

## SOS AND THE STORY OF ABBY

As an environmental professional for more than 30 years, I would periodically be asked to conduct information sessions and provide talks on a variety of natural resource issues. Invariably there were repeated questions of “what can I do?” My response was always the same, “take your passion and make it happen,” coined from the classic film *Flash Dance*. In other words, I can make suggestions related to environmental activism, but without commitment and follow through in the form of passion I was not convinced anything would ultimately get accomplished. And that is the reason I formed the Southwestern Organization for Sustainability (SOS) in 2006. The SOS, a non-profit 501(c)3, was established to provide a venue in the form of structure and organization for individuals to implement and process their environmental convictions. In this regard, while we have a board of directors, the organization operates on a subcommittee basis. People with different interests attend and can join a currently operating subcommittee (past subcommittees have included energy, recycling, simplicity circles, etc.) or they can form a new one to match their particular passion(s). The story of Abby provides a very real and perfect example.

It was in the early SOS years during a monthly board meeting, of which the public is always welcome and invited, that Abby Linzie joined us. She waited patiently while we finished administrative business and when it was time for new business we asked what we could do for her. “I want to start a farmer’s market,” she said. Great we replied, how can we help and support that effort? She informed us that she would likely need seed money. Therefore, we formed a farmer’s market subcommittee, with her as the chair, and we found, wrote, and applied for a \$2,000 grant to get the market going. The grant was approved and with that they were off and running. While a plethora of work (e.g., budgets, marketing plan, vendor contacts, etc.) was required to get the farmer’s market started, her and the subcommittee’s passion saw the task through. This very successful SOS-sponsored farmer’s market is now in its 9<sup>th</sup> year! This is just one example, another could be our Earth week activities, now in its 6<sup>th</sup> successful year—but that is another story.

The point is that this is a perfect illustration of why SOS was formed and what can happen when a small group of committed people are passionate about a particular environmental issue or topic. Abby will be moving away from our community soon and she will be sorely missed. At a recent going away party, pictured below, before parting ways she said to me “you are my real hero.” I responded back with tears in my eyes, “no Abby, you are mine!”



[SOS board of directors at Abby’s 3-24-16 going away party—she is front and center]

We are facing survival issues related to environmental degradation that are unprecedented. To stem our slide toward extinction, the easy and comfortable measures are no longer adequate. It is time get crazily passionate; to do the harder thing, the longer reach, the greater sacrifice to defend the Earth and the imperiled experiment called humanity. We have responsibility, not power. Our job is not to exploit, but to be wise stewards. We cannot stand by as the human race destroys itself, its habitat, and countless other species. Let us remember Margaret Mead’s words, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”