

# *the Story Catcher*

*A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society*

## Conference and Pilster Lecture to be held in Fall

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society conference will be held in conjunction with the Pilster Great Plains Lecture in September or October 2011. A newly-formed committee will determine the speaker and date for the lecture, most likely on a Thursday evening. The conference will begin with breakfast on Friday morning and end mid-afternoon following a luncheon where the Spirit of Mari Sandoz award will be given.

With the theme “The Joy of Learning,” the conference has been reformatted allowing more interaction with other members who attend and with the speakers. In order to participate in the discussion, the conference committee suggests reading, re-reading or brushing up on Mari Sandoz’s *Old Jules* and/or Helen Winter Stauffer’s *Mari Sandoz: StoryCatcher of the Plains*. The dates for the Pilster Lecture and the conference will be announced in the May StoryCatcher. Conference registration materials will be available online at [www.marisandoz.org](http://www.marisandoz.org) in July or in the August 2011 StoryCatcher. ✂

## Con Marshall is Chadron Citizen of the Year

**Edited from an article by Kerri Rempp, Chadron Record staff writer**

The name has become practically synonymous with Chadron.

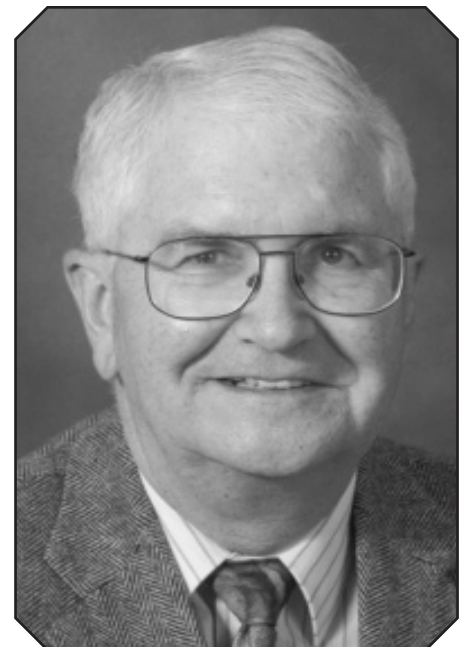
“He is Chadron,” said Marshall’s long-time friend Dennis Edwards.

Marshall has worked tirelessly over the years promoting Chadron and Dawes County and the people who call the area home. His work for the Chadron Record and Chadron State College has sent him everywhere, covering topics ranging from agriculture to sports.

Now, he will also be known as The Chadron Record’s 2010 Citizen of the Year.

“Con is one of those people that you want and hope will be on your team. He is an amazing person,” wrote George and Emily Klein upon learning of Marshall’s selection as Citizen of the Year. The couple worked with Marshall during preparations for Chadron’s 100th and 125th anniversary celebrations. Marshall compiled history books for each occasion.

“Con is like a walking history book,” Emily said. “We certainly could not have been successful in putting together Chadron’s Quasiquicentennial History Book without Con. He was extremely busy at the time and highly committed on other projects, but he agreed to work on the project and produced a wonderfully inclusive piece of memorabilia.” *Continued on p. 2*



*Mr. Chadron, Con Marshall, has “dedicated his entire life to Western Nebraska.”*

## The StoryCatcher

The "StoryCatcher" is the title of a book by Mari Sandoz and it is the title of Helen Winter Stauffer's biography of Mari, *Mari Sandoz: The Story Catcher of the Plains*.

The StoryCatcher is published four times a year by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

The vision of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society is to perpetuate and foster an understanding of the literary and historical works of Mari Sandoz; and to honor the land and the people about which she wrote: Native Americans, ranchers, farmers and the people who settled the High Plains country.

The Society hosts a conference and presents the Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series.

Additionally, the society provides collections on loan to the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College.

Address changes should be mailed to 2301 NW 50th Street, Lincoln, NE 68524.

