Sunday February 27, 2005

Scouts' honor

The whistle-blower

By • By PETER ZUCKERMAN • PZUCKERMAN@POSTREGISTER.COM • AND POST REGISTER STAFF

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Ben Steed

Adam Steed

His first week of Boy Scout camp, 14-year-old junior counselor Adam Steed marched into the director's office and said: "Brad Stowell is molesting Scouts."

Brad wouldn't do that, said the man behind the desk.

"How can it be right that Brad goes into boys' tents alone, gives them massages and touches them where he shouldn't?" the Pocatello teenager asked.

"We've talked to Brad," Elias Lopez said. "He promised me he doesn't massage below the waist."

Adam asked to go home.

Stay, Lopez said.

Adam asked to call his parents.

Don't tell them about Stowell, Lopez said.

Adam stomped out, frustrated. It wasn't the first time he had complained.

This is Adam Steed's account, told publicly for the first time.

The adults wouldn't stop Stowell, so Adam decided to do it himself. With help from his little brother, Ben, he gathered a group of victims who told their stories and demanded someone call the police.

About four days later, on July 11, 1997, many of the roughly 300 children at camp gathered by the dining hall as deputies arrested Stowell and hauled him away.

Charged with sex abuse, Stowell eventually pleaded guilty to molesting two boys.

A district judge sentenced Stowell to 150 days -- the time often served by repeat drunk drivers -- and put him on probation for 15 years.

Then came the lawsuits. Victims other than the Steed boys alleged the Boy Scouts knew Stowell was a risk and hired him anyway.

The Scouts had the lawsuit files closed and settled the claims.

When one file was finally released to the public last month, it revealed that before the Scouts settled the suits and paid the victims, Stowell had testified under oath that from 1988 to 1997 he molested at least 24 boys, many of them Scout campers. Another victim was 6 years old. Scout leaders testified they received warnings but went ahead and hired Stowell.

Stowell is now 32, married and living on the 800 block of Chantilly Lane in Idaho Falls. He works at an eastern Idaho recreational vehicle dealership, hasn't reoffended and was recently accepted to law school. He said he's changed and that this publicity is unfair.

But Adam, now a junior studying science at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, said he has trouble understanding how Stowell molested so many kids and served so little time in jail.

Local Scout volunteers, he said, do great work and shouldn't be tarnished by the actions of a few.

The camp director, Elias Lopez, wasn't being malicious, Adam said; he was poorly trained and following orders.

The Scouting professionals at the Grand Teton Council (which overseas Scouting in the region) didn't do their jobs and allowed a pedophile to devastate the lives of dozens of children, Adam said.

Nearly eight years later, Adam still wants to know: Why did it take a 14-year-old to finally confront the molester?

Brad Stowell looked like someone parents trust: button-down shirts, trimmed hair and a ready smile.

He had served an LDS mission, he worked for the Boy Scouts as a teenager, his mother was on the Boy Scouts board of directors. He talked Scouting and religion. He brought his fiancee with him as he schmoozed neighbors, including the Steeds.

He ate dinner at the Steed home in Pocatello, gave Ben and Adam rides in his souped-up Toyota 4-by-4 and cheered at Adam's wrestling meets.

"He came with all the credentials and had the appearance of someone you want your children around," said Adam's father, Paul Steed, who teaches at the LDS church's Century Seminary in Pocatello.

Everyone in the neighborhood seemed to love Stowell, too, and Paul and Deborah Steed were flattered when he asked their sons to work with him at Camp Little Lemhi.

Stowell invited Adam to camp early. He said four other staffers would be sleeping in the same room and he needed Adam's help "to make sure camp was ready."

It was a lie.

Little, if any, work was done on the camp. Stowell opened a cabin on the east side of the lake, talked about the soft mattresses and placed two sleeping bags on the same bed, zippers facing each other. The bed was in a room away from the others.

Adam moved his sleeping bag to the floor.

Stowell put it back on the bed.

"I want to sleep alone," Adam said.

Scouts often sleep together, Stowell said.

Adam woke later that night to heavy breathing.

Someone had unzipped his bag and undone his clothes.

Stowell hovered overhead, naked. His hands were busy where they shouldn't be.

"What is going on?" Adam thought. He tried to move, but was petrified.

Stowell breathed faster and louder.

Adam sat up and acted like he'd just woken.

Stowell moved away.

Adam stayed awake most the night praying Stowell wouldn't return.

After the so-called work day, Adam went home, fearful of the man who used to look like a perfect Scout.

Adam didn't want to return to the camp.

Stowell told the Steeds their son couldn't break his commitment and that Camp Little Lemhi was understaffed.

Adam braced himself.

"You got one, too?" another counselor said when he saw Adam's necklace on the first day of camp. "I burned mine."

"Why?" Adam asked.

"Don't you know?"

Adam didn't.

Stowell slipped the leather necklace around Adam's neck six months before camp. He called it a "friendship necklace" and said he got it on his LDS mission.

Other boys had them, too. Stowell made them seem cool, something Scouts earned -- like a merit badge.

Adam pressed the boy. Why burn it? Because, Adam was told, Stowell gave necklaces to the boys he touched in the dark.

Adam boiled. He recruited his 12-year-old brother to spy on Stowell and hunt for other victims.

