

### BIOGRAPHY

#### GILA COUNTRY LEGEND:

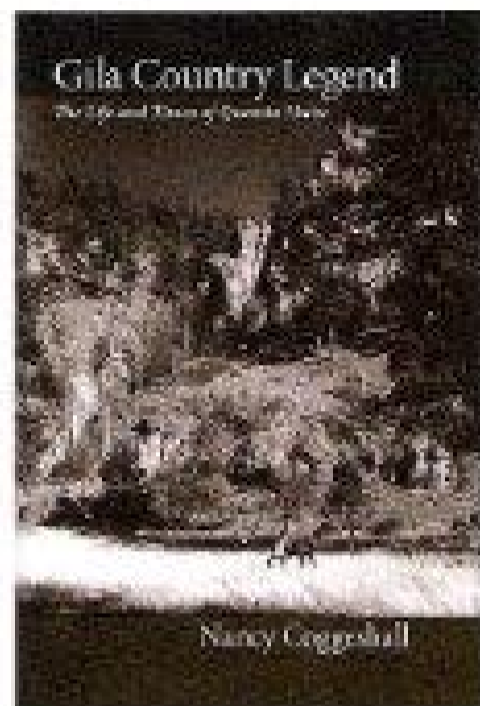
#### The Life and Times of Quentin Hulse

BY NANCY COGGESHALL

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If a man becomes legendary through the number of stories told about him, then Quentin Hulse, a New Mexico guide, hunter, rancher, and tale-teller, certainly qualifies. As a friend of Hulse's said, "When Quentin came into Uncle Bill's Bar [in Reserve], it was like a movie star arriving. He was well known as a storyteller, but also highly esteemed as an oral historian."

In Nancy Coggeshall's haunting biography of Hulse, whom she came to love and live with late in his life, we meet a man whose life seemed to reflect his home: the Gila Wilderness of southwestern New Mexico. "Nothing smooth or soft about this western range," Coggeshall writes. "This country shaped him."

To substantiate tales she heard about Hulse, Coggeshall interviewed more than 200 people and scoured

archival sources. Neither shying away from his drinking binges nor indulging in sentimental fawning, she tells the story of a man who didn't follow marked trails.

Hulse was born in 1926 to "clannish, defensive, tough" parents who'd exchanged marriage vows on horseback five years earlier, in New Mexico's Catron County. They lived on Canyon Creek in the Gila Wilderness with no phone or electricity. Coggeshall states that when electricity was finally installed in the house, in 1993, the only thing 67-year-old Hulse wanted to plug in was an electric blanket.

At age 10, Hulse witnessed a point-blank shooting that was the culmination of a frontier feud. He served in the Navy in World War II. In the 1950s, Hulse's cowboy good looks were authentic enough to get his face on a tourist postcard and a novelty New Mexico license plate.

Hulse patronized Silver City's legally operated bordellos, but also dated on occasion, and could become "an instant Casanova," though not always with success. One woman he courted got so angry with him on a date that she walked five miles home, alone, in the dark.

Storytelling came naturally to Hulse, as did his sense of humor. He liked to say he was glad he'd been born poor. "We ate a lot of squirrels. The young ones were easy. The old ones were tough—like taking a truck engine out and trying to fry it."

A stroke finally ended Hulse's drinking binges. Though Coggeshall didn't witness any of his unchecked imbibing, she tells stories of some of his drunken escapades, including getting shot outside a bar near Silver City. As a friend said of Hulse after his death in 2002, "He was rough, but refined."

For those who didn't know Quentin Hulse, Coggeshall has brought a true Westerner back to life.

Tom Clagett, a member of the Western Writers of America, lives in Santa Fe.