Contributions to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society are tax-deductible. To join the Society, fill out and mail the form on the back of this newsletter. For more information, e-mail [marisandoz\\_society@windstream.net](mailto:marisandoz_society@windstream.net), or visit [www.marisandoz.com](http://www.marisandoz.com).

## Mari Sandoz

The feats, the passions, and the distinctive speech of the West come alive in the writings of Mari Sandoz (1896-1966).

As the author of 23 books, including *Old Jules*, *Cheyenne Autumn*, and *Crazy Horse, the Strange Man of the Oglalas*, she was a tireless researcher, a true storyteller and an artist passionately dedicated to the land.

With her vivid stories of the last days of the American frontier, Mari Sandoz has achieved a secure place as one of the finest authors in American literature and one of Nebraska's most important writers.

As a historian and as a novelist, Sandoz was inducted into the Nebraska Hall of Fame in 1976 and posthumously received the coveted Wrangler Award from the Hall of Great Westerners.

## Citizen of the Year (cont.)

Marshall's work ethic, mentioned over and over again by those who know him, has made him the "go-to" person for many projects.

"He's one of those people who can take a project and go," Emily Klein said. "We're really fortunate to have him and (wife) Peggy in the community."

Marshall's dedication to promoting the area, its athletes and its citizens is deserving of the Citizen of the Year Award" said CSC athletic director Brad Smith. "What a wonderful honor to a tremendous man who has dedicated his entire life to western Nebraska."

"I never cease to be amazed at how many different hours of the day in so many different settings I see Con," Edwards said. "I have so much respect for his work ethic. You could not afford to hire Con Marshall by the hour."

Marshall began his career in journalism working on the Chadron State Eagle while in college during the 1960s, but didn't cover the sports beat. When he went to work at the Chadron Record in 1964 in the one-man news department where he wrote about everything.

In 1969, Marshall took on the role of full-time information and sports information director at CSC. Over the years, he's accumulated reams of information, with scrapbooks of articles and folders of stats filling file cabinets at his college office and at The Chadron Record.

His work earned him an induction into the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame, as a contributor, in the fall of 2008. Edwards nominated him for the (citizen) honor.

Edwards said he would have nominated Marshall prior to 2010, but Marshall was always suggesting other nominees.

Marshall works in the background to make sure others are recognized for their achievements.

Now "retired" from his position at CSC, Marshall still puts in more than 40 hours a week covering the triumphs and tribulations of area athletes at the high school and college levels and volunteering his time to the Kiwanis Club, the Gideons and his church.

As the son of Bob and the late Jeanette Marshall, he grew up south of Chadron on a registered Hereford ranch. He graduated from Chadron High School in 1959 and from Chadron State College in 1963.

Marshall married Peggy Galbreath of Crawford in 1965. The couple met in college — Con was a senior, and Peggy was a freshman.

"We took a honeymoon, and he had to get back to write stories for the paper. His work and his hobby are the same thing. He loves what he does. I gave up a long time ago trying to get him to not work so much." ❀

*The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society is proud to have Con Marshall as one of our hard-working board members.*

# Mari and Me: A Personal Odyssey

By Donald E. Green, Ph.D.

I never knew Mari Sandoz in person. I am not a native Nebraskan, nor even a Middle Westerner. I plead guilty to being a native Texan, born and raised on a Texas Panhandle ranch.

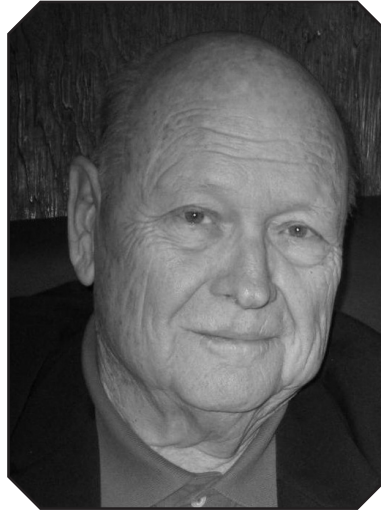
I did not grow up reading the stories of “The Story Catcher of the Plains,” as Helen Stauffer has so aptly described Sandoz in her biography.

