



Friends of
Lorine Niedecker

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I was the solitary plover



"Ducks" by Schomer Lichtner (1905-2006), iconic Milwaukee, Wisconsin painter is on a semi-permanent loan from the Fort Atkinson Arts Council and hangs in the Lorine Niedecker Study Room. The painting was used for the 2011 Lorine Niedecker Wisconsin Poetry Festival poster, brochure and bookmark.

Friends of Lorine Niedecker News

LORINE NIEDECKER: A POET'S LIFE by Margot Peters was published October 2011 by the University of Wisconsin Press and was immediately hailed as an invaluable addition to the appreciation and study of Niedecker's work and life. The Friends of Lorine Niedecker celebrated the biography's publication with a book bash party at the Café Carpe, in Fort Atkinson, on Lorine's Rock River. Margot gave 14 presentations in 2011 in connection with the biography, with more coming up this spring. Reviews have been excellent. Margot says: "I have loved Lorine's poetry since 1985, when I discovered THE GRANITE PAIL. Working on the biography for three and a half years was, in a sense, a holy task for me--so deep is my love and admiration for this great poet."

Save the Dates!

The 2012 Lorine Niedecker
Wisconsin Poetry Festival
is scheduled for November 2 - 4.
Details and schedule
will appear in the
summer Solitary Plover.

Did you know Lorine Niedecker has a Facebook page? She currently has 722 friends, 122 more than last year.



The Friends Of Lorine Niedecker 2011 Annual Report is now posted to the Web. The year was a busy one. The report can be found at lorineniedecker.org/pastevents.cfm.

I was the solitary plover

a pencil

for a wing-bone

From the secret notes

I must tilt

upon the pressure

execute and adjust

In us sea-air rhythm

"We live by the urgent

wave of the verse"



NEWS

SWORN TO WATER

By Dale Dunn

Back in August, I was contacted by THEATERWORK here in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to write a play in response to the work of an American woman poet. Now, I've always been a writer, having worked as both a journalist and a playwright most of my adult life, but I've never been very comfortable around poetry. The works of Wordsworth, Keats and Eliot that they made us read in school made me feel, well to tell the truth, stupid, because I never really understood them. It always seemed to me that most poets were trying to be obscure in order to distance themselves from their readers and maintain an air of mystery. In my college years I found a kindred soul in Pablo Neruda, the Chilean writer and dissident, but that's about as far as I had ever gone towards an understanding of a poet or his/her poetry.

Having several friends who are writers, I asked them all to weigh in with some suggestions for me. Sit down and make me a list of your favorite American woman poets! My inbox filled up with the likes of Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Elizabeth Bishop, Marianne Moore, H.D. Adrienne Rich... I Googled every name that came in and sampled their work, but nothing really struck a chord with me until I came upon Lorine Niedecker, who was suggested to me by a friend's nephew in Montana, Brent McCafferty. Niedecker's poems on the "Friends of Lorine Niedecker" website were clear, simple, and straight-forward: no flowery layers to plow through, no obscure references, no pretensions, just your everyday words, strung together in jagged lines and often jammed up against each other in surprising ways that made them hum and radiate with an emotion and a truth that I found surprising and new.

I soon immersed myself in everything Lorine; from John Lehman's America's Greatest Unknown Poet, to the Collected Works edited

by Jenny Penberthy, to the new biography by Margot Peters, and on to Between Your House and Mine, featuring Niedecker's correspondence with her friend and editor, Cid Corman. It soon became obvious to me that if I was going to write a play about Lorine Niedecker and her poetry, a visit to Blackhawk Island was going to be required. Living in the high-desert foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains here in Santa Fe, I had a hard time imaging what it would be like to live on a peninsula which turned into an island when the Rock River flooded, just about every spring. Since Niedecker's poetry is so full of the sights and sounds of Blackhawk Island, I needed to see, feel and hear it for myself.

I was warmly welcomed in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, by Amy Lutzke at the Fort Atkinson Library, Karen O'Connor and Kori Oberle at the Hoard Museum, Ann Engelman, president of the Friends of Lorine Niedecker, and Bonnie Roub who was a friend and neighbor of Lorine's back in the 60's. In the arms of these wonderful women, I was transported, literally and figuratively, to a new understanding of the life and work of Lorine Niedecker. After three days in "Fort" I had enough to take with me back to Santa Fe so that I could dive into creating something for the theatre.

