

The Story Catcher

Mari Sandoz Heritage Society
Celebrating 50-Years 1971-2021



Story Catcher Workshop Moves to Chadron State Park

Mari Sandoz loved writing and she loved to encourage young writers. It's in keeping with that spirit that the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society is sponsoring the 10th Anniversary Story Catcher workshop June 14-17, 2021 at Chadron State Park.

"Despite the ongoing pandemic it will be a live event this year," said organizer and English Professor Matt Evertson of Chadron State College. Last year's Covid-19 edition of the workshop was held via livestream and, "while well attended, it just wasn't the same as being inspired by the scenic northwest Nebraska landscape and the opportunity to share with other aspiring writers," he said. Faculty for the workshop includes most of those who held the online distance learning experience last year.

Laura Pritchett is an American author whose work is rooted in the natural world. She began her writing journey with the short story collection *Hell's Bottom, Colorado*, that won the PEN USA Award for Fiction and the Milkweed National Fiction Prize in 2001. This was followed by the

novels *Sky Bridge* (2005), *Stars Go Blue* (2014), *Red Lightning* (2015), and *The Blue Hour* (2017), all of which garnered numerous literary awards, including the High Plains Book Award.

Stars Go Blue, her bestselling novel, has been optioned for film. She's also written two nonfiction books, *Great Colorado Bear Stories* (2012) and *Making Friends with Death: A Field Guide to Your Impending Last Breath* (2017).

Environmental issues are close to her heart, and she's editor of three anthologies about conservation for which she also contributed selections. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *O Magazine*, *Salon*, *High Country News*, *The Sun*, *Orion*, *Pinch*, *High Desert Journal*, *Lit Hub*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *The Normal School*, *Writers on the Range*, *OnEarth*, *Brain*, *Teen*, and many others.

Pritchett holds a PhD from Purdue University and teaches at various writing conferences around the country and is

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Story Catcher Workshop continued...

the Director of the Nature Writing MFA Program at Colorado Western University. Her sessions in June will include an advanced workshop on “book length considerations,” as well as “the art of place.”

Alyson Hagy grew up on a farm in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. She is a graduate of Williams College and the University of Michigan. While at Michigan, she was awarded a Hopwood Prize in Short Fiction and a Roy Cowden Fellowship. Early stories were published in *Sewanee Review*, *Crescent Review*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*.

Hagy taught at the University of Virginia, the University of Michigan, and the Stonecoast Writers Conference in Maine before joining the faculty at the University of Wyoming in 1996. She is the author of eight works of fiction, including *Madonna On Her Back* (1986), *Hardware River* (1991), *Keeneland* (2000), *Graveyard of the Atlantic* (2000), *Snow, Ashes* (2007), *Ghosts of Wyoming* (2010), and *Boleto* (2012). Her most recent novel *Scribe* (2018) is described by Graywolf Press as “a haunting, evocative tale about the power of storytelling, drawing on traditional folktales and the history and culture of Appalachia” where the author “has crafted a gripping, swiftly plotted novel that touches on pressing issues of our time— migration, pandemic disease, the rise of authoritarianism—and makes a compelling case for the power of stories to both show us the world and transform it.” She has been awarded fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Christopher Isherwood Foundation. Her work has won a Pushcart Prize, the Nelson Algren Prize, the High Plains Book Award, the Devil’s Kitchen Award, the Syndicated Fiction Award, and been included in *Best American Short Stories*. Recent fiction has appeared in *Drunken Boat*, *The Idaho Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *INCH*, and *Michigan Quarterly Review*. Her sessions will include “the Story Telling of Objects,” and a follow-up workshop.

Derek Sheffield’s collection *Not for Luck* (2021) was selected for the Wheelbarrow Books Poetry Prize. His other books include *Through the Second Skin* (2013), runner-up for the Emily Dickinson First Book Award and finalist for the Washington State Book Award, and *A Revised Account of the West*, winner of the Hazel Lipa Environmental Chapbook Award judged by Debra Marquart. With Simmons Buntin and Elizabeth Dodd, he co-edited *Dear America: Letters of Hope, Habitat, Defiance, and Democracy* (Trinity University Press & Terrain.org, 2020).

