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Edward Abbey was an anarchist, activist, philosopher, and the spiritual father of the environmental movement. He was also a passionate journal keeper, a man who filled page after page with notes, philosophical musings, character sketches, illustrations, musical notations, and drawings. His "scribbling," as he called it, began in 1948, when he served as a motorcycle MP in postwar Italy, and continued until his death in 1989, totaling twenty-one volumes.

His journals are the closest thing to an Abbey autobiography we will ever have. They reveal his first youthful philosophical ruminations about art, love, literature, and anarchy as a student at Edinburgh, follow his wanderings through Europe, Scandinavia, and the eastern United States and finally to his spiritual home, the American West; record his many loves and marriages; and chronicle his lifelong struggle to preserve the disappearing southwestern wilderness, as well as his bitter and often hilarious disputes with the East Coast intelligentsia. His journals contain the first inklings—backgrounds, narrative pictures, and sketches—of his hard hitting, popular, irreverent published works. But perhaps most important, they offer us a portrait of Abbey the man: the friend, enemy, husband, lover, loner, writer, and fiery environmentalist who forever changed the way we look at the American West.

Edited by Abbey's good friend, writer David Petersen, *Confessions of a Barbarian* presents the best of these previously unpublished journals for the first time, illustrated with Abbey's own sketches.

Confessions of a Barbarian Details

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From Reader Review Confessions of a Barbarian for online ebook

Kati says

Though Edward Abbey is a complete bastard, I found his journals interesting and sometimes even inspiring. He had a vision for a simple life lived close to the earth that I really admire. I also appreciated his thoughts on writing.

Michael says

my favourite part about ed abbey is that hes just so bloody human.

Susan Klinke says

Was Edward Abbey racist and sexist? Does lust after pretty women make him sexist? Does having been married five times and not being a particularly good husband to any of them make him sexist? I have to admit that he can sure piss me off when he makes comments like, *These women with their narrow shoulders and huge bulky rumps - constructed like ants - the little round knobby head and tremendous powerful squat foundation of belly, hips, pelvis, ass. All these big saddles - like so many plow horses. @*%\$!!!* Does saying that Mexicans, blacks, Indians, and Mormons should be encouraged to slow their birth rates make him racist? Does his belief in militarizing the Mexican border make him racist? What does one make of comments such as the following made in 1956, *On the Negro question: I don't like 'em. Don't like Negroes. As far as I can see, they're just as stupid & depraved as whites.* and *There are two kinds of people I cannot abide: bigots and any well-organized ethnic group.* I find it interesting that he once played Scrooge in a Christmas Carol and said he enjoyed it. This misanthrope is just not much of a people person no matter what one's persuasion, unless of course she's a pretty girl. I really don't know how one gets in his good graces.

I certainly do not agree with Abbey on everything, and he can sometimes make me really angry. I don't know whether I would have liked Abbey in the flesh, but there is often absolutely no one else I'd rather read than him. His ability to be ecstatically materially present, his lust for life, his love of freedom, and his opinionatedness are electrically palpable. Oh, and let's not forget Abbey's sense of humor! After a writer for the New York Times called him "thirty years behind the times", ever the jester, he claimed he was closer to a hundred years behind the times!

I love Edward Abbey for the life he stirs up in me. These journals are a treasure that I will return to as "electric shock therapy" as needed throughout my life.

Here are a couple excerpts from his journals:

Am I really so crude and ugly as I sometimes seem in these vulgar pages? No. I am not. I am a sensitive young punk, poetical, melancholical, romantic, fastidious, fond of Mozart and marigolds and cats and cunt and delicate varieties of fruit such as watermelon and buckbrush nuts.

The more I dim my eyes over print and frazzle my brain over abstract ideas, the more I want and appreciate

the delight of being basically an animal wrapped in a sensitive skin: sex, the resistance of rock, the touch and taste of snow, the feel of the sun, good wine and rare beefsteak and the company of friends around a fire with guitar and lousy old cowboy songs. Despair: I'll never become a scholar, never a decent good Christian. Just a hedonist, a pagan, a primitive romantic. But what's an honest soul to do? I don't know. I can say this. Be loyal to what you love, be true to the earth, fight your enemies with passion and laughter.

