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BATTERED PIONEERS
JULES SANDOZ AND THE PHYSICAL ABUSE OF WIVES ON THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

BETSY DOWNEY

One of the most compelling aspects of Mari Sandoz’ biography of her father, Old Jules, is her account of the violence that Jules Sandoz inflicted upon his family. Jules Sandoz had left his native Switzerland in a fit of temper and ended up in northwestern Nebraska in 1884. Well educated and from a well-to-do professional family, he was nevertheless a character by any standards. He had a violent temper matched by unflagging paranoia and contentiousness. He was remarkable for personal filth and filthy stories. But he was also a gregarious center of community life, an outstanding horticulturalist, a voracious reader with cultivated musical tastes, and a tireless correspondent. He married four times; he deserted his first wife; the second and third left him. His fourth wife, Mary, bore him six children and stayed with him until his death in 1928. Jules physically abused at least three of his wives and the three oldest children. Mari, his eldest child, wrote Old Jules partly as a response to his deathbed request that she “write of his struggles as a locator, a builder of communities, a bringer of fruit to the Panhandle.” In writing that story she also wrote of the dark side of Jules Sandoz.1

Jules Sandoz’ abuse of his family represents a frontier characteristic that has been long overlooked. Until recently the frontier has been a largely male landscape, presented largely by males. During the last two decades, however, an increasing number of historians, many of them women, have started to examine American frontierswomen more closely. The number and significance of the frontierswomen they show us are great enough to constitute what Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson call a “Woman’s West,” or what Glenda Riley calls “a ‘female frontier’ . . . shaped . . . by gender considerations.” Many aspects of the male and the female frontiers overlapped, of course; one area

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of overlap was violence. Susan Armitage believes that this violence was not simply the public violence so often associated with the male frontier, but was part of the domestic life of the frontier wife, a private violence in need of further investigation.\(^2\)

This paper uses Old Jules as a case study of wife beating on the American frontier, putting Mari Sandoz’ biography of her father in social and historical perspective. Violence toward wives has been a part of American life at least since the first white settlements of British North America. By the 1870s, despite public condemnation, it was so widespread in the eastern United States that many reformers regarded it as a problem needing immediate attention. I argue that the factors that fostered Jules Sandoz’ violence to his wives are virtually identical to—and in some ways more intense than—those that fostered it in the eastern United States in Sandoz’ time and across the United States today. I find evidence in Old Jules itself, in women’s accounts of their western experiences, and in other records that such violence was not unique to the Sandoz household but was part of the pattern of family life in frontier settlements.\(^3\)

**Definitions of Violence**

Despite the pervasiveness of violence against wives, defining the problem and explaining its causes are complex and controversial. Many sociologists use the terms “family” or “domestic” violence to describe the abuse that took place in the Sandoz household. They believe that wife abuse is part of a larger pattern of violence within the family and society in general, part of the way some families interact, with both spouses and children as participants. They relate “the frequency or severity of family violence . . . to the frequency or severity of other types of violence in a society.”\(^4\) According to the “family violence” approach, such specific factors as the individual’s personality, personal experiences and development, and ability to relate to others, as well as a variety of social/economic factors also contribute to domestic violence. Violence occurs in families who are not poor, but is more likely to occur where there is poverty with its attendant stress and frustration. Status problems, often linked with poverty and low educational skills, may contribute to domestic violence. So too may the “status inconsistency” that “occurs when a man’s educational background is much higher than his occupational attainment.”\(^5\) Alcohol and drugs are frequently part of domestic violence. Finally, conclude sociologists Gelles and Straus, “people hit family members because they can.” The home provides an outlet for stress and frustration that is impossible in the world outside the home, where there is likely to be a more powerful audience and where the costs of violence would be unacceptably high.\(^6\)

Feminist sociologists criticize the terms “domestic” or “family” violence and the assumptions behind them. They insist that a pervasive attitude of male superiority, which transcends specific psychological and social factors, is responsible for the persistent belief that certain kinds of violence are permissible in the home. Wife beating, writes Linda Gordon, is essentially a gender issue; we must consider “violence between men and women as an aspect of overall social relations between the sexes, particularly as they are experienced within the family.” The feminist approach argues that violence in the family, and indeed in society at large, derives from males attempting to assert and maintain power over others. Feminist scholars emphasize that violence within the family is initiated most frequently and significantly by males, that this violence is most frequently intended to keep females subordinate and submissive to male dominance, and that male violence has the most serious physical consequences. “Wife abuse” better expresses this male-dominated pattern of violence than the terms “family” or “domestic” violence, which imply more equality and reciprocity and make the causes of violent behavior less connected to specifically masculine behavior. The term wife abuse, which covers actions ranging from repeated verbal abuse to marital
rape, is too inclusive for my purposes. Although Jules Sandoz was apparently guilty of all these, Mari's focus is on the beatings her father inflicted on his wives, particularly on her mother, and this will be my focus as well. 7

Both the domestic violence and feminist approaches are useful in explaining the wife abuse that appears in Old Jules and on the frontier. Following the feminist approach, I will argue in this paper that the violence found in the Sandoz household and across the frontier was rooted in fundamental ideas about the superiority of males. Yet not every husband in this male-dominated society was a wife beater. I find the explanations used by domestic violence sociologists useful in explaining why some men became wife beaters while others did not. Wife abuse seems to have been encouraged by specific personal/psychological and social/environmental characteristics found in Sandoz, other frontiersmen, and frontier society. My focus on these personal and social issues along with gender distinguishes my paper from Melody Graulich's work on Old Jules. Graulich writes as a feminist literary critic. Taking an approach similar to the feminist sociologists, she argues that the wife abuse seen in Old Jules resulted from a widespread belief in male power and the right of men to dominate women. She devotes more attention than I do to the effects that the power struggles between Jules and Mary had on Mari, and she does not explore the other factors that contribute to wife abuse. 8

Late nineteenth-century Europe and America were male-dominated societies. Despite changes in the role and status of women, males continued to control the instruments and institutions of power, both public and private. Many women, as well as men, believed that this was the way it should be. Linda Gordon thus found nineteenth-century men "accustomed to supremacy, acculturated to expect service and deference from women." When this was not properly forthcoming some men—perhaps unskilled at negotiating, perhaps with explosive tempers—became wife beaters. Violence brought the desired results. "Beatings kept women from leaving, kept them providing sexual, housework, and child care services." It kept them silent, submissive, obedient. Some women, however, refused to play the expected role; thus, "wife-beating arose not just from subordination, but also from contesting it." Sometimes women resorted to violence, but often their response was verbal, provoking violence in an already explosive situation. Moreover, many women were ambivalent about their husbands' violence and "did not seem to believe that they had a 'right' to freedom from physical violence"; they accepted it even though society publicly condemned it. 9

