

# *The Story Catcher*

*A publication of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society*

## **Sandoz Conference Follows Pilster Lecture**

Mari Sandoz exemplified the roles of both student learner and then teacher. School was a sanctuary for Mari.

“Mari wanted desperately to learn,” said Helen Winter Stauffer, Sandoz’s biographer. “And school was the most interesting place in the world.”

Here Mari learned the English language and to read and write. She would say later that she began to write as soon as she could read.

For much of her busy writing career, Mari Sandoz was also a teacher who shared her literary talent with students. She was a staff member of the Writers’ Conference at the University of Colorado in 1941 and at the University of Indiana in 1946. Between 1947 and 1956, Mari taught Advanced Novel Writing at the Writers’ Institute; part of the University of Wisconsin Summer Program.

Celebrating education, the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society’s 2011 conference entitled, “The Joy of Learning,” will be held on Friday, Oct. 14 at the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center.

### **Rural Schools Part of Nebraska Life**

In the session, “Sandhills Weekdays: Lessons from the One-Room Schoolhouse,” Deb Carpenter-Nolting, of Bushnell, Neb., will facilitate a discussion of one-room schoolhouses with the audience, while sharing Mari Sandoz’s experiences attending and teaching Sandhills schools.

Carpenter-Nolting, who grew up in Sheridan County, attended a one-room school and taught

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*Singer, songwriter and school marm, Deb Carpenter-Nolting will lead a discussion on one-room schools at the conference.*

## **Pilster Lecture: “Mari Sandoz: On Writing and Life”**

The second annual Pilster Great Plains Lecture Series, titled “Mari Sandoz: On Writing and Life,” will feature one of Nebraska’s most famous daughters in her own words.

The lecture, scheduled for Thursday, Oct. 13, 2010 in Memorial Hall at 7 p.m., is free for anyone who is interested in Sandoz and enjoys storytelling.

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## 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.

## 2011 Sandoz Society Conference (cont.)

in rural schools. Rural education is entrenched in our lives in the Midwest and many have an ancestor who attended, taught or both.

"I have many anecdotes about my school days (we pumped our own water and had two outhouses out back behind the school) and of teaching in one-room schools (with electricity and indoor plumbing)," she said "I have a feeling we will hear lots of great stories,"

In addition to one-room country schools, Carpenter-Nolting has taught at a BIA high school as well as a tribal college on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota; Chadron State College and at Gering High School. This fall she will begin a new teaching adventure at Burns High School in Wyoming.

A teacher by profession, she found a natural progression using the art forms of poetry, song and stories to instruct as well as entertain, sharing her original work throughout the West for years.

In partnership with poet and free-lance writer Lyn Messersmith, Carpenter-Nolting performs educational programs about women who traveled and settled the Plains, and about leaders and legends who helped shape the American West. Their latest program is about not-so-well-behaved women. These programs are available through both the Nebraska and South Dakota humanities councils.

She's most content when composing, but Carpenter-Nolting also keeps busy conducting writing and songwriting workshops, teaching, grading papers, reading a good book or spending time with family.

Her life and dance partner is husband, Tim Nolting, who is also a writer/entertainer. They perform nationally at cowboy gatherings.

Come prepared not only to hear about Deb's and Mari's experiences, but to share your tales out of school.

### Ghosts of Generations Past

At times, school experiences were traumatic and that trauma may affect generations, as Chuck Trimble will discuss in his session, "Generations: Ghosts That Haunt Native Youth."

Trimble, who was born and raised on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, will discuss the "so-called" intergenerational trauma that some say is afflicting native youth today.

Intergenerational trauma (IGT) is defined as historical trauma and historical unresolved grief. This is not only trauma that has happened in a person's own history, but what's happened in the generational line of his/her parents, grandparents and community that brings unresolved grief along with that trauma.

"The theory is that horrors of boarding school life experienced by our great grandfathers has hopped over generations and haunts native youth today, even to the point of suicide," he said. "I won't try to debunk the theory, but I will talk about issues faced at places like Pine Ridge and Rosebud and a generally dysfunctional society."

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## 2011 Sandoz Society Conference (cont.)

However, Trimble, a pioneer Lakota journalist and economic development promoter, believes that many prefer the IGT theory to having to actually address the problems that result from long-term unemployment and a hopelessness that comes from total dependency over many generations.

“We are concentrating so much of our energy on more abstract problems like intergenerational trauma as the root of our problems,” he said, “when families and communities have become totally dependent on relief programs, including aid to dependent children, food stamps, and surplus foods (commodities).”

In such complete dependency, the government has supplanted the family and the male population is most impacted, he said.