He is the recipient of the James Hearst Poetry Prize,

fellowships from Artist Trust, the Spring Creek Project, Allied Arts, and the Sustainable Arts Foundation, and a Special Mention in the 2016 Pushcart Prize Anthology. Vijay Seshadri chose his poem as the sole finalist for the 2018 Lynda Hull Memorial Award. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Southern Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *AGNI*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Orion*, *Shenandoah*, *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, and on NPR’s *Poetry Moment*, and have been part of many anthologies, including *New Poets of the American West*, *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, *Nature and Environmental Writing: A Guide and Anthology*, *A Ritual to Read Together: Poems in Conversation with William Stafford*, *The World Is Charged: Poetic Engagements with Gerard Manley Hopkins*, and *River of Memory: The Everlasting Columbia*. Sheffield is the poetry editor of *Terrain.org*. His sessions will include “The More-Than-Human World” and a follow-up workshop.

Carson Vaughan is a freelance journalist and author from central Nebraska who writes frequently about the Great Plains. His work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The Paris Review Daily*, *Outside*, *Pacific Standard*, *The Atlantic*, *Smithsonian*, *VICE*, *In These Times*, and more. His first book, *Zoo Nebraska: The Dismantling of an American Dream* was named a “Favorite Nonfiction book of 2019” by Bookriot.com, chosen as “Amazon First Reads” selection, and was awarded a 2020 Nebraska Book Award for Investigative Journalism.

He is currently working on a second book of narrative nonfiction chronicling both the history and contemporary world of cowboy poetry. His profile “My Cousin, The Cowboy Poet” was published in the March 16, 2016, online edition of *The New Yorker*. Vaughan was awarded the 2018 John M. Collier Award for Forest History Journalism from the Forest History Society for his *Weather.com* feature, “Uprooting FDR’s ‘Great Wall of Trees.’” He was also a recipient of a 2018 Individual Artist Fellowship from the Nebraska Arts Council. Vaughan holds an MFA in Creative Writing (Nonfiction) from the University of North Carolina Wilmington, and bachelors in both English and Journalism from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His sessions will include “Distilling the Extra from the Ordinary” and “Writing and Reporting in ‘Flyover’ Country.”

The authors will also participate in nightly dinner roundtables to discuss “The Writing Life” and will do fireside readings to end the day.

Registration is now open and information is available at www.marisandoz.org

Thoughts on Fifty-Years of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society

Brian Rockey, Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Treasurer

Although I grew up in Sandoz Country, *Crazy Horse* was the only book of Mari's that I recall in our home in Alliance. It wasn't until I had graduated from Creighton and moved to Lincoln that I discovered all that Mari Sandoz had done, and over the not quite 40 years since I have read all of her books at least once. There is something about Mari's descriptive style and voice that speaks to me more than any other Nebraska author. The straightforward imagery and descriptions of the sounds and smells of the settings, and her use of idiom and cadence make her characters' dialogue, thoughts, and experiences so authentic it's easy to become part of the story. Of course, Mari wasn't just a storyteller, she chronicled priceless portions of our history (the bad as well as the good). She observed and commented upon commerce, justice, socioeconomic conditions and political issues of the times that were not only relevant to her books but that we revisit to this day-- consider *Capital City*, *The Tom-Walker* and *Crazy Horse*, for example. And *Sandhill Sundays*, *Love Song to the Plains*, and *Hostiles and Friendlies* are wonderful collections of slices of humanity. A favorite line of mine from *Hostiles and Friendlies* is something I consider good advice, "There was no training school for the pioneer. He went out and he either was one or he wasn't." The most important role of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, beyond honoring her memory, is perpetuating the impact of her work.

The 2021 Pilster Lecture & Sandoz Symposium to be Presented in Person and Virtually

The Life of Mari Sandoz is the 2021 Theme of the annual Mari Sandoz Heritage Society symposium and Pilster Lecture to be presented in partnership with the Great Plains Center on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus September 23 and 24. Buoyed by the success of the pandemic-driven virtual conference in 2020, this event will be a hybrid with both in-person and on-line availability, said Michael Smith, Society board member and chair of this year's event. Topics have been selected to represent the 50th anniversary of the Society, the 55th anniversary of Mari's death and the 125th anniversary of her birth.

The Annual Pilster Lecture will be presented by Shannon Smith, the Wyoming Humanities Council's Executive Director Emeritus on Thursday September 23 from 3:30 to 5 pm (Central). Smith is a Society board member, longtime Sandoz scholar and resident of Gordon.

Friday's Symposium Sessions begin at 8:30 am and last until noon (Central). Sessions at the Great Plains Center and available on-line include: Mari Sandoz and Her Cities with presentation by Jamison Wyatt on Mari's time of residence in Lincoln; Dr. Margaret Frisbee on Mari's years in Denver; Dr. Elaine Marie Nelson on Mari's long residence in New York City. Society Board member and Sandoz scholar Dr. Jillian Wenburg will discuss Mari's Groundbreaking Research and Writing in the West. Mari and Hollywood will be discussed by Dr. David Nesheim of Chadron State College, also a member of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Board.

This year's Sandoz Scholar, Brock Anderson will be presenting his research, and there will be additional events and activities that will be announced later.

Further details on the program and registration will be available this summer.

The Story Catcher

The "Story Catcher" 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 Story Catcher is published four times a year by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, a 501(c)(3) non-profit 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 conference, the Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series, and a writer's workshop. Additionally, the Society provides collections on loan to the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska.

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Contributions to the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society are tax-deductible. To join the Society contact visit our website at www.marisandoz.org



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*, Sandoz was a tireless researcher, a true storyteller and 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.

A Decade Ago: Pilster Great Plains Lecture, October 13, 2011

“Mari Sandoz: On Writing and Life” with Ron Hull

(EDITOR’S NOTE: This is an occasional reflection from past newsletters during our anniversary year)

The presentation featured Mari Sandoz in video-tape excerpts sharing her personal tips on how to write your story, with help from Ron Hull, Ph.D., senior advisor to Nebraska Educational Telecommunications and professor emeritus of Broadcasting at UNL and a Sandoz Society Board member. In addition to other NET appearances, Mari taped a series entitled, “Mari Sandoz Discusses Creative Writing.”

As a friend of Sandoz, Hull worked on many NET television productions with her in the 1950’s and 1960’s. He discussed his personal reminiscences of the author, including her work and her philosophy about writing, which is illustrated with video clips taken from her series, “Mari Sandoz Discusses Creative Writing.”

“She worked many days and hours on the creative writing series in 1959 and her discussions about writing reveal much about herself as well,” Hull said.

In the series, she talks about: “gathering your material, beginning the work, choosing the point of view, revising and polishing and the beginning and ending.” Sandoz said, “There was no training school for the pioneer. He went out and he either was one or he wasn’t.” And there was no training for Mari Sandoz. With a limited education and an abundance of drive and courage, she willed herself to be a writer, gaining both success and fame as a chronicler of the history of the high plains country of Nebraska.

Mari said that everyone has a fascinating story to tell, he said. To do it you must bring a willingness to do a lot of work and the work must be imbued with honesty.” Sandoz was a strong-willed, opinionated, energized person. Yet, when she was first approached about doing a television interview, she was not comfortable. “I’d rather face a rattlesnake than one of your cameras,” she told Hull, who produced and directed that first interview, “Mari Sandoz: Nebraskan,” for KUON-TV.

But Sandoz continued to work with Hull over the years, ultimately resulting in two television series. An important part of his presentation includes excerpts from “Creative Writing,” a series Mari Sandoz

did for NET. “She was driven by her zeal to tell the stories of the high plains country and she was most passionate about the lives of the plains Indians,” he said. “She respected the culture and wisdom of the Native Americans, having been raised among them.”

If Mari Sandoz were still alive, she would be urging all the people she met to write their stories. She felt everyone could be taught to write, just as he or she can be taught to sing and dance,” Hull said. “And, she wanted everyone to do some writing. She felt everyone has a story to tell and she would tell them to get to work.”

Hull first met Mari Sandoz in 1957 and the pair quickly struck up a discussion about early Nebraska history, a shared interest.

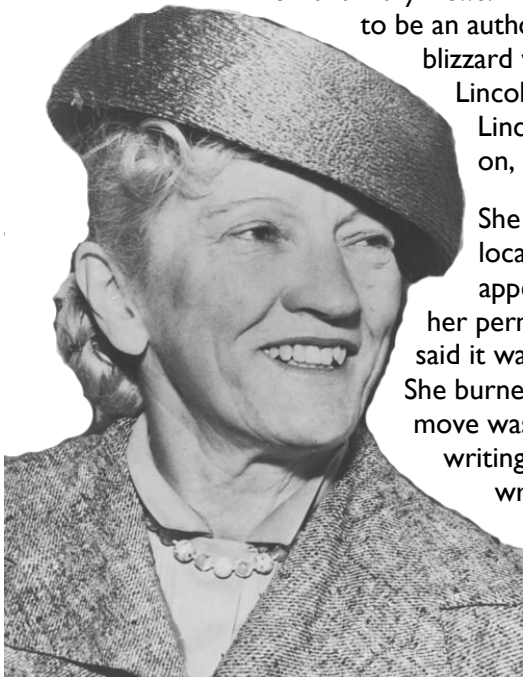


OLLI Participants Learn About Sandoz

Members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln signed in virtually to four sessions on author Mari Sandoz in March and April. Otherwise known as OLLI at UNL, the lifelong learning program for adults age 50 years plus is billed as “all about the joy of learning.” Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Board President Lynn Roper of Lincoln opened the first session for 80 participants on March 29. She said that her history in Western Nebraska (Rushville) and a lifelong search for strong women led her to the Society.

Roper presented an intro to Sandoz and her importance to today’s literature. In subsequent sessions, Sandoz board members Jamison Wyatt, Matt Evertson, and Shannon Smith talked about Sandoz colorful life in Lincoln; her battle with movie makers in Hollywood and publishers in New York City; her personal style; and the High Plains Heritage Center at Chadron State College that features displays of Sandoz’ work and Sand Hills artifacts.

Sandoz was born on May 11, 1896, 125 years ago. At age 12 she submitted a story to the junior writers’ page of the *Omaha Daily News*. When her father, Jules, learned of this he beat her. He obviously didn’t want her to be an author, Roper said. Mari became snow blind in her left eye during a Sand Hills blizzard when she was 14. At age 17 she earned a teaching certificate. She moved to Lincoln in 1919. In 1921 she moved to Dalton to teach. In 1923 she moved back to Lincoln where she enrolled in a writing class. She lived and wrote in Lincoln, off and on, until 1940.



She was told her stories were too drab and that she wrote about the Sand Hills, a location about which no one knew anything. Yet, she persevered. Her first story appeared in *Prairie Schooner* in 1927. Her father, Old Jules, died in 1928 and gave her permission to write his story. She did and it was rejected by 13 publishers. One said it was a dull book about a dirty old man. Sandoz was hungry, poor and discouraged. She burned the 70 stories she had written and moved back to the Sand Hills. But the move was short-stayed and she moved back to Lincoln in 1934 to work for a federal writing project. The big news came in 1935 when *Old Jules* won the *Atlantic Magazine* writer’s contest and she received a \$5,000 award. The book was both praised and condemned, but her spirits were renewed and she started writing again. Her second book was the highly controversial *Slogum House* followed by *Capital City*, an equally much-discussed book thought to be about the city of Lincoln. Sandoz moved to Denver in 1940 to work on *Crazy Horse*, a book that was compiled from her research notes on 5,000 index cards. It was published in

1942 and she moved to New York City in 1943 where she spent the last 23 years of her life. In 1953 *Cheyenne Autumn* was published and was more acclaimed than *Crazy Horse*. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1954. She kept writing, 20 books in all and countless short stories, until her death in 1966. Roper said it is difficult to pick a favorite. Her research was meticulous and her writing was accurate. From brutal and hard to controversial to much-loved. That’s the legacy of Mari Sandoz.

Two Present Sandoz Papers at Western History Association

The art of Amos Bad Heart Bull was both loved and revered by Mari Sandoz. It was also the subject of two papers presented by Sandoz scholars at the October conference of the Western History Association. Matthew Evertson of Chadron State College and Nicole Gray of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln were the presenters. *Catching Conflict: The Role of Native American Pictography in the Late Publications of Mari Sandoz* was presented by Evertson who teaches at Chadron State College and is also a member of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society Board. In 2017, the University of Nebraska press issued the 50th

anniversary edition of *A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux*, featuring drawings by Amos Bad Heart Bull, and an introduction by Mari Sandoz, who died a year before the original release of the book in 1967. Sandoz’s last-published novel, *The Story Catcher* (1963), is inspired by the Bad Heart Bull family legacy, and dedicated to the family—and Sandoz herself was directly involved with helping to get the collection on the track toward publication. The 50th anniversary edition brings fresh eyes to this work, and interrogates the role of art and

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Western History Association continued...

pictography in the preservation and promulgation of tribal history, Evertson said. Sandoz's novel imagines the evolution of a "Story Catcher" and depicts the role of such a chronicler in 1840's Lakota culture, before the major forces of conflict and acculturation that would comprise a major portion of Amos Bad Heart Bull's artwork. "Ledger Art" has since become an iconic element of the "Graphic West." Evertson's paper explored the role of pictographic imagery in the portrayal and publishing of Native American life when these editions first appeared and under new scrutiny with their republication. Much has been written about the possible cultural appropriation employed by Sandoz and others, but less has been explored in relation to the graphic content of such works, and the role that such imagery may or may not have played in the reception of these tribal histories, then and now.

Mari Sandoz and A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux was presented by Gray. The 2017 publication of a 50th Anniversary Edition of *A Pictographic History of the Oglala Sioux*, with reproductions of ledger drawings by Oglala Lakota artist and historian Amos Bad Heart Bull, marked a new milestone in more than a century-long history of art, storytelling, research, and recovery, she said.

Bad Heart Bull (1869-1913) created drawings of scenes from the history of the Oglala Sioux in a ledger book procured during his time as a scout for the U.S. Army. He was meticulous about the accuracy of events represented in the drawings, seeking approval for his depictions from tribal elders. Although the ledger was buried with his sister Dollie Pretty Cloud, the drawings were photographed by Helen Blish, then a graduate student at the University of Nebraska. Blish's research into the drawings, which included interviews with Pretty Cloud and Lakota leader He Dog, was brought to the attention of the University of Nebraska Press by Sandoz, who wrote an introduction to the first edition published by the press in 1967. The images in the 2017 edition were created from digitized prints restored from glass plate negatives. Gray said that digital enhancements in many cases enable clearer reproductions of the drawings and Lakota annotations than had previously been possible. Her paper explored the publication history of the drawings and traced their emergence into the twenty-first century, including as an influence on the work of Joe Pulliam, modern-day ledger artist and the great-great-nephew of Amos Bad Heart Bull.

Generations Later, Brownlee's Work Shown Alongside Sandoz's

Kerri Rempp, Discover Northwest Nebraska

The legacy of Mari Sandoz's creative talent is alive and well in her ancestors, and for one descendant that talent manifests itself in drawings in the realism style reflected in the author's work. Before Mari Sandoz's "Old Jules" was published in 1935, the author fought those who would have standardized her language, keeping the Western idioms she used intact. Her writing style and straightforward portrayal of her father's life on the frontier shocked readers who had romanticized the West but was the beginning of a successful writing career. "She believed that universal truths could be learned from careful study of one's own neighborhood, and she diligently studied and wrote about her own neighborhood, the Great Plains, to our great good fortune," wrote Helen Winter Stauffer in the Afterword to "Old Jules" in the 1985 and later editions. Sandoz's realistic approach to her writing is mirrored today, more than eight decades later, in the drawings of her great-great-niece, Rachel Brownlee. From graphite to charcoal, Brownlee uses several mediums to create drawings in the realism style of her ancestor. Old Jules didn't approve of Sandoz learning to read and write, but she persevered on her own to achieve her career as a published author. Likewise, Brownlee had no formal education to guide her career in art. She and her six siblings were raised and homeschooled on Celia Sandoz Ostrander Barth's (her grandmother) ranch. "There was no art education of any kind," she recalled. However, when she was five or six, her sister gifted her a "How to Draw Horses" book, and it inspired her to explore her budding artistic talent. "By the time I was nine, I had sold my first piece for \$1," she said. Her works currently on display at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center in Chadron cost more than \$1, all of them the product of a more recent effort to prioritize her artwork. Brownlee completed some art in high school, but put it aside completely in college while she studied to become a software engineer. When her family returned to Ashby, it gave her the opportunity to dedicate her time and talents to artwork full-time. She had her first art show six months ago, and now has seven scheduled. Her work will be on display at the Sandoz Center on the Chadron State College campus through May 21. While she still operates her software engineering company – a cattle management program with 60,000 cattle in the database – she believes her artwork fits well within her wheelhouse. "In my mind all of my artwork is technical," she said. Whether it's a sepia-toned drawing of a horse, a graphite study of spur straps, a Gothic church in ink or a charcoal production, she's using rulers to sketch it out on graph paper and math to scale it up to

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Brownlee continued...

the finished size. "It's all bits and bytes. It's black and white," Brownlee explained. "Most of my technical skill has come from trying things," she said. "I'll just put all the effort into it I can and see how far it goes. Some of those (pieces) have turned out to be my best pieces." The bulk of Brownlee's artwork is inspired by, according to her website, "the harsh realism of agriculture and western life, and she seeks to show highly realistic details of that life." She's learned through experimentation that different mediums serve different purposes. Brownlee said graphite is economical and easy to work with because it's forgiving, while ink requires the artist to be very purposeful. Much of her work, however, is in charcoal. It's perfect for realism, she said, but is dirty and unforgiving. "I'm washing my hands constantly and vacuuming up the small pieces to control the white space." She's dabbled in acrylic as well and wants to explore that medium more, and is considering trying her hand at black and white oil painting as well. Aside from experimentation in mediums, Brownlee also said she wants to take the next step and move from realism to artwork that viewers will be "more intimately attracted to." While many of the pieces on display at the Sandoz Center reflect the western lifestyle, visitors might be surprised by one display – a collection of charcoal works inspired by Star Wars and video game work. "I am not an adherent to straight up western artwork," Brownlee said. "I enjoy all subject types." The Star Wars-themed works were done for her husband, Ethan, and she made the leather steampunk costume, featuring a neck corset, hatband, sword belt and pleated skirt, for a trip to Omaha Comicon for her video game artwork. She's explored anime and supernatural dream art, too, and during her recent artist-in-residence appearance was working on a calligraphy design. It's one more way she feels connected to her great-great-aunt Mari Sandoz. She wrote about frontier life, but she had other interests and lived in Denver and New York City. "She's always been very important. She was a huge part of our family history." Brownlee said her grandmother Celia greatly respected Sandoz's accomplishments and wanted family members to be good representatives of her legacy. "I think there is truly a genetic trail of talent because there are several artists in the family," Brownlee said, adding that showing her work at the Mari Sandoz Center holds special meaning. "It's neat to be here next to her work." Inviting Brownlee to have a showing at the Sandoz Center was an easy decision given her family connection to Mari Sandoz, said Holly Counts. Her work is a great representation of Sandoz, she added. "You're seeing a younger generation, but the same type of storyline continues." For more about Brownlee, visit www.rachelbrownlee.com.

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Thank you for your support! Your membership is important to the Society's programs and activities. Each dollar helps us preserve and share the important work of Mari Sandoz. Members receive our newsletter, advanced notice of special events, and discounted registration for the annual Story Catcher Writers Workshop and the annual Fall Sandoz Symposium.

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