Patriarchal concepts of the family, closely linked to ideas about gender roles, contributed to wife abuse. Although Robert Griswold and others have noted a trend toward companionate marriage, nineteenth-century "family structure was, after all, patriarchal," writes Glenda Riley, "with its attendant implications of the male's right to dominate a female, control her, and coerce her." 10 Adherence to the patriarchal model varied among different individuals and social and ethnic groups but persisted especially among first-generation immigrants many of whom, like Jules Sandoz, came from societies where patriarchal traditions were stronger than they were in late nineteenth-century America. Elizabeth Pleck found that there was more violence in these families and that, "compared with women born in the United States, immigrant wives were more willing to accept the traditional authority of the husband," even when it included beatings. Moreover, Americanization tended to frustrate men who resented any erosion of their traditional authority, including wife beating, and first generation immigrant women seemed more unwilling than native-born women to resort to divorce as a solution to their marital problems. This linking of immigrants with wife beating must be approached cautiously, however. Linda Gordon warns that the poverty and alienation of the immigrants were just as important as their ethnic origins in contributing to violence against wives. And she warns that the early reformers, who often had
strong social and ethnic biases against the “New” immigrants, might not have understood the complexity of the factors that produced the violence of their clients.\textsuperscript{11}

Concepts of gender, the family, and the home contributed to problems in using the legal justice system against wife abusers. Abusive husbands could be prosecuted for assault and battery. Sometimes they were convicted, but the courts often supported the batterers. A Missouri court in 1899 proclaimed that the husband “‘is to be the ruler of the house’”; a woman whose husband slapped her for contradicting him was more “‘guilty than he for trying to contradict and thwart her husband’s will.’”\textsuperscript{12} Often when cases did come to trial the victims themselves, especially if they had children, asked for dismissal, generally for economic reasons; a jailed husband brought home no wages. That same economic dependency, then and now, ruled out divorce as an escape for many women and left them captive to their abusing husbands.

Elizabeth Pleck found that late nineteenth-century reformers also were hampered by a widespread belief in the sanctity of “family privacy, conjugal and parental rights, and family stability. . . . Intervention in the family was viewed as problematic, a violation of family intimacy.” One pioneer woman told of an abused neighbor whose son appealed to the narrator’s father for help. Her father hesitated: “You can’t walk into a neighbour’s house and tell him what he has to do.” The husband would not let him in; the woman died. The narrator concluded: “It was too bad. . . . but you can’t break down a neighbour’s door to come in.” Law enforcement agencies and courts also hesitated to interfere in a “family matter.” They often dismissed “wife-beating as a petty crime which did not warrant prosecution,” and preferred to concentrate on “offenses of a graver character.”\textsuperscript{13} Using law enforcement agencies and courts must have been especially difficult on the frontier where, as Robert Utley points out, law officers, courts, and even jails tended to be underfunded, inefficient, and inadequate for the conditions on the frontier and the nature of its populace. Pleck concludes that “American legal justice in the Victorian age was mostly ineffectual.” The victims of domestic violence could expect little help from legal institutions unless they were willing to resort to divorce, which an increasing number of women did as an escape from abuse they could no longer tolerate.\textsuperscript{13}

\section*{Jules Sandoz as Abuser}

When we turn to the world of Jules Sandoz we find that the Nebraska Panhandle provided an ideal setting for factors conducive to family violence to intersect with a man already predisposed toward violence. As Melody Graulich has so clearly demonstrated, Jules Sandoz brought strong attitudes of male superiority and patriarchal authority to his family. These attitudes were very likely a part of the cultural baggage he took with him from Switzerland. Sandoz expected, to use Linda Gordon’s words, “supremacy, . . . service and deference from women.”\textsuperscript{14} He consistently belittled the worth of women and was notorious for his “smutty” stories and his insistence that women’s function was to serve men sexually, as well as in other ways. It is likely that he was guilty of repeated marital rape. He complained after Mary had banished him from her bed, “making him sleep alone,” that “a man needs a woman as he needs the earth, for relief” (414). Late in life he lamented that “there is nobody to carry on my work. . . . If the Marie was a man she might—as a woman she is not worth a damn” (418). He would not listen to women or take their advice unless he had convinced himself it was his own idea. Women were liars, complainers, deceivers, useless unless they were serving men.

Sandoz romanticized his old girlfriend Rosalie, but the real women in his life were little more than objects to be used, as one would use a farm animal or tool. “‘Every man need a good woman,’” he told his neighbors—somebody to take care of him, do the chores, lend a strong back to the tasks that could not be done alone (24). Once, when Rosalie had written to say again that she would not come to America, “he
FIG. 1. Old Jules and Mary Sandoz, 1926. Photograph courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society.
cursed her, . . . all women, and spent a lurid
night in Chadron with the worst one he could
find. And then, because his need for a wife had
become great, he asked her to marry him" (95).
In Mari's story, it was Jules's wives and children
who did most of the physical labor on their
homesteads; he was busy reading, hunting, talk­
ing, resting. Yet Jules refused to share the credit.
"I had to fight for it alone—for all I got" (401).
Mari records it as a noteworthy occasion when,
"at last, he said we" (388).

If companionate marriage was a trend in the
larger American society of his day, it was not
for Jules Sandoz. Within his family he was to
have complete authority and control. "Women
who won't obey their husbands are worthless," he
proclaimed (95). "I learn my kids to obey instantly
or I lick hell out of them" (284). The
circumstances of his marriage to Estelle are not
clear, but the marriages between Jules and his
last three wives did not begin with any sense
of affection or partnership. He and Henriette,
them Emelia, and finally Mary, were strangers
when they married, brought together solely out
of need. It was Jules alone who made the
decisions in the family, without discussion and
often without warning. He had complete
control over finances. When, after they were well
established on the Niobrara he decided to move
the family to the Sandhills, he hid the news
from Mary until it was time to make the move,
then announced it as an edict.

He exacted a terrible price for disobedience,
as his family was to learn again and again. "I
learn the goddamn balky woman to obey me," he
raged as he beat Mary with a wire whip. "I
learn her to obey me if I got to kill her!" (230).
The last time he beat Mari, he used "a choke-
cherry club, broke a bone in her hand" (382).
When Jules's first wife Estelle had refused to
obey him, he "closed her mouth with the flat
of his long, muscular hand" and left her (5).
He beat Henriette until she could stand it no
longer; she retreated into silence and submit­
sion and finally fled. Rather than submit to his
abuse, Emelia left at once. But Mary and the
children suffered Jules's fists and feet and nearby
objects repeatedly, until finally he was too old
to exact their obedience and the children were
old enough to fight back and to flee.

