



## Remembering Bob Abel

By [Ken Mirman](#)

Sep 27 2001 02:22:00:000PM

VFXPro, in honoring graphics and effects pioneer Robert Abel, who died September 23, is creating a Bob Abel tribute journal. If you have a story or a memory you'd like to share with your friends in the visual effects community, please email us at [editors@creativeplanet.com](mailto:editors@creativeplanet.com) and we'll include it.

In lieu of flowers, Bob's family extends an invitation for donations to be sent on his behalf to [The American Red Cross](#) to aid the families of victims of the Sept. 11 tragedy, [The American Heart Association](#) and [The American Cancer Society](#).

Ken Mirman, Bob's friend and colleague, delivered the eulogy at Bob's funeral yesterday, and has allowed us to publish it. Ken can be reached at [Kmirman1@aol.com](mailto:Kmirman1@aol.com).

---

### Eulogy to Robert Abel by Kenny Mirman

Given at his Memorial Service on September 25, 2001

Bob's beloved family Marah and Josh, Judi, Jerry and Kirsten, and to Bob's dear friends, colleagues, students... DREAMERS.

We've lost the man carrying the torch.  
The Navigator.  
The one who lit the way.  
Sometimes by wildfire.  
Sometimes by light alone.  
Sometimes by the seat of his pants.  
It was Faith.

This Visionary, he was in the front, always, and his torch treated us to a view of remarkable beauty, wisdom and truth. He showed us the way, and it was magic.

Bob Abel endeared us, gifted us, inspired us, blessed us, revived us, guided us, to BE something we never thought possible...

*True to our hearts.*

Bob inspired us to not only dream, but to make our dreams reality. And he taught us by example of his passionate life.

It borders on incomprehensible how Bob Abel, this man of such unspeakably passionate creative vitality and wisdom, could be taken from us so swiftly and so soon. It's an indescribable loss. Yet I have to believe it's some kind of mysterious beauty. Life's way of perfection. And so I celebrate Bob Abel's life today...

this True Artist of a human being.

The one carving the path.  
The Maverick.  
The Rebel.  
The Inspirer!

The MythMaker.  
The Huckster.  
The Storyteller.  
The Humanitarian.  
The Gunslinger.  
The Pitchman.  
The Comedian.  
The Filmmaker.  
The TEACHER.  
The Godfather.

There are many more on your own list, I'm sure of it.

But one thing is certain. I bet that on all of our personal lists of "Who he was," in capital letters it says...  
Bob Abel was THE VISIONARY.

A guiding light to not only an industry, but to art, to education, and to history.

He moved us. And I miss him deeply.

The Mentor of all mentors...  
he was Obi Wan Kenobi with a twist.

Picture this: a tall glass of Obi Wan Kenobi, with a cup of Albert Brooks, two shots of Frank Capra, a half pint of Joseph Campbell, an ounce of the Wizard of Oz, three heaping capfuls of Akira Kurosawa, a cup of Rumi's poetry of the divine, and a spritzer blast of Cal Worthington and his dog Spot.

I say Obi Wan, because Bob's truest gift was as mentor and muse. He had the uncanny sixth sense to hand pick the truest, keenest talent, hire them on the spot, and then inspire them to be more than they ever dreamed possible. He was a builder of dreams. He used us. I know he used me. And I loved him for it.

We all have our stories of Bob. Our cherished memories. What he meant to YOU. How he touched YOU.

One of the most cherished memories *I* have of Bob was on his birthday a couple of years ago. We were having lunch at Chaya, and in walks this little white haired man, dashing in black overcoat and scarf, shuffling with a cane and two assistants helping him make his way over to a table. Bob then proceeds to tell me that this was Billy Wilder and he then explained, gushing with enthusiasm, how Billy had been such a key influence in Bob's life as an artist. He told me about every one of Billy's films and everything they meant to him. I just listened, and received a lesson in cinema, and a lesson in life.

When Billy was leaving, I begged Bob to go tell him how he felt... that he would never have another chance. Bob said "No... no, no, no." He was so bashful.