Necklace-wearers were easy to find but reluctant to talk. Children, especially teenage boys, often feel humiliated if they're molested. They may think they'll get in trouble if they tell anyone what's happened to them.

When victims did open up to Adam, they reported attacks like his own.

Scouts are taught to remember three R's to keep themselves safe from abuse: Recognize danger, Resist abusers and Report.

It was time to Report.

One problem. Such reports were supposed to go to the program director: Brad Stowell.

Adam went to the man in charge of the whole camp.

Gathering his courage, he found the camp director by the bell in the center of camp.

Adam felt like he'd pass out, but he spoke to Lopez in a clear voice: "I need to talk to you."

It took a long time, and Adam still didn't think Lopez believed him.

Don't worry, Lopez said when they were done.

Adam kept an eye on Stowell, and a few hours later, Lopez pulled Adam aside to talk again.

He had talked to his supervisor and to Stowell. Everything had been resolved, the man said.

But within two days, Stowell followed Adam to his tent at night, crept inside and tried to touch him.

Adam ran.

He dashed to the north side of the lake, where a white canvas tent stood near the dock. Panting, Adam sat amid the noisy crowd of campers.

Some time later, perhaps 20 minutes, Stowell walked in. He opened a Bible and sat next to one of the children to read Scriptures. In his right hand, Stowell held the Good Book. With his left hand, he massaged a child's shoulder. Ben and Adam watched the hand move down the child's pants.

The child, one of the youngest in the room, didn't say anything. He looked shocked, a forced smile on his face.

Older staffers laughed at Stowell's jokes and listened to a story. Didn't they notice?

So Adam stood up. "Don't do that," he said in a voice everyone could hear.

Stowell ignored him.

Adam wedged his arms between Stowell and the boy and pried them apart.

Stowell kept talking.

From the beginning, Stowell had separated Ben and Adam from most of the other Scouts, putting the brothers alone in a tent on the north side of the lake. Most campers slept in larger groups in a different area.

Ben, a heavy sleeper, woke one night (as best he can recall, four nights later) and noticed he'd been moved outside. His sleeping bag was unzipped.

He dragged his sleeping gear inside, tied the tent closed, zipped his bag and fell asleep.

He woke again, perhaps an hour later. Again, someone had dragged him outside and unzipped his sleeping bag.

This time, he tied the tent closed with a fist-sized knot. He asked his brother, now awake, what was going on.

"Be careful," Adam said.

The third time Ben woke outside, Stowell's hand covered his mouth. Ben tried to yell but couldn't. He struggled free, and Stowell ran away.

Adam and Ben were furious: This kind of stuff shouldn't happen at Scout camp.

The next day, Adam, who wanted to be an Eagle Scout, stopped all work on merit badges. He spied on Stowell full time. He followed him when he went into tents alone, stopping him when he tried to touch kids.

By now, Adam was reporting each incident to Lopez, who didn't seem to believe him and kept telling Adam he was calling his supervisors.

When Adam gathered Scouts who were willing to walk with him into Lopez's office, he demanded the camp leader call the police.

Instead, Lopez wanted to call the Scouting office.

Adam shook his head. "This is a police matter."

Everything is OK, the man said. Brad won't go alone into tents anymore.

Adam asked for a phone.

The Scouts are taught to "always be prepared," but Adam wasn't ready for the backlash.

Nobody believed him.

The molester said he'd been framed for accidentally brushing a child's rear on an obstacle course. Plenty of folks believed that.

Classmates gossiped that it was Adam's fault. That's what he got for spending so much time with Stowell.

After Stowell was arrested, Paul Steed, a loyal worker in the LDS church's Scouting program, had to press his sons for their story. They resisted for a half-hour.

"They said they weren't allowed to say what happened," he said.

Adam's classmates, who didn't read the court file, harassed him.

The Scouts never defended the whistle-blower's honor either, the Steeds say.

And the news media weren't helpful, publishing few details.

"Many of the parents don't know what happened to their children," Paul Steed said. The Scouts and the courts didn't tell parents, he said, even when they should have suspected there were more victims.

For at least four years, Scout leaders had access to a sworn statement from Brad Stowell in which he said he began abusing boys at camp in 1988 and victimized two dozen boys, many of them campers.

Based on what a prosecutor once told them, the Steeds thought Stowell would get a standard sentence for a serial molester: about 20 years in prison.

When the time came for court, hardly any victims would testify, the Steeds said. Parents, who didn't know what happened, loved Stowell. Youngsters didn't want to criticize the Boy Scouts. Adam was on his own.

The rumors and harassment were so bad at his high school that he left, took the GED to graduate and took college courses.

"I felt like I was the one who got in trouble," he said.

Still, Adam said he knew he did the right thing. When he feels upset, he can look at the letter the courts ordered Stowell to write him:

"I'm sure I would have continued going to camp had I not been caught. ... I was always creating a circle of more lies, more deception and more opportunities to abuse boys for my gratification. That was my ultimate goal with the boys I befriended."

If he had not exposed Stowell, Adam said, he could have enjoyed high school.

The Boy Scouts might have treated him better.

They might have recruited him to help lead campers.

Instead, he did what Scouts are supposed to do: help other people ... stay morally straight ... do a good turn daily.

Today, Brad Stowell is an Eagle Scout with five palms.