Several factors in Jules's own character put
him at risk to become a battering husband. His
very presence in Nebraska was the result of an
uncontrollable temper that raged so often that
his daughter wondered if it was "peace he could
not endure or was there something in him that
made him destroy as he built?" (245). No one
could work with him or hunt with him. "Some­
times," wrote Mari, "it seemed that Jules's purpose
in life was to quarrel with everybody he knew" (313). Jules was no-
torious in the Sandhills for his sharp and abusive
tongue, and one old neighbor wrote that "since
he never walked the street without his long
barrel rifle ready for instant action, some saw
him as a potential killer." But Sandoz appar­
tently never resorted to actual physical violence
with his neighbors, preferring verbal abuse and
warning or harassing shots, and withdrawing
from public confrontation before it resulted in
physical exchange or bodily harm. Only twice
in Mari's account did he actually come close to
pulling the trigger in anger. The first was late
in his life when, sorely provoked in his own
home, he nearly shot a neighbor. He came "very
near to murder" that time, "and it left him
strangely weary and old" (312). The second
time it was even closer and more chilling. Rifle
aimed at another neighbor, he was actually pull­
ing the trigger when Mari "struck the barrel
upward." The shot went into the air; Jules drove
another cartridge into the chamber and "whirled
upon his daughter. For a long moment the two
frozen eyes looked down the blued barrel an
inch from her chest" (378). Jules finally lowered
the gun and limped off.

One gets the sense from Mari's account that
Jules had remarkable control over his public
outbursts, knowing exactly how far he could go
and where he must stop to keep his neighbors' reac­tions limited. It was as if he were playing
a game whose object was to show how dangerous he could be if pushed. "I'd a thought they'd a shot you years ago," a settler once remarked. "They were afraid of me," Jules responded. He had achieved his goal, for, as Mari wrote: "It was n't worth the risk to mix with the old crack shot" (297). Only within his family did he actually go over the edge and lose control. This public control and private loss of control is frequent behavior with wife beaters.16 Even in his rages Jules, like so many batterers, realized that the costs of public damage or harm would be unacceptable; there were too many fists, too many guns, and too many matches in the Panhandle. Even there, the law was near enough that it often—or at least sometimes—caught up with murderers.

As well as a violent temper, Jules had problems of self-image and status. He was a cripple in a land that required a strong and able body. A crushed ankle shortly after his arrival in the Panhandle left him "crippled Old Jules for all time now, hurt and defiant" (55). The accident and its results haunted him for the rest of his life. Mari emphasizes how much it scarred him emotionally and diminished his self-esteem. Although it gave him an excuse to avoid physical labor, it must also have contributed immeasurably to his rages, limiting his freedom of motion and constantly reminding him how little control he had over his fate or even his own body. Adding to his problem of self-image was the "status inconsistency" noted by Gelles and Straus. Jules's life on the frontier was far different from what it should have been. From professional upper-middle-class origins, and in his early years a dandy and a gentleman, he was educated for medicine, well-read, and in correspondence with lawyers, doctors (including Walter Reed, who had saved his crushed ankle), and public officials on up through President Theodore Roosevelt.

Though he was regarded ultimately by his neighbors as a "big man" (398) and was posthumously honored by the University of Nebraska for his achievements in horticulture, he was not successful in any usual sense. Poverty was a constant problem. He could not keep the post office stations that the government awarded him. His attempts at politics were unsuccessful. The same neighbors who saw his importance thought he was "unconfinably crazy" (172). Charley O'Kieffe wrote that "to most of us who so frequently saw him striding down the middle of Main Street, he presented a figure both pathetic and formidable. To others he was only a freak." He was notorious among his neighbors for his personal dirtiness; old friends from Switzerland seeing him were shocked. "Where then was the dandy who must maintain the style of a gentleman's son in Zurich? It was almost to laugh! . . . 'Must one then become so coarse as the land? '" the wife boldly asked (235). Frustrated he once roared at Mary: "You want me, an educated man, to work like a hired tramp?!" And he "threw her against the wall" (199). He was "the patriarch of pioneers in the Northwest," but he was at the same time one of the community cranks (312).

**Pioneer Life and Abuse**

In addition to Jules Sandoz' personal make-up, many factors in the harsh circumstances of pioneer life in Nebraska contributed to the physical violence of the Sandoz homestead. These things are all part of the profile of domestic violence, unique to neither Jules Sandoz nor his time and place. Scholars continue to debate the role of the frontier in causing and representing American violence. Nevertheless it is clear, as Robert Utley has observed, that, "whether more or less violent than elsewhere, the frontier was assuredly a violent place." W. Eugene Hollon concurs: "almost everything that has been said about it [violence] in relation to our frontier heritage contains large elements of truth." Violence was an integral part of both the Sandhills and the Sandoz family. The pages of Old Jules and the newspaper accounts Mari Sandoz used as her sources are filled with episodes of violence for, as Mari wrote: "War and
wholesale bloodshed stalked very close to the Panhandle” (326). On Jules’s first night in western Nebraska he witnessed a barroom murder. Someone once shot a lighted lamp out of his second wife’s hands. His own brother was later murdered by a cattleman’s hired killer. The introduction of sheep brought “war with the cattlemen... conflicts, lawsuits, destruction of property, and finally murder” (226-27). Guns were as much a part of Jules’s normal attire as was the old overshoe he wore to protect his crippled foot. There seems to have been as much use of violence as of litigation to settle quarrels in the Panhandle. The rifle was, as Helen Stauffer has suggested, an important tool for backing up legal rights. 

Economic stress and poverty were continual problems in the Sandoz home. In selecting the Niobrara area and the Sandhills of northwestern Nebraska to build a future based on a small farm and orchard, Jules virtually sentenced himself to a battle against the elements and poverty that he could neither control nor beat. Even a man less paranoid would find there a host of formidable enemies. There were the ranchers and sheepmen who wanted the range to themselves and would do anything in their power to keep the settlers off. There was the law, often in the hands of the enemy, often powerless. There was the government, disinterested in the feuds of the Panhandle; and the railroads, which too often did not come where they were wanted; and the banks, quick to lend at high interest and quicker to foreclose when payments were missed.

And always there was the weather, which was the least controllable of all and which added to the power of the other enemies. Predictable only in its violence and its extremes, nature seemed as determined to prove its invincibility as Jules was determined to triumph over it. While winter blizzards took a recurring toll on his stock, the summers were probably a greater problem, for rain was a constant—and frequently absent—need. The drought cycles and Jules’s violence seemed to run parallel. When there was rain it was better, for Jules and for the whole household. But even when the rains came, the weather could be fickle. One spring the weather was mild and the orchards lush with young fruit and promise. Then came the hail, pounding the corn into the ground, stripping the trees of foliage and fruit, and even beating the bark off the trees. The Niobrara and Sandhills were, in the last analysis, ill suited for the small farming to which Jules was committed. These areas “for years had been looked upon as the Creator’s waste material dumping ground,” wrote one Nebraskan. Another, who had been “in the Farm and Ranch loan business for over 30 years,” concluded that “the Sand Hill country of Neb. would be the last place in the world that I would go to, to make a living as a farmer.” In such a climate, there could be, for the horticulturist, no certainty of success or reward, only of stress and frustration.