But I did grow up in a story-telling culture. The good story—tragic as well as humorous, both entertaining and educational—was an indigenous part of our culture.

Like western Nebraska, ours was a recent frontier. My father described, in colorful language, his life as a young cowboy and bronco-buster.

I discovered Mari Sandoz as a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma in the 1960s. *Old Jules* was my introduction. When I began teaching courses in the History of the American West at the University of Central Oklahoma, her books were on my reading lists.

I strongly advised my students to read at least three of her books: *Old Jules*, because I believed then, as I do now, that it is the single best book about the settler experience on the Great Plains, “warts and all;” *Crazy Horse*, because it is perhaps the first full-length biography of an Indian leader written by an empathetic white author; and *Cheyenne Autumn*, because it was the best book ever written about both the tragedy of the reservation



*Don Green is the former chairman of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Society board of directors and dean emeritus of Liberal Arts, Chadron State College*

experience and the indomitable spirit of Indian peoples against overwhelming odds.

In the spring of 1990, I saw an advertisement in the *Chronicles of Higher Education* for the position of dean of Humanities and Social Sciences at Chadron State College. I am embarrassed to say that I had never before heard of Chadron, but when I located it on the map, no one had to tell me that it was in Mari Sandoz country.

Northwestern Nebraska with its Sandhills, the Niobrara River, Fort Robinson and the Lakota People had long ago been burned into my brain as Sandoz Country. She had interpreted the region for me in much the same way that John Steinbeck had interpreted the Salinas Valley/Monterey Bay and William Faulkner had left his indelible literary stamp upon northern Mississippi.

From first sight, Chadron reminded me of the town in which I was born and reared.

During my time on campus, I met Michael Cartwright, the current dean, who was returning to the classroom as professor of English. Mike told me about future hopes to build a Mari Sandoz Center on campus in the old library building, about his work with the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society and about the Mari Sandoz materials and artifacts in the basement of the library.

Dr. Sam Rankin, then CSC president, offered me the position and I accepted. My first challenge was to learn how to be a dean, but almost from the beginning of my tenure at the College, I became enmeshed in the cause of Sandoz.

In 1990, Mike and I sat down again to discuss the future of the Sandoz Center and the Sandoz Society. From that meeting, we decided to try to “breathe” new life into the Society, and, through the Society and the College, work toward creating the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center.

In 1991, I asked to see Mari’s artifacts and archives, I was taken to a small locked room in the library basement and showed the “stuff.” These were items that had been donated by Lloy Chamberlain, after the closing of the Sandoz Room in Gordon.

Among the collection was a priceless limited two-volume portfolio of prints of American Indian ledger art—the Amos Bad Heart Bull prints published in the 1930s in Europe.

Also in the artifacts was a .38 caliber, Colt’s single action revolver, we thought had belonged to Jules Sandoz.

*Continued p. 4*

## Mari & Me (cont.)

It was in a red canvas, zippered holster. The holster also contained five or six ancient, unfired cartridges.

After that, I set aside a small classroom on the second floor of the Administration Building, just down the hall from my office, and dedicated it as the Mari Sandoz Heritage Room. The dean of Math and Science loaned us some small display cabinets, and the director of maintenance found some money to purchase a large free-standing horizontal exhibit case. It was a very modest beginning, but a beginning, nonetheless.

The room had no regularly scheduled hours and we had no staff, but my secretary, Leona Wilkins, and I opened the room "on demand." And our office became something of a clearing house for Sandoz matters.

For instance, a writer from Switzerland working on a massive, heavily-illustrated Sandoz genealogy book spent several days gathering materials on the Old Jules branch of the family.

