

Remembering Abbie Hoffman

July 1989

Contents

Michael Kennedy, Lawyer; Defended Rennie Davis at Chicago 8 Trial 3
David Peel, Marijuana Activist and Leader of the Group, Lower East Side 3
Paul Krassner, Writer and Former Publisher of *The Realist* 3
A.J. Weberman, Dylanologist 3
Jerry Rubin, Former Yippie 4
Dana Beal, Marijuana Activist 4
Paul Kantner, Jefferson Airplane 4
Aron Kay, Marijuana Activist 5
William Kunstler, Radical Lawyer 5

Michael Kennedy, Lawyer; Defended Rennie Davis at Chicago 8 Trial

The first time I met Abbie was in a hotel room in the fall of 1967. He had a pot of honey laced with acid. We were all supposed to take a big finger full of honey and sit down and formulate a strategy and that's what we did.

Abbie would try anything. In the old days, he did acid the way some people would do bacon and eggs. He obviously was not averse to drugs—they were a very important part of his personality. I just don't think he intended to kill himself. I can imagine it as an accident because he was very compulsive and unafraid of any kind of drug or pill.

Abbie saw the next four years as critical. He was looking forward to riding another wave. He was ready. For instance, he was going to go up to Alaska to defend the otters. The [oil spill] depressed the hell out of him, but he was not the type to give in to depression. Being a manic depressive, we learned years ago that that was a power—that depression is as much a power as mania is. If you could harness it—that's where the lithium came in—you could turn it into positive political activity. That's why he had this incredible fucking energy. Abbie lived about as fully as anybody I've ever known.

David Peel, Marijuana Activist and Leader of the Group, Lower East Side

Abbie was my hero. Because of him, Jerry Rubin and Howard Smith [a former Village Voice writer], I became a radical. He made me become very outspoken and open-minded.

We appeared at many rallies together. What Abbie did with words and lectures, we did with music. It was the same thing, except he talked and we sang.

Abbie made the Youth International Party grow up. We all grew up with him. He saw the truth the way I see my music—right from the streets. Matter of fact, a few years ago I told Abbie, "I haven't left the streets yet," and Abbie said, "David, neither have I."

I don't know the reason why, but goodbye, Abbie, goodbye.

Paul Krassner, Writer and Former Publisher of *The Realist*

What I learned from Abbie was the inseparability of politics and culture. He clearly saw this linear connection between busting kids here for smoking pot and dropping napalm on the other side of the world. It was all an extension of the dehumanization.

Abbie's commitment never wavered. He was a total political animal. He squeezed life out of every moment and was a delight to be with. But all his time underground put a strain on him. He was a manic depressive the last few years. He had an auto accident, his mother was sick. And how affected was he by the Alaskan oil spill and the anniversary of Phil Ochs' death both of which had recently happened?

Abbie's legacy is his inspiration to young people. He said you can fight City Hall. Most of all, he said, you don't have to sit back and watch the news, you can be part of it.

AJ. Weberman, Dylanologist

Abbie was a real outlaw. He was always into doing something illegal, whether it be the Weather Underground, blue boxes, counterfeit watches or coke. He was an honest, principled all-around dude who never ripped anybody off except the establishment.

I used to sell Abbie pot. I once had a fistfight with him in Florida when we [the Zippies] were sleeping in Flamingo Park and he and Rubin and the Yippies were staying in a fleabag hotel. Jerry and Abbie became corrupt; they were just doing media stuff. But after awhile, we forgot the whole thing and became friends again.

The last time I saw Abbie he told jokes, but was pretty subdued. He was depressed. The car accident and getting caught smoking a joint on the airplane shook him up. They were thinking of institutionalizing him. He didn't want to get out of bed. He started taking those fucking mood elevators [beta blockers]. He should've stuck with pot.

People keep asking me if it's alright to cry about Abbie. It sure the fuck is.