The pounding of the weather and Jules’s poor business sense brought grinding poverty and increased the stress on everyone. Though in later years the farm prospered, especially after the emphasis shifted from farming to cattle ranching, in the early years Mary could hope “for nothing more than that her children might have enough to eat and someday have shoes between their feet and the iron-hard ground of winter” (219). She was such a hard worker that she made other women “seem lazy, impractical and irresponsible” and was back in the fields hoeing ten days after the birth of her sixth child (221). But Jules was an unwise and impulsive businessman and an unpredictable worker who was apt to be reading, hunting, or talking when there was work to be done. Worse yet, in his zeal to populate the West, he brought a constant stream of guests to the home to eat up their meager rations. Too often “there was no flour, no sugar, no kerosene for months. Then Jules revived the skunk-oil lamp of his batching days and Mary ground wheat in the hand gristmill until the perspiration streamed from her veining temples” (222). And she would nag in despair and he would hit her to shut her up.

The privacy of Jules’s frontier homestead provided both dependents he could control and
a setting where his violence could rage unchecked. In some homes the presence of many children in close quarters provided enough of an audience to deter violence.21 Such was not the case in the Sandoz household. Even with Mary's mother and sister living with them, and a growing number of children, Jules's violence was frequent and physical. Once he beat Mary with a four-foot wire whip so badly that, with face and hand streaming blood, she tried to poison herself. While her mother knocked the strychnine from her hand and mouth "and hidden far under the bed the three children cowered like frightened little rabbits," Jules burst in again screaming "I learn her to obey me if I got to kill her!" (230). This audience was a powerless one, incapable of halting his violence. Moreover, the frontier, with its isolated families and remote settlements offered much more privacy than modern society. Jules Sandoz' nearest neighbors were usually a mile or more away, providing him all the privacy he needed to create a reign of terror in his household. There were no outsiders to hear or witness his violence. The victims could not get help; the neighbors could not hear. It is not clear from Mari's account how much the neighbors knew of the violence in the Sandoz household. They certainly knew something of it, but Jules had little to fear from their intervention. There was enough violence in other Sandhill families that they were probably surprised only by the extent of Jules's violence, and they very likely shared the general social reluctance to intrude in family matters. While Mari reports some head-shaking and mutterings among the neighbors, they wisely hesitated to invade Jules Sandoz' privacy.

Jules's family could do little to raise the costs of his violence to unacceptable levels. His second and third wives had been able to leave him because they had borne him no children. Henriette who "did not intend to become a burden-bearing woman" also had a little money of her own which she kept from him and used to establish her own land claim, "Henriette's place," which provided her with a threat and then finally an escape when his treatment of her became unbearable (102). In June 1892, Henriette filed for divorce on grounds of cruelty. She charged that on four occasions Jules, without provocation, beat her and caused bodily injury. Once he beat her with his fists; three times he used other objects: a shoe, a club, and a horse-whip. The divorce was granted.22 Emelia, the third wife, had no money (she came from Switzerland on money he had sent); even so, within two weeks she had escaped to work in a hotel in the nearest town. But Mary was not so lucky. "Brought up in the tradition of a lifetime of subordination to man," she had turned over all her money to him (187). "Now there was no escape. She had nothing" (190). Soon she was pregnant. "With a baby she could never leave Jules, not so long as she could stay at all, so that was settled" (212). Like so many battered wives, she was trapped with a growing family in grinding poverty. She would live with him until he died.

**Rewards to the Abuser**

Submission and obedience on the part of his family were Jules Sandoz' rewards for his violence. His wives had much to nag about: the drudgery, the poverty, his habits, the weather. Jules's fists and feet soon put a stop to the nagging. The second wife Henriette "was intelligent, quick to recognize the potency of silence" (102). "Trying very hard to live in peace," Mary, the fourth wife, learned to keep her comments to herself, to avoid "crossing him or bothering him for help in anything she could possibly do alone" (199, 230-31). The children, too, were helpless victims who had to endure his physical and verbal violence until they became old enough to move out. Young Jules was stubborn and was beaten repeatedly, but Mari said she "learned conformity early" (266). "When the little Marie was three months old and ill with summer complaint, her cries awakened Jules. Towering dark and bearded in the lamplight, he whipped the child until she lay blue and trembling as a terrorized small animal. . . . The night's work was never to be undone," she wrote,
and she “hid away within herself” after that (215-16). Trapped by their poverty and their remoteness from better circumstances, their survival lay in remaining silent and docile. Jules’s violence brought him other rewards besides his family’s silence. Family patterns were organized around him, and family members tried to cater to him as much as possible to avoid unleashing his wrath. There were few extras in his impoverished household, but he always got the best of what there was.

THE VICTIM’S RESPONSE

The effects of Jules’s abuse on his family were predictable. The violence begat violence; this violence was “the violence of self-defense,” and, as is the case with most such violence, it never matched that of Jules in its extent or damage.23 Henriette “sometimes gave the man as good as he sent, both in curses and in blows” (133). Long before Jules’s death, Mary Sandoz began to mix her “resolution to make her man as comfortable as possible, with her determination to send as good as she got” (279). She too “learned to strike back” (397). (On at least one occasion Mary took out her own frustration and anguish by hitting Mari.) And finally, the children learned to stand up to Old Jules—when their father’s aging and their own growth had eliminated at least the physical inequality. “Before the desperate young eyes, the tight bony fists, he fell away. ‘Sons of bitches!’ he called them” (397). But their violence finally was rewarded by his modified behavior.

The hardships, and even the physical abuse, that Mary Sandoz had to endure were shared by many women on the frontier. Women coped with them, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, in a variety of ways. Glenda Riley has concluded that women’s ability to deal with harsh frontier and domestic conditions was not dependent so much on their own feelings toward themselves and their men as on three factors of their situations: “their ability to create a rich social life from limited resources, the tremendous reward they derived from their roles as cultural conservators, and their willingness and ability to bond to each other.”24 While Mary Sandoz clearly emerges from the pages of her daughter’s book as a survivor, and as a silent hero, she is also portrayed as a victim who had virtually no control over her own life. Whatever networking resources Mary had were not so much the result of her own individuality and development as they were of Jules’s activities. Jules discouraged her from visiting off the homestead and discouraged her from activities that were not initiated by him or that did not include him. He did not allow her to create a life of her own outside her battered household, and this was part of her abuse. According to Mari, Jules did his best to deny her a social life. Early in their marriage they went to a local dance. Mary, who loved dancing, had a wonderful time until Jules, who could not dance, took his gun and went home in a temper. She flung her curly head and said it made no difference to her. But as soon as she could she slipped away. She found Jules sitting in the kitchen, his rifle across his knee. When he saw her in the doorway he arose and cursed her until he was dry as a bleached bone. With tears marking indelible lines down her cheeks Mary put the blue-sprigged dress away. She never went to another dance. (198)

Jules’s jealousy extended beyond the threat posed by male rivals at dances. Other women also challenged his control. Early in their marriage, the news got out in the community that Mary

was neat and quick as a blue-wing teal and gay when she could be. The neighbor women invited her to their homes, asked her to join their Kaffeeklatsche. But Jules rose in anger when she would go, and so she faced him with tear-swollen eyes across the table for a meal or two. (195)
Her daughter never mentions the *Kaffeeklatsches* again. Like so many things for this battered pioneer, the pleasure was probably not worth the pain. Nor does Mari mention any of the other usual forms of women's networking: quilting bees and sewing circles, aid in times of illness and death, participation in all the activities of a wedding. Largely absent, too, are the independent friendships with other women that Glenda Riley found so important among the plainswomen. Given his attitude toward the *Kaffeeklatsches*, Jules probably exacted too high a price for these as well. What could have been an invaluable survival network seems to have been denied by the man who made it necessary.

