

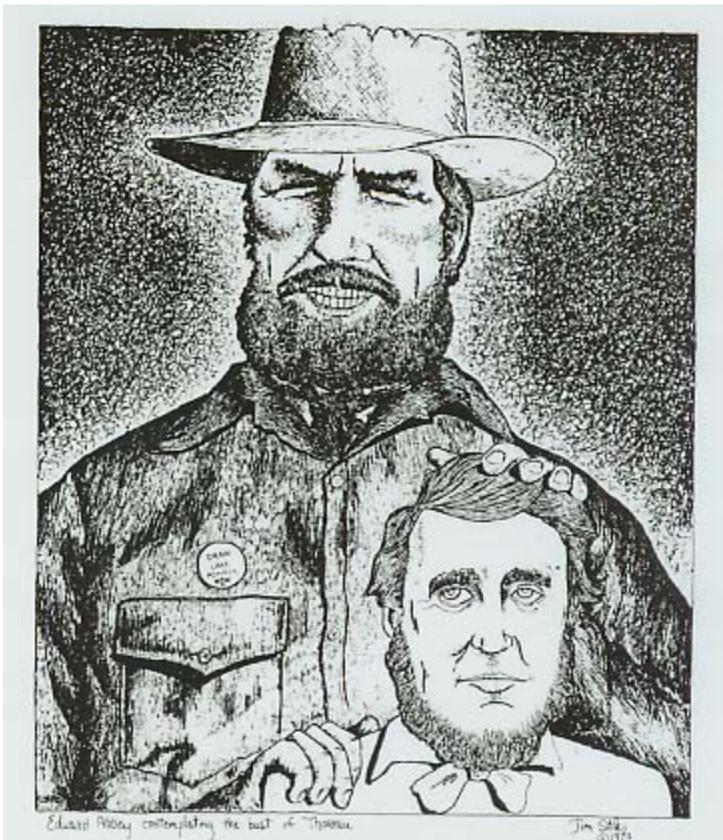
1982 Eric Temple Interview with... EDWARD ABBEY

(continued)

EA) Well I'm not going to advocate sabotage publicly on the federal airwaves here. But I think there probably will be more of it if the conflict between conservation and development becomes more intense, and if the politicians fail to follow the popular will on the matter. I think a lot of people are going to become very angry and they're going to resort to illegal methods to try to slow down the destruction of our national resources, our wilderness, our forests, mountains, deserts. What that will lead to I hate to think. If the conflict becomes violent and physical then I'm pretty sure the environmentalists will mostly end up in prison or shot dead in their tracks. So I hope we can save what's left of Arizona and the United States by legal, political means and I still think we can. I still vote in elections...even though there doesn't seem to be much to vote for or against, when there's not much choice. I think if enough people get sufficiently concerned, why we can still make changes...needed changes in this country by political methods...God, I hope so.

ET) What does the future hold for you, what are your plans?

EA) Oh, write a few more good books and die. I've done almost everything I've ever



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wanted to do. Traveled over half the world, enjoyed the love of some good women, and the friendship of some good men. Had some adventures. Wrote a few books that I'm still pleased with. Had a pretty soft easy life. Most of my life I've been able to do exactly what I wanted to do. I haven't had to turn my hand at honest labor for about ten years. And I never did believe in working for more than six months our the the year at any job I didn't like. So I'll write a few more books, explore a few more places. I'd like to go to Australia again. I'd like to see something of Africa. I've got a teenaged daughter, got to get her through the agonies of adolescence before I can shunt her off to college.

I'd like to grow wise and venerable, but I haven't figured out how to do it yet.

ET) Do you see any positive thing...We've been talking about a lot of things that are pretty unpleasant. Is there something happening that you see in the world today that might be interpreted as a positive thing?

EA) Oh, the arts are thriving. Music, literature, dance, sculpture, painting, seems to me in this country and in most of the world there's a great burgeoning artistic activity. I think modern technology has created a sort of world culture which may in some ways actually be bringing people together or creating an international culture, and that may turn out to be a good thing.

Nuclear power has made war less appealing than ever. Hydrogen bombs take all of the fun out of war. I think there's an enormous amount of goodwill and good feeling being shared around the world, people visiting one another. Visiting one another's countries and lands, getting to learn something about each other. But this is in a race against the other catastrophe of overpopulation, war, hunger, civil war, revolution. Not that I'm against revolutions...I think many of them are necessary and therefore are justified. I'm not anti-technology either. I like all of our gadgets and toys, it's just the scale

of them that I think is doing us harm. As I've written, I'm very much in favor of space exploration for example, I think it's a great adventure for humanity insofar as we can all share in it. But I think it should be supported by voluntary contributions only. Not by compulsory taxation under threat of prison and death. The Sierra Club gets by on voluntary contributions and so should NASA, and moon shots, and space travel. Let those things be financed by people who are willing to support them.

Good things, I'm trying to think of good things!