Adam Steed is not.

Idaho Falls reporter Peter Zuckerman can be reached at 542-6750.

'Someone you want your children around'

A district judge sentenced Stowell to 150 days -- the time often served by repeat drunk drivers -- and put him on probation for 15 years.

Merit necklaces

Scouts are taught to remember three R's to keep themselves safe from abuse: Recognize danger, Resist abusers and Report.

His brother's keeper

'I felt like I was the one who got in trouble'

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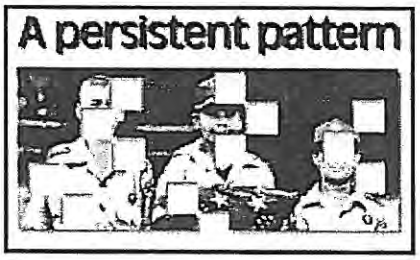
Sunday July 03, 2005

MORE PEDOPHILE CASES EMERGE WITH SCOUT CAMP CONNECTIONS

A PERSISTENT PATTERN

By PETER ZUCKERMAN



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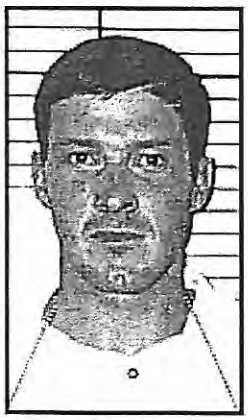
• By PETER ZUCKERMAN • PZUCKERMAN@POSTREGISTER.COM • AND POST REGISTER STAFF

A Post Register investigation has found evidence that at least three molesters stalked eastern Idaho Boy Scouts during the career of current Grand Teton Council leadership:

Dennis Empey

• A sworn statement filed Friday in Bannock County court alleges that a camp counselor named Dennis Empey mutilated animals, showed off his firearms and then raped a 15-year-old Eagle Scout in 1983 at the Island Park Scout Camp. The allegation matches the crimes Empey was convicted of in Utah in 1991. The story about the rape was bolstered by a second Eagle Scout who says Empey tried to rape him a few weeks later during a sleepover.



Jeff Hardin

• Court records unsealed in May show that Jeff Hardin, a counselor at Camp Little Lemhi was convicted of lewd conduct for molesting a Chubbuck Scout. Hardin, a Scoutmaster, met the boy at Camp Little Lemhi, got to know him and sneaked into his bedroom to fondle the boy in September 1991. According to the victim, similar abuse occurred "too many times to count."

• As previously reported by the Post Register, former Camp Little Lemhi counselor and staff supervisor Brad Stowell confessed to molesting at least 24 boys, many of them Scouts. He was arrested in 1997.

Victims said the molesters presented the facade of respectability. They landed top Scout ranks, served LDS church missions and pursued college degrees.

Although they wouldn't grant detailed interviews for this story, Grand Teton Council officials have said that, at least in the Stowell case, they could not have done anything to

stop the pedophile.

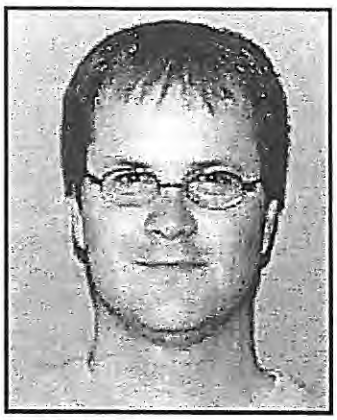
The victims disagreed. They complained that executive director Kim Hansen and other leaders of the region's Grand Teton Council discounted warnings and complaints.

They said Scout officials should have told more parents that Scouts had been fondled, seduced or sodomized by Scout leaders.

While they emphasized that most Scout volunteers and sponsors are virtuous, victims said they have spoken out in hopes that confronting the truth will forever break the pattern of pedophilia at eastern Idaho Scout camps.

"Knowing the bewildering horror that befalls young victims, how it alters so dramatically the rest of their lives, I feel it is immoral to do nothing," wrote Jeff Bird, who says Empey raped him.

" ... Be thankful that this filth has been exposed to the disinfectant of light for all to see so that we can ensure that our Scouting organization follows the rules that are there to protect our sons from the deep wounds of this crime."



Brad Stowell

Kim Hansen

When the first case surfaced in February, Grand Teton Council executive Kim Hansen said he knew of only one pedophile camp counselor: Brad Stowell.

Jeff Bird thought he ended it by reporting -- twice -- that he'd been anally raped at camp in June 1983 by an older instructor who coerced him to share a tent.

Bird grew up, got married, had six kids and told his wife little about it until he read the newspaper's report on Brad Stowell.

Change the names and it's a rerun of the same story, Bird said when he called the paper. How had pedophiles returned to camp, he demanded, after he'd reported his humiliating rape?

"They told me it would never happen again," he said. "It was supposed to stop with me."

Bird earned his Eagle Scout badge at age 13 as a member of Troop 313 sponsored by the 13th Ward of the LDS Idaho Falls North Stake.

His father was an Eagle Scout. So were his relatives and friends.

On Friday, Bird filed a sworn version of these charges in Bannock County court to support younger Scouts who have filed a lawsuit against the Grand Teton Council.

Repeated efforts to reach Dennis Empey by phone and e-mail were unsuccessful

during the course of more than a month.

