

# The Wild Girl: The Notebooks of Ned Giles, 1932

by Jim Fergus



## About the Book

From the award-winning author of **One Thousand White Women**, a novel in the tradition of **Little Big Man**, tracing one man's search for adventure and the wild Apache girl who invites him into her world.

When Ned Giles is orphaned as a teenager, he heads West hoping to leave his troubles behind. He joins the 1932 Great Apache Expedition on their search for a young boy, the son of a wealthy Mexican landowner, who was kidnapped by wild Apaches. But the expedition's goal is complicated when they encounter a wild Apache girl in a Mexican jail cell, victim of a Mexican massacre of her tribe that has left her orphaned and unwilling to eat or speak. As he and the expedition make their way through the rugged Sierra Madre mountains, Ned's growing feelings for the troubled girl soon force him to choose allegiances and make a decision that will haunt him forever.

In this novel based on historical fact, Jim Fergus takes readers on a journey of magnificent sweep and heartbreaking consequence peopled with unforgettable characters. With prose so vivid that the road dust practically rises off the page, **The Wild Girl** is an epic novel filled with drama, peril, and romance, told by a master.

## Discussion Guide

1. The title of the novel is **The Wild Girl**, and yet much of the novel is narrated from the perspective of Ned Giles. Which character did you respond to more? Why?
2. Do you consider Billy Flowers a moral person? What were his varying attitudes toward whites, Mexicans, Native Americans, and animals?

3. What do you think of the portrayals of women in the novel? Did you find the wild girl and Margaret to be believable? Did you think the author accurately imagined the way women in these situations might think and feel?
4. The novel takes place during the Depression, and Ned is very conscious of class. What are his attitudes toward the privileged, and how justified do you think his attitudes are?
5. Wealthy and homosexual, Tolley is at once privileged and an outcast in society. Which do you think affects his life in a greater way? his wealth or his sexuality? Did you find his character's flamboyance believable from a historical perspective?
6. Did anything surprise you about the history of the time period depicted by Jim Fergus?
7. Did anything surprise you about the depiction of the Apaches, as well as their relationship with the Mexicans? Did you feel that the author was making any judgments in his depiction of the Apaches, Mexicans, and whites?
8. How did you feel in reading the story about the murder of Charlie McComas's parents, and Charlie's kidnapping? Did it surprise you that a boy would embrace the people who murdered his parents?
9. Consider the choices made by Goso over the course of his life. Do you understand those choices? Did you find him sympathetic?
10. In much of 20th century film-making and writing, continuing to the present, Native American cultures have been represented in black and white terms. Do you think Jim Fergus's depictions of the wild Apaches, Mexicans, whites, and their interactions differ from other depictions?
11. Do you think that the Apaches and the whites and Mexicans could have coexisted peacefully, or was a violent outcome inevitable?
12. What did you think of the love story between Ned and the wild girl? Did his choice to go back to the white world surprise you? Do you think he should have made a different choice?
13. Consider the course of Ned's life after his experiences with the Apaches. Why do you think his life took the turn it did? Is it due to what happened to him and his relationship with the wild girl, or does it stem more from the losses he experienced prior to meeting the wild girl?
14. How does Ned use photography to express himself? What do you think this says about how artists deal with emotion and human suffering?
15. In what ways is **The Wild Girl** similar to the author's first novel, **One Thousand White Women**? In what ways is it different? Which did you like best, and why?

## Author Bio

Jim Fergus is the author of ONE THOUSAND WHITE WOMEN, THE SPORTING ROAD, A HUNTER'S ROAD and

WILD GIRL. His articles and essays have appeared in a wide variety of national magazines and newspapers, including *Newsweek*, *Newsday*, *The Paris Review*, *Esquire*, *Sports Afield* and *Field & Stream*. Fergus was born in Chicago and attended Colorado College. He worked as a teaching tennis professional before becoming a full-time freelance writer. He lives in southern Arizona.

## Critical Praise

"Illuminated with the technicolor scenery of a John Ford western."

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### **The Wild Girl: The Notebooks of Ned Giles, 1932**

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