

From the Editor

Twelve Years of Dear Abbe



It is hard to conceive that we have been dispensing questionable advice to our colleagues all this time. Much less be funny. Dear Abbe started one morning over the usual lab meeting with coffee and snacks in the break room of the University of Georgia's EM Lab. Mark Farmer and I were joking about giving bad personal advice to grad students, researchers, and each other when the idea of Dear Abbe (with apologies to Pauline Phillips) came to mind. We envisioned a curmudgeonly, old German scientist fashioned as a mythical man with no chronological, or ethical, constraints.

After conjuring up a couple of short advice columns, we wondered if someone would be foolhardy enough to let us publish them. We approached Ron Anderson of *Microscopy Today*, who enthusiastically said yes (and contributed several questions and suggestions of his own)! Eventually Charles Lyman became the current Editor-in-Chief, and he began to have some influence over Herr Abbe's free-ranging style. Charles has been a strict mediator and has been known several times to bluntly note, "I don't see the humor in this..." Several years ago, I approached Phil Oshel over beer and popcorn at a Microscopy and Microanalysis poster session to join us. He was reluctant at first, but his input added a radical look to our irascible character. These men, and many others, keep Abbe from going off the metaphysical deep end.

Do scientists really ask Dear Abbe all those questions? Some questions (particularly early on) were created by us. Then some brave souls began to write in, and a few also provided their own answers! Several questions were inspired by comments or motions at Microscopy Society of America executive council meetings. We also gleaned many from the microscopy listserver—from people who allowed us to use their unintentionally (or intentionally) humorous queries as fodder for Abbe. Our loyal fans may not realize this, but we did attempt to interject obscure, true historical characters, modified historical events, and some actual science while helping the illustrious Abbe advise microscopists.

Dear Abbe may last another ten years, or he may evolve into something else entirely. Whatever happens, it will be the microscopy and microanalysis community at large that determines his fate and caricature. After all, Abbe's world is created by the oddities of lab life, the curious characteristics of scientists, and the antics of our students and colleagues—and there is plenty to go around.

John P. Shields
Guest editorial
University of Georgia

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