SWORN TO WATER will open at THEATERWORK here in Santa Fe on February 17, 2012 as a part of FOUR X FOUR X 4, a series of chamber plays about the life and works of Lorine Niedecker, Ann Sexton, Amy Clampitt and Denise Levertov. (Visit the website: <http://www.theaterwork.org> for more information about the plays, the poets and the playwrights.) I hope that my play serves as homage to the keen intellect and insightful, inspiring, luminous talent of Lorine Niedecker, American Poet.



for a wing-bone



LORINE WAS OUR MATCHMAKER

By Steel Wagstaff

This April, Laurel Bastian and I will marry, thanks in large part to Lorine Niedecker. I sometimes even tell people that it was Lorine who reintroduced us several years after our first meeting. This is our story.

Laurel and I are both poets, and we first met in a graduate creative writing course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2007, where I was taking classes for a Ph.D. in English literature and Laurel was earning her M.F.A. in Creative Writing. Over the next few years we took a few more poetry classes together, and though I liked her writing, we never saw each other outside of class. After we stopped taking courses together, Laurel was just another casual acquaintance, hardly more than a face I'd nod to whenever I happened to pass it in the halls of the Helen C. White building.

Our relationship changed, appropriately enough for our digital age, with an email. In September 2010, I wrote to the English department's graduate listserv asking if anyone wanted to attend the upcoming Lorine Niedecker poetry festival in Fort Atkinson with me. I love Lorine's poetry (so much so that she's a key figure in my ongoing dissertation), and I was sure that others in my department

would feel similarly and would want to attend a festival dedicated to her memory with other Wisconsin writers. To my surprise, Laurel was the only person from the entire department to reply with interest, and when a friend backed out of the trip at the last minute, it meant that Laurel and I were going to Niedecker Festival by ourselves. Laurel came to my apartment in Madison early in the morning and as we drove to Fort Atkinson, she invited me to help myself to stores of fresh fruit she had brought to eat along the way. I chose a peach, and munched happily on it as we talked about our lives, our writing, and about Lorine. We became so engrossed in conversation that I forgot the directions to the festival and got us lost (more than once, actually, including an embarrassing detour that took us through a Pick 'N Save parking lot somewhere between Madison and Milwaukee).

We did eventually make it to the festival in Fort Atkinson, and though it was much later than we had planned, there was plenty of time for us to attend a few of the discussions and panel sessions. We made new friends and met several other admirers of Lorine's poetry, including Ann Engelman and Janice Radway, who I remember because of her lively young brilliant blue eyes and because she was the first person I'd ever met who had known Lorine personally. During a break in the conference, Laurel and I went to lunch at the Black Hawk Café, where we ended up in a booth for more than two hours, talking, sharing stories, and getting to know each other. After lunch, instead of going to Lorine's cabin for the writer's retreat we had signed up for, we decided on a whim to drive to the beautiful Forest Hill cemetery in Madison, where we walked the grounds before stopping on a stone bench to read Lorine's poetry aloud to each other for a few hours, a fitting location for reading poetry by the woman who once wrote "Understand me, dead is nothing / whereas here we want each other." I still remember leaning into Laurel's body to feel the vibrations of sound as she carefully intoned the brilliantly condensed syllables from Lorine's lovely short poem:



I must tilt

traveled out to Fort Atkinson several times and visited Lorine's cabin with Ann Engelman and other writer friends on a couple of occasions. We love the place for its beauty and for its history. It is a place that represents many things for us: it's one of our favorite Wisconsin places—as Lorine's home for many years it is a powerful reminder of what it means to live with sincerity and artistic devotion in a deeply cherished and intimately known place, and it is also a place that reminds us of the beginnings of our friendship, our curiosity about and love for one another, and our dreams of a future as poets and members of a partnership we hope will span two long lives. Because of our story and because of what the place means to us, we've asked and received permission to hold our very small, private wedding outdoors on Blackhawk Island, just outside of Lorine's cabin (provided that the road isn't flooded). If you'd like to see pictures of the two of us and read a bit more of our story, visit our wedding website: <http://laurelandsteel.info>, where you can also find our contact information. You can also read some of Laurel's poetry online at her website: www.laurelbastian.com.