If Mary Sandoz had her own social life or network of friends outside her home we have little evidence of it from *Old Jules*. Nor is there much evidence in Mari's account of the family that her mother was able to play a significant role as a cultural conservator, a role that Riley sees as one of the constructive responses of women to their harsh frontier conditions. Jules apparently preempted this role for himself with his books and his wide-ranging interests and hobbies.

Although she did not have a support network of female friends outside her home, Mary did have some significant support from her family and probably, also, from the wives of Jules's brothers and a few of his closest friends. Her mother seems to have been most important to her, coming to live in a lean-to adjacent to Jules's house a year or so after their marriage and staying there until her death some years later. She could not stop Jules's violence, but she was a support to her daughter against his rampages. On the day that Jules beat Mary so badly with the wire whip, it was the grandmother who cursed Jules: "'You!' the grandmother cried, shaking her fist against him. 'For you there is a place in hell!' . . . Then she led Mary out of the house" to a secret place in the brush that was her refuge (230-31). For a while Mary's younger sister, nineteen-year-old Suzette, also lived with them and provided not only assistance and companionship but much needed gaiety. When the neighboring bachelors came courting there were pleasant evenings of teasing and the songs of the old country.

Then they frankly wept as they laughed and drank of the sweet wine. Ah, it was like the old homeland here in Jules's kitchen. Perhaps they danced a little on the scrubbed, rough boards. Sometimes Mary joined in, until her face flushed and Jules glowered from his chair at the stove. (212-13)

Suzette's leaving and their mother's death must have left a great and unfillable void in Mary's life.

Even though she was not able to develop her own social network outside the home, within her home Mary Sandoz was definitely in the center of a social whirlwind, for thanks to Jules there was a constant and stimulating flow of activity around them. Jules was the focal point of this activity with his post offices; his streams of visitors complaining and plotting in the endless conflicts between settlers, cattlemen, sheepmen, and government; his new recruits to the country; his horticultural experiments; and his flow of correspondence. In their later, more prosperous days, there were neighborhood picnics in the orchard, socials, and dances in the new barn. Jules discussed his interests and activities with Mary, or, more probably, proclaimed on them, for he was not one to seek or take the advice of women. So she stayed abreast of what was happening in her community and the world. Even with Jules on center stage, she could associate with other people and, at least if they spoke German, join in their conversations. She had a hard life filled with the drudgery of hard work, but there was no monotony. "Jules was difficult, but he was intelligent. He ridiculed all that she held right and sweet, but he was always interesting" (196).
itself, a form of abuse. Jules did the work he wanted to; Mary did the work he wanted her to or that she had to do to feed her family. Jules, of course, took credit for it and denied credit to Mary. While the constant stream of guests made more work—and worry when times were extra hard—she could take comfort in that work, especially with the welcome visits of old friends, for they made life more pleasant and even Jules seemed more mellow at times. One other important result was that “if she worked hard enough and long enough, she could sleep” (196).

Like so many things in her life, Mary's children were a bittersweet experience. Pregnancy increased the physical discomforts of daily routine; six pregnancies took their toll on her strength. But with a baby in her arms she was generally safe from Jules's fists and with a baby at her breast she felt she could share her bed with him and cheat the stork, for a while at least. Children, as Jules well knew, were an asset when it came to farm life. Mary, too, counted on her children for help. Mari, the eldest, had so much responsibility for the younger children that the daughter was nearly as upset as her mother at the last pregnancy; neither could bear the thought of the additional work. Although the children were an invaluable asset to farm life, there is evidence that they added to Mary's problems. She must have suffered greatly to see them verbally and physically abused by their father, knowing that intervention was not merely futile but actually provocative. As they got older and began to lash back at their father she was “caught between husband and children” (368).

Soothing Jules after one outburst she complained: “Always I have to eat the dirt between you and the children” (382). She stood up for them when she could, however. When young Jules ran off and his father threatened to retrieve him and send him to reform school, she had threats of her own: “I'll tell them how you treat them and me! You'll see—” (397).

“The truly unique and sad aspect of intimate violence,” Gelles and Straus believe, “is that violence is experienced by people who profess love for one another. . . . We are tied to our abusers by the bonds of love, attachment, and affection.” In the last analysis there was literally a love-hate relationship within the Sandoz household. Mary, and later the whole family, stuck it out because they had to, but they also adjusted; they were all survivors who fought to make the unendurable endurable. In Old Jules Mari gives us some evidence of these ties. Most notable was the Christmas when Jules’s mother died and he extravagantly used a significant amount of his inheritance on a record player, with Mary and the children joyfully joining in the selection and playing of records. “Here, for once, differences in taste and temperament were countenanced—more, encouraged.” Here too, in the ordering and the playing of the records “was a good time for all of them” (336-37). During the holidays with the phonograph, Jules whirled Mary around the floor a few times as the neighbors danced to the records. “Before this,” wrote Mari, “we had never seen him even put an arm around her.” But though the music brought rare fun and family unity, it was a strain on family resources. The money was needed for other things; it also brought “more company than ever,” and “all this company meant work for Mary, endless cooking and baking” (337-38). And once when Mari was careless closing doors, the pig got in the house and ate dozens of the wax cylinders. For that carelessness, she wrote, “I got the worst whipping of my life.”

There are few occasions that approach the warmth of the response to the phonograph, yet there are other suggestions of a family tied together by something beyond economics and terror. There was one other memorable Christmas with gifts and decorations sent by friends, and there were the evenings with Suzette and her suitors. Mary and Jules shared a pride in his horticultural achievements. It took six pregnancies before Mary banished him from her bed. When their first child (Mari) was born in May of 1896, the first thing Mary saw after waking from her morphine-induced sleep was Jules “looking anxiously in upon her through the window and his arms were filled with plum blossoms” (212). There were at least occasional
peace offerings from Jules. After the beating that drove her near suicide Jules bought her a dress—though not in the calico she loved. In later life, Jules's violent temper and Mary's nagging sometimes mellowed into teasing. And twice, once when he thought he was dying of a snake bite and then on his deathbed, he let slip to Mari how important his wife was to him. “Your mama’s a good woman,” he told her as he battled the venom. “You'll get like her. Marry a farmer and help build up the country” (332).