Kim Hansen would only comment on Empey's recent work on the Grand Teton Council Web site.

Here's a summary of Bird's allegations:

Bird said he met Empey in the early 1980s and, as a teen, considered the older man a friend. At the time, Empey worked as a waterfront instructor at several eastern Idaho Scout camps, Grand Teton Council President Dave Smith confirmed.

Empey helped boys earn merit badges and taught them to swim. Charismatic and popular, he sang made-up songs. He convinced campers to wear bejeweled cat-eye sunglasses to the laundromat. He wowed campers by creating a floating fireplace, several local Scouts recall. With gunpowder and gasoline, he concocted a cannon and small explosives, Jeff Bird said in a detailed sworn statement.

Empey was friends with Island Park Scout Camp director Kim Hansen, Bird and another Scout recall. Empey and Hansen hung out together at camp, staying up late talking.

Hansen, who now holds the top job in the Grand Teton Council, declined to comment on the relationship.

Bird says Hansen interviewed him in 1983 and hired him to teach Scout campers about plants. Bird lived in a framed tent in the nature area and fed the nearby rock chucks.

For two weeks, camp was full. Empey, then 25, was nice to Bird and included the teen with the popular Scouts.

"I got into a disagreement with another staffer and Dennis Empey reprimanded that staffer to the point that [the staffer] was crying," Bird recalls in his affidavit.

When campers and staff went home for a weekend, Empey and Bird stayed.

On Saturday, Empey used his .44-caliber pistol to blast the rock chucks to pieces.

Empey didn't stop there.

He dissected them, pulled out their entrails, played with the mangled bodies. He seemed to enjoy it.

Bird didn't tell him to stop, even though he wanted to -- Empey was scaring him.

That night, Empey asked Bird to stay in his tent.

No, Bird said.

Empey insisted it would "be fun."

After dinner, Empey and Bird went into Empey's tent, where Empey told the teen "gross ... secrets" about his girlfriend and about sex. He showed Bird the guns under his cot.

At about 1 a.m., Empey took the cot on the east side of the tent and Bird took the one on the west.

Empey extinguished the light, sat down on Bird's cot and made the boy fondle him. Then he held Bird down and raped him. Bird says he screamed in pain.

"I was so overwhelmed by the situation that I was unable to fight," Bird said.

They were still alone.

Next morning, Bird ate breakfast with his attacker, his superior in the camp chain of command. Empey took him sailing.

"I was so ashamed of what had happened because I felt I might have been responsible," Bird said. "I was confused and scared and I didn't even understand what had happened to me."

Sex-abuse prevention is now taught to Scouts and Scout leaders. But Bird said he didn't get any training back then. Still, he says, he did what Scouts are now trained to do: report pedophiles.

When campers and the rest of the staff returned to camp the next day, Bird asked to talk to the man in charge.

Big mistake, he says. Telling Hansen made the rape seem worse.

Nervous, Bird met Hansen by the treeline at the edge of the flag field, Bird's affidavit says.

"As best as I was able, I told Kim Hansen what had happened to me Saturday night," Bird said. "I was still quite scared, shaky and was tearing up as I spoke to him. I told him that when Dennis and I were alone, Dennis had me stay in his tent. I told him that Dennis had touched me in a bad way.

"Kim Hansen was very stern with me and told me that he appreciated my 'efforts as a staffer' and would really like to hire me again next year, but part of the decision about who to hire would be made on how well I could get along with others at the camp.

"Kim Hansen walked away from me. He completely ignored me and my report to him about the incident with Dennis Empey. He made me feel even more ashamed of what had happened and I felt powerless to do anything about the attack.

"To my knowledge, Kim Hansen did not notify the Scouting organizations or the sheriff's office about what had happened to me."

Bird never told the police.

He was 15, Empey was 25 and he was terrified of the man, especially after Empey sent him a note. It said: "Write me or die."

Bird took the note as a threat and got out of Scouting.

He couldn't forget it.

About a decade later, he went to get tested because he worried Empey had infected him with a sexually transmitted disease. The test was negative.

Still burdened, Bird turned to his church.

Bird says he told his stake president. The man told him he knew about Empey's history of molesting children and put him in contact with a Utah detective who was investigating rapes Empey committed in Provo.

Efforts to confirm this were unsuccessful. The man Bird says he spoke with is serving a mission in the Philippines. Church officials have confirmed that he received phone and e-mail messages, but he did not reply. Dave Bolda, the Provo, Utah, detective who worked this case and other similar cases, says he does not remember any contacts from Idaho.

Bird has broken the chain of Scouting in his family.

"I don't want my boys to participate in Scouting because it is not safe," Bird said in the affidavit he filed Friday. "As long as Kim Hansen is in a leadership position with Scouting, I will be concerned that sexual predators will be sheltered and boys won't be safe at Scout camp."

Even today, Bird says, he is worried about Dennis Empey and his guns.

An Eagle Scout tapped for the honorary Order of the Arrow says Dennis Empey tried to rape him, too, just weeks after Jeff Bird allegedly was preyed on.

Word of this case circulated through law enforcement to the Post Register, which confirmed details with the boy, his mother and his relative, Bonneville County Commissioner Lee Staker, whom the boy said he told about the alleged attack years later.

