

A Lady to Remember

Eve Ball, 'Woman among men'

By Lynda Sánchez

Knowing Eve was an adventure in itself because she was one hell of a gutsy lady and as I worked with her day by day, month by month I was allowed a glimpse into her decades on this earth. She was funny, generous beyond measure, spunky and always ready to help a fellow author or person who cared about history and the way of things. Little did I know in 1973 when I first met her that I needed to put on my seat belt for I would be in for quite a ride!



Marker photos by David Tremblay

I met her at a Lincoln County Historical Society meeting in Capitan. It was show and tell night and in addition to a potluck meal there was excitement in the air and finally I figured out why. The elderly woman sitting at my table with the sparkling and mischievous grey eyes was the featured speaker. When she began speaking it was amazing. The audience was in the palm of her hand.

I later found this to be true on every occasion when she spoke. She did not need props, slides or music. She simply spoke from the heart.

She held in her hand a war club that had belonged to Ace Daklugie (son of Chief Juh of the Sonora Nednhi Apaches and nephew of Geronimo). She explained that as a young warrior, Daklugie and several Apaches surrendered

to the cavalry. It was a heart wrenching time, yet in one act of defiance, Daklugie exemplified Apache courage. Just prior to the surrender he walked up a nearby canyon, found a large boulder, dug a hole and placed his war club at its base. He then walked down the arroyo and into history. Twenty-seven years later he returned to that rugged canyon, re-located the boulder and retrieved his war club. Most of the wood had rotted as had the leather, but he refitted it and it was as good as new. That treasured memento of his freedom had finally come home. He kept it from that moment in 1913 until 1955 when he presented it to Eve as a gift and symbol of his respect for her.

I got chills when I heard that story as did most of the audience. There were folks of all ages in the group, and she was at least fifty years my senior but with Eve Ball there was no generation gap. Later that evening I learned she needed a typist so I talked to her, and from that time until her death in 1984 I worked with her first as secretary but later as her assistant. In fact the first day upon my arrival she had moved out of her office and had made a place for me at her desk. However, Eve discovered, I really did care about her materials and I often had questions or made suggestions that she accepted. About six months later she moved back into her office and from that time on a partnership had been formed.

Her vision was fast disappearing and she also needed a driver. We drove all over New Mexico together visiting her Apache friends or I took her to various writer conferences and talks. One time upon returning from the Alamogordo Holloman Air Force Base where she had wowed the officer's wives (at age ninety) I was speeding through Tularosa trying to get her home before dark. We got a ticket, but she gladly paid for it. And always as we drove the highways and even the back roads she would point out places where certain events took place. She was literally a walking geography lesson.

Eve Ball, author, educator, historian,

and humanitarian has been gone now for a quarter of a century yet her influence continues to hold sway today in a land that she called home for the latter part of a long life that spanned two centuries, the 19th and the 20th. Upon her death in 1984, at the age of ninety-four, a vast reservoir of knowledge and history of our beloved Southwest, and in particular, southeastern New Mexico, was lost. However, through her writing much has been saved for future generations.

Ironically, on the 25th year of her passing, New Mexico honored Eve with her very own classic historic marker. These special markers can be observed throughout the state. They are one of a kind Pueblo style in design and are usually not reserved for historians, let alone women. However, thanks to the New Mexico Women's Forum, Eve, along with over thirty other women significant to the culture and heritage of New Mexico, have been honored for their contributions.

When questioned about her personal life, Eve Ball was as elusive as were the rugged ranchers and valiant Apaches she wrote about in over 150 articles and numerous best selling books. At the turn of the century there was no women's movement, yet this spunky woman preferred to earn her own living and that was rare in those early years. She received her university training in English and education, completed a master's degree, and was aiming for a doctorate. She taught several grades in her hometown, and later taught junior college English in Dodge City. Several of the wild oil boomtowns of Texas and New Mexico were also graced by her presence. One year she even taught first grade in isolated Chama, New Mexico, to help out the superintendent who was a good friend. She told me that she finished *Ma'am Jones of the Pecos* during those cold winter nights.

Her roots encompassed the South, the plains of Kansas and Texas, but, ultimately, the lure of New Mexico brought her to the Ruidoso Highlands after World War II. Eve had traveled



throughout New Mexico many times and always had the desire to find a niche that would fulfill the ambition she had since childhood — to write about the Apache people. The mountain village of Ruidoso proved to be that niche. Not only were the beautiful natural surroundings appealing, but the Mescalero Apache Reservation was nearby.

Several Hispanics built an adobe home for her in 1950 and in this way she became friends with some of the oldest and finest families who had preceded the Anglo ranchers in the region.

Long before *Roots* became popular, Eve insisted in her quiet manner on learning the history of Anglo, Apache, and Hispanic people. She became respected and trusted by all three groups and impressed upon each the importance of preserving this information as part of their heritage. Her sincere interest led many reticent pioneers to give her their papers, family photos, and treasured mementos.

