

The Story Catcher

A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

High Plains Lecture with Michael Forsberg a Success

by Justin Haag, CSC Information Service

Nature photographer Michael Forsberg of Lincoln added words to his images in expressing love for what he termed “the big back yard of the Great Plains” during an October presentation at Chadron State College.

Forsberg, who was presenting the inaugural installment of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Society’s Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series, was joined by South Dakota rancher and author Dan O’Brien for the presentation. Forsberg and O’Brien recently collaborated on a book, *Great Plains: America’s Lingering Wild*. (Some 250 people attended the presentation.)

O’Brien read one of his essays from the book, which helped illustrate the amount of time, patience and skill involved in photographing wildlife.

In the past four years, Forsberg has shot 30,000 images while logging 100,000 miles on the road. He also went through “two wheel-bearing assemblies, three sets of tires and one and a half Suburbans,” he said.

The primary focus of Forsberg’s presentation was conservation. To make his point about the decimation of species since westward expansion of the United States, he showed historical photographs, one of which was an early 19th century image of “U.S. Biological Survey” spelled out with 1,600 dead prairie dogs.

Forsberg said goals of the *Great Plains* book were to study the ecosystem and to build an appreciation for the plains from those who haven’t witnessed its



Nationally known photographer, Michael Forsberg of Lincoln, was the first presenter of the Pilster High Plains Lecture. His wife, Patty, is setting up a slideshow of Forsberg’s photography set to music.

beauty. He said people have a “perception versus reality” problem in the Great Plains— a massive area stretching from Canada to Texas that he noted would be the 10th largest country in the world if sovereign.

“It doesn’t knock your socks off at a glance. It’s not the Colorado Rockies, it’s not the Pacific Northwest, it’s not the Grand Canyon,” he said. “It’s a place that you can’t appreciate from a roadside pullout in five minutes. It’s a place you have to linger for hours, for days, for months, for years or a lifetime. Then it’s like getting to know an old friend. The more time you spend, the more layers you peel away, the more beauty you see.”

Continued on Page 2

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, 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.

Pilster Lecture Series (cont.)



Michael Forsberg met with four classes of students at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College while he was there for the Pilster Great Plains Lecture. Center Director Sarah Polak observes.

That's what the Great Plains is, and it can be every bit as remarkable as all these other places, he said.

Showing a series of maps to illustrate the development of the Great Plains, Forsberg said that despite the many challenges facing today's Great Plains ecosystem, there's hope.

"All is not yet lost on the prairie. There is still that lingering wild that survives here and the idea of conservation is still alive and well," he said. "Conservation efforts are growing, and it's not coming from some government directive on high. It's a movement coming from people as firmly rooted in the soil as the prairie is itself."

His photography has evolved from something he once did for himself to something he now does for his children and future generations.

"I care a lot about this place, I care a lot about the people who make their life on the land here, and I care a lot about the wildlife and our natural heritage," Forsberg said.

Forsberg provided live narration for a 12-minute slideshow of his stunning photographs to finish the presentation.

In introducing Forsberg, Sandoz Society president Lynn Roper of Lincoln used the title of a Sandoz book.

"We can't think of a better way to start this series off than with someone who really has *Love Song to the Plains* in his heart," she said.

The lecture series is funded from an endowment created from the sale of 3,731 acres of Dawes County ranchland donated by Esther Pilster to the Sandoz Society in 2006. ✨

Jules in a Lacy Headscarf? Likely, Not.

A woman named Debby contacted the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society to ask about the word fascinator and was curious about its meaning in Mari Sandoz's book, *Old Jules*.

Sarah Polak, director of the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center and a noted historic clothing expert at the Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer in Grand Island, Neb. investigated.

A Wikipedia definition called a fascinator a style of millinery, a fine, lacy head covering akin to a shawl. In 20th century it was called a cocktail hat; often seen at horse races.