POETRY

Triple Lens

East

On Long Island,
Whitman's long lines lie strung out, tossed-up
like weeds along miles of Paumanok beach.
The Atlantic surf curling around the continents stern,
collecting sand, cherished debris where Walt's mother-sea
whips up dunes along the shore to keep her whitecaps
clean and buffered from the landed earth of his father.
Like an outstretched hand, clean tombolo
sands reach the island rock, and Walt waves
his arm synchronous with the surf, the water piling
on shore like Old World immigrants, endlessly
rushing and receding.

West

In California,
Jeffers stands as a fleshed figure
head on a Carmel promontory, like a physician
with mason's hands he feels the earth's tremors—
the locked tectonic titans—North American, Pacific,
Juan de Fuca plates, where flagged pines signal storm,
and that all will be bowed to leeward.
The wind labors breath, the cliffs—the wind's
whistle accompanies the temblors—
above the broad wake of this barge's bow
Robinson calls the Continent's End.

Midwest

In Wisconsin,
during the Pleistocene, the glacial lobes
played with scoop and pail in the sand counties—
building drumlins, kettles, moraines—they still stand
silent, depressed and dusted in Midwest earth. And along
a Lake Koshkonong backwater, close to Blackhawk
Island, Lorine Niedecker kneels by a course motionless
as green amber, and watches a drop of water
convex her entire world on the back of a frog.

Jeff Ross



upon the pressure

The Ladies

Not a leaf falls
in the yard without

Babe knowing it
she gathers

Agnes sweeps
the street
Advising

Mastery Test, I - VII

The ecstasy to guess
is sometimes inconvenient
the whirr
of solution bliss

If grace could talk
she'd say douse
the candle
burning at both ends
read by the light you have

Elizabeth Savage

Elizabeth Savage is the author of *Jane & Paige* or *Sister Goose* and *Grammar*, both from Furniture Press. She is professor of English at Fairmont State University in Fairmont, West Virginia, where she also serves as poetry editor for *Kestrel: A Journal of Literature & Art*.



Folding It In

Folding paper—
years,
15
40
I have known
birthday
and duration
dear one,
tears and
folded memory.
In arrears:
time?
— *well*,
spent.

Gordon Sisler

Gordon Sisler explores the interface of poem, print and paper through writing, handmade paper and letterpress printing.



Haiku

so many
a few less stars
so many

deep space
light that doesn't reach earth
on its own

Gary Hotham

execute and adjust

Island

Along cracked brick
and shore stone

the season's last dragonfly
and I

carry the sun
loosely
on our backs

can't keep clouds
from following

Angel Vora-Hills



No boats in this north wind.
Muskrats deep now, no raiding rabbits.
Bright water hardening into silence.

Paul Hayes

Along the river
wind moving weeds
crisp curling leaves
Ice will still them.

Brown of tree trunks
White rimmed eyes
let in light
all four sides.

Whisper of branches:
be here now
smelling
future ashes.

Privacy for comfort
an exchange
so painful
What would Blackhawk think?

Dot Kent



Lorine is ok
with my not reading today
Glory! I wrote --
snapped twigs,
revered the clouds traveling up current

I'm considering my AI
and will share later

Beth Gehred

In us sea-air rhythm

How Zen it is to be an Old Woman

she might find herself there
in a familiar house
a comfortable chair
a room dark and spare

except for a light
that shines on the hair
of a boy at the piano
practicing

his head slightly bent
his small fingers float
touching once on each note

the door to the kitchen
might be open
she might see that room
bright with children
busy with homework
a daughter cooking
moving quickly back and forth
from the stove to the sink
pots and dishes would clink

she might be still then and think
how zen it is to be an old woman
how blissful just to be present
she might smile remembering
the old women in dark dresses
who sat on folding chairs
along the wall in the wedding hall
calm and happy and knowing
it is enough just to be present

Elizabeth Harmatys Park

Elizabeth Harmatys Park is a native of Wisconsin, now settled in Burlington. She is a sociologist by profession, a teacher by vocation, a prison volunteer and peace activist by hope, and a wife, mother, grandmother and friend by love.



