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JIM NATICHIONI, PATH GUIDE



I am Jim Natichioni of RightLivelihood.com and I have written the inspirational book: **Finding Your Path, Tales of Right Livelihood**. This excerpt is from Chapter Eleven: “Counter Culture and Following Your Dreams” and relates to non-conformity and its roll in shaping our dreams. To read more please visit RightLivelihood.com.

**Finding your path and right livelihood:** This story is about where the best salesman I know and I came from, and about the counter-culture movement we joined. In some ways we still are a part of that movement; one that questioned among other things the above mentioned values of honing interpersonal skills for profit, developing salesmanship, being manipulative or pro-active, and especially supporting capitalism itself. Following your dreams can take us from ambition to non-conformity and back in a flash. I hope to demonstrate, through juxtaposition, the way of change and the way of inspiration. It too can happen in a flash.

**The Age of Aquarius:** The dawning of the Age of Aquarius is upon us. One half million came together in all out harmony at the 1969 Woodstock music festival and again in 1970, twenty million earth well-wishers gathered nationwide for the first Earth Day celebration. We rebelled against the establishment and their middle class values. We did not want their food, their money, their homes, their religion, their education, or their jobs. As the Black Panthers’ Eldridge Cleaver said: “If you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem.”

## **The 60’s path of anti-capitalism and non-conformity:**

### ***The countercultures cyber revolution:***

To hippies, capitalism represented the root of all problems. It caused wars, inequality, and injustice. Hippiedom was not just a generation and not just a *fad*, it was and continues to be a *movement*; one that expresses itself through: my friend Greg and the environmental movement; my friend Howie and workers rights; Joan Baez and the women’s movement; Dr. Neal Barnard and the Natural Foods Industry and through the gay rights and the new age movements. The hippie ethic and their rethinking of American priorities continues to emphasize civil rights, human rights and animal rights.

In 1977 the technological revolution was inspired by two hippies named Jobs and Wozniak and took place in Menlo Park, California near where hippiedom originated. The personal computer gave ‘power to the people,’ to the individual, and away from corporate America. The personal computer and the Internet not only changed the way we communicated to each but also revolutionized the way they conducted business.

**Computers:** In his Time Magazine article: “*History. We owe it all to the Hippies. Forget antiwar protests, Woodstock, even long hair. The real legacy of the sixties generation is the computer revolution*” Stewart Brand says that the transformation began

when a small contingent of 'hackers' began turning computers into tools of liberation. As Steven Levy chronicled in his 1984 book, Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution, 'youthful computer programmers deliberately led us away from centralized mainframe computers and their predominant sponsor, IBM.' Some tenets of "The Hacker Ethic," were that computers should have unlimited access, offer free information and should move away from authority. These freedom scribes were hard-core hippies like Steve Jobs, who developed and sold "blue boxes," outlaw devices for making free telephone calls. "Do your own thing" segued into "become an entrepreneur." In this world of technology the counter culture were no longer the outcasts, in fact they were poised to be the leaders.

**The Internet:** We all have a little hippie in us; a little playfulness and rebellion. The Worldwide web is the logical extension of hippie ideals where a whole universe of innovative products and ideas became available to a whole universe of alternative people. The Internet had no leader, no supreme authority to dictate the rules, in fact the young pioneers could play by their own rules and ethics. Through this interactive, open and free forum the collaborative network of independent peers could advance their egalitarian and liberalized social values. The Internet was about to "flatten organizations, globalize society, decentralize control, and help harmonize people," as MIT's Nicholas Negroponte put it.

In his book, From Counterculture to Cyberculture, Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism Fred Turner says that beginning in the late 1960's it was Stewart Brand and the Whole Earth network of reformist-minded San Francisco Bay area journalists and entrepreneurs who assembled a network of people and publications that helped bring the hippies of San Francisco and the emerging technology hub of Silicon Valley together. "In 1985 he gathered them again on what would become perhaps the most influential computer conferencing system of the decade, the Whole Earth Lectronic Link, or the WELL." And in 1993 they would help develop *Wired*, the magazine that defined the emerging digital world in revolutionary terms.