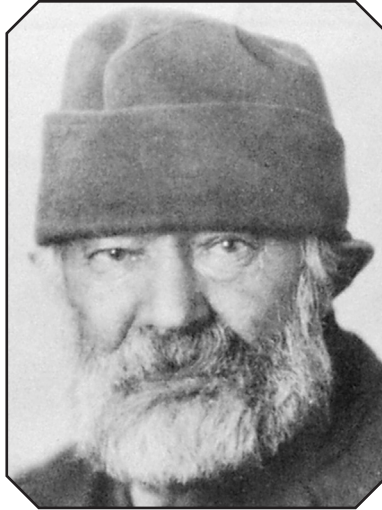
Debby found it a little peculiar that Jules Sandoz or any of his family would wear a cocktail hat or any kind of lacy, fancy millinery. Sandoz mentions it several times in her books *Old Jules* and *Hostiles and Friendlies*.

Polak discovered in the 1897 Sears and Roebuck catalog, page 305, a fascinator was the term for a knitted head scarf.

It is listed as a ladies garment and the illustration accompanying the description shows it with ruffles, she said. It is displayed on the same page as shawls to be worn around the shoulders or on the head.

It appears wider than a typical scarf, so the fascinator would cover the back of the neck, Polak said. The one that Jules is wearing in the book is one that was probably made by Mary.

"I don't think that Jules would have paid for one," she said. "Looking at the Sears illustration, it was probably very warm,



Old Jules

especially made with heavy yarn. Jules was not exactly a fashion plate and probably would not have worn anything that was not warm."

From *Old Jules, Henriette*, pg. 104

After that, things went better in the home on the Running Water. Jules put on a little weight, wore cleaner shirts, and no longer rode around with his knees out. He stayed home more, spending long evening hours over his new stamp collection, his guns and his reloading tools.

This was different from living with the illiterate Estelle. Sometimes he even talked of Rosalie. At first Henriette went out into the night, but after a while she kept right on mending. Toward winter Rosalie sent her a knitted cap, such as the sportswomen wintering in the Alps wore, tomato red and white, very pretty, and becoming to Henriette's dark eyes and straight brows. Jules had not written, but it was good Rosalie knew. Henriette kept the gift wrapped in tissue paper and wore a long brown fascinator about her ears instead.

From *Old Jules, The Hills*, pg. 361

The next morning, long before daylight, the mother, without awakening Jules, called the two older children. The wind was dead, the stars were out; and the shed was empty of everything except Brownie and Blackie, the team, nickering for food. They were saddle-broke, and on them Jule and Marie were to track the cattle, dig out and save what they could.

After gulping a hot breakfast they were bundled into what warm clothes the family afforded, an old fascinator wound about Marie's head. Climbing upon the old horses, they set out, equipped with a spade and a hammer.

From *Old Jules, The Hills*, pg. 362

The next cow was dead. And still the two climbed on and off, digging and sweating, their feet clumpy and wooden with cold. Noon came; Marie's face burned; her lips were blistering in the unshielding fascinator. She thought about the smoked glasses at home in Mary's trunk. Jule, protected by darker pigment and a huge cap, was hungry. ✨

The Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center celebrates the life and literature of Mari Sandoz and the culture of the High Plains. The Center is located at Chadron State College, 1000 Main Street, Chadron, NE 69337. Web site: www.csc.edu/sandoz, 1-800-CHADRON or email spolak@csc.edu.

Kelley Joins Sandoz Board

Karen Kelley, who was born and raised in Chadron, has become the newest member of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Board of Directors.

Her parents were Don and Gerry Kelley, longtime Chadron residents.

“My childhood home was in the same block as the Chadron Public Library, where I spent many summers reading,” she said. “It was here that I discovered Mari Sandoz when I checked out *Winter Thunder*, which triggered my ongoing interest in Sandoz and her books.”

Kelley graduated from Chadron State College with a BS in art education, but the amount of time she spent reading was a clue to what her future would bring. She decided not to pursue teaching and went on to receive a Masters of Librarianship at the University of Denver.

“My first library job was as a Children’s Librarian at the Englewood Public Library and at my retirement in 2009, I was working as a Reference Manager for Denver Public Library,” said Kelley.

While at the Denver Library, she explored the Western History collection that has some Sandoz material, and she began to donate Sandoz-related books to enrich the collection.

“A memorable experience for me was taking the Sandoz road tour with my mother,” Kelley said. “My mother had arranged for us to visit with Caroline Sandoz Pifer and, while there, I had the



Karen Kelley

opportunity to explore Mari’s memorabilia in her basement.”

Each year she attended the annual Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Conference in Chadron, weather permitting, and enjoyed the diversity of programs.

“I look forward to being a contributing member of the Sandoz board,” she said.

Currently, she works as a substitute librarian for the Douglas County Libraries in and around Denver. Happily retired, she reads, travels, paints watercolor landscapes and works as a docent at the Kirkland Museum. Additionally, she is working on a certificate in Botanical Illustration at the Denver Botanic Gardens. ❀



City of Chadron wants to honor Crazy Horse

By Emily Nohr

Omaha World-Herald

(Published Oct. 14, 2010)

The City of Chadron has asked the State Highway Commission

to change the name of Highway 20 between Hay Springs and Fort Robinson to “Crazy Horse Memorial Highway.”

Dr. John Gamby, a veterinarian and city councilman in Chadron, came up with the idea, said Chadron City Administrator Sandra Powell.

“It was his hope that a portion of Highway 20 could be renamed to honor Native Americans and to pique residents’ interest in Nebraska’s rich history,” she said.

Crazy Horse, an Oglala Sioux war chief, was killed at Fort Robinson in 1877.

“The trail roughly along Highway 20 was where they carried Crazy Horse’s body after his death,” Powell said. “Some say he was buried not too far away from Highway 20. Some say it was farther away. That’s still up for discussion.”

The person being honored must be deceased for at least five years, have lived a significant portion of his life in Nebraska, have a reputation within the state and contributed to Nebraska society.

The Crazy Horse memorial project started in 2008 and has gained support through resolutions from Sheridan County, Dodge County and the City of Crawford, Powell said.

“That would be a great honor to name it after him,” said Doug Bissonette, a liaison to the Oglala Sioux Tribe and a Crazy Horse historian at South Dakota’s Pine Ridge Reservation. “It would bring more awareness to the tribes along the Nebraska and South Dakota border.”

NOTE: The Nebraska Highway Commission approved the request, which now is awaiting approval by Gov. Dave Heineman. ❀

When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

By Jillian L. Wenburg/ M.A.

I was introduced to Mari Sandoz as a voracious young reader with *The Story Catcher* and *The Horsecatcher*, but I didn't truly appreciate Sandoz's art in those works and her many others until I had aged. By that, I mean I did not fully understand her works until I took the time to appreciate the plains and landscape right beside me.

Having had the providential opportunity to be raised in a small Nebraska town, I am intimately familiar with the land Sandoz so fondly writes about. However, until reading Sandoz's works, I did not fully appreciate the beauty of the open sky and plains and the tragedy of the end of some of it.

In Sandoz, I have found a kindred spirit. Her attitude toward teaching, learning, writing and Nebraska is one I can relate to so well. In reading her writing, both her letters and fiction, I find pieces that I wish I had written, ideas I have contemplated but that she articulated so much better.

The one aspect between Sandoz and me that most certainly differs was her ability to speak her mind with such razor sharp conciseness and fire. This trait I find so admirable! Sandoz never shied away from taking on issues and tasks in which she was criticized or critiqued. She would listen to all sides and formulate her opinion and fight for it. She spoke her mind with aplomb in a brilliantly articulate manner.

Her texts described the plains in way that I have not yet discovered how to do. Her richness in detail in her explication of the land truly captures the Nebraskan



Jillian Wenburg appreciates the beauty of the land near the Standing Bear bridge in north-eastern Nebraska.

experience. Her work reels the reader into her narrative, explored in such rich detail that any reader can tell she loves the land.

I am currently enrolled in an English PhD program and plan to center my dissertation around Sandoz and her works. Recently traveling back to Kansas City from the Sandoz Heritage Center, where I was doing some preliminary work for my dissertation, I stopped at 6 a.m. between Chadron and Ogallala. I thought taking some snapshots for my family was a way I could capture some of what I was seeing. But I knew that this special moment - seeing, quite possibly, beyond eternity above the plains, in the richness of clouds and colors - would not fully translate in any Kodak form.

At that moment, I realized that what I could not capture in a photo or even in my writings, what Sandoz could. The art that she painted across each page transmits me to the plains and resonates for years. So many times, in viewing the areas about which Sandoz writes, I can hear her.

2011 Sandoz Conference Moved to Fall

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Board of Directors has decided to move the Mari Sandoz Society Conference to the fall in 2011 in conjunction with the Pilster Great Plains Lecture.

With the success of the lecture in October, drawing 250 people to the Chadron State College campus, the board hopes that more people will also attend the fall conference.

Additionally, the people who attend the conference will be able to enjoy a high profile speaker and lecture as a kick-off to the conference on Thursday evening. The conference will follow on Friday ending mid-afternoon.

The 2011 conference will coincide with the centennial celebration of Chadron State College.

Watch future issues of the *Story Catcher* for the exact date of the conference and registration materials in August 2011. ✨

In those moments, she is clearly still with me, allowing me to better experience the area and history in ways I otherwise would not. I am not sure how I found Mari Sandoz, but she, most evidently, found me— for a lifetime.

Jillian Wenburg received her Master of Arts and Bachelor of Arts degrees in English from the University of Nebraska in Kearney and is currently enrolled in an Interdisciplinary PhD program in English and History at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She lives in Kansas City with her husband, Chris. ✨

When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

By Kate Knickrehm

I discovered Mari Sandoz through my grandfather, Rudolph Wilhelm Kahman. Known as “Rudy” to his friends and family, “Doc” Kahman to his patients, and as “Opa” to my brother and me. He was born in 1903 at the family farm near Glenville, Neb.

Having had his fill of farming, he headed to Los Angeles in the 1920’s to study chiropractic and nutrition, graduating from the Los Angeles School of Chiropractory in 1929. He returned to Nebraska and set up practice in Grand Island, where he lived until he passed away in 1996.

As a young girl growing up in Denver, Colo., I adored my Opa and our times together, especially when my brother and I would travel to Grand Island each summer to stay with him and learn about the land.

Opa had a keen intellect and was interested in everything; he was constantly studying and reading and learning—at least when he wasn’t fishing. He was particularly interested in western history, the stories of the Plains Indians, the fur traders and trappers and the things he knew as a boy. When Mari Sandoz’s works began to be published, Opa’s enthusiasm for her was contagious.

She wrote about the things he loved, the people and families he had known and the experiences he had shared. His father was no “Old Jules” - Rolph was a kind and caring father - but his



Opa’s enthusiasm for Mari Sandoz prompted her discovery.

pioneering family’s stories were right out of Mari Sandoz’s world.

Toward the end of his life, we encouraged Opa to write his “memoirs” and we are so lucky today to have notebooks filled with his distinctive scrawl and, later, video cassette tapes, telling his family history and tales of growing up in Nebraska. What a life they had.

Opa writes: “On the homestead it was a constant fight for survival; either the drought or the grasshoppers would get the corn.”

As much as I revered Opa, I know that as a child I wasn’t able to fully appreciate what those pioneers went through or to fully appreciate Mari Sandoz’s writings.

I remember being enchanted when we read *The Christmas of the Phonograph Records* at a Christmas gathering. After perusing our bookshelves for inspiration, my mother even named our German Shepard puppy “Sandoz,” after Mari. (A strange name for a dog, to

be sure, and not many people got the connection.)

It wasn’t until I was much older that I came to a better understanding of my family’s experience and Mari’s writings.

A number of years ago, well before the beautiful High Plains Heritage Center was built, my mother and I took a sort of driving pilgrimage through Nebraska, stopping at what we thought was the little cemetery where two baby Kahmans were buried, visiting Mari’s grave and Old Jules’s grave, and to my mother’s dismay, Carhenge.

And then, just last year, through an odd coincidence, I learned that a friend from Boulder, Kathryn Keller, had been coming to the Sandoz Heritage Society conferences for many years.

She invited me to join her and Jane Patrick for the 2010 Conference last March, where the book *Son of the Gambler Man* was discussed. Reading that book and participating in the conference and meeting so many wonderful people who value Mari Sandoz and western Nebraska history renewed my enthusiasm for her work and my study of the family history.

My Opa would have loved to have seen this interest and devotion to Mari Sandoz, and I have joined the Sandoz Heritage Society in his honor and in honor of all of the other sons and daughters of the western Nebraska pioneers.

