

Norm Jensen (1940-2012)

This is a brief glimpse into his life, jointly written from the musings and piecing together of a life by two of his good friends, Cecile Shohet and Alex Maksymowicz.

It is hard for us to know, as we didn't think to ask in time, but Norm Jensen either knew of his fascination with the flora of the Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains before he arrived in southwestern Oregon in 2001 (he was fifty-nine), or he very quickly acquired it, as evidenced by his participation in NPSO flora forays that same year. He immediately put his long-standing interest in photography to valuable use by compiling an extensive photographic record of the wildflowers of this region. His collection totals over twenty thousand superb images.

From the start, Norm befriended many botanists at the Forest Service, BLM, Nature Conservancy, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service, seeking their help in the identification of his photos, wanting to know more about the flora of our region and to locate botanical hotspots. He soon started volunteering his services on projects for agency personnel. His last project was collecting seeds from two wild whitebark pine trees on Mount Ashland to preserve the genome of that species in the Siskiyou Mountains.

Norm soon became an expert on the flowering plants of southern Oregon, along the way learning the detailed botanical terminology necessary to use the keys and to discuss the ecology and taxonomy of wildflowers. He even took up sparring over the correct pronunciation of Latin words! Cheerful, helpful, and fearless, he was the perfect companion on botanical expeditions.

Eventually, Norm's passion focused on finding and photographing rare wildflowers, utterly intrigued as he was by the Siskiyou endemics. He traveled extensively in our region, camping in his beloved gray van to get that magical early morning light so coveted by photographers (and to avoid wind).

His visits to family members in northern California and the Rocky Mountain states were often timed to correspond with native plant society hikes, and he expanded his society memberships to include the California and Utah native plant societies in addition to NPSO.

In 2004, he put his computer skills to use by volunteering to create a website for the Dorothy King Young chapter of CNPS (Mendocino County) and continued to serve as their webmaster until his death. He served as the NPSO webmaster for six years (2006-2012) and set up and moderated the NPSO Discussion List. He posted many, many of his flower photographs on the CalPhotos website, and later in the NPSO Photogallery, which he set up and managed. His personal botanical websites were creative, whimsical, and artistic: <http://mitella.org/> and <http://botanicals.mymesis.com/photos/main.php>. It's worth checking them out!

Starting with one client in Ashland, Norm developed a far-ranging house and pet sitting service that allowed him to botanize

and photograph in other areas of Oregon. His reliability, patience, sensitivity and true love of animals resulted in a great demand for his services, and sometimes he was booked a year in advance.

For seven years Norm lived in a rustic cabin in Takilma in the Illinois Valley, surrounded by Douglas fir, madrone, ponderosa pine and white oak. It had an outhouse for a bathroom and no running water, and he loved it. Maybe his longevity there had something to do with the fact that about half the time he could indulge in all the modern amenities in someone else's house! During his time in the

Illinois Valley, he acquired extensive knowledge of the location of the many special plants that grow there and shared his knowledge with other plant lovers by leading multiple NPSO field trips. His final residence was in Medford, where he shared a house with the owners.

Prior to moving to the Rogue Valley, Norm lived in the San Francisco Bay area where he taught school. He loved teaching his third graders! He claimed to have been the first person to bring a computer into the classroom there, most probably one that he put together from a kit. He taught himself to sail and spent lots of time sailing in San Francisco Bay. He loved skiing, so when he retired from teaching, he moved to the Lake Tahoe area of California. His interest in computers (again, self-taught) enabled him to set up a consulting business there. And, as ever, he continued to photograph nature.

As a youngster, he was confined for a full year in an iron lung, after contracting polio at the age of ten. He was one of the few to survive this

experience and come out relatively unscathed. His brother recalls that it was during this time that he began excelling in school, and perhaps it was during this confinement that he developed his incredible focus and ability to teach himself anything.

Norm loved to cook and eat good food and drink good wine. He was always a welcome guest at dinner parties, especially because he was an attentive, sympathetic and non-judgmental listener. He was a very private person; his way was to learn about others rather than talk about himself. But he was very open to answering questions about himself if asked. He had a great sense of humor and a love of the English language which he put to use frequently; there were those witty jabs with just a touch of sarcasm that always brought a twinkle to his eye, and e-mail exchanges with him could escalate into a game of punsmanship, each pun engendering another over many messages.

Norm was a very special person who has left behind not only the extensive family to whom he was very attached, but also the many friends that he made during his eleven years in Oregon and those previous. His memory lives on in our hearts, and his many exquisite photos populate a number of web pages.

His artistic sense is on display in his wildflower photography and in the composition, arrangement and design of his websites. Norm chose to use his time here on earth doing the things he truly loved. He was a man of peace: gentle, patient, and generous with his time. He walked in beauty.



Norm Jensen at Woodcock Fen. Photo by Alex Maksymowicz.

A memorial fund has been set up through the Oregon Flora Project (<http://www.oregonflora.org/>) to incorporate Norm Jensen's photographic record of native plants (over 20,000 images) into a lasting archive for use by the botanic community and as a historic record in documenting the Oregon flora. Donation checks

may be sent to Agricultural Research Foundation, 100 Strand Ag Hall, Oregon State University, Corvallis OR 97331-4067. In the memo column, please write #4482 Oregon Flora Project, In Memory of (IMO): Norm Jensen.