At the end, he asked for Mary. “Where's Mama?” The sick man asked from his dozing. ‘I want Mama.’ . . . ‘A good woman, your mama’” (423). Then he said a few words about some planting and bringing in new settlers to the Sandhills, and he died.

Although Mari writes in the foreword to Old Jules that “there was apparently no affection” between her and her father (viii), there were moments with the children when Jules acted almost like a normal father, a friend and teacher, and Mari admitted that she, too, had special moments with him. Jules “told her many fine stories when the others were n’t around” (329). He took her quail hunting, took her on his visits to the Indians, showed her “fossils, pottery, and remains of village sites along the Niobrara.”

Jules, who once beat the infant Mari until he was exhausted, shared the vigil with Mary when the daughter was snow-blinded, giving her morphine for her pain until he dared not give more, changing her cold packs until his own aching hands could stand it no longer, limping in to check on her “a dozen times” in the night (363). He was restless and fretful when the children were gone, especially if horses were involved; he could not bear to think of them crippled. And though they all ran away, they all came back; only Mari did not settle near him as an adult, but even she was there to keep vigil with him as he was dying.

CORROBORATING ACCOUNTS

Mari Sandoz left home with an enormous and understandable amount of anger at her father and at her mother as well. Old Jules reflects her enduring ambivalence about her childhood. Though Old Jules is a biography, Mari was highly selective in it, focusing on those qualities of her father and her family life that were most important to her: his vision, his love of the land, his violence, her sense of rejection by both parents. Despite this selectivity, Old Jules remains an important document for the study of the female frontier. We have corroborating evidence for Jules's character, for the conditions of life, and for many of the major incidents of the Sandoz family’s life. An important source is the short memoir Son of Old Jules, written by Mari’s brother Jules with the aid of their sister Caroline Sandoz Pifer. Caroline writes in their introduction that “this book is meant to supplement, not contradict, the book Old Jules.”

Four things stand out in Son of Old Jules. The first is that, despite what Mari wrote about the lack of affection between her and Old Jules, young Jules wrote of his father that “it was Mari he favored, when he favored anyone.” Second, Son of Old Jules shows the Sandoz family, mother and children, as part of a much more expansive social life than Mari portrays. Relatives, neighboring adults, and the children’s school and neighborhood friends seem, in young Jules’s account, to have brought more of a sense of community to the Sandoz homestead and more of an independent life for Mary than we see in Mari’s account. Mary is seen more as an individual apart from Old Jules, though certainly dominated by him. Third, young Jules showed more clearly the affection in the Sandoz family—between the parents themselves and the parents and children. Finally, there is Old Jules’s abuse. While his temper and the beatings he inflicted on the family are less central to young Jules’s account than to Mari’s, they still are powerful. His father “never considered” Mary’s interests, wrote young Jules.

She was to do what he said, and that was that. One day I heard a ruckus in the house and ran down from the barn to look. Papa had Mama by the throat up against the wall,
choking her. She was blue in the face and shaking, limp like a rag doll. I screamed as loud as I could that he was killing my Mama, and it got his attention. I thought he was going to come after me next, but he let go, and she crumpled to the floor in a heap. . . . I vowed that if I ever got big enough, I’d give him such a threshing he’d never forget when he tried such a thing again, cripple or no cripple.10

Jules Sandoz, Jr. gives us no reason to question the truthfulness of his sister’s account of their battering father.

The experiences of the Sandoz family were not unique. The abuse of western women was noteworthy enough to attract public attention well before the days of Sandoz. In the 1862 report of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Dr. W. W. Hall, citing alarming statistics on the expanding population of rural insane asylums, asked why American farmers, and particularly farm wives, were “more liable to insanity” than other Americans. The answer, he believed, lay in the treatment of farm wives by their husbands.

It is perhaps safe to say, that on three farms out of four the wife works harder, endures more, than any other on the place. . . . Many a farmer speaks to his wife habitually in terms more imperious, impatient, and petulant than he would use to the scullion of the kitchen or to his hired man. . . . Many a farmer’s wife is literally worked to death in an inadvertent manner from want of reflection or consideration on the part of her husband.

The cowboy “Teddy Blue” Abbott concluded that “the cowpunchers treated . . . sporting women better than some men treat their wives.”31

The West was full of families sharing the same attitudes toward women and marriage, the same stress and poverty and frustrations, and the same isolation and privacy that we see in Old Jules. There were numerous individuals in the West who were as eccentric as Jules Sandoz. Many of them came with personality traits that put them, too, at risk for domestic violence. Mari Sandoz wrote, after a lifetime of studying the history of the plains states, that

the maladjusted, the misfits—economic, social or emotional, men and women—normally drifted to the frontier. Many of these were further unsettled by the hardship and isolation, to end in a mental or penal institution or a suicide’s grave.

Ill-equipped by nature and background to deal with the hardships that faced them, too many of these men became wife beaters, too many of their households became violent. David Lavender wrote of his Colorado boyhood that:

Our homesteading neighbors were not intentionally brutal. But, except for a few families who had arrived early enough to obtain a favorable piece of land, they were helpless in the iron grip of poverty. Ill-educated and overworked, some of them were perilously close to mental deficiency. If the parents cuffed and swore at the children, if toward each other they used vile talk and fought fist and nail, it was because their raw nerves demanded these sharp releases; because, remembering their own childhood, they were quite without realization that there might be other methods of exacting obedience.32

Across the frontier, notes Glenda Riley, “women’s diaries and memoirs . . . [and] newspaper accounts . . . reflect the incidence of wife abuse,” and the occasional arrests of the abusers. Mari Sandoz remarks almost incidentally on the violence in other households: perhaps Jules’s brother William, a Polish neighbor, Cousin Pete who “kicked his wife until she almost bled to death”; and Blaska, the man who murdered his wife.

In court Blaska insisted that his wife died of the flu. He had fresh meat in the house that
choking her. She was blue in the face and shaking, limp like a rag doll. I screamed as loud as I could that he was killing my Mama, and it got his attention. I thought he was going to come after me next, but he let go, and she crumpled to the floor in a heap. . . . I vowed that if I ever got big enough, I'd give him such a threshing he'd never forget when he tried such a thing again, cripple or no cripple.30

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In court Blaska insisted that his wife died of the flu. He had fresh meat in the house that
he didn't want tainted and so he put her outside. He admitted that he had whipped her, as is every husband's right. She started to run away again and, handicapped by his crutch, he sent her sons to bring her back. They held her while he pounded her with a three-foot piece of wagon tug with a metal cockeye in the end. Was it his fault that she died?