The boy, now grown, says it happened during an Order of the Arrow ceremony in late summer 1983 at a water park near Idaho Falls.

The Order of the Arrow recognizes Scouts who exemplify the Scout Oath and Law.

The boy, 14 at the time, got a stomachache and went to the lodge to rest. Empey checked in on him and brought him cold drinks during the day.

At about midnight, while other Scouts and leaders were sleeping nearby, Staker's relative says, Empey unzipped his sleeping bag, climbed on top of the boy and tried to have anal sex with him repeatedly while the boy struggled.

The Post Register has agreed not to name the victim, whom Staker says was dangerously traumatized as a result of what happened. This account is based on an interview with the young man, his mother and with their relative, Commissioner Staker.

"I was mortified," the young man said from his home out of state. "I didn't know what to do. Afterwards, I became borderline suicidal. I felt like I'd done something wrong."

Staker confirmed this and so did the boy's mother.

The boy didn't tell police, and Empey moved on, eventually landing in Provo,

Utah, Staker said.

Brigham Young University officials in Provo confirm that Empey attended from September 1983 to April 1984.

His major? According to Staker, the pedophile was pursuing a degree in child counseling.

Staker strove to stop the pedophile. Still, it took eight years and a Utah court to catch him.

The commissioner says his relative first told him what happened in the early '90s and that Staker believes he was one of the first people to hear the story.

Convinced the statute of limitations had passed, Staker said the boy couldn't press charges. So, Staker did the next best thing he could think of: He made sure Empey was kept away from boys. He told the people in power what had happened.

When Empey returned to Scouting in the early '90s, Staker says he called Utah Scout officials, who kicked Empey out immediately. Efforts to corroborate Staker's story were unsuccessful because he could not recall who he contacted.

Staker bore no grudge against Scouting. "I still want my grandsons to be part of the Boy Scouts," he says. "It's a wonderful program that does a lot for this community."

By 1991, Empey befriended a family in Provo, Utah, who opened their home when he couldn't afford a place on his own, court records say.

Nicknamed "Uncle Dennis," he gained the trust of the children in the neighborhood. He showed his victims guns before he sodomized them, causing the kids "to fear for their safety if the incidents were reported," Utah County Detective Dave Bolda told the court.

In May 1991, Empey was arrested for molesting children "with the intent to cause substantial emotional or bodily pain, or to arouse or gratify ... sexual desire," Utah County Prosecutor Kay Bryson wrote in a court record. The circumstances were nearly identical to those now described by Bird, who had not seen the Utah case file obtained from storage by the Post Register: Empey flashed a gun and inflicted pain when he sodomized his victims.

Charged with five felonies, he pleaded guilty to three: two counts of forcible sodomy on a child and one count of sexual abuse of a child.

One neighbor demanded a severe penalty.

"This man molested so many children that it involved four [b]ishops from [T]he Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-[d]ay Saints," including her own, wrote Lorrie Ann Arthur. In her Sept. 13, 1991, pre-sentencing letter to Utah County Judge George E. Ballif, she said Empey had caused great emotional distress in her Provo neighborhood. Efforts to find her for further comment were unsuccessful.

"... His 'disease' has affected five families, totaling more than 30 people," the letter continues. "Mr. Empey's disease has a far-more-reaching effect tha[n] anyone could possible believe. ... Where will Mr. Empey go after his jail term?"

Back to Scouting.

Back to Idaho.

Back to the Grand Teton Council.

Empey, sentenced to probation on Oct. 8, 1991, was released two years later. He moved home to eastern Idaho and eventually started an Internet business.

When Jeff Bird first called the Post Register about Empey, a search of the Grand Teton Council Web site revealed a photo of a mountain canyon bearing a "Dennis Empey 2002" copyright mark, designating either the date the photos were taken or published.

When asked why a convicted pedophile was supplying material to the Grand Teton Council, Hansen wrote in a May 13 letter: "In recent years, Dennis Empey donated graphic designs to the council. All materials were sent by either electronic means or mail. He has not been in our office and has not had any volunteer positions."

Hansen's boss provided more detail.

"We paid him for the supplies he used to make pictures and designs," Grand Teton Executive Council President David Smith said in a June 9 interview. Smith said the Grand Teton Council had just severed its business relationship with Empey and that the man didn't have any contact with children.

Jeff Bird, whom Empey allegedly raped in 1983, mentioned Empey's Web work in the court papers he filed Friday.

"When I found out that Empey was still alive and still employed by the Scouts, I was terrified not only for my own personal safety, but for all the hundreds of boys who attend Scout camp in the Grand Teton Council each year," he said in a sworn statement.

Empey is not registered as a sex offender in Idaho or Utah.

There were two pedophiles working at the Camp Little Lemhi waterfront in 1990.

Brad Stowell, whose case has been widely publicized, and Jeff Hardin, whose case lay hidden in a sealed and stored Bannock County file until last month.

Hardin was arrested for molesting a boy just as Stowell was starting to prey on children.

Hardin's victim agreed to an interview on the condition he not be named. He guided the Post Register to the file that details Hardin's crimes.

The Post Register petitioned the court for public access and corroborated the victims' account with the documents in the file, where his name is blacked out.

