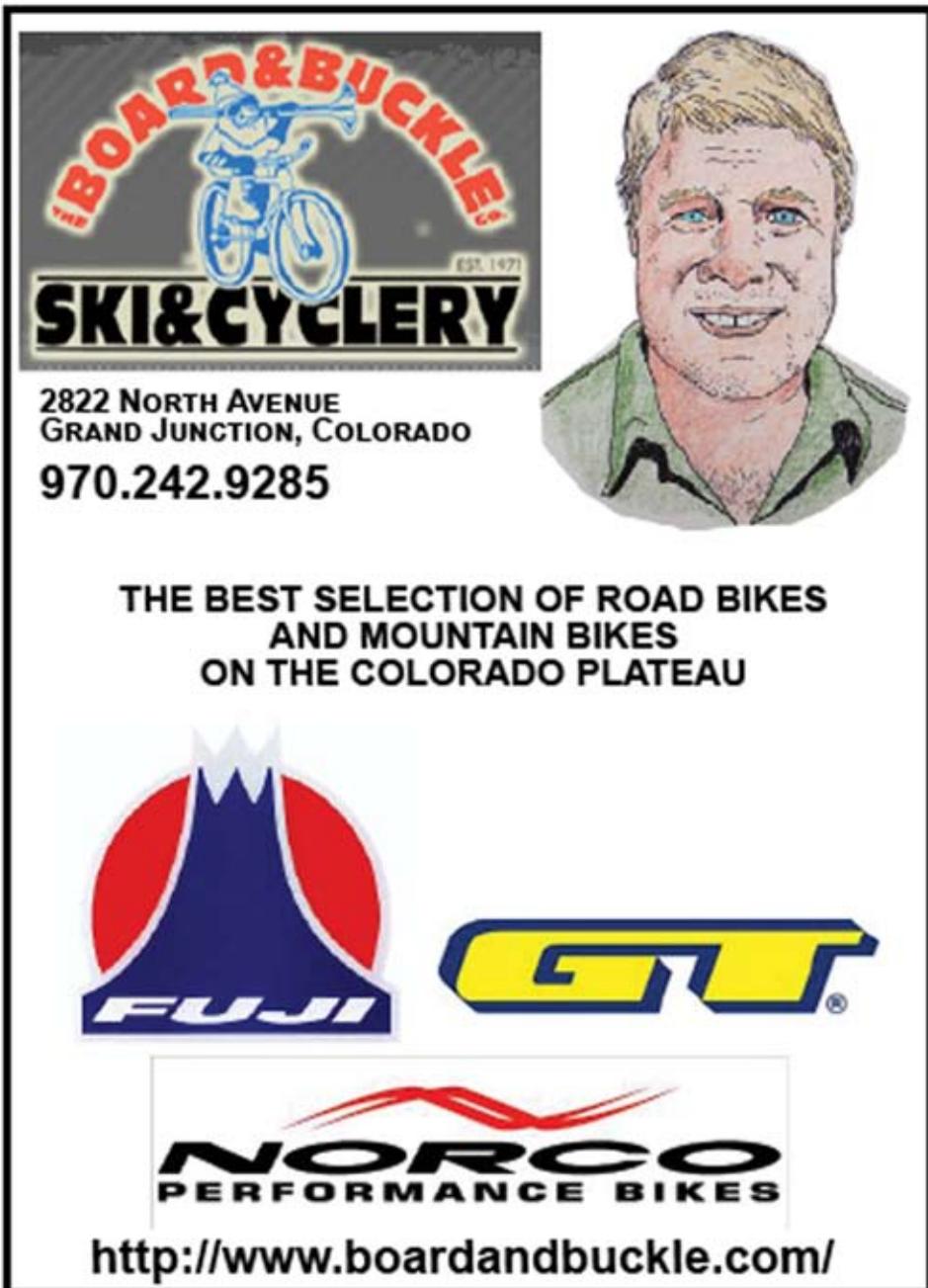
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The CC Zephyr provides an outlet for Scott's thoughtful reflections about not only his passion for his connection to the high country desert but also an important connection to like-minded people

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people—Jim, Tonya and Doug—who share his views and concerns for the future of the land. They are like cosmic BFFs who have yet to meet face to face. The Z allows Scott to be honest and openly express his love for the land in the style of Ed Abbey whom he greatly admired. Although we have a tight little circle of aging hippie, peacenik friends in our meditation group and often talk about climate change and the sad desecration of our own beau-

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