He cried like a lonesome little dog when they took him away to the asylum, but the boys calmly watched him go and then started to the reformatory. (412)

The story of Blaska was unusual in its tragic ending, but domestic violence was so common among the frontier families that Mari would write of “the ultimate accolade of the Plains as a good husband: 'He never laid a hand on his wife.'”33

Although Mari Sandoz was criticized by some readers for an “undaughterly” portrait of a man they considered atypical, Old Jules elicited both painful recognition and gratitude from others. “For a long time,” one woman wrote to Mari, “I have thought there was a need to tell the story, not only of the heroism of the frontier but of its dreadful and needless cruelty to women.” Another woman described growing up in a similar setting. “I don’t know of any of the men who were duplicates of your father in all respects, but there were so many of them who resembles [sic] him in some of the ways that it is not hard to vision him as you have pictured him.” She remembered “wives who trembled at the approach of the man coming into the house and children cowering behind the stove or staying out of doors just as long as they dared, afraid to talk or make any noise when the man was in the house,” and a German who “was inclined to knock his wife around, regardless of whether she was pregnant or not.” Others mentioned similar experiences in their families. Old Jules “was unusually appealing to me as my childhood was very much like yours. . . . I hope you get along better than I have.” “My father” was “a man of daring, ferocious temper” who “forced his wife and daughter “to work in the fields” and “was always ready to shoot it out with the neighbors.” “My father and mother came from Denmark. He had a violent temper and he and my mother weren’t exactly lovers. . . . To assert himself, my father often fell into a rage . . . with violence and cussing. . . . I couldn’t resist telling you how I’ve laughed and cried over the affairs of Old Jules which called to mind so clearly the affairs of Old Peter N. my father.” “My father could have been taken for ‘Old Jules.’” “Your book held ‘extra-special’ significance for me, as my own father was of a nature and temperament so similar to that of ‘Old Jules,’ that . . . reading your book was like re-reading certain portions of my own life. Childhood fear of my father’s violence was reawakened.”34

CONCLUSION

Though there are significant indicators that violence was an important part of the frontier experience for many American women it is difficult to find documentation as thorough and moving as Old Jules or as the case studies of battered women in contemporary society. Frontier women seem to have been as reticent as many modern women in discussing this aspect of their lives. One woman wrote to Mari Sandoz after the publication of Old Jules that “what impressed me most was the candor with which you wrote of the things that most people, and especially a person as repressed as your Marie, wish to hide in their own families.” And Pauline Neher Diede’s Homesteading on the Knife River Prairies is brutally frank in depicting her family’s terrible poverty and living conditions but most circumspect in dealing with its domestic violence. She says only that some of the men “became severe and took out their anxieties on wives and children by rough treatment, often beating them” and that it “was common practice among most homesteaders of all nationalities” to be “too strict with children and women.”35 Perhaps further exploration of unpublished manuscripts, letters, and diaries will yield more accounts of wife beating, although
Carl Degler warns that these are not the sorts of things women committed to paper, even privately. The work of Elizabeth Pleck, Robert Griswold, and Paula Petrik suggests another direction for researchers to take: court records. Pleck’s article on nineteenth-century wife beating relies heavily on the records of assault and battery cases in several states. Griswold has studied divorce cases in San Jose and San Mateo counties in the late 1800s, and Petrik has done a similar study of Helena and Butte, Montana. Testimony and depositions in these kinds of cases should provide a wealth of information on violence against women who, as Griswold says, “would not tolerate behavior that their parents and grandparents accepted as a normal part of marriage.”

Although there is much work yet to be done, it is clear from the evidence now available that physical violence was a part of women’s frontier experience. Certainly more private than the violence of the male frontier, the violence of the female frontier was just as devastating. Perhaps it was more so, for it struck in the place where women were supposed to be most safe and within relationships that were supposed to be most supportive and most sacred. Thus, as Mari Sandoz intended, Old Jules is more than the story of a unique settler. It is powerful evidence of a pattern of intimate abuse, evidence of a characteristic of the American frontier that has long been buried “in a dark, hidden place” in the nation’s memory (191).

NOTES

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3. The suffragist editor Henry Blackwell wrote in 1875 that “wife-beating and wife-murder have become of late almost an epidemic,” Women’s Journal, 15 May 1875, p. 156. See Elizabeth Pleck’s Domestic Tyranny: The Making of Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 3-121. This is an excellent history of family violence in America. See also her “Wife Beating in Nineteenth-Century America,” Victimology 4, no. 1 (1979): 60-74; and her “Feminist Responses to ‘Crimes Against Women,’” Signs 8 (Spring 1983): 451-70; and Linda Gordon’s Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston 1880-1960 (New York: Viking, 1988). All focus on the eastern, urban United States, where reform movements apparently were strongest. My study, however, deals primarily with the rural West. I have limited it to caucasian married families. Except for letters to Mari Sandoz, my sources are almost entirely published works, especially most of the published diaries, journals, letters, and collections of writings of western women; see my discussion on the problems of source material at the conclusion of this paper.


5. Gelles and Straus, Intimate Violence (note 4 above), pp. 85, 91, 88. See also William A. Stacey and Anson Shupe, The Family Secret (Boston: Be-
con, 1983), pp. 85-90; Gordon, Heroes (note 3 above), pp. 8-11, 264-71; and Pauline Neher Diede, Homesteading on the Knife River Prairies (Bismarck, North Dakota: Germans from Russian Heritage Society, 1983). Alcohol is often associated with domestic violence and Robert Utley associates it with frontier violence in general. See the discussions by the authors cited in this note and Robert M. Utley, High Noon in Lincoln: Violence on the Western Frontier (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), p. 176. Although the Nebraska Panhandle had its share of alcohol-related violence, alcohol does not seem to have played a part in Jules Sandoz’ violence, so I will not discuss it further. Diede believes that, in part, the “general abuse of minors in the family, children and wives, . . . was considered discipline according to the Bible” (84). Philip Greven develops the connection between religion and the abuse of women and, especially, children, in Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse (New York: Knopf, 1991). There does not seem to have been a religious dimension to Jules Sandoz’ violence either, though there may have been in other pioneer families.


7. Gordon, Heroes (note 3 above), p. 286; Wini Breines and Linda Gordon, “The New Scholarship on Family Violence,” Signs 8 (Spring 1983): 440-531; quotation from p. 521. This is a very useful review essay. More recently Demi Kurz has discussed both the feminist approach and the family violence approaches in her excellent review article, “Social Science Perspectives on Wife Abuse: Current Debates and Future Directions,” Gender & Society 3 (December 1989): 489-505. The feminist approach also criticizes the methodology of the domestic violence sociologists. Diana E. H. Russell discusses the terminology of physical violence against wives in Rape in Marriage (New York: MacMillan, 1982), pp. 9-10. Jules Sandoz’ beatings, particularly of Mary, whom we see more clearly than we see his other wives, appear to be frequent enough and severe enough to justify describing Sandoz as a batterer and Mary Sandoz as a battered wife.