Also, I got a call from a professor in Germany putting together a course on American feminists. He was including Mari Sandoz in the course and wanted to check out some factual details.

When Caroline Sandoz Pifer asked for the return of the pistol, I took my wife, Elenor, with me as we drove through the many cattle guards between the highway and Caroline's Sandhills ranch. It was a new, almost exotic experience for my Eastern urban-born-and-reared Florida bride.

The meeting with Caroline was



*The Mari Sandoz Heritage Center under construction in 2001. Sandoz often expressed a hope for the development of an educational and cultural facility depicting the heritage of the region she called home.*

pleasant. I told her of our vision for the future Mari Sandoz Center, as a regional archives and museum for all of northwestern Nebraska, as a place where students, faculty, regional citizens and visiting scholars could do research on regional topics, and as a monument to the life and work of Sandoz.

In a few weeks, I got a call from Caroline informing me that she wanted to return the gun. We discovered the pistol belonged to Mari's brother, Fritz, but it had been part of Old Jules' arsenal.

During my visits with Caroline and Flora, I began to acquire more materials for the Sandoz collections. Flora gave us copies of the Old Jules papers, some written in German. The papers included the original Swiss passport of Jules, and numerous letters on horticultural subjects.

Publicity about the annual Sandoz conferences, the Sandoz Heritage Room and the Sandoz Society began, to use an Old Jules metaphor, to bear fruit. James Carr, a book seller and sometime

publisher in New York City, as well as a longtime friend of Mari, donated his entire collection of books and materials relating to Sandoz to the Sandoz Society. The Sandoz Room began to change from one of displays to a storage room awaiting the construction and opening of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center.

There were times when even I had misgivings that the Sandoz Center would ever become a reality. With much hard work and supreme dedication, we raised the funds.

It was discovered that George Lundeen, well known sculptor and Nebraska native, was interested in doing a bronze statue of Mari.

Finally, construction of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center was completed in 2002.

So Mari, we can report that the Center was completed, but the mission has barely begun. It will be left to younger generations to make the Center an integral and invaluable part of the scholarly and historical life of the region and Nebraska and a constant fountain for cultural enrichment.✧

## When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

By David Bristow

I moved to Nebraska as an adult, and gradually acquired a Nebraskan's working knowledge of such necessities as Husker football, the Unicameral legislature and the correct pronunciation of Keya Paha County.

But my Nebraska education began in earnest when I got married. Right away Grandma Kessinger, my wife's maternal grandmother, took it upon herself to introduce me to the state's literature. To her it made no sense to live in a place without knowing its stories and storytellers. She gave me a guidebook to a half-dozen Nebraska writers. To this hardworking farm wife, such a gift was as practical as a roadmap or a seed catalog.

Being from Bancroft, Grandma Kessinger held a special love of the work of John G. Neihardt,



*David Bristow discovered Nebraska through Mari Sandoz.*

but also spoke highly of Mari Sandoz. On her recommendation, my first Sandoz book was *Old Jules*.

Mari Sandoz doesn't sound like anyone else. Her use of detail, her diction, even her vocabulary, are rooted in the place she is from. You can't talk about her without talking about northwestern Nebraska, just as you can't discuss the Great Plains without talking about her books.

Today I work for the Nebraska State Historical Society, editing Nebraska History, which once had Sandoz on its editorial staff.

Grandma Kessinger died years ago, and her copy of *Old Jules* is on my bookshelf. Inside the front cover she wrote her name and taped a newspaper clipping about the Sandoz family.

Grandma Kessinger turned many of her Nebraska books into scrapbooks of clippings and handwritten notes.

Her copy of Roger Welsch's *A Treasury of Nebraska Folklore*, for example, is stuffed like an

old cookbook to half again its normal thickness. It was all part of the ever-growing storehouse of knowledge about her home state that found its way into her conversation and her columns for *The Bancroft (Neb.) Blade*.

