



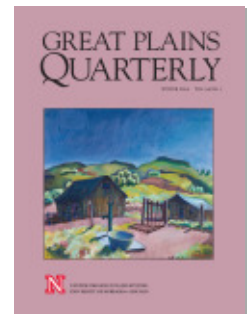
PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Backstage: Stories from My Life in Public Television* by Ron  
Hull (review)

Daniel L. Schiedel

Great Plains Quarterly, Volume 34, Number 1, Winter 2014, p. 107 (Review)



Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/gpq.2014.0013>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/536903/summary>

ists, their audiences, and their aims, rather than the eternal “challenge the mainstream” agenda employed here.

NANCY MARIE MITHLO  
Department of Art History and  
American Indian Studies Program  
University of Wisconsin–Madison

***Backstage: Stories from  
My Life in Public Television.***

By Ron Hull. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012. ix + 260 pp. Photographs. \$19.95 paper.

Ron Hull's *Backstage: Stories from My Life in Public Television* sums up the incredible journey of a man who has loved, with heart and soul, the mission and impact of a philosophy and medium known as public television. I read with fascination, consuming his tales of pioneering work at the birth of the University of Nebraska's educational television station in the mid-1950s, to his bringing television to South Vietnam a decade later, through his directing the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's Program Fund from 1982 till 1988, as though acquainting myself with a childhood superhero. Ron's strong convictions and ideas created a lasting roadmap for future generations of content developers and public media advocates. As he put it during his Program Fund interview with the CPB board, “Our job [in public television] is to provide viewers with programs in all the disciplines, backed by scholarship and accuracy and representative of the best the world has to offer in the arts, sciences, humanities, news, and public affairs. Our distinguishing feature is intellectual and artistic excellence—and audiences instinctively know when they are seeing the best.”

Ron's rich, descriptive recollections give depth and substance to our collective public television history. Many tremendously successful and gifted individuals who led the charge to create a better world and a more civilized nation through their efforts in the arts and education are acknowledged and given due credit. Writers John Neihardt and Mari Sandoz contributed to the reputation and stature of educational television in Nebraska during its early years. Later, as Ron recounts, such luminaries as Bill Moyers, David McCullough, Ken Burns, Stanley Karnow, Nancy Dickerson, and a host of others would add their talent and support to public television's mission. Ron's stories also bear witness to the difficulty of “insulating federally appropriated dollars from politics,” which ultimately led to his principled departure from Washington DC and his grateful return to Nebraska Public Television.

*Backstage* is an arresting read for all of us in public broadcasting and for any student of history and public media. The diverse relationships Ron has developed throughout his life and his engagement and love of the arts are a joy to encounter. His passion for learning, teaching, profound conversation, and thoughtful reflection, in tandem with strategic thinking and planning, is a theme woven from beginning to end. His stories are encouraging, insightful, and revealing of why we have such a strong foundation in public television today.

“The most valuable asset of any life,” Ron Hull observes, “is the time we are given.” Thanks, Ron, for using your time so well and blazing a trail for the rest of us to follow.

DANIEL L. SCHIEDEL  
Executive Director  
Oklahoma Educational Television Authority  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma