

Story^{the} Catcher

A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

Joe Starita, Author of “I Am Man,” is September Pilster Great Plains Lecturer

Joe Starita will present the Pilster Great Plains Lecture on Thursday, Sept. 27, 7 p.m. in Memorial Hall at Chadron State College. The lecture is free to the public.

His speech, “Chief Standing Bear: The Enduring Legacy of a Courageous Nebraskan’s Journey For Justice,” demonstrates his long-held interest in Native Americans.

The Lincoln, Neb. author can’t remember a time he wasn’t fascinated by the people who were the first residents of the Plains.

When he was young, he read Mari Sandoz’ *Crazy Horse: Strange Man of the Oglalas* and loved the story—and the storytelling—so much, he didn’t want it to end.

When a sixth-grade teacher assigned a five-page biography of an important person, Starita chose to write about Crazy Horse.

“I did a 40-page paper because I was so swept up in the power of his story,” he said.

In 1978, Starita graduated from the University of Nebraska (UNL) with a double major in English and journalism. He joined The Miami Herald in January the next year where he held several positions.



Joe Starita

In December 1997, he was appointed city editor of the Lincoln Journal Star, where he directed coverage of major news events.

Starita is now an endowed chair in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s College of Journalism and Mass Communications, where he teaches Investigative and Depth Reporting – yearlong classes that often focus on social justice issues.

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Hostiles and Friendlies, Theme of Symposium

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Symposium (conference) program will be held on Friday, September 28. The registration form/schedule for the day-long program is enclosed, as well as detailed information on the speakers. Online registration is available at marisandoz.org.

Speakers will focus on various aspects of who was hostile and/or friendly in contemporary and western history and will use themes from Sandoz’s work. Come and learn more about High Plains history and enjoy the discussion with other Mari Sandoz fans.

The popular round-table book discussions will center on the themes in the Sandoz books, *Hostiles and Friendlies* and *Cheyenne Autumn*. So, reread a good book this summer before attending the Symposium in the fall. Come and learn in a casual and open format. ✨

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 an annual symposium, the Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series and presents a writer's workshop.

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 or visit 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.

Joe Starita, Pilster Lecturer

Pulitzer Nominated Book

Starita's interest in Native Americans never waned and in 1992, it led to a three-year project that involved spending hundreds of hours on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and poring over thousands of pages of archival documents in repositories throughout the Great Plains.

The effort culminated in the 1995 publication of *The Dull Knives of Pine Ridge - A Lakota Odyssey*. The non-fiction account of five generations of a Lakota Sioux-Northern Cheyenne family became a selection for the Book of the Month Club, History Book Club and Quality Paperback; and it won booksellers' association awards and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

The book has since been published in French, German, Japanese, Dutch and Italian and has been used in scores of American History, English and Native Studies classrooms throughout the United States and abroad.

The Dull Knives of Pine Ridge is also being developed into a one-hour documentary by a London-based producer and director who have worked with the British Broadcasting Corp.

Inspiring, Important Story

Starita's 2009 book, *I Am a Man - Chief Standing Bear's Journey for Justice*, highlighted the courageous court battle of the Ponca chief to gain equality for his people under the law.

New Yorker staff writer Ian Frazier called it "a painful, moving, inspiring and important story...essential reading for anyone interested in the history of the West, or of America. Part family saga, part Native American history, part courtroom drama, this riveting account of Standing Bear's journey moves with the vigor of a rushing river."

The book, now in its third printing, is the focus of an upcoming PBS documentary, has been optioned to a Los Angeles production company as a potential feature-length film and is being used as a teaching tool in classrooms across the nation, as well as throughout Nebraska high schools and colleges.

Using proceeds from the book and fees for related speaking engagements, Starita created the Standing Bear Memorial Scholarship Fund for Nebraska Native American high school students.

Through hundreds of talks and workshops throughout Nebraska and the nation on the topic of Chief Standing Bear's journey for justice, Starita explains how this 1879 landmark legal victory established for the first time in U.S. history that a Native American must be considered a "person" under the law and

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Joe Starita, September Pilster Lecturer

therefore entitled to many of the same rights and privileges “as the more fortunate white race.”

I Am a Man is the 2012 One Book One Nebraska selection and in 2011, Starita was honored by the National Education Association (NEA) during its annual Human and Civil Rights Awards in Chicago.

Dennis Van Roekel, NEA president said, “His books are a must-read to better understand Native Americans, their heritage, and their contributions to American life and history.”

Native History is American History

In 2009, Starita led a yearlong, UNL depth reporting class project extensively examining the role that Native American women traditionally have played in Indian history, culture, art, medicine and politics.

