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Cantankerous Cowboy

This splendid biography tells the story of a New Mexico rancher who is part of a dying breed

by [Jon Shumaker](#)



Gila Country Legend: The Life and Times of Quentin Hulse

By Nancy Coggeshall University of New Mexico 280 pages, \$29.95

He was 70. She was 55. He was an old-time New Mexico rancher, guide, outfitter, hunter, storyteller, oral historian, ladies' man, drunk, emotional cripple and World War II veteran. She was a patrician New England horsewoman, educated, well-traveled—someone who traced her ancestors back to the Revolutionary War.

He hunted mountain lion and bear, yet grouched about backpackers not picking up after themselves and removing rocks from a historic grave to make a campfire ring. She drove a Subaru and brought an English saddle to her first roundup.

The first time they met, he completely ignored her. It was during a 1991 fiesta in a cowboy bar in Winston, N.M. The bar was the real deal—greasy hats and dusty boots, with no indoor toilet and no tourists. The word "chingao" erupted regularly from the vicinity of the pool table. The old man with the silver-gray Resistol and white beard held court, teasing the young people and regaling them with stories. She watched and sensed something powerfully electric in his presence.

Five years later, she decided to go meet the old man, for real this time. She drove 90 miles through some of the wildest country in the Southwest to visit him at his remote ranch. He brought her down the precipitous road to the house and handed her a Budweiser. Feeding her dinner, he showed her photos from a full and colorful life. She felt instantly at ease with this man, and suddenly realized she lusted after his old bones, wanting nothing more than to crawl under the down-filled covers on his bed with him, surrounded by his amazing library. For her, it was lust at first sight with this (as she describes him) "septuagenarian hunk."

They spent four years together.

Meet Quentin Hulse and his biographer/lover, Nancy Coggeshall, in her fine book *Gila Country Legend: The Life and Times of Quentin Hulse*.

Neither a pure academic biography nor a chronological narrative, the book is a sort of oral history consisting of "Quentin stories," as Coggeshall calls them, pulled from myriad sources as well as the author's brief time spent with Hulse, all backed up by in-depth research and more than 200 interviews.

Quentin Hulse emerged into life on April 30, 1926, in Miami, Ariz. Along with neighboring Globe, Miami was at that time considered to be one of the most prosperous places in the entire American Southwest, thanks to the rich silver—and then copper—deposits that were discovered in the area. Quentin's father worked for the Inspiration Copper Co. in the power house.

Quentin's parents had been the first couple married in the newly formed Catron County in New Mexico's Gila country in 1921. Their initial ranching effort there went bust, leading them to move to Arizona temporarily. In 1933, they returned to the headwaters of the Gila River and bought another ranch.

High in the Mogollon Mountains of New Mexico is the little place long known as the Hulse Ranch. Surrounded by 3.3 million acres of national forest, and adjacent to the Gila Wilderness, it's located deep in the heart of one of the very special places in the Southwest. Its snow-covered peaks, deep rocky canyons, flower-filled meadows and babbling trout streams have drawn people here for millennia.

Quentin's ancestors were Texans by way of the Appalachians, and subscribed to the "law of the feud." They were "clannish, defensive, independent and tough"—in other words, a classic American family birthed in violence and lawlessness. New Mexico at the time Quentin was growing up was a wild place. One grandfather was shot; the other tried to jump out a window while suffering from alcohol withdrawal. Quentin himself was shot outside of a bar during a wild night of carousing.

Hulse died in 2002. Coggeshall had by that time already begun her project to capture his life in words.

At its heart, this book is a love story about the very last vestiges of the Old West. It's also about a cantankerous old cowboy and the people who orbited around him. It's about love for the land. And it's about two people in their later years colliding in a fusion of love, passion and respect. *Gila Country Legend* honors a man who is very likely the last of his breed. Nancy Coggeshall has done a remarkable job of capturing a character of the Old/New West, warts and all, and we are richer for the intimate tale she shares with us.