

Scott Thompson – “Anti-Marlboro Man”

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“Scott Thompson, a Californian, spent most of a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall in Poland, where he used his only marketable skill, his native language, to support himself as a teacher. Surrounded by a frenzy of cigarette marketing, he channeled his revulsion and shame into tobacco control efforts”.

This was the note I received from Scott after asking him for an autobiographical piece devoted to the time he spent in Poland in the 1990s. “As you know, tobacco control is one of my favorite topics. In contrast, among the subject I least like to discuss is myself” – he added. Instead, attached to his e-mail was a reflective essay on the uncompromising barrage of marketing practices that the US tobacco companies were delivering against the newly democratizing nations of Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Iron Curtain (see *One American reflects on cigarette promotions in Poland in the 1990s*, pp. 131-132).

This modesty, and the willingness to use every opportunity to promote public health rather than himself, are characteristic of Scott. However, this humorous self-deprecation did not manage to fool Daniel Michaels, a Wall Street Journal reporter who in 1999 described the phenomenon of Polish anti-tobacco advocacy for his newspaper (Fig. 1). Scott introduced himself to the reporter as an “aimless, unambitious Californian” but Michaels saw right through that. In his article, he presented Scott for who he was – an idealistic health advocate who decided to devote a decade of his life to help defeat the tobacco-related disease epidemic that was ravaging his second homeland. Scott was also representative of a larger group of Western health advocates – medical doctors, epidemiologists, activists – who brought invaluable expertise, knowledge, and passion to our struggle against smoking. It is thanks to people like Scott that Poland’s anti-tobacco efforts were so successful, and that we could halve lung cancer incidence among Polish men between the peak years and today.

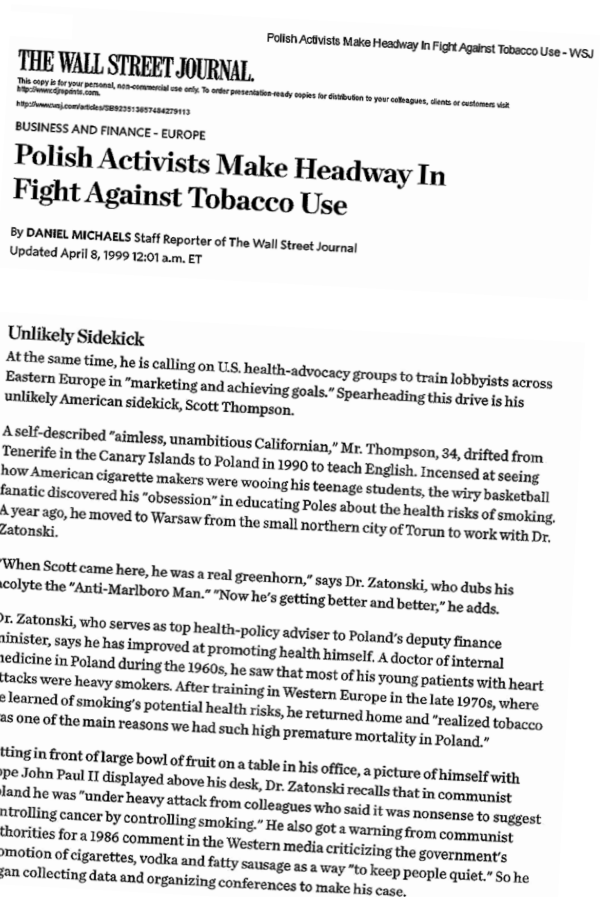


FIG. 1. The Wall Street Journal April 8, 1999

DISCLOSURE

Author reports no conflict of interest.