Jeff Hardin seemed like a model Scout: a 25-year-old returned LDS missionary, he was dating the sister of another camp staffer when he first met the 13-year-old.

Hardin was warm with campers: wrestling, giving young Scouts hugs, chummy

head locks and the occasional wedgie. But he watched a little too closely while they took showers and was at least once visibly aroused while toweling off at the waterfront, the victim said in a May 23 interview.

Back home in Chubbuck, Hardin was the Varsity Scouts leader for his ward's troop, a Sept. 14, 1991, Chubbuck Police Department report says. He was a member of the National Guard and studying for a college degree.

His major?

Like Empey, he wanted to be a counselor.

Like Stowell, Hardin drove a cool car -- an orange Fiat two-seater. And like Stowell, he took his time getting close to the victim, eating dinner at his house, playing in the yard with his brothers and watching movies.

Not only were Stowell and Hardin similar, they were friends, according to the victim and a police report in the Stowell case.

On Sept. 9, 1991, Hardin's wife was out of town and Hardin was at the victim's house for a visit.

At about 4:30 a.m., Hardin, then 26, sneaked into the boy's bedroom, court records say. "I pulled the sheets off him a couple times and he pulled them back, half asleep," Hardin wrote in a statement to police. "Then the thought came to masturbate him and I didn't even think about it or push the thought away. I just began to do it."

The boy had finally had enough.

He grabbed Hardin's hand and said, "I've been awake for 20 minutes," Hardin wrote in a statement to the court.

Police reports say that Hardin told the boy, "I was messing around and shouldn't have, I don't think I'm [g]ay. Do you think I need to contact my Bishop?"

The boy pushed Hardin off him and told his mom what happened, court files say.

Hardin followed him, spoke to the boy's mom and left.

Hardin told his LDS bishop, and the congregation leader reported him.

"I remember being embarrassed," the victim said. "I didn't feel comfortable saying anything." He and Hardin didn't discuss what happened. "I felt like it was my fault," the victim said.

The boy said Hardin molested him several times before the arrest. When nobody was watching, Hardin fondled the 13- and later, 14-year-old "too many times to count" at the boy's Chubbuck home, the boy said.

Hardin pleaded guilty in October 1991, to lewd conduct with a child under 16 and was sentenced to probation. He was released six years later.

Attempts to locate and contact Hardin were unsuccessful, both through phone records, the Internet and several Western states' registries of sex offenders.

The victim, now married with two children, said he still suffers from panic attacks and feels depressed about what happened.

"It's repulsive to think there were more victims after me," he said. "How many more will it take for it to change?"

Brad Stowell, the most recent known pedophile to prey on local Scouts, may be the Grand Teton Council's most expensive mistake.

Last year, at about the same time, the national Scout office awarded eastern Idaho's organization top honors for its risk management, Scout lawyers settled a second lawsuit brought by a scout molested by Stowell.

When two families went to court to find out why their boys weren't protected, they learned Scout leaders had been warned about Stowell years before his arrest.

Parties to the lawsuits aren't allowed to say how much the Grand Teton Council paid.

But as a condition of settlement, the Grand Teton Council -- or its insurance company -- insisted the files be sealed.

Grand Teton Council executive Kim Hansen assured the public that everything had been handled properly, that Scout leaders couldn't have done anything because Stowell was too slick.

But when a judge opened case files to the public, readers learned Stowell didn't have two victims. He had at least two dozen.

The unsealed court file revealed:

• Once Stowell was arrested, Grand Teton Council leaders didn't tell some parents their children had been molested. Doing so "would open old wounds" and the victims "could have been asleep when the molestations occurred and might not remember anything anyway," said Boy Scout attorney Gary Dance, according to a sworn statement filed by plaintiff's attorney Chad Campos.

• Six years before his arrest, the Boy Scouts received a written warning about Brad Stowell's past molestation of a 6-year-old neighbor. The church that sponsored Stowell's troop also received a warning about Stowell from the same man, a neighbor of the Stowell family.

• Judith Stowell, the pedophile's mother, served on the Grand Teton Council executive board. She knew her son had confessed to abusing a neighbor boy. She talked about it with the victim's mother and the police officer. And she knew Brad was ordered to attend six months of professional counseling through LDS Social Services in Pocatello as a result.

• Brad Stowell confessed what he had done to his LDS bishop, who sent him to counseling. Bishop Lorin Talbot said he was told Stowell was cured. Years later, a Scout leader checked a tip about Stowell by calling Talbot. He reported that he knew of no reason Brad Stowell shouldn't be in Scouting.

• Adam Steed, a junior counselor at the time, said he reported Stowell, but Scout leaders ignored him for days before finally calling police. Subsequent reporting has confirmed this account.

• In the first civil case, Judge Gregory Anderson ruled out punitive damages, meaning the victim could only ask jurors to award him the actual costs of his injuries. Anderson opined that no one person had a complete picture of what Stowell was doing and therefore the Scouts should not be held accountable.

• In 2004, Judge W. H. Woodland had new information, about the Grand Teton Council's decision not to alert parents. Woodland opined that "There are facts in the record of this case which demonstrate a reasonable likelihood that the conduct of the Grand Teton Council was at least oppressive and outrageous." He said they failed to follow their own reporting rules.

• Woodland opined that evidence showed the Grand Teton Council concealed the molestation of the victim to avoid liability and that the concealment was "fraudulent."