Trimble is an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. He received his elementary and high school education at the Holy Rosary Mission Indian School in Pine Ridge, So. Dak. (a type of boarding school) and received a B.F.A. degree from the University of South Dakota. Following service in the U.S. Army, he did further studies in journalism at the University of Colorado.

Trimble founded the Native American Journalists Association and is a past director of the National Congress of American Indians. During his tenure, the NCAI is generally credited with effective lobbying for enactment of the Indian Financing Act, the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, the Indian Self Determination Act, the Indian

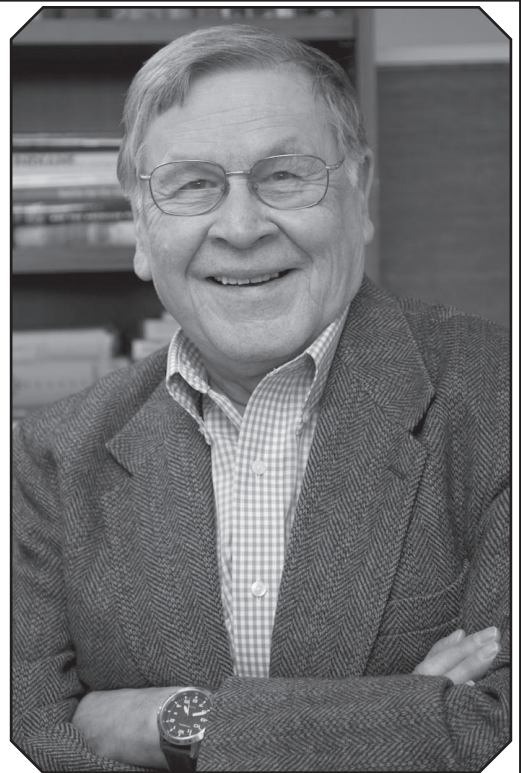
Religious Freedom Act, the Indian Child Welfare Act and unprecedented return of land to Indian tribes.

Also involved in international affairs for protection of indigenous rights and human rights in general, he represented U.S. Indian tribes at the charter meeting of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1975.

And in 1983, he was a U.S. delegate at the U. N. Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in Geneva, Switzerland followed by a U.S. delegate to the Human Rights Experts meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Accord) in Ottawa, Canada.

With an active interest in western history, Trimble served on the Board of Trustees of the Nebraska State Historical Society, three of those years as president. He also served on the board of the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation, and as a member of the State Historic Preservation Board. He was appointed by the Senate majority leader to the American Folklife Center Board of Trustees in the Library of Congress in 1996.

As president of the John G. Neihardt Foundation, Trimble established the Institute for Vision and Learning, a summer workshop in literature and writing for Native American high school students. He has been an instructor in Native American affairs at Fort Lewis



*Chuck Trimble, an Oglala Lakota, has been on the forefront of or leading positive changes for American Indians for more than 40 years. He will be examining issues and solutions during the conference.*

College in Durango, Colo., taught contemporary Indian affairs at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and also taught in the Nebraska State Historical Society's Nebraska Institute for Teachers. Over several semesters in 2006-2008, he served as interim director of the Institute of American Indian Studies at the University of South Dakota.

In retirement, he writes a periodic column for indianz.com and for Indian newspapers throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Trimble, who has received many national and state awards, honors and honorary degrees, lives in Omaha, Neb., with his wife, Anne. ✨

*Conference information is also available at [www.marisandoz.org](http://www.marisandoz.org).*



## Pilster Lecture: “Mari Sandoz: On Writing and Life” (cont.)

The presentation will feature video-taped excerpts of Mari Sandoz sharing her personal tips on how to write your story, with facilitation by Ron Hull, senior adviser to Nebraska Educational Telecommunications and professor emeritus of Broadcasting at UNL.

As a longtime friend of Sandoz, Hull worked on many NET television productions with her during the 1950's and 1960's. He will present a personal reminiscence 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 covers “gathering your material, beginning the work, choosing the point of view, revising and polishing and the beginning and ending.”

Sandoz said: “There was no



*A young Ron Hull in a discussion with Mari Sandoz on the set of a Nebraska Educational Television production.*

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, Hull said, 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.”

The second annual Pilster Great Plains Lecture series presented by the Mari Sandoz Heritage Society is supported by the Esther and Raleigh Pilster endowment. The series contributes to the educational mission of the Chadron State College and residents of the plains. ❀

## British Writer Studies Mari's Landscape

A British writer, Alan Wilkerson, has taken up residence in the Sandhills for six months during the summer. He has been fascinated by Mari Sandoz's non-fiction for more than 20 years, but in particular by the hold that the Plains environment exercised over her creative sensibilities.

“Since I was introduced to Sandoz' work, I've made over a dozen visits to Nebraska,” he said, “I've driven the back roads; camped, hiked and canoed; and cycled the length of the state from Rulo to Kimball, but it's the Sandhills that I keep coming back to.

Wilkerson said he finds the Sandhills lonely at times but captivating, bleak yet welcoming and always fascinating. He is living in an old hunting lodge on a cattle ranch south of Merriman, beside the Niobrara. He is writing a daily blog on his experiences, <http://walkinonnails.blogspot.com/>

“I'm interested in the way a writer like Sandoz had to escape the restrictions and hardships of life in the hills in order to flourish creatively, yet returned here constantly in her work,” Wilkerson said.

The writer said he is not sure what will emerge from this excursion. Any writing will combine reflections on the road he took to discovering Sandoz's work, the remarkable trajectory of her career and on his day-to-day experience of the landscape that shaped her. Some observations on ranch life may also be included.

“I'd like to achieve two things in particular: to capture the spirit of the place and to awaken some interest in Mari Sandoz in Britain,” Wilkerson said. “I think she remains seriously under-estimated as a writer on the West.” ❀

# When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

By Jane A. Wolfe

I discovered Mari Sandoz several times. In the early 1970's, *Cheyenne Autumn* was assigned reading in one of my college classes.

When I complained about the endless facts in the book, my mother suggested I read *Miss Morissa*. Mom, who was a registered nurse, often read work written by and about women who lived on the Great Plains.

No doubt, she enjoyed the book's connection to the medical profession. She also believed my sister and I should know about strong, intelligent women.

Although I was skeptical, I checked the book out from the public library. Sandoz's description of the independent young woman captured my attention.

Stories, like the one of the Native American couple giving the doctor a horse blanket after she treated their sick child, kept me reading. The following summer, I went back for other books by Sandoz.

In the middle 1990's, my extended family gathered at Fort Robinson for a few days. Before the reunion, I read *Sandhills Sundays* to learn more about Northwestern Nebraska and the people who lived in the area.

As Mom and I walked the parade ground, we talked about Sandoz's work. On the way back to Lincoln, my husband, children and I visited The Mari Sandoz room in Gordon, Neb., and then searched for her grave



*Pictured is Jane Wolfe and her daughter, Kate Collins, with whom she will share her love of Mari Sandoz.*

and marker. While my preteen children complained from the back seat, I soaked in the beauty of the grassland.

At home I bought a copy of Sandoz's *The Story Catcher* because I wanted to tell my children more about Native American culture. Not too long after that trip, my mother gave me a copy of the *Mari Sandoz: Story Catcher of the Plains*.

Most recently, I turned to Sandoz's work as an example of good nonfiction writing. After reading the World War I letters written by my then 19-year-old grandfather, I set out to write a story about the everyday life of his mother.

I read *Love Song to the Plains* because I wanted to know more about the central Nebraska area where my great grandparents made their home. When I learned my great grandmother traded one

of two dresses for a milk cow, I reread *Old Jules*.

In Sandoz's work, I found eloquent portraits of ordinary folks written with unflinching honesty. I also learned to appreciate Sandoz's persistence and meticulous research.

Although my mother passed away nine years ago, I have many pleasant memories of our conversations about writers and women's history. Since my grown daughter, Kate, and I talk about books we are reading, I realize I need to share Sandoz's story with her. Perhaps I'll give Kate a copy of *Miss Morissa* on her next birthday.

*Jane A. Wolfe is a wife, mother, and grandmother who lives in Lincoln, Neb. She writes, knits and quilts and is an Early Childhood Special Education Teacher with Lincoln Public Schools. ❀*



# When I Discovered Mari Sandoz . . .

By Diana Robinson

I first discovered Mari Sandoz through the writing of Jim Harrison. In his splendid book *The Road Home* (1998), his narrator Naomi says:

“My own family place was over southeast of Gordon, not all that far in Nebraska terms from where Mari Sandoz of Old Jules fame was raised... She was very much my hero by the time I reached my teens and the very thought that a local young woman could become an admired citizen of the world thrilled me.”

That comment made me curious about this Midwestern writer whose works I had never read and went online to order *Old Jules*. I quickly devoured everything of Mari Sandoz’s I could find:

*Cheyenne Autumn, These Were the Sioux, Sandhill Sundays and Other Recollections, Crazy Horse, Love Song to the Plains and Miss Morissa: Doctor of the Gold Trail.*

Not only did I enjoy her storytelling, I took a special delight in learning about northern Nebraska through her exceptionally detailed descriptions of the area. After reading *Sandhill Sundays* and *Old Jules* I felt an immediate connection with the people and landscape around Gordon, the Niobrara River and the Sandhills, even though I had never visited there before.