Richard says

Whatever else he was aside for the moment, Abbey was a relentless diarist and we have this selection taken from his journals by a close friend (David Peterson) to thank for compiling it. Like many authors when asked which of their work is their favorite they will pick them but Abbey he shunned at least this portion of his output and at one point almost destroyed the originals that at the time were in the possession of the University of Arizona special collection. Fortunately they survived and we have this collection to illuminate one of the least understood and frequently most maligned of contemporary writers (not without good reason).

Abbey is a hard one to pin down - frequently funny, often caustic (particularly to fellow writers with whom he had public feuds especially later in life i.e., Tom McGuane, Gretel Erlich and Annie Dillard with whom he was often compared as a “nature writer” for lack of a better label.

“‘Be kind’ is perhaps actually more difficult than ‘Love everybody.’ Love is treacherous, really easy and the lover a tyrant. I would rather be tolerated than loved – wouldn’t I? – as I prefer to tolerate rather than love. I’m another tepid liberal myself, despite extreme inclinations and fanatic aspirations.” (p.59) This sentiment from the man fathered four children from five different wives and had little to do with the upbringing of most of them either because his peripatetic wandering from coast to coast left him apart from his kids or he was too busy doing what was most important to him.

He grew up in the small town of Indiana, Pennsylvania but is most associated with his life and writings set in the southwest and Utah where he found his muse – the canyon lands and deserts of the American southwest. Although much of who we are today is defined what we do for a living Abbey is more defined by the work he didn’t do – an itinerant working part time for the Park Service primarily as a fire lookout a job he loved for its isolation.

The love of nature sentiment runs strongly throughout his diaries e.g.,

"This land belongs to them that love it (and will fight for it?).

DICTUM: NO AUTOMOBILES IN NATIONAL PARKS.

Let's make them parks and not parking lots.

FOR HUMAN BEINGS ONLY.

God bless America. Let's save some of it." (p.141)

But then there is the Abbey who purchased a Cadillac convertible later in life and was known to drive down forest roads tossing his empty beer cans aside saying “my beer cans are prettier than your billboards”.

Much of his writing occurred during and between his stints with the park Service including “Desert Solitaire” one of the greatest books about the outdoors and love of nature written to date.

Not surprisingly he had a less than positive view of reviewers and the publishing industry on which given his spotty work history he became increasingly dependent for income. About what was reportedly his favorite novel he wrote: "Rejecting Black Sun – the biggest publishing blunder since Simon & Schuster rejected the New Testament." p. 174 Yet it is candid statements like this that show his humanity: "All of my books have been hastily and carelessly written, in violent desperate spasms of last-minute effort to meet some publishers mad invented deadline. The only book I took pains with, actually labored over was Black Sun and the reviewers hated it. (I think it's my best, most deeply felt.) p. 253

As readers we can't help but wonder what the spark is for the book we're holding in hand. Here is one of the more clearly stated reasons I've seen:

"Why I write:

Not so much to please, soothe or console, as to challenge, provoke, stimulate, even to anger if necessary.

Such is my aim. (What's yours?). And, of course, to entertain. To generate tears and laughter.

Or I wrote to amuse my friends, and to aggravate – exasperate- ulcerate- our enemies.

The fine art of making enemies: I've become remarkably good at it. Which is probably why reviewers give me such a hard time?" p.284

And he does all in equal measure in this highly readable collection.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

You really have to already be an Ed Abbey fan to appreciate this one. Some of it is tedious and maudlin, but there are bits of treasure if you don't mind plowing through the dross. I hope this doesn't sound like a criticism. These were his private journals started at a very young age and never meant to be published, so they're not exactly an example of literary genius.

I enjoyed much of this just because I've read all of his books and it was interesting to see how his life and writing unfolded.