• In the end, the Grand Teton Council decided to avoid trial and paid the boys' claims.

Shortly after these and other details were brought to light in February, probation officials investigated Stowell's behavior and sent him back to prison. He had been caught spending time alone with children.

Scout leaders returning from the first few weeks of camp this summer say it is obvious leaders have been more carefully trained to follow the Grand Teton Council's award-winning child protection program.

Who to call?

The statute of limitations on most child sex-abuse crimes is five years after the person turns 18. If you're younger than 23, you may still be able to press charges against someone who molested you many years ago.

Below is a list of some of the agencies you can call if you or someone you know has been molested.

• Child Protection Services 24-Hour Crises Line: 528-5900

• Rape Response and Crime Victim Center 24-Hour Crises Line: 521-6018

• Idaho Falls Police Department: 529-1200

• Bingham County Sheriff's Office: 785-4440

• Butte County Sheriff's Office: 527-8553

• Fremont County Sheriff's Office: 624-4482

• Jefferson County Sheriff's Office: 745-9210

• Madison County Sheriff's Office: 356-5426

• Teton County Sheriff's Office: 354-2323

IN THEIR WORDS

The following is from the Boy Scouts' "Procedures for Maintaining Standards of

Membership Including How to Deal with Child Abuse" booklet on page 15 in the section titled "How to Deal with Allegations of Child Abuse":

"The most important thing to remember is that all reports must be forwarded immediately to the Scout executive. Initial reports may be verbal, but any verbal report must be documented by the Scout executive or designated professional staff in writing at the earliest possible time. The Scout executive will be *personally* responsible for seeing that the proper procedures are followed."(italics are in the original document, which was filed in the negligence case brought by victims of the pedophile Brad Stowell)

When asked by a plaintiff's attorney about those procedures, Grand Teton Council executive Kim Hansen said:

"... it's a set of guidelines telling me how I ought to proceed. But it's not something I've got to cross every line and dot every (i)."

Wednesday July 13, 2005

Scout case 'not found'

Court records show fourth pedophile led several Boy Scouts outings

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• By PETER ZUCKERMAN •
PZUCKERMAN@POSTREGISTER.COM

Court records shown to the Post Register on Tuesday reveal a fourth pedophile worked or volunteered for the local Boy Scouts.

Robert "Scott" Price, now 43, is serving 15 years to life for using alcohol, pornography and money to get children to have sex with him. He was associated with the Grand Teton Council as recently as 2002.

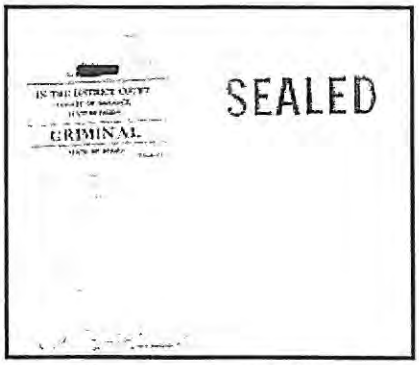
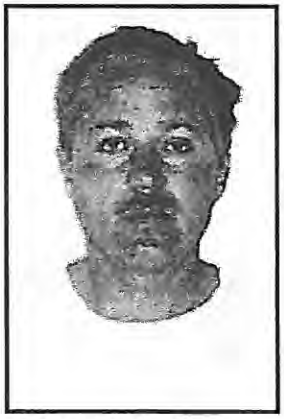


Illustration by Jerry Painter / Post Register, based on photocopy of court file cover

Little was known about the Price case until now because it was under an extraordinary veil of secrecy for a criminal prosecution. This is consistent with unusual secrecy measures that have been applied to two other pedophile cases involving eastern Idaho's Grand Teton Council of the Boy Scouts of America.



Robert Scott Price

On Tuesday, using the court's own system to look up the Price case by name and by case number, the courthouse computer system in Pocatello replied "Case Not Found."

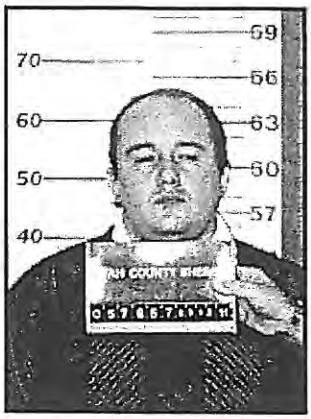
Records clerks in Bannock County initially declined to give any information about the Price case, but when given the case number, they confirmed it existed.

The Idaho State Journal reported on March 22, 2002, that the case had been sealed. The newspaper reported briefly on some court proceedings, which were open to the public.

On Tuesday, acting on tips from two callers, the Post Register gained access to the Price file through the judge's clerk, who reviewed the sealing order, which showed that the file should now be open and should have been since the pretrial preliminary hearing three years ago.

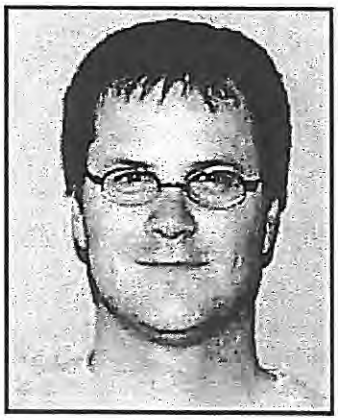
Court clerks declined to allow the Post Register to photocopy the case. The clerks wanted to talk to the judge first to find out whether names needed to be blacked out, as is often

done in sex abuse cases to protect the victims' privacy.