I continued to read Jim Harrison as well, and in his collection of essays entitled *Just Before Dark* (1999) his descriptions of the Nebraska Sandhills and Valentine, Neb., along with the writings of Mari Sandoz, made me want to see the area for myself.

Since I’m a photographer and love to search out new places to photograph, I drove from New York City to Valentine in the summer of 2008, armed with what I had read. I spent a week in Valentine taking photographs of the town, Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge, Smith Falls State Park, the Cowboy



As a result of her interest in Sandoz, *New Yorker*, Diana Robinson has photographed scenes in northwest Nebraska in summer and in winter.



Diana Robinson

Trail, Valentine Wildlife Refuge and the impressive Niobrara River. I drove along Route 20 and vowed to return to photograph the same scenes in the wintertime (which I later did).

Jim Harrison was absolutely right about Valentine and the Sandhills. I felt right at home there. I met Dave Sandoz at the Bunk House Restaurant in Valentine (a great place for pancakes) and spent time talking with him about his aunt.

I made friends in Valentine that have persisted on my return visits (2010 and 2011). The folks at the Plains Trading

Company Book Store on Main Street will tell you anything you want to know about the region (and they really know what they’re talking about). Duane Gudgel who owns the store gave me several good tips for places to photograph. However, my deepest friendship in Valentine has been with David Tehrani and his family.

On a recent visit this past January, the Tehranis surprised me with a connection leading back to Mari Sandoz. I had driven on Highway 20 to Gordon, Rushville, Hay Springs, Chadron and visited Mari’s gravesite. After I returned to Valentine, David

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## The Joy Of Learning Sandoz Conference

The Mari Sandoz Heritage Society conference will begin with breakfast and end mid-afternoon on Friday, Oct. 14.

To participate in round-table discussions, the conference committee suggests reading or re-reading Mari Sandoz's *Old Jules* and/or Helen Winter Stauffer's *Mari Sandoz: Story Catcher of the Plains*.

A Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center archive session will be held after the awards luncheon in the afternoon.

Conference registration materials are included and are available online at [www.marisandoz.org](http://www.marisandoz.org). ❀

## Discovered Sandoz (cont)

Tehrani told me that his mother is a Sandoz related to Mari.

When I met her, she gave me a photograph taken in 1913 at the Jules Sandoz homestead school, which showed his barn.

As a result of discovering and reading Mari Sandoz, I have come to know and love northern Nebraska, the Nebraska Sandhills, Highway 20 and the town and the people of Valentine.

*Diana Robinson was born in Columbus, Ohio, but moved to New York City to study and perform with her own jazz trio. While hanging out with jazz greats, Diana began photographing rehearsals and performances she attended and her love for photography soon overtook her love for performing jazz. <http://www.dianarobinsonphotography.com>. ❀*

# LSU Student Researches Old Jules at Sandoz Center



By Sarah Polak

Omaha Native, Marti Ossman, spent five weeks this summer at the Sandoz Center researching *Old Jules* for her master of Liberal Arts thesis on Jules Sandoz and the Kinkaiders. A Louisiana State University student, she said she was initially exposed to Sandoz's work in a class at the University of Nebraska at Omaha taught by Susan Maher, a Sandoz board member.

The honesty of Mari's work and her connection to the land stood out to Ossman, as did the unapologetic way that *Old Jules* had lived his life.



*Sarah Polak,  
center director*

"Once I saw Western Nebraska, I understood Mari's love of the land," said Ossman, who grew up in eastern Nebraska and never thought of the western side of Nebraska as being pretty.

"When I was looking through the Sandoz Center archives trying to clarify my thesis topic, I found a document that Caroline (Sandoz Pifer) had written," she said. "It was a wish list of things that Caroline wanted someone to write about, and when I read that something clicked."

Ossman discovered that Mari was guarded about her personal life.

"She was very aware of what she was writing, even destroying some of her works," she said. "Only those who were close to her will ever truly know her."

Ossman is a high school English teacher in Stonewall, La., where she is planning to integrate Sandoz into her high school literature curriculum.

"Students don't know much about this side of the world," she said. "She is important and doesn't get enough credit." ❀

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](http://www.csc.edu/sandoz), 1-800-CHADRON or email [spolak@csc.edu](mailto:spolak@csc.edu).

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