

Apache Legends, Songs of the Wind Dancer book reviews

1. Interview with the author, Lou Cuevas: "My grandfather was a full-blooded Apache and my grandmother was Spanish, a curandera, a Spanish medicine woman. I started about 15 years ago trying to recall the stories they told me. I went to various members of my family and asked them if they remembered the stories. It took me 12 years to assemble them.

"In publishing the stories, I'm keeping a promise I made to my grandparents. Grandmother, upon Grandfather's death, urged me to become a storyteller and to recite these legends. The stories in *Apache Legends* are stories my grandfather told me when I was about 5 or 6 years old. They are stories that were told to explain nature and human behavior and were taught to Indian children. I think the most important part of the stories is the morals they teach us. When we hear the story, we are no longer afraid to be human.

"My grandfather told the stories in a repetitive chant that began with a name of an animal or a warrior, and then told all the deeds and attributes associated with that name. I tell the stories to children, but I can't tell them the way he did. I tell the stories the way they are written in the book. If I went back to my reservation, I would stick out like a sore thumb. All I can be is proud that I came from that tradition. All I can do is remember what he gave me and do with it the best that I can." (interviewed by Ollie Reed, Jr., *The Albuquerque Tribune*, Feb. 26, 1992)

2. "Lou Cuevas'...book is a special gift and insight into the ancient spirit people and legends. Each legend explains nature, its manifestations, and human behavior that is taught to Apache children so they might learn to respect the power of life. In one such legend, the Roadrunner teaches: 'If one looks for greatness in size, one tends to overlook it.'

"As a young boy...Cuevas, an Albuquerque resident, spent many hours with his grandfather, an Apache medicine man. Each inquiry of an animal brings an intriguing story, spirit songs that grandfather vividly and descriptively brings to life. He details its origins and how it evolved from a legendary people, known as the ancient ones, or the *Ndee*, the spirit race. The ancient ones are responsible for originating the spiritual and cultural values of the Apache people.

"Storytellers, according to Cuevas' grandmother, are an honored people purposely selected by the spirits of living things to chant the spirit songs. After his grandfather's death, his grandmother urged her grandson to recite the oral chants and preserve in writing these sacred spirit songs for future Apache generations. Cuevas painstakingly wrote down these oral chants, his ability to weave rich and descriptive words giving an incredible life to fascinating and beautiful stories. His writing reflects a gifted storyteller who enchants, captivates and entices the reader to grasp the proud history of an ancient tribe. How fortunate for the reader to be allowed to experience the beauty of these sacred legends--spirit songs and legends that are meant to teach about courage, destiny, beauty, and passion." (Maria Leyba, *Albuquerque Journal*, Feb. 23, 1992)

3. "The author brings much to this title. His desire to collect and pass on those Native American legends that his Apache grandparents had sung to him as a young child. However, he related that for one reason or another his early school teachers had done their best to remove his ability to

speak in his native language. Living in his home town of Albuquerque, New Mexico, Cuevas delights in taking the time to tell such Apache tales to a wide range of school age children.

"Taken in a wide variety of forms, such tales as Wind Dancer, Dream Woman, Swift Wind, the Vexing Visitor, Flower Maiden, Thunder Wish, and the Endless War, allow readers to glimpse the passing of Apache values from grandfather to grandson. Do not expect to find direct morals in such tales, as they highlight the world view of the Apache and the origins of the ancient one's impressions of their prairie creatures and companions. These include such creatures as the butterfly, buffalo, Gila monster, bear, eagle, rattlesnake, and hummingbird. Such tales continue to emphasize important Native American values and traditions. *Apache Legends* would be a most suitable choice for one's children to learn about Native American valued traditions and their interest in passing such culture on to succeeding generations." (Chuck Hamsa, *Smoke & Fire News*, December 1996)