

For years, Ed Abbey was a man I didn't want to know. We occasionally said hello in the post office, and that was enough. While I admired his ferocious reverence for the land, much of what he said about people sounded to me like bigotry; his proscriptions for Latin American refugees were frankly brutal, and on the subject of women he was given to

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remarks so anachronistically patronizing that they were either annoying or absurd.

When I learned last year that he and I would be meeting to co-judge the *Tucson Weekly's* fiction contest, I was doubtful. I complained to a friend, "Me and Abbey at a restaurant, trying to agree on something? Sounds like a Blind Date from Hell."

It was nothing of the kind. Abbey was gracious, respectful to the point of deference, and wonderfully guileless. We had both had unlucrative careers as musicians, before becoming writers, and he reminisced about his beatnik days as a flute-player at an Albuquerque coffeehouse. (He was fired after some incensed townsfolk shot out the windows.) It dawned on me that the revolution of his youth was not the same one as mine. While Abbey was inspiring the ire of cowboys with his black turtleneck and beret, Gloria Steinem and Malcolm X were still awaiting conversion and I hadn't yet learned to walk. His language came out of a time I never knew. I decided to lighten up a little on Ed.

By the evening's end we had ascertained that we were neighbors and had children of the same age, and also that we had a lot of similar thoughts on writing. We exchanged phone numbers. As we were leaving, I asked him, "Do you just do the Old-Bastard image so people will leave you alone?" He gave me an absolutely radiant smile and said, "Yep."

I assumed I'd have all the time in the world to cultivate his acquaintance. I didn't, and I regret it.