Brand first published the *Whole Earth Catalog* to provide a transformational tool for the 1970's 'back to the land' bunch who were looking for a vehicle of social change other than political activism. Their cybernetic vision was one in which material reality and even global harmony could manifest through the invisible play of information. I subscribed to this wonderful *Catalogue* for years, it was a place to go where everything from digital software to photovoltaic cells fed ecology-minded people like me new age ideas and products. In essence Brand was able to use the power of networking and technology to give hippies a vision commensurate with the achievements of mainstream America, however this innovative technology was set up not just as another tool of 'the system' but as a countercultural force in the 'new economy'.

By networking extensively through the Whole Earth Lectronic Link, the Global Business Network and the *Wired Magazine*, the growing force "helped redefine the microcomputer as a "personal" machine, computer communication networks as "virtual communities," and cyberspace itself as the digital equivalent of the western landscape into which so many communards set forth in the late 1960s, the "electronic frontier." From the 1980's through the 1990's Brand and his colleagues were not only building networks and writing National Award winning publications but they were also helping to

build the infrastructure of successful businesses and communities that they wrote about. What a wonderful path to 'right livelihood.'

The transformative power that cyberspace had on moving the workforce away from the typical JOB market was formidable. To reach independence pioneers of the "New Economy" would become entrepreneurs, "moving flexibly from place to place, sliding in and out of collaborative teams, building their knowledge bases and skill sets in a process of constant self-education." As *Wired* magazine's executive editor, Kevin Kelly argued that the world was a series of interlocking information systems, all of which were working to corrode the bureaucracies of the industrial era. Kelly, the founders of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the others see 'the Internet as both the infrastructure and the symbol of the new economic era and see themselves as harbingers of a cultural revolution.' Who would have guessed at the successes of the computer and the Internet, and as Brand indicated, "We owe it all to the hippies."

### **From hippie to executive: Greg Chelius:**

One of the best hippies I know who turned into one of the best salesman I know, is my old college roommate Gregory John Anthony Chelius, Chel for short. Chel never lacked in confidence or in the ability to strike up an entertaining conversation with a pretty girl. He may not have Ross Perot's billions or fame, but if you had to look for someone to go into the boardroom or foxhole with, Chelius is your man. He is undoubtedly good at what he does.

Charisma is something you either have or you don't; Chelius did. He feared nothing, was irreverent, and loved by the girls for his Peter Fonda looks. One day we played tackle football in our living room with eight big guys. When the cops came and saw the huge pink elephant we had painted on the wall, even Chel had a hard time talking us out of trouble. We would hitchhike across Texas to places like Hollywood, California and Shreveport, Louisiana. We would sleep in all manner of places like municipal dumps, cow pastures, and Indian sites. We sang Indian chants, got into bruhahas and went to class dressed in pajamas. With Chel, life seemed like a crazy adventure.

### **There is always a price to pay:**

**California:** While I trained to participate in triathlons; Chelius worked in Silicon Valley for National Semi Conductor managing about one hundred people in his high-tech, high-stress job. I could not believe my eyes when I saw him. The erstwhile hippy wore a dark suit and tie looking, and acting (quite well I might add), the part of the Wall Street executive. He had changed. At work he was all business; so much so that he seemed like a stranger to me. I had remained the same naïve, carefree kid who refused to be tied down by the establishment, and I did not know what to think.

"Every lifestyle has a price to pay, you're gonna' pay a price no matter what you do. What matters is if you think what you're doing is worth the price you pay." This quote came from a friend of a friend who works as a professional photographer and rides his bike across the country, taking beautiful pictures. His lifestyle excludes any possibility of having a family or a steady roof over his head, of ownership, security, or even safety. "Spending a night in a tent during a Texas thunderstorm will make you believe in god," he said. Chelius who has also spent many a night under scant cover and

the big Texas sky and loves to ride his bike, did have a regular job, a family, and all the responsibilities that they imply. He also paid a price, but unlike the freewheeling photographer did not feel certain his lifestyle was worth the cost. The stress of working began to mount, and his health began to deteriorate so badly that the doctor advised Chel to quit his job and relax a little.

Eventually Chelius moved back to the more laid back city of Tallahassee, left his brusque demeanor behind in California, and found his way into commercial real estate. One of his big projects involved working with the Trust for Public Land; when the Trust noticed his charisma, they scooped him away from commercial real estate, one of the smartest moves they ever made. As the Director of TPL for Florida and the Caribbean Chel now directs one of, if not the most successful, Land Conservation offices in the country.