

PRENTISS, Sean -

PERSONAL: Married; wife's name Sarah. Education: Attended Western State Colorado University.

ADDRESSES: Home--VT. Email--seanprentiss@gmail.com.

CAREER: Norwich University, Northfield, VT, assistant professor of English. Formerly worked as trailbuilder, Northwest Youth Corps.

AWARDS, HONORS: Albert J. Colton Fellow, Utah Humanities Council.

WRITINGS:

(Editor, with Joe Wilkins) The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre: An Anthology of Explorations in Creative Nonfiction, Michigan State University Press (East Lansing, MI), 2014.  
Finding Abbey: The Search for Edward Abbey and His Hidden Desert Grave, University of New Mexico Press (Albuquerque, NM), 2015.

Contributor of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry to journals and other periodicals, including Brevity, ISLE, Nimrod, Passages North, Spoon River, and Sycamore Review. Creative editor, Backcountry.

SIDELIGHTS:

"Sean Prentiss," declared the contributor of a biographical blurb to the author's eponymous Web site, the Sean Prentiss Home Page, "is a writer who focuses on creative and environmental essays, poetry, a few short stories." His works also include The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre: An Anthology of Explorations in Creative Nonfiction, which he coedited with Joe Wilkins, and Finding Abbey: The Search for Edward Abbey and His Hidden Desert Grave.

Prentiss's two works are related: if The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre is a study of ways of writing nonfiction, Finding Abbey is an example of the way the fourth genre is practiced. The volume traces Prentiss's search for the last resting place of environmental writer Edward Abbey, who was buried secretly in the Arizona desert by friends after his death in 1989. "For many contemporary environmentalists, Abbey is a seminal figure whose writings on preservation and sustainability, especially in the southwest, still guide the environmental conversation today," said Adele Oliveira in the Santa Fe New Mexican. "Though Abbey resisted the label of 'nature writer,' his writing about the West is undeniably romantic, and resonates with many who love the desert." "In 2009 &hellip; Prentiss set out to track Abbey's life, to get inside his head," explained John Peel in the Durango Herald. "Over a two-year period, he traveled around the Southwest, interviewing Abbey's friends, visiting Abbey's favorite haunts and, yes, searching for the hidden grave."

At the same time, Finding Abbey is not just about the search for a hidden grave. It is also about Prentiss's search for meaning within himself. "Finding Abbey moves across landscapes urban and rural, lonely and intimate, lush and dry, some filled with a depth of meaning and others

with a hollow ache," stated Cherice Bock in an introduction to an interview with the author in Whole Terrain. "Prentiss uses the landscapes to explore his own interior landscape: the line between mystery and revelation, epistemic questions of what is knowable and what he wants to know, and why it is so important for him to go on this quest to find Abbey's grave." "While having all the makings of an expertly researched piece of narrative journalism," said a Vermont Sports reviewer, "Prentiss also turns the magnifying glass on himself. What is most commendable about 'Finding Abbey' is the narrator's willingness to go the distance and explore, to think deeply about one of modern America's most outspoken critics, and to inspire others to look for what he rightfully calls 'a life worth living.'" "Finding Abbey," stated Jamie Houghton in High Desert Journal, "is not a map, it is a log-book of a journey through the maze; Prentiss' mind, Abbey's mind &hellip; minor characters encountered along the way. At the end of the book Prentiss realizes that 'I must allow it (my mind) to remember what true home feels like out in the self-willed lands.' He suggests that we don't have to be physically West to connect with wildness, with mystery, with self-will. He suggests there are endless mysteries that can be found without being attached to one place in particular. Perhaps, Prentiss suggests, the West is a state of mind." "So this journey is about the need to unravel, thread by thread, this mystery--to follow where those threads lead," Prentiss wrote in an essay found in Terrain. "Or maybe it's because humans need mystery, because a person like me, who has been sated on the wrong kinds of food (security and home ownership and a steady paycheck in the city), becomes hungry for something nourishing, something healthy, something real. Or maybe we are pulled by mystery like we are pulled by wilderness--that desire to enter self-willed lands."

Prentiss was drawn to Abbey's vision of the West. "What I realized," Prentiss told Bock, "was that he [Abbey] was showing me a way to view the environment that I had never noticed. I was a business major, so I wasn't reading a lot of environmental literature. Abbey didn't sound like what I assumed a writer should sound like. I thought they should be kind of obnoxious and pretentious with an artistic lifestyle. Abbey was one of the first writers I could relate to. I loved the outdoors, and so did he. He spoke in a language I could understand. He was the first person speaking that language that I encountered." "The original subtitle for the book was, 'The Search for Edward Abbey, His Hidden Desert Grave, and a Place Called Home,'" Prentiss said in his Whole Terrain interview. "If I could, I would add that subtitle back, because this journey was not about a grave or an adventure, but about finding home. I hope people like the book, but even if no one reads the book, I'm so glad to be excited to go home every single time." "The essence of who Edward Abbey remains out there," the author concluded in his Terrain essay, "and I intend to find it, because maybe his essence, his secrets, can teach me how to best live my own finite days here in cities and in deserts, in lifetime jobs and in 30-year mortgages."

Critics appreciated Prentiss's account of the search for Abbey's grave and the search for meaning within himself. "Reading Finding Abbey will cause you to rush to the copy of Abbey's Desert Solitaire that's been neglected on your bookshelf for so long," declared Peel. "It will again make you question what's going on in this world and why we need to

protect wild places and will force you to look at your own life and actions--or, unfortunately and more likely, inactions." The author, said Henry T. Armistead in Library Journal, "discourses engagingly on the significance of mystery, quests, travel, personalities, the desert, and humankind's relationship to nature." "Prentiss offers a book that's part memoir, part literary appreciation, part biography, part travelogue, part jeremiad," declared a Kirkus Reviews contributor, "for what the rest of the world has become." His account, wrote Jeff Friend in Foreword Reviews, is "an exceptional narrative that flows smoothly and conveys his admiration for Abbey and the American West. Finding Abbey is a journey well worth taking."

#### BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL SOURCES:

##### PERIODICALS

Choice, November 11, 2015, review of The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre: An Anthology of Explorations in Creative Nonfiction, p. 70.

Durango Herald, May 11, 2015, John Peel, "Finding Abbey: Or Finding Yourself."

Kirkus Reviews, March 1, 2015, review of Finding Abbey: The Search for Edward Abbey and His Hidden Desert Grave.

Library Journal, June 15, 2015, Henry T. Armistead, review of Finding Abbey, p. 109.

##### ONLINE

Foreword Reviews, <https://www.forewordreviews.com/> (May 27, 2015), Jeff Friend, review of Finding Abbey.

High Desert Journal, <http://www.highdesertjournal.com/> (December 2, 2015), Jamie Houghton, review of Finding Abbey.

Santa Fe New Mexican, <http://www.santafenewmexican.com/> (May 22, 2015), Adele Oliveira, review of Finding Abbey.

Sean Prentiss Home Page, <http://www.seanprentiss.com> (December 2, 2015), author profile.

Terrain, <http://www.terrain.org/> (October 27, 2015), Sean Prentiss, "Beginning a Journey: Finding Edward Abbey by Sean Prentiss."

Vermont Sports, <http://vtsports.com/> (December 2, 2015), review of Finding Abbey.

Whole Terrain, <http://wholterrain.com/> (May 11, 2015), Cherice Bock, "Finding Abbey: Whole Terrain Interviews Author Sean Prentiss."\*