In order to secure the Jones family history for *Ma'am Jones of the Pecos*, she braved rough roads and the skepticism of the elder Jones because the violence and hatred caused by the Lincoln County War still lingered. She was so determined to get their story she even took shorthand notes while riding fence. Table and chairs soon took the

place of horse and saddle however, and she completed her interviews of this remarkable family in their comfortable ranch house.

To obtain the Apache story took much longer, two decades in fact. It took that long to research and get to know the participants of the Apache wars before she was ready to write about the Mescaleros and Chiricahuas. The Apaches also well remembered the lost freedom, broken promises, and bitter years of exile from their beloved southwestern homelands. By patience and an honest desire to learn from the Apaches, Eve won the confidence of over sixty-seven tribal elders. She became close friends with the major players in the Apache Wars such as Ace Daklugie, Eugene Chihuahua, Old Martin, Scout Big Mouth, Percy Big Mouth, Old Crookneck, Charles Istee, son of Victorio, and Amelia Naiche, granddaughter of Cochise.

They trusted her and believed she would write history from their side, not that told by their enemies. While she documented and included the military point of view, it often differed from that of the Apaches. If one were to describe the Apache version using their words and world view, one often went against the military accounts, especially of conflicts during the war years.

Some who did not get their stories included realized much later that it was a mistake not to have trusted her, but by then it was too late

By the 1960s, Eve's files had grown to the bursting point and she felt she was ready to write. She wrote about Bob Crosby, world champion cowboy. Then came *Ma'am Jones of the Pecos*, *In the Days of Victorio*, *My Girlhood Among Outlaws*, and *Indeh, An Apache Odyssey* (co-authored by Lincoln County residents Nora Henn and Lynda A. Sanchez). *In the Days of Victorio* and *Indeh* are considered classics in oral history and as with many of her publications, they are used as college texts, and in the public schools. *Indeh* received the Zia Press Women's Award and continues to be published today.

Eve was presented the WWA Spur for best short story in 1974 and in 1982 the prestigious Saddleman award. That event was quite an experience. It was held in Santa Fe and I drove her there in my “war wagon,” the 1977 International Scout that she absolutely loved to go traveling in when we went together. During the afternoon before the main presentation she “held court” in her room because it was so difficult for her, at age ninety-two, to walk. Thus, the many authors and friends, mostly men, came to her room. Marc Simmons, Leon Metz, Doc Sonnichsen, and many others visited her and of course I was very fortunate because I got to meet these giants in Western writing. That evening she gave a fabulous talk and once again, held the audience in the palm of her hand.

True West, *Frontier Times*, *New Mexico Magazine*, and other publications were graced with her humor, her dead on appreciation for the Apache point of view, and even stories of the more contentious ranchers and outlaws who trusted her to “tell it true.” Eve Ball was truly “a woman among men.” No matter where she went, most of her colleagues or interviewees were men.

In 1982 she was also nominated for the nation’s highest honor, the Medal of Freedom. Although she did not receive it, a special joint U.S. Congressional Resolution was submitted by U.S. Senator Pete Domenici honoring her work as an author and in preserving the heritage of the American West. He came to Ruidoso and presented this award to her at home as she was unable to travel to Washington. That same year she was inducted into the Cowgirl Hall of Fame.

Eve was my mentor, and much like a grandmother to me. She also started me on the “downward path of Western writing” as she often said, chuckling all the while. After five years of working with her, she finally suggested to me that I should start to write my own material. Shortly thereafter, my first article written for *True West* was “Geronimo’s Wives.” That was in 1978.

Yes, Eve Ball was truly the most remarkable woman I have ever known and her inspiration and guidance have seen me through many of my own adventures.

Upon her death, a unique Memorial Service was held at the St. Joseph’s Apache Mission in 1984. This magnificent stone church was built by her friend of many years, Father Albert Braun (the hero priest of Corregidor). There was special music and there were many eulogies in English and Apache presented by her friends from both groups. It was a fitting tribute in a fitting place and though the icy fingers of winter were present that cold December day, memorial tributes warmed our hearts and minds.

Dr. David Townsend, long a favorite among students of New Mexico history stated: “Her views on history were a breath of fresh air. At some point... history becomes so esoteric that only traveling troupes of PhD’s could understand it. That is hurtful and dangerous.

Hurtful in that the beauty and symmetry of history gets buried by endless minutiae. Dangerous in that many people, especially young people, turn away from their gloriously instructive past.”

Noted author, Dan L Thrapp wrote in agreement that, “this, you will understand long before you finish (her books)...It will bring to you, as it has brought to all of us, a gladness that she came this way, and in our time.”

I was greatly honored when the editor of the Roundup asked me to write about Eve Ball, how she influenced my life as a writer, how she inspired people, and what her contributions were to Western literature. I had written an eighty-plus page photo essay about Eve (2007) with hitherto unpublished photos and vignettes from her intriguing life. The challenge was to condense almost a century of living into 2000 words!

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