You can still get good cigars. I'm impressed by the young people that are growing up around us. They seem to be healthier more athletic and brighter than ever. At least the ones who haven't been lobotomized by too much television and Newsweek and Time. I suppose for every danger in the contemporary world you can find a corresponding avenue of hope, an opportunity for true progress, as opposed to mere quantitative growth. Probably never before in human history have so many been so keenly aware of what our troubles are and what causes them and what can be done about them. I think the knowledge and the goodwill is here, present in most people. Our problem is how to translate that knowledge and goodwill and technique into the creation of a true civilization, which I do not think we have.

Kurt Vonnegut says we're still living in the dark ages, I agree with that. But we're still struggling to get out of the dark ages into some kind of enlightenment, I think that's possible. Still might happen before disaster solves all our problems. If we don't solve our troubles by reason and goodwill and generosity and mutual aid and sharing, then I think our troubles, national and international, will be solved in the usual way. By catastrophe. By war, famine, plague...what was the fourth horseman? Death.

And anyway, even if the human race wipes itself off the face of the earth as Jonathan Schell thinks it might in his book, I still think that life will survive, even if only in the most rudimentary form. I'm in favor of all kinds of life, even bacteria, germs, bugs, insects, scorpions. I don't think that anything humanity can do will destroy all life on earth. And as long as there's life in any shape, why there's still hope of some kind.

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In fact life is good in itself. If we humans are stupid enough to destroy our own lives, that doesn't necessarily take all of the goodness out of the lives of other creatures that might, and I hope will, survive us. I think earth would still be a decent place if there were no humans on it at all. I don't know exactly what kind of consciousness a dog has, or the wildlife or the birds we see out here, but my impression is on the whole they seem to enjoy their existence and I think it's worthwhile for its own sake. They're not dreaming of heaven or some technological utopia. They just find the ordinary daily business of life, breeding, nest building, and finding food a good in itself, and I agree with that. I think the hawks are right and the rattlesnakes. Keep going...continuity.

I don't have any hope of personal immortality, but I am glad I've had children. And that therefore I have a stake in the continuity of human life. I think it's well worthwhile just keeping the game going, whether it leads to any greater end or not. Well, enough of mesophysics. Do you have any simple, easy questions?

ET) Yeah, I've got one more. What do you see your role as, social commentator, author?

EA) My role...I see myself as an entertainer. I'm trying to write good books, make people laugh, make them cry, provoke them, make them angry, make them think if possible. To get a reaction, give pleasure. I do not see myself as a social commentator because I don't look at any of these things we've been talking about hard enough, I'm not really skilled at it.

But I like to write. I like to throw words around. And if I can give pleasure in that form I feel I'm earning my pay. I have no desire to be a leader of any kind, I dislike being called a guru. I think every man should be his own guru, and every woman her own gurette...we should all be leaders. I'm an anarchist. My father was a Wobblie. I.W.W. We should all take charge. We should all be leaders, neither followers nor rulers, make our own decisions. I'm really a democrat, small "d", I really believe in democracy. Direct democracy.

I think every issue of any importance should be decided by popular referendum. It's nice to see these petitions get on the ballot. The process should be made much easier. If we could do away with those bunch of morons and moral dwarfs up in the state legislature and decide state policy by public referendum, I would love to see that. I think the majority of the people in this state and in this country are almost always far ahead of those who call themselves the authorities, or presume to be our leaders. They're not leaders. What was the last leader we had in this country? Thomas Jefferson perhaps. Anyway, my role is just to write books. I'm not really trying to do anything more than that. Write some good books, if possible, and enjoy my life...the lives of my family and friends, and my enemies. I enjoy their problems too.

Eric Temple interviewed Ed Abbey on several occasions. His documentary, Edward Abbey: A Voice in the Wilderness is available on video. He is also the administrator of the facebook page: "EDWARD ABBEY: A VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS."

* Since Abbey gave this interview in 1982 the U.S. population has grown to almost 315 million people.

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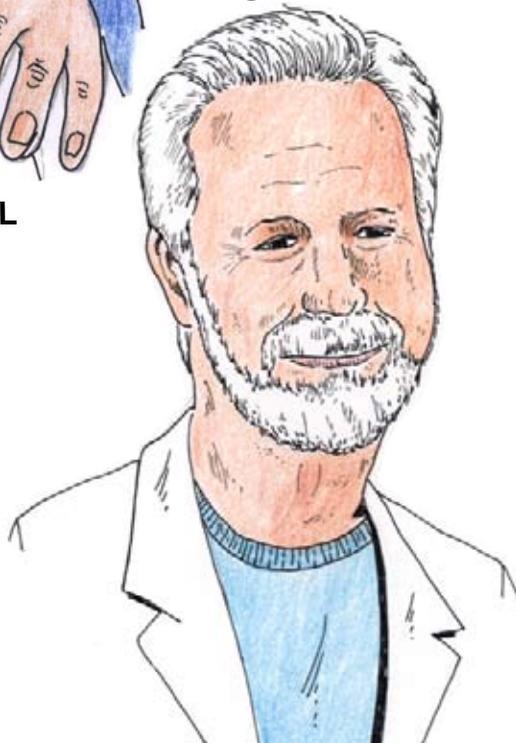


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