Jerry Rubin, Former Yippie

Abbie was never mellow. He was either depressed or ecstatic. He was a comedian. People tend to think comedians don't feel. Abbie felt. I saw a lot of pain in his face during the '80s—pain caused by a crazy world, all the environmental damage, all the homeless. I think it was that pain that exploded inside his heart.

Abbie was never the same after he went underground. It deepened his alienation and furthered his politicization. He was actually more political in the '70s and '80s than he was in the '60s. We disagreed politically—I don't think we were aware of how different we were in the '60s—but resolved our personal problems. A couple of years ago we went out on a campus debate tour and got along fabulously. No matter what, we were always partners.

I recognized Abbie's pain during the debates. When you stripped away all the words and the jokes, he was simply saying "feel." Kids are not big on "feeling" today; they just want to make it.

Abbie was a true American hero, an original. In a perfect world, he'd still be outside protesting.

Dana Beal, Marijuana Activist

I believe the government persecuted Abbie to death—just like they did to Tom [Forcade]. This is the story, man: DEA Dirty Tricks Killed Abbie! The 150 pills they supposedly found in him is a hoax. How did they miss the 150 pills the first time? [The first medical examiner's report was inconclusive.] Wake up and smell the coffee, man. You know the auto accident Abbie had? He said it was the result of someone tampering with his brakes. Before Abbie left New York to move to Pennsylvania, someone came to his apartment, posing as a secretary, and ripped off all of his stuff. Man, they hounded the dude to death because of his piss-test book. Was Abbie murdered? That's for us to find out.

Paul Kantner, Jefferson Airplane

Abbie wanted to die when he was still alive. He was upset about how badly old people are treated in this country. It was a good time to die.

He used to come to our shows, we'd go to see him speak. When he was on the lam he stayed with Grace and I for about six months. For China's birthday he dressed up as a clown and entertained the fuck out of the kids all afternoon. Of course, the other parents didn't know their kids were being entertained by a Federal fugitive. Abbie loved to get away with stuff.

I'll never forget the time we tried to crash Tricia Nixon's party at the White House. Grace and Tricia had gone to the same school, so Grace got an invitation to this tea party. Abbie went with her as her escort—his hair all slicked back, looking like a gigolo—and I was the driver. Grace brought about five million tabs of acid with her; she was gonna spike the punch. Unfortunately, security didn't let them in. Too bad—Nixon tripping on acid certainly would have had some interesting historical implications.

Abbie turned me on to Nicaragua. He told me to go down there. It's like San Francisco was in the '60s, or Paris in the '20s. Abbie had a facility for turning lights on that needed to be turned on. Wherever a light needed to be shined, Abbie was there.

Aron Kay, Marijuana Activist

Abbie should be remembered as a true revolutionary, not a druggie who killed himself. He transformed society. Him not being with us is like the Kennedys, Martin Luther King and John Lennon not being with us. He may be gone, but his energy continues. The way to remember Abbie is to have constant, meaningful protests against the fucking status quo.

William Kunstler, Radical Lawyer

People keep asking me, did Abbie change? My answer is yes. Over the last 15 years he became more of a participant and less of a publicist. He was a political prankster during the Yippie experience, a clever manipulator of the media. He knew how to use satire, parody and ridicule for political purposes. But then he got involved, as Barry Freed [his underground alias], in the St. Lawrence River movement and later at the University of Massachusetts with Amy Carter and more recently in the Dump the Pump campaign for the Delaware River. He realized that he didn't have to be the dominant figure—he could work with other people without having to be the big cheese.

Abbie was disappointed that young people were not out behind the barricades. Times change; great efforts exhaust people. We're all waiting for the next battlefield.

I just don't think he took his life. Abbie would've left a long note. Knowing him—he was such a publicist—Abbie wouldn't have departed without giving us his final words.

Steal This Wiki

Remembering Abbie Hoffman
July 1989

July 1989 issue of High Times. <hightimes.com/culture/abbie-hoffman/>

stealthiswiki.com