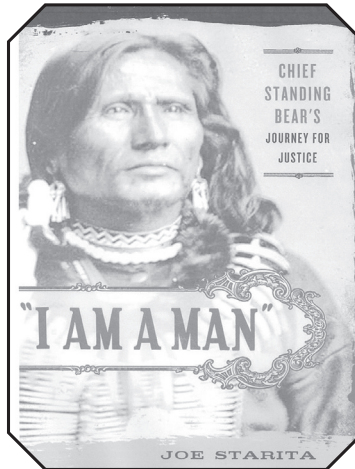
The extensive research-driven project underscored the Northern Cheyenne proverb: “A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women lay on the ground.”

The project brought to campus 10 of the nation’s

most accomplished and decorated Native women – a Lakota Iraq War veteran, award-winning children’s author, Stanford-trained Navajo surgeon, Harvard-educated Ojibway environmentalist, Cherokee filmmaker and Cheyenne political activist.

Also, the class spent a week on various reservations, conducted more than 100 interviews, shot thousands of photos and hundreds of hours of video.

The result of the *Native Daughters* project was a 147-page full-color magazine, a 30-minute documentary and an interactive Web site. From the beginning, this multimedia project was



envisioned as an educational tool, as a package that could be integrated into public school curricula throughout the country.

Lincoln Public Schools, state education officials and Nebraska Native leaders have strongly indicated they want to use the package in classrooms - as a vehicle to provide positive female role models and insights into the valuable contributions of Native American women.

This year, the Nebraska Humanities Council, Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and UNL’s College of Journalism and Mass Communications produced a *Native Daughters* curriculum companion free to all K-12 educators.

In February, *Native Daughters* had sold out its second printing. But the sales numbers aren’t

as interesting as the people who placed the orders: prison officials, directors of education programs and anthropology instructors.

From all this, Starita learned two things: readers had never

seen a publication that featured compelling success stories of Native women past, present and future; and students, especially Native students, can be inspired by such stories.

Native Daughters II is in the works and will continue the stories of inspirational Native American women through various multimedia projects.

“You really can’t understand American history unless you understand Native American history,” said Starita. “And you really can’t understand Native American history unless you understand the role Native American women have played in the past, present and future.” ❀

That hand is not the color of yours, but if I pierce it, I shall feel pain. If you pierce your hand, you also feel pain. The blood that will flow from mine will be of the same color as yours. I am a man. The same God made us both.

Chief Standing Bear addressing the judge at the historical trial.

Sandoz Symposium Speakers

The Nature of Native Stories

During the Sandoz Society Symposium, retired professor and poet, Norma Wilson will focus on the Native storytelling tradition's outlook for survival, as illustrated by the stories of Luther Standing Bear, N. Scott Momaday, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve and Delphine Red Shirt.



Norma Wilson

A deep regard for the Earth, as mother and resource, is at the core of this tradition in which the ancestral history of the people remains an ever-present influence. She will also discuss parallels found in the storytelling of Mari Sandoz.

In the 1970s, Wilson was introduced to the Native storytelling tradition as a student at the University of Oklahoma. There she met N. Scott Momaday and other Native authors and storytellers.

Her dissertation topic was *The Spirit of Place in Contemporary American Indian Poetry*. After receiving a Ph.D. in English from OU, she moved to Vermillion, South Dakota in 1978, to teach in the University of South Dakota (USD) English Department.

After teaching at USD for 27 years, she retired in 2005 as English Professor Emerita.

Wilson is author of *The Nature of Native American Poetry*. Her essays on the work of Native storytellers have been published in "The Columbia Companion to the 20th Century American Short Story," "A Reader's Companion to the Short Story in English," "Dictionary of Literary Biography," "175: Native Writers of the United States," "Dictionary of Native American Literature," "Native American Women: A Biographical

Dictionary," "The Heath Anthology of American Literature," "Approaches to Teaching Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*," "Denver Quarterly" and other publications.

She and her husband, Jerry, wrote the film script for "South Dakota: A Meeting of Cultures."

Also the author of *Wild Iris* (poems), Wilson edited *South Dakota Rainbow: An Anthology of Multicultural Literature* and co-edited with Charles Woodard *One Room Country School: South Dakota Stories*.

Her essays on Native poetry have appeared in "The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature," "The Salt Companion to Carter Revard" and other books.

Her own poetry has been recently published in "Caduceus," "Paddlefish," "South Dakota Review," "South Dakota Magazine," "travelin' music: A Poetic Tribute to Woody Guthrie," and "Elegant Rage."

Under the Rainbow, her chapbook of poems has been recently accepted for publication by Finishing Line Press.

Wilson and her husband remain on the land, working to preserve the native prairie on a bluff above the Missouri River.

Mari's Beacon of Light

Jamison Wyatt, tour guide and researcher at the Nebraska State Capitol, grew up in Albion, Neb. His interest in Mari Sandoz began in high school when he took advantage of his grandparents' extensive library—much of which was filled with Nebraska authors such as Cather and Morris.

Then one day, he picked up *Old Jules* and became "quite entranced" with the novel. While studying history at the University of Nebraska, he began his study of Sandoz in earnest after

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Symposium Speakers (cont.)

taking a course with John Wunder, longtime Sandoz scholar and Sandoz Society board member.

Wunder's honors seminar focused on Mari Sandoz and her Nebraska literary contemporaries. The class was quite intimate—just five students who gained a firm understanding and love of Nebraska's great authors.

"The highlight of the class was the road trip to Chadron for the 2009 Mari Sandoz Society Conference, Wyatt said. "Along the way, we stopped to visit Mari's grave and at that point I began to feel spiritually connected with Sandoz."

After the Sandoz Conference, he purchased *Capital City* and was struck with Mari's descriptions of a tall white capitol building, a building that was clearly inspired by Nebraska's statehouse.

"From Dr. Wunder's class, I also knew Mari received her telegram announcing her Atlantic Monthly prize for *Old Jules* while she was at work in the Nebraska Capitol and I had to know more about Mari's relationship with the Capitol, a building that I love," he said.

During the symposium, Wyatt will retrace Mari Sandoz's path in Lincoln and discuss her relationship with the Nebraska State Capitol as is evidenced by her letters and other writings, and especially in the *Mist and the Tall White Tower*.

Like Sandoz, Wyatt lives within the shadows of Nebraska's statehouse and has become a recent contributor to *Nebraska History*.

Symposium Speakers Continued on page 6



Jamison Wyatt

Endowments Help Fulfill the Mission of the Society

The Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series, the StoryCatcher Writing Workshop and the Mari Sandoz Symposium are all funded by endowments from people who care about the future of Mari Sandoz's legacy.

Endowments enable the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society to carry out Mari's wishes and the vision and mission of the society.

Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Vision

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.

Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Mission

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society works to build an appreciation of Mari Sandoz's body of work and to preserve the legacy of this premier historian by bringing people together for the discussion of her works, presenting a symposium, distinguished lecture series and a writing workshop and administering and raising funds to support these efforts.

Additionally, the Society provides collections on loan to the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College (Nebraska) and supports the Center's academic, archive and research programs.

Endowments also provide scholarships to students researching Sandoz and to those working to maintain the archives of her works. These gifts support educational events and programs, as well as the business and maintenance needs of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center. To make a gift or find out more information creating an endowment, please contact Lynn Roper, Sandoz Society president, 402-473-1831. ✨

Sandoz Symposium Speakers (cont.)

A House Divided: Oglala Politics During the Great Sioux War

Ephriam Dickson is curator of the Fort Douglas Museum in Salt Lake City. He grew up south of Crawford, Neb. attended Chadron State College and has long been an avid reader of Mari Sandoz's writing.

During high school and college, Dickson worked summers as an interpreter at the Fort Robinson Museum where *Crazy Horse: Strange Man of the Oglalas* and *Cheyenne Autumn* were required reading.



Ephriam Dickson

His most recent book, *The Sitting Bull Surrender Census*, presents the story of the federal Indian census of 1881, previously thought to have been lost and includes the data for the Standing Rock Reservation just months after the surrender of Sitting Bull from Canada.

Dickson is currently finishing a manuscript on photographer D. S. Mitchell who produced a series of remarkable portraits of Lakota leaders at the Red Cloud Agency near Fort Robinson. Using the portraits, he will tell the rich story of internal politics between the "Hostiles and Friendlies" as they struggled over the loss of the Black Hills during the Great Sioux War.

For instance, by the 1870s, Lakota politics had become deeply polarized as bands debated the collapsed native economy and their loss of territory to continued American encroachment.

Some Oglala leaders, such as Little Wound, Red Cloud and Young Man Afraid of His Horses, largely avoided becoming involved in the Great Sioux War of 1876-77. Instead they remained at the Red Cloud Agency where they struggled to preserve their sovereignty through the limited political means available to them.

In bitter opposition, however, were the leaders of the non-treaty bands who rejected the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 and largely shunned

the Indian agencies. Men like Black Twin, Big Road and Crazy Horse led a strong traditionalist movement within Oglala society, striving to maintain their values and customs for as long as possible.

The final surrender of Crazy Horse and other northern leaders in the spring of 1877 brought the agency bands and the non-treaty bands together for the first time in years, exacerbating political tensions between them. ✂

Sandoz and the Two Sitting Bulls

Kimberli Lee is an assistant professor of English at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Okla., where she teaches courses in both Native Studies and Rhetoric Studies. She is also a Sandoz Society board member.

She will discuss Mari Sandoz's research and findings about the Two Sitting Bulls and discuss why Mari felt compelled to straighten out the fact that the two men had been melded into one person.

Both were at times hostile and friendly, as well as complex and complicated leaders of Sioux bands. Additionally, both were respected by whites and Indians alike.

Lee's recent book from Texas Tech University Press, *I Do Not Apologize for the Length of this Letter: Mari Sandoz and Native American Rights, 1940-1966*, is an edited collection of the Native American-focused correspondence of Nebraska author Mari Sandoz and her activism regarding tribal rights in the mid-twentieth century.

Her research is centered at the intersection of Indigenous studies and various forms of rhetorical situations. She is currently working on a collection that is focused on the ways in which contemporary American Indian music serves as a platform for activism and reform. ✂



Kim Lee

When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

By Susanne Bloomfield

When I was pursuing my doctorate at UNL and commuting from Hildreth, Nebraska—a three hour drive one way—I needed to take two graduate seminars on the same day so that I would only have to make the trip once a week.

I had planned on specializing on 19th Century British Literature. In order to take a course focusing on George Eliot, I also had to sign up for a course titled Plains Literature with somebody named Frances Kaye.

Little did I realize when I entered Dr. Kaye's class that first evening that she would change my life. Not only did I become intrigued with Elinore Pruitt Stewart and her *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, which became the topic of my seminar paper, my dissertation and my first published biography, but I also discovered amazing Nebraska writers no one had ever told me about, like Willa Cather, Wright Morris, and Mari Sandoz.

Old Jules and Mari Sandoz have had a profound effect on the trail I having been following through the Great Plains that began in Lincoln in 1983 and led me on so many adventures.

Not only did the homesteading experiences of *Old Jules* make me look more deeply into those of Stewart and put them into a more realistic light, but the biographical techniques of Mari Sandoz as well as those of her biographer, Helen Stauffer, became impressive models for me to attempt to emulate.

After my first biography of

Stewart, I wrote two more, and as I labored over the research and the writing of each one, I would pull *Old Jules* from my shelf for inspiration, marveling at Sandoz's ability to take historical facts and make them into a good story.

As my appreciation for Sandoz grew, so did my interest in other Nebraska writers and I was fortunate enough to be able to participate in the first Nebraska Literature Festival in 1991 sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book.

Although I was asked to speak on the Willa Cather panel, what I remember most about the festival was Kira Gale's talk about her amazing Sandoz photographs. For years, I never missed a festival and even had the honor of speaking on a Sandoz panel now and again.

Another key discovery about Sandoz occurred when I was honored by being invited to speak at the 2003 Annual Sandoz Conference in Chadron. Although I enjoyed meeting with so many Sandoz scholars and friends gathered in one place, making my first pilgrimage to the homestead and visiting Mari's grave was the highlight of the trip.

Since my awakening to Nebraska authors, I had been researching and teaching Sandoz's works often, so my students would not miss out on one of Nebraska's great writers as I had.

I was well-grounded as a scholar,



Susanne Bloomfield with Bear.

but I was not prepared for the emotional response I felt when everything I saw was just like I had visualized it from reading Sandoz's works.

When I stood by her marker on the hillside, felt the spring breeze in my hair and saw it waving the prairie grasses that she had walked barefoot.

I understood her bond to the Sandhills, despite the harsh life she lead there.

Even though I am now a resident of Colorado, like Sandoz, my roots will remain forever in Nebraska.

I never would have made it as a British scholar! ✨

Susanne Bloomfield is a professor of English at the University of Nebraska-Kearney. She and her husband are now living in Colorado, and she is teaching full-time online from their mountain home. She was honored with the Mari Sandoz Award from the Nebraska Library Association in 1998.

Writing Workshop and Festival a Success

The first Story Catcher Writing Workshop sponsored by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society and hosted by Chadron State College in May, was “a good start,” said director, Dr. Matt Evertson. But he also knows “the bar was set pretty high.”

Workshop participants ranged in age from high school juniors to senior citizens and came from four states. Previous workshops the Sandoz Society sponsored were designed primarily for young writers.

“We changed things by design because we wanted to include those who are finally finding the time to write that novel or the story of their life while also encouraging young writers,” Evertson said.

The three authors who led the workshop instruction were Poe Ballentine of Chadron, Linda Hasselstrom of Hermosa, S.D., and Sean Doolittle of Council Bluffs, Iowa.

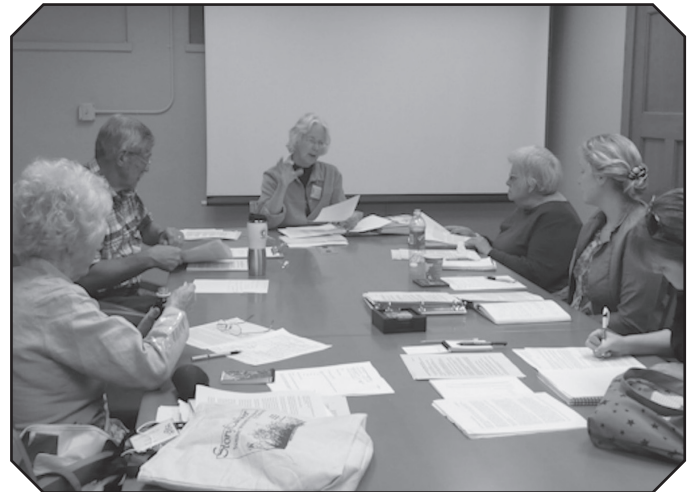
“These are people (the authors turned instructors for the workshop) who are currently making a splash ‘in the writing and publishing game,’” Evertson said. “It got the workshop and festival off to a good start. We hope to continue to build on what took place this year.”

Author Laura McNeal, spoke on the books she has written in collaboration with her husband, Tom McNeal, and read from her solo work, *Dark Water*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award in 2010.

At the Story Catcher Festival following the



Author, Laura McNeal, reads for her book, “Dark Waters” and responds to an audience member’s question.



Author and poet, Linda Hasselstrom, discusses editing techniques with a small class of writers.



Three authors—from left, Sean Doolittle, Poe Ballentine and Linda Hasselstrom— spoke on writing and publishing.

workshop, participants read from their work and a panel, including the three workshop instructors, told of some of the trials and tribulations they have gone through to get their work into print.

Their advice included finding numerous friends who will critically proof their manuscripts. They also noted that in this digital and electronic age, it is easier to get work into print because self-publishing has become a readily-available alternative. And while this is not usually profitable, it is often fulfilling.

The festival concluded with a presentation by Tom McNeal, author of two award-winning novels.

Participants and fans lined up to get autographed copies of books from the workshop leaders and the McNeals. ❀

McNeal Wanted to Return to Area, Speak at Festival

By Con Marshall

Tom McNeal said it didn't take long for him to make up his mind to speak at the Story Catcher Writing Festival that took place at Chadron State College in June after the invitation was issued.

He quickly said "yes" because he has such fond memories of the area when as a youth his family came from their home in southern California nearly every summer and spent a few weeks at the ranch near Crawford where his mother's family lived.

McNeal, whose award winning books *Good Night, Nebraska* and *To Be Sung Underwater*, are largely set in Hay Springs and Chadron, respectively, told the audience, that included numerous cousins, he's not sure why the summer visits had such an influence on him.

"I wasn't born here. I don't know the place like you all know the place, but something about it draws me, and my imagination quickens when I write about it," he said.

We would come back to my grandmother's farm for summer holidays and it cemented my feelings for the place. Here were cousins my own age driving a tractor and heaving bales onto the trailer, building a raft for the lake and baking fresh rolls—served with real butter and chokecherry jelly, he explained.

Some 15 years later, McNeal had attended college and graduate school, was a partner in a business and was trying to write in his spare time.

He wanted to use the setting and the kind of



Sandoz Society member and workshop participant, Helen Walker found herself sitting next to author, Tom McNeal, in an audience for his wife, Laura.

people he'd met during those summer visits in his writings, but realized he should follow the old creed of "writing about what you know best" and needed to become better acquainted with the area.

So, McNeal spent two years teaching English at Hay Springs High School.

McNeal said some people have difficulty understanding his fascination with small towns on the plains. He recalled that after "Goodnight Nebraska" was in print in the late 1990s, he attended a dinner hosted by the publisher, Random House."

"He just couldn't understand why anyone would want to move to a small town in the plains or Midwest," McNeal recalled. "But he didn't know the people I had known."

In the years that followed as he wrote and rewrote, the memories flowed and the results were exceptional.

Both of his books received prestigious honors. *To Be Sung Underwater* was selected one of *USA Today's* top five novels of 2011 and was named a best book of 2011 by *The Wall Street Journal* and others. ✂



Tom McNeal

Watch future newsletters for information regarding the 2013 Writing Workshop or go to www.storycatcher.com.

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