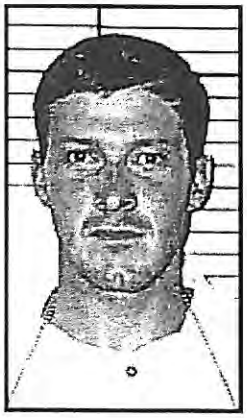
Below is a summary of the Price case. Unless otherwise noted, this information is based on records viewed Tuesday from file CR-2002-105FE; a Bannock County Sheriff's Office report; an interview with Bannock County Prosecutor Mark Hiedeman, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Stake President William McKee and others familiar with the case; and records of the Idaho Department of Correction.

Price was a Scout and youth leader at an LDS church in Bannock County. He worked as a realtor and, before that, an officer for the Pocatello Police Department.



Price may have started molesting in the mid-'90s, though some records indicate he started earlier. Around the winter of 1994 or 1995 is when the Bannock County Sheriff's Office report says Price and some Scouts stayed in a cabin near Driggs, close to the Tetons.

The cabin had two queen-size beds, and Price slept with one of the boys, about 14, and molested him. The boy didn't report the incident to police until several years later.



At least 14 incidents, which involved oral sex and fondling of boys ages 15 to 17, followed, according to the sheriff's office report.

Price typically gave the boys alcohol, showed them pornography and paid boys between $50 and $100 for various sex acts.

The attacks occurred in several areas. The places mentioned in the sheriff's office report include Challis, Pocatello, Power County, Salmon, Fort Hall, Mount Borah, Bannock County, Montpelier and Soda Springs.

Price encouraged his victims to be quiet and once told one that "later you will think it felt good, and you will beg me for more," the sheriff's office report says. He told the boys they would ruin his life if he was turned in and that the boys wouldn't be able to go on LDS missions if anyone found out, investigators reported.

It's clear that at least some of these attacks involved Boy Scouts, but sources could not provide a specific number.

Several episodes occurred during church-sponsored camping trips for young men. The Boy Scouts, the official young men's program of the LDS church, frequently involves camping trips, and Price was a Scout leader.

Hiedeman, the prosecutor, said Price found most of his victims through the Boy Scouts. The Grand Teton Council is in charge of Scouting in many of the areas Price worked.

But LDS Stake President William McKee said many of these trips were not sponsored by the church or the Scouts; Price led the trips on his own and met some victims outside of church. Church leaders, he said, teamed up with detectives to find out what Price had done.

Police arrested Price, who appeared in court for the first time on March 1, 2001. He was released from jail on a $100,000 bond while deputies investigated his case. By May 2, 2002, Price had returned to Scouting, sheriff's investigators reported. At least one person, whose name is blacked out from the sheriff's office report, was "very concerned about Price being around the young boys" at Boy Scout functions, the sheriff's office report says.

On May 7, 2002, Judge Randy Smith ordered that Price be arrested for violating the terms of his release by spending time alone with children.

Charged with five felonies, Price pleaded guilty June 20, 2002, to three: sexual abuse of a child under 16, lewd conduct with a child under 16 and sexual battery of a child 16 or 17 years old.

Smith received at least 40 letters from people affected by Price's conduct. One of them reads:

"My son said a BSA [Boy Scouts of America] member had done [im]proper things with him. ... Why had no one picked it up before? Why was no one cautious? ... It was because ... we don't want to think bad of those close to us and ... because Scott Price has obviously spent a lot of time building a charisma and a good picture of himself."

The judge sentenced Price on Sept. 5, 2002.

"The Defendant sexually molested several underage boys (at least eight) since 1987," the judge wrote on Dec. 23, 2002, regarding a hearing where he refused to reduce the sentence. "Mr. Price also used his position as a leader in the boys' church, as a Scout leader and as a friend. ... Given the evidence here, he cannot have a life without supervision."

Peter Zuckerman can be reached at 542-6750.

Other pedophiles who worked in the Grand Teton Council

- **DENNIS EMPEY:** Swan Valley Boy Scout Camp waterfront instructor alleged to have raped a Scout in 1983 after flashing a gun and mutilating animals. Jeff Bird, then 15, said he told Grand Teton Council Executive Kim Hansen. Hansen ignored him, Bird says. Convicted of raping boys in Utah, Empey got off probation and was paid in June for Internet work for the Grand Teton Council.

- **JEFF HARDIN:** Scout camp waterfront instructor who molested a boy he met at Camp Little Lemhi "too many times to count," according to the victim. He was sentenced to probation in December 1991.

- **BRAD STOWELL:** Camp Little Lemhi waterfront instructor who molested at least 24 boys, many of them Scouts. He was rehired despite written warnings. Junior counselor Adam Steed said he complained about Stowell but was ignored. After Stowell's 1997 arrest, Boy Scout attorney Gary Dance said some parents

weren't told their children had been molested because doing so would "open old wounds," according to a sworn statement. Hansen, who fought to keep court records about Stowell secret, has said Stowell is the only pedophile who has worked for the Grand Teton Council.