

# Book festival Northern Arizona

## ***Living After Midnight: A novella and stories*, by Lee K. Abbott Review by Larry Hendricks**

A good writer of fiction takes a reader on a ride into a new land where words on a page evoke a movie upon the mind's eye. An excellent writer of fiction not only takes a reader on that ride, but offers pure pleasure to the reader in the reading of the words on the journey. Lee K. Abbott is an excellent writer of fiction.

In his latest book, *Living after Midnight: A novella and stories*, Abbott packs a punch in every well-chosen word to lead a reader down a path of inevitability for the characters' lives who populate his stories. The relevant and the meaningful abound in each singsong turn of phrase, each brilliant simile and metaphor, each word-choice whose equal might not exist.

American short story stylist Edgar Allen Poe, in an essay on the subject of short stories, said that writers should strive for a "unity of effect," when crafting a short story. In essence, get in, make the reader feel something and get out. Abbott does this in spades -- at least for this reader, who after reading through the worlds Abbott created, often exclaimed, "Whoa," or "Wow," or "Man, that's something."

The flagship story, the novella "Living After Midnight," brings two college buddies together for pseudo-scientific philosophical discussions while experimenting with debauch and mayhem. The central character, not satisfied with the American Dream, takes, or is forced into, an existential drop into depravity to see just how bad he can be, just what he is capable of.

In the story, "Freedom, A Theory Of," the central character attempts to reconcile conundrums of his life with the fact that his father walked out on the family when he was young. The man's reunion with his father decades later and the subsequent conclusion of the reunion could not turn out any other way.

The woman in "Sweet Cheeks," once she's fallen in love, must decide if she'll take the second best thing or take a chance. A father's loss of his daughter in "The Who, the What, and the Why," reveals the disconnect often associated with tragedy, and the resultant reconciling of the experience in one man as his life continues.

And life does go on for all of Abbott's characters. The decisions they make, although seemingly inevitable given the circumstances, bring about a deeper meaning to their lives, an acceptance, that completely satisfies Poe's "unity of effect" in a reader.

Abbott's characters are three-dimensional, his settings vivid, his situations believable and his themes, if not universal, understandable. But beyond the essential criteria, Abbott's lyrical prose has a richness that transcends the final result of story -- the sum of all the parts equal more than the whole.

Love, family, infidelity, friendship and loss receive focused treatment by Abbott, and the result is epiphany and revelation. And for lovers of language, *Living After Midnight* is a must.



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