Kate recently retired from 28 years of law practice and is enjoying free time by painting and cooking. She lives in Denver, Colo., with her husband and two dogs. ❀

When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

By **Gil Savery**

Thanks for the opportunity to relate how I discovered Mari Sandoz. No, no, it wasn't through an Internet matchmaking Web site. Those had not yet been developed. But it had a strong romantic twist. It came about this way:

In 1938, I was dating a girl who later became my wife. Among her books was *Old Jules*, in hardcover and published in 1935 by Blue Ribbon Books, Inc. New York.

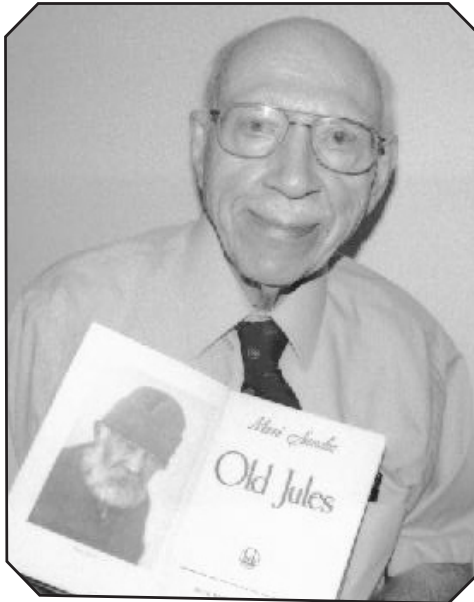
I read *Old Jules* with pleasure; little realizing that ultimately my own career would acquaint me with some of Mari's friends.

In Sandoz's foreword to *Old Jules*, addressed to the Atlantic Non-Fiction Contest, she establishes the authenticity of her work by referencing Dr. A. E. Sheldon, superintendent of the Nebraska State Historical Society and Frank L. Williams, managing editor of the Nebraska State Journal.

"Williams," she wrote, "spent his cub reporting days in western Nebraska in the eighties and knew *Old Jules* in the orchard days."

The aging, corncob-pipe smoking Williams, with striped shirt and rumpled trousers, hired me as a police reporter in 1941. Helen Mary Hayes, a skilled reporter and assistant city editor, and Anne Longman, a great feature writer, also were among Mari's Lincoln friends. Mari herself tells of being a proofreader for two Lincoln newspapers. That would have been at different times for the Journal and the Lincoln Star were then competitors.

I never met Sandoz, but should have. Once we shared nearby seats as we watched a session of Nebraska's fledgling unicameral legislature. She was wearing a hat and was attired much the same as I have seen her pictured. I regret that I did not introduce myself and share a mutual interest in the printed word.



Gil Savery knew and worked with Mari Sandoz's friends. He never met Sandoz, but should have

I read her books and those of Willa Cather. In the mid 1930s, when I was a student at Lincoln High School, Elsie Cather, Willa's sister, was one of my English teachers. It was primarily a grammar class so we spent much time diagramming sentences. Still, there was time to write and Miss Cather encouraged aspiring writers with her ready laugh when humorous prose poured from our Parker fountain pens.

On occasion I had the opportunity to review books about Cather, who had started her writing career at

the Journal as a critic. Cather did indeed write beautifully of pioneer days in Webster County. Her background and interests, however, did not parallel those of Sandoz who experienced a hard life in Nebraska's Sandhills. Mari's father's response to her honorable mention in the Harper Intercollegiate Short Story Contest was: "You know I consider writers and artists the maggots of society."

I can't resist making comparisons. These authors applied their talents influenced by disparate life experiences. In Lincoln, Cather wrote, among other things, of the performing arts in the heyday of traveling theatrical companies. Actors were wary of the ink that flowed from her critical pen. Her background and growing-up years were very different from those of Sandoz.

Enriched by real-life experiences and keen observation, Mari's prose portrayed and documented the climate of conflict that prevailed in settlement years, including the pioneers' relationship with Native culture.

Ah, Mari Sandoz and Willa Cather! Both lit up the history of the high plains using literary torches set ablaze by dissimilar flames. As the French would say: *Vive la Difference!*

Gilbert M. 'Gil' Savery is a 92-year-old retired managing editor of the former "Lincoln Journal." Mari Sandoz's acquaintance, Frank L. Williams, mentioned in the story, hired Gil for the Lincoln editing job in that lasted 44 years.✻

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