11. Elizabeth Pleck, “Challenges to Traditional Authority in Immigrant Families,” in Michael Gordon, ed., The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), pp. 504-17; quotations pp. 504, 512. Gordon, Heroes (note 3 above), pp. 8-16. Henry Blackwell wrote that the majority of incidents of wife beating “are committed by foreigners—probably because women are less esteemed and respected in foreign countries than in our own,” Woman’s Journal, 15 May 1875, p. 156. Pleck also found that Americanization strained relationships between mothers and daughters, as the second generation daughters rejected the old world models their mothers provided. Louise Bernikow in Among Women (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) sees a larger mother-daughter problem, with daughters often rejecting a “maimed” female role represented by their mothers (pp. 45-60). Both these ideas are significant for the Sandoz family, Mary Sandoz, herself a German-Swiss immigrant, seems not to have believed in divorce, which helps account for her remaining with Jules Sandoz despite his abuse. Her daughter Mari, on the other hand, escaped a bad marriage through divorce, but at the cost of a very painful, temporary, estrangement from her mother.


13. Pleck, Domestic Tyranny (note 3 above), pp. 7-8; see also Gordon, Heroes (note 3 above), p. 6; Eliane Leslau Silverman, ed., The Last, Best West (Montreal: Eden Press, 1984), p. 174. One of the sons of the murdered woman vowed: “It might be years, but when I’m old enough, I’m going to beat my old man to a pulp”; Pleck, “Wife-Beating in

14. Gordon A. Craig, in The Triumph of Liberalism: Zurich in the Golden Age (New York: Scribner, 1988), pp. 156-57, concludes that Zurich during the time of Jules Sandoz' student days was "very largely, a male-dominated culture, for the emancipation of women was not very far advanced" there. Karin Hau­ sen suggests that "patrarchal monogamous marriage" in Germany persisted, with some erosion, into the twentieth-century; see her "Family and Role Divi­sion," in Richard J. Evans and W. R. Lee, eds., The German Family (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1981), pp. 56-57. See also Catherine Prelinger, Charity, Challenge, and Change (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), pp. 15-23. Prelinger found there were religious attempts in Germany in the late 1800s to shore up the patriarchal family against erosion. The Sandoz family may well have shared these attitudes. In a note to me dated August 1988, historian Karen Offen from the Institute for Gender Studies at Stanford described Jules Sandoz' Neuchâtel as a "Germanic outpost"; Gordon, Heroes (note 3 above), p. 256.


19. Helen Stauffer, Mari Sandoz: Story Catcher of the Plains (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 15. Mari Sandoz' notebooks contain references from local newspapers contemporary to Jules' early days that document the extent of violence in the Panhandle. See the Old Jules Notebooks in the Mari Sandoz Papers, Manuscripts and Publications, Box 18, University of Nebraska Archives, Lincoln, subsequently cited as Mari Sandoz Papers.


22. Civil Case No. 694, Sheridan County, Nebraska. Jules divorced his first wife Estelle, in 1886, on the grounds that she had abandoned him, apparently because she refused to follow him west after he left her in Knox County; he divorced his third wife Emelia in 1894 on the grounds that she had committed adultery; see Civil Cases No. 19 and 996, Sheridan County.


26. Gelles and Straus, Intimate Violence (note 4 above), pp. 50-51; Sandoz defended her father in many of the letters she wrote in reply to comments from readers of Old Jules, insisting that although her father was stern and her childhood difficult in many ways, she would not change either. See letters to Maude Demel, 13 January 1936; Herbert Cushing, 6 January 1936; Verona Kirkpatrick, 4 March 1936; Mrs. L. T. Rosser, 6 March 1936; Katherine Dugan, 24 January 1936; all in Mari Sandoz Papers, Personal Files (photocopies), Box 4, and to Mrs. L. A. Hornburg, 3 June 1936 in Box 5. Helen Winter Stauffer
cites the letter to Katherine Dugan in which Mari Sandoz explained of Old Jules that “although it appeared that the women and children of his family had been sacrificed to his ego, they actually had been privileged to ‘look upon the lightning’” (Mari Sandoz [note 19 above], p. 106). In her introduction to Old Jules, Sandoz wrote that she would not want to change any of the figures in her book. Even Old Jules himself she would not “have one whit different,” for they were “a gallant race, and I salute them” (ix). It could be argued that the affection within the Sandoz family was a product of the “traumatic bonding” that some researchers link to the Stockholm Syndrome in battered households. For a good, brief discussion of the Stockholm Syndrome see Dee R. Graham, Edna Rawlings, and Nelly Rimini, “Survivors of Terror: Battered Women, Hostages, and the Stockholm Syndrome,” in Kersti Yllo and Michelle Bograd, eds., Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1988), pp. 217-33.

27. Mari Sandoz, “The Christmas of the Phonograph Records,” Sandhill Sundays (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 78, 87. This little essay expands on the account in Old Jules and is a rare suggestion that the Sandoz family enjoyed the kind of warmth and close ties that we nostalgically associate with farm communities, yet the story ends, typically, with a beating.


33. Riley, The Female Frontier (note 2 above), pp. 96-97; Sandoz, “Friendly Earth for Hoof and Plow,” (note 32 above), p. 125; see also “Ideas for Dunn article: S. Dak, homestead period” and “Pioneers” file in General Subject Files, Box 38, Mari Sandoz Papers.

34. Letters from Magdalene Craft Radke, 25 November 1935; Edna M. Hornburg, 25 May 1936; Fay Davis, 6 December 1935; Kay Brady, 24 February 1936; D. H. Nelson, 2 January 1936; Elizabeth Rosenthaler, 23 January 1938; Margaret Johnson, 9 March 1938, in the Mari Sandoz Papers (photocopies), Boxes 2, 4, 5. I found more than a dozen other letters in Mari Sandoz’ correspondence from 1935 to 1938 from writers who said that they too had experienced or seen similar abuse of pioneer women. More than half of the writers specifically mentioned that their families were immigrants—mainly German or Swiss.

35. Katharine C. Gregg to Mari Sandoz, 14 December 1935, Mari Sandoz Papers, Personal Files (photocopies), 1935, Box 2; Diede, Homesteading (note 5 above), pp. 84, 86.

36. Degler, At Odds (note 10 above), p. 41. Mari Sandoz commented in a letter to a reviewer in 1936 that there was a general “drought of source material” in pioneer history partly because so many of the first settlers were non-writers, if not actually illiterate, and partly because many of them had “no desire to leave records.” See her letter to Glenn McFarland, Mari Sandoz Papers, Personal File, Box 4 (photocopies), 1 February 1936. See also Carol Fairbanks and Sara Brooks Sundberg, eds., Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1983), pp. 55-59, and Ruth B. Moynihan, Susan Armitage, and Christiane Fischer Dichamp, eds., So Much To Be Done: Women Settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontier (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), pp. xiii-xiv. See Griswold, Family and Divorce (note 10 above), p. 1; and Paula Petrlik’s studies of Montana women (note 13 above): No Step Backward, and “If She Be Content.” Both Griswold and Petrlik use divorce records, which are invaluable sources of evidence on wife beating since so many divorce petitions were based, as was Henriette Sandoz’, on grounds of physical abuse. Elaine May, Great Expectations: Divorce and Marriage in Post-Victorian America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) uses similar sources.