Finally, I stood up and literally pulled Bob out of his chair. We went out and reached Billy on the sidewalk, and with tears in his eyes, Bob explained to Billy how he had inspired him to become an artist and a filmmaker. Watching MY mentor, Bob Abel, meet HIS mentor, brought me to tears too. We both stood there crying, for two different reasons.

Bob loved nothing more than to be on the further side of the cutting edge, and it was FUN being there with him. Wasn't it?

At RA&A, formally known as Robert Abel & Associates and affectionately called "Abel's," he provided a paradise for creative expression. It was 24 hours a day experimental filmmaking of the highest integrity. We all had endless passion to follow the example he set. What a thrill it was to be making it up as we went along.

Many times he didn't have the money to pay us, but we worked anyway. Remember those days in the screening room he'd announce "half salaries!?" But Bob would always come through for us. He'd go off into a rage about how they were going to come and padlock the doors if we didn't get this project or that. He was a NUT! But he loved it this way. That was the key to him, flying blind, through a forest.

Bob spoke about this in an old interview:

*"The essence of what I do is that I take risks. That's what film and special effects are all about. Every time I set out to do a project, I go out to do something never done or seen before. That means there's a great deal riding on everything I do."*

And there was nothing scarier than Bob Abel pitching one of *your* ideas. Oh God. Hold on. He was the absolute king of salesmen. He'd make stuff up on the fly, serve every sentence with topspin, shoot ideas from behind his back blindfolded, quote poets, classic films, and passages from great authors, half the time he'd make them up. Then make outrageous promises about using technology that hadn't yet been invented, quadruple the complexity of what you had taken a leap designing, and promise it sooner than what you had already said was too soon.

He'd fight for the integrity of *our* ideas.

He'd do anything for them. These IDEAS; they were Bob's gold. He'd bankroll them himself. He'd mortgage his house, he'd lay down whatever he had, to maintain the integrity of the film, to keep the company alive.

Bob was a "one of."

While he was making the documentary of Elvis Presley "Elvis on Tour," he met with Colonel Parker, Elvis' manager, and basically in charge of Elvis' life as a human being. You just couldn't make a documentary with integrity about Elvis without filming Col Parker. Bob tried every way possible to convince Colonel that he must be in the film, but Colonel Parker said, "For every frame of film that I see myself in, I will dock your budget \$1000.00."

Bob was so absolutely pissed. Shortly after that, Bob was standing and talking with Sylvia Harp, his producer. It was the late 60's and Bob used to wear the same pair of tight, tight bellbottoms everyday, and they were worn as thin as paper.

Bob bent down to pick up some papers from the floor just as Colonel Parker happened to be walking behind him, and Bob's pants split open loudly, from bow to stern.

Being Bob Abel, he naturally took advantage of the situation and let the Colonel know how he felt about him. He mooned him good with everything he had, and as the story goes, only Colonel Parker knew whether Bob was wearing underwear or not.

I love Bob Abel. I love and admire him so dearly. I loved him for his insanity! I loved him for his humor and his sharp, crack WIT. I loved him for his true caring, he was a mensch. For his kindness. For his endless soul and compassion, and his understanding of the human spirit. I loved him for his wisdom; deep and true. I loved him for his heart; huge. What a remarkable tribute he was to being a human being. What a lucky break to having worked with him. What a blessing to call him my friend.

How did I luck out? Where was the fork in the road I took that led to him? Where was the signpost I picked that said, "This way to Beauty. This way to Truth. This way to inspiration. This way to unbridled creativity. This way to dreams actualized. This way to raw humanity. This way to mass communication of absolute SOUL and love."

And now where are the signposts leading? Where does the fork in this road go? Who are our mentors? Who are our Soul guides? Who are our torchbearers?

And so I dare us... to use Bob's life as an example, by picking up this torch he lay at our feet, and raising it high above our heads, as a tribute to him, to us, and to those who follow. And maybe, if we're lucky, we'll catch a glimpse once again, of who we are.

*"The Magic Never Stops."*

Thank you Bob Abel. You will live forever.