I don't know how Sandoz organized her own research—probably better than that—but in a way her mind was like one of the books in Maxine Kessinger's library: filled with the basic text of history, but supplemented with a lifetime's worth of stories, research, nuances of a place and its people, everything she gathered along the way.

Only a person with that kind of patience and experience can write deeply about a place. For me, discovering Mari Sandoz was part of discovering Nebraska. I imagine many native Nebraskans can say the same.

*David Bristow is associate director for research and publications at the Nebraska State Historical Society, and author of Sky Sailors: True Stories of the Balloon Era (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). He lives in Lincoln. ❀*

**Editors Note:** at his website <http://www.davidbristow.com/articles.html>, you will find my oft-used quote about Sandoz from the *The Enduring Mari Sandoz*, written by Bristow:

*“More than a generation later, her literary legacy endures—still read, still loved—a rare accomplishment for a writer. Despite the passage of years, her best work still seems fresh, timeless, and as relevant today as when it was written.” ❀*

## Kit Watson Posters and Notecards

Over the years, many people have requested copies of the four pastel paintings of the pioneer woman fiddling, displayed in the atrium of the Sandoz Center.

Posters and note cards of Kit Watson's *The Accompanist* are now available for purchase.

The note cards are sold in sets of five.

For information on purchasing, contact Sarah Polak, center director, at 308-432-6401 or [spolak@csc.edu](mailto:spolak@csc.edu). ❀

# When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

By Alan J. Bartels

Any spare time I had during my high school years was spent exploring the Nebraska Sandhills near Greeley, Ericson and Bartlett. I would walk for hours, cresting hill after hill, always anticipating what might lie over the next dune. There were box turtles, lizards and bull snakes, coyotes, cattle and deer.

Sometimes I would carry my grandpa's old model 34 Remington .22 rifle (which I still have) and harvest a cottontail or jack rabbit along the way. Other times I'd fish Pibel Lake or the Cedar River below Ericson and bring home stringers of catfish and bluegill.

Those times were enjoyable, but until I left Nebraska following high school graduation, I never really realized how much I loved my home state. And it wasn't until I began reading the works of Mari Sandoz that I realized my deep obsession for the history, culture and land comprising Nebraska was acceptable, and not entirely unique.

Upon my return to Nebraska in my early twenties I began making excursions into the Sandhills nearly every weekend. These initial expeditions were often to the familiar areas of my youth.

I quickly learned that the remoteness of these places where childhood memories were made was largely gone. Perhaps it was modernization or "outsiders" creeping in. More likely though it was an increasing level of wander lust, a need to see the unknown.

I began collecting anything I could find that had been written



*Mari's influence has helped Alan Bartels discover himself and his profession.*

about the curious dune formation covering much of Nebraska. In this way I could immerse myself in the Sandhills at any time. Although I knew of her previously, this is really how I truly discovered Mari Sandoz.

After reading *Old Jules* it occurred to me that I could actually visit the places mentioned in the book. Weekend excursions into the deep western Sandhills were quickly replaced by three, four and five day mini-sabbaticals made easier by understanding bosses and a lenient daughter that on occasion would negotiate the sand trails and blowouts with me.

I was able to visit the store where Mari caught cowboy stories as she waited for the mail to arrive. I toured the Sandoz family orchard and enjoyed succulent apples from Jules' original test trees on more than one occasion.

The answers to unspoken questions have come via the Sandhills wind while communing with Mari from her gravesite. Although I have made it known that my remains

are to be cremated, I believe my soul would find it quite restful to be interred as she is, on the sunny side of a grass covered dune.

As an extension of my love for Nebraska I began writing about my travels and adventures, first for several newspapers and then for magazines.

As part of the research for one story (*On the Trail of Old Jules*, *Nebraska Life Magazine* November/December 2008) I spent several hours interviewing Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Board Member and niece of Mari Sandoz, Celia Sandoz Ostrander Barth in her grandfather's, Old Jules Sandoz, home.

