



Life

SECTION D

Monday, December 11, 2006

Thompson gets the last word

Tributes canonize gonzo journalist

By Mike Snider
USA TODAY

Nearly two years ago, Hunter S. Thompson, 67, used a pistol to take his own life in his Woody Creek, Colo., home.

Actor Johnny Depp, who portrayed Thompson's manic alter ego in the 1998 film *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, helped see that his friend's last wishes were carried out (among which were that his ashes be shot out of a cannon).

Depp figures prominently in two new eulogies to Thompson: the documentary *Buy the Ticket, Take the Ride: Hunter S. Thompson on Film*, which premieres Tuesday (Starz, 10 ET/PT; also viewable on vongo.com) and repeats all month, and a limited edition coffee-table book titled simply *Gonzo* (Ammo Books, \$300).

At times celebratory and melancholy, the 82-minute film, co-produced and directed by Tom Thurman (*Sam Peckinpah's West: Legacy of a Hollywood Renegade* and *John Ford Goes to War*) and narrated by Nick Nolte, tracks Thompson's life from a boy in Louisville to his days at *Rolling Stone* and beyond.

Relating their remembrances are Thompson's widow, Anita, childhood friends and celebrities including Bill Murray (who portrayed Thompson's Raoul Duke character



1994 USA TODAY file photo by Jym Wilson

An original: Hunter S. Thompson is credited with inventing gonzo journalism, a radical departure from objective reporting, around 1970.

in *Where the Buffalo Roam*), Sean Penn, John Cusack, Gary Busey, Sen. George McGovern, William F. Buckley, Tom Wolfe and the late journalist Ed Bradley.

After achieving notoriety, Thompson at times felt like "a prisoner of his own cult," says artist Ralph Steadman, a collaborator on many projects. In the film, Steadman and Thompson are seen, more than 30 years ago, hatching plans for a Gonzo memorial. Thompson later decided he wanted it fashioned into a cannon — a wish he spoke of many times over the years.

"When I got the news that Hunter had made his exit, I remember thinking almost immediately, 'The cannon, we gotta do the cannon,'" Depp says in the film. "I know

somewhere in his crooked mind, he knew I was the only one perhaps loyal enough, perhaps insane enough, to attempt it."

The cannon's firing is captured for the film. A two-page photo of the finished memorial is the last image in *Gonzo*, a 239-page book released earlier this month, that Thompson had been working on with editor Steve Crist. In addition to photos (many taken by Thompson himself), there are press passes, early stories and drafts, napkins with scribbled notes, along with *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*-era reporter's notebooks.

"I literally consider this Hunter's last book," says Crist. "It was a book he was making his whole life. I think in a way it's a perfect last document for him."