

*Gila Country Legend: The Life and Times of Quentin Hulse.* By Nancy Coggeshall. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009. xiii + 280 pp. 29 halftones, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth, ISBN 978-0-8263-4824-1.)

I wish I had known Quentin Hulse. The marker on the plaque mounted on a cross made of rebar, standing on a hill overlooking Canyon Creek near the Gila Wilderness, identifies him as a “Houndman Cowman Hunter-Cowboy.” For those who knew him, this simple epitaph captures his essence. Fully at home in the rugged country of southwestern New Mexico, Hulse was in many ways a modern incarnation of the mountain men who first entered this region. Yet he is not easily typecast. Although he was perfectly content to go long stretches by himself, he was not a misanthropic loner. He enjoyed people, was a great storyteller, and had great stories told about him. His formal education may have ended with high school, but he was an omnivorous reader and an authority on regional history.

Hulse’s exploits and abilities as a hunter and hunting guide, as a hand with horses and mules, as a hard-drinking hell-raiser, as an authority-averse wartime sailor in the South Pacific, and as a truly rugged individual are not unique. I have known some old-time cowboys from Idaho to Kansas whose life stories would have made a book every bit as interesting and as good as this one. As English poet Thomas Gray told us centuries ago, the graveyards are filled with men and women whose stories are buried with them. But Hulse was lucky: he has a biographer who writes well. This book is well researched and documented, yet neither aspect obtrudes on the narrative of this remarkable life. My chief complaint is that the index is not as thorough as I would like it to be.

Many biographers become deeply attached to, even fall in love with, their subjects. That literally happened with Nancy Coggeshall and Hulse. In a sense this book is both a biography and a love story. Coggeshall, whose family roots go back to colonial America, left Rhode Island to attend the University of Chicago, married, divorced, lived in Europe and Canada, and in 1988, moved to New Mexico. Her story and her relationship with Hulse serve as bookends to the center of the book, which recounts Hulse’s exploits and adventures.

Coggeshall first met Hulse three years after her move west. At the fiesta in the small town of Winston where the meeting occurred, he not only ignored her but did not even look at her when they were introduced. By 1998, however, they were living together in Reserve, the town Hulse had moved to when a mildly debilitating stroke had forced him off the ranch at Canyon Creek. The couple spent four years together, happy ones despite some minor incidents such as Hulse using Coggeshall’s pastry brush to apply linseed oil to his favorite rocking chair. He died in April 2002, just a few weeks shy of his seventy-sixth birthday.

I enjoyed this book and learned much from it, both about Hulse and the country in which he lived. It is a great tribute to a great life.

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