To experience her hospitality and hear the family stories while within view of orchards that experts said would not grow, was a true honor. Thank you Celia.

Mari Sandoz's influence is always with me and the broad variety of topics she wrote about is amazing.

I was even able to reference a passage from *Love Song to the Plains* in a story I wrote about Nebraska UFO encounters called *Is There Anybody Out There?* (*Nebraska Life Magazine* July/August 2010).

More collaborations between Mari and I are sure to play out in the pages of the magazine.

I've visited Caroline Sandoz Pifer on several occasions and recently, as part of research for another story I tracked down, inspected and photographed Jules Sandoz's original Nebraska dwelling - his small Knox County cabin.

To pursue anything Sandoz related is to immerse myself in Nebraska.

*Continued p. 7*

# When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

## Alan Bartels (cont.)

Thanks to Mari's books, the Sandoz family story as it ranges from eastern Nebraska to western is known. Whether being read from a tattered first edition or a newly printed paperback, her works describe the settlement of a nation but more importantly to me—the history of my home state.

Although she died in 1966, four years before my birth, through diligent digging I have accumulated a cherished collection of signed Mari Sandoz books.

I credit my obsession with the people and places, history and culture of Nebraska for recently obtaining my position as Field Assistant Editor at Nebraska Life Magazine. Now, I get paid to discover my fellow Nebraskans, my Nebraska.

The things I love about the state are the aspects of it that Mari put so eloquently into words. I will be fortunate if I can muster on occasion, a mere sliver of the ability to express to my readers in the potent way that Mari seemed to do with ease.

Northwest Nebraska may have indeed been Old Jules Country; it seems to me that it still is. With that said, the entire state could be considered Mari Sandoz Country.

Discovering Mari Sandoz helped me discover myself and Nebraska, and I've found that it's my country too.

*Alan Bartels believes he would not have been offered the position at Nebraska Life Magazine if he had not been expressing his love of Nebraska for many years as a freelance writer and photographer. ❀*

## By Lois Bauer

It was the 1950's. I left J.C. Penney's with packages under my arm, and headed past Miller and Paine toward my bus stop.

As I passed a doorway, I spied a small lady wearing a perky hat seated at a table, obviously signing books for the ladies that surrounded her.

How I wanted to go in! But I knew that if I did, I would feel obliged to buy a book and I could never face my husband, Martin, who worked several jobs just to keep us going.

I hurried past the doorway, and boarded my bus. But come to find out, I could have had a Mari Sandoz signed first edition!

Years passed before I noticed a book on the mantle entitled, *Old Jules*. I asked Martin what it was about and he suggested I read it.

It was then I discovered a woman who had the courage to overcome a troublesome father and fulfill her need to write.

Years later Martin took me to visit the Old Jules homestead. We stopped at the Niobrara—a beautiful spot. At Chadron we visited the Sandoz Room on the second floor of a long building.

In this part of the state, I found all I needed, not just to fall in love with the land, but with Mari's works as well. History became real.



*Martin and Lois Bauer are enthusiastic members of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society and have attended several annual conferences.*

The land there still soothes me. Nowhere else does such beauty exist, including the rivers running through it: the Niobrara, the Snake, the Dismal, the Loop and others.

They all create the kind of beauty that fills me with wonder.

From Mari, I learned history beyond what any classroom could teach. The books opened my mind to the trials the Indians suffered. Without her writing, I wouldn't realize what we had done to American Indians.

Mari taught me to reconsider, to know that there is worth in all men, if we but seek to find it.

This may be her greatest gift to our world. Now it is our duty to see that that gift continues.

*Lois Bauer is retired and lives with her husband, Martin, in Lincoln. ❀*

# 2010-11 Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Board Members

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Mari Sandoz Heritage Society  
1208 Laramie Street  
Alliance, NE 69301.  
[marisandoz\\_society@windstream.net](mailto:marisandoz_society@windstream.net)  
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