Terry says

This autobiography was edited after Abbey's death from a collection of his journals. It was a moderately interesting read because I think of Abbey as one of the first environmentalists, and he earned this distinction because he is a determined and outspoken writer. The journals also show the sad side of the man - racist, selfish, and unable to dedicate himself to marriage. He wrote of the sadness of his own impending death well. I believe his books are fun and provocative, if I remember Monkey Wrench Gang correctly, perhaps a more accurate depiction of Abbey.

Zack says

My review here: <http://www.examiner.com/examiner/x-83...>

Chris says

I took this on in order to broaden my literary horizons from more accepted environmental writers, and to embrace the more poetic/anarchistic prose of a eccentric American. I was surprised at how dark and morose Abbey's thoughts could be, and how often he contemplated suicide/wished-for-death. Everything about Abbey's life was over-the-top, from his trips in the outdoors to his F-I-V-E marriages! Abbey often seemed shocked when his marriages failed, which seemed rather evident to me from his actions, or lack there of, on the marital front. I've read Abbey's non-fiction, and now I will move onto his fiction with a better understand of how his personal life may have shaped his writing.

Laurie says

Reading this now....love it!

Elise says

Abbey fascinates me. For a sexist racist pig, he's a great writer and environmentalist. There's just something about him that makes me want to keep reading his work. And yes, I know I'm on some government list for that.

I went into this book with little expectations. It took me about 50 pages to get into the rhythm, and for the book to include more than short snippets. He's real in his journals, and the passages included seem to hold nothing back. Abbey was aware of his faults--something we should all aspire to.

Jason Gibbons says

4.5

Ed Abbey in all his glory and nakedness. A beautiful and troubling journey "down the river" of Abbey's writing and personal life. Aptly titled from his own words, the journals reflect a man who could be as barbaric as the barren deserts he loved so deeply. But he is also the lovable philosopher/prophet calling modern man to their senses before they destroy one of the things that makes us great as a country.

Louise says

Amazing and disappointing. Some really interesting insights into the man, he's mostly very honest and yet sometimes you almost wish he wasn't as for all his ideals he's revealed to be insightful, sometimes brilliantly inspired, brutally honest, funny and also, selfish and somehow lacking in imagination for the thoughts and emotions of others. An interesting read but to say it's a bit 'mixed' is an understatement. I'm predisposed to like his general stance on many things but this book was a reality check.

Stan says

I enjoyed the book even though I abandoned reading it for quite some time. This is no fault of the editor or even the book itself- it's Abbey's own damn fault. I had a hard time slogging with his melodramatic whiny shit from the 1950 and early 60s- tedious. About the time he is mid 30s, You come to recognize the mind and soul that gives you Desert Solitaire and Monkey Wrench Gang. I've enjoyed his writing for quite some time and I was curious about the man behind it. So I really enjoyed the latter 2/3s of his journals. I'm sure many will be disappointed to see the imperfect human behind his works but I wasn't. He was no desert zen monk-saint. Certainly no hippie and in no way politically correct. Far from it, just an ordinary human full of faults and flaws but graced with extraordinary insight and the guts to be honest and critical in print.... maybe with a dash of crazed desert prophet/madman thrown in. If you are a fan of his work, you'll enjoy these journals. If you want to tear him down, you'll find plenty to cherrypick and justify your disdain.

Kate says

I was very disappointed in this book. I love Edward Abbey's writing, and was looking forward to a glimpse into his mind -- how he came to write The Monkey Wrench Gang, what it was like to be in Arches Natl. Monument, what prompted him to write Desert Solitaire. Etc.

But no. This book is a series of excerpts from his journals, and are mainly about how his marriages failed, how he met the next wife, etc. Perhaps I'm an unusual fan, but I don't care much about authors or artists personal life -- I care about the music, or the book, and the act of creation.

If there was any of that in this book, it was minuscule, and I missed it.

Kay says

I loved Desert Solitaire so much that I wanted to find out how Abbey had evolved into that writer. This was fascinating and at times disturbing. This book traced his life through his journals. Beginning shortly after college and the end of his first marriage and ending shortly before his death, we see him struggling both professionally and personally. The constant is his love for the nature in Utah and Arizona. Passion, ego, stubbornness, and brilliance are all reflected in these pages.