How My Father Found Jesus and Quit Farming

It wasn't a moral issue, a worry
about eating the old milk cow
with a milk gravy, for instance.
It was time mostly – not enough
time in the day to be married
to my mother, the farm,
and the church.

Each Spring he would faithfully sow
corn or beans, ancient Allis Chalmers
chugging back and forth across
the sixty acres, but almost miss
the you-shall-also-reap part in fall.
Then came the year I was 20,
when corn stayed
and stayed in the field. I walked
the barn lane, corn leaves
rigid and brown rustled, rattled,
until one would rip free, sail
on late November winds like
a knife thrower's blade
until it stuck in the brush
or skipped like a bad mumblypeg
off the rock pile. Ears grew moldy
in October rains, started to shed
their husks. Even raccoons
had their fill. Finally I told my
distraught mother, "Dad's sold us out
for Jesus, gone to be with him
in Heaven. Call Cousin Dan.
Tell him to bring the combine."

Mary Linton



We live by the urgent

notes on blackhawk island

*
fungus rushing under the bark
of old root
where dead wood
softens and frays

*
to be counted on: new leaves
new dead leaves
and how they curl
into each other

*
how this river looks
like a river I've seen
before
the Menominee
wide and muddy

*
tree uprooted
dead tree
what was once
so deep in soil bent
back now
roots splayed:
a frame

*
found a feather
kept it
left the trash
candy wrapper/bottle
beer can/shoe/some tires

stepped on a frog
actually sat
on lots of living things

*
anyone know anything
about mushrooms
Carl
don't eat that

*
if they thought I wasn't
going to fill my pockets with rocks
well

*
you are my other country
and I find it hard going
you are my rivers I don't recognize

*
ramshackle dock rendered
unstable—
the planes of the planks
all wrong

*
and I am floating
so fast

Liz Chereskin



At L. N.'s, Again

Here comes the water

an ear thing

a near thing

the border

collie walks upstream

many yellow greens the blue

sky

shy

if the cloud

wave of the verse"

drift and
the sun is often behind
a face, or among
ones
along the river
--
What word comes into
this cabin, door
open, floor swept where she swept
the river matter out
the ear of a mother
--veer into weather
& sit beside
the very owl by the steps

Lisa Fishman



Do I write to you from
these small woods?
my sight across the page,
perpendicular, aiming
Or are we elsewhere,
the other-side
of this page, perhaps
our lines cross
somewhere
[Did you see the owl?]
this is the frame
that in reading lengthwise
across the page or
property line,
we eventually grow together and cross
“VERY VEERY,”
two songs
at once
from one body

Brian Mornar



Pollination

At sixty I awoke and
threw off the smothering
blanket of fear and oppression
I'd been under for forty years

Earlier I had tried, hear
me, I had tried, but his
weapons, like mustard gas,
burned through all my organs

Now healing, I flower in sun and shade
seeding my life with
honorable pursuits and
artful passions

It has become an effort to lay down
the words but I applaud poets
and the world's need for them

Walk the trail, celebrate local laureate, visit the point
my hand working with others

Somewhere in this county
a piece of land has become protected
I steered estate gains to this end

A great man, a poet's champion, came from
Japan to meet his disciples and spread
the wonder this small woman's
words—100 years after her birth
A man who lived simply needed help
to travel to Milwaukee and I was compelled
to insure his coming

To some it may appear that I flit from blossom to blossom
but, to me, the sown seeds spread far and wide

Nancy Rafal



Trading Places

It had all come down through the flowers
one petal talking to another
breaking off from the main stem
falling into this
October river

a good place to throw out a line
while
wind rustles in overhead elm bunkers
then winnows my bamboo into chalk

the way shadows create shawl-taking
the passage of clouds working water anemone

first sunspots
now homeopathy

No channel of water flowed to this cabin
and it is true she wrote by candle

in the dusk

I can make out Lorine sitting along the River
holding the chattering paper in place

drinking from the Songs of Birds
into cursive

while I become earth smoke
slipping away with the geese.

Elaine A. Barrett

ABOUT US

The Friends of Lorine Niedecker is a non-profit corporation. There are no staff, just devoted volunteers. Our goals include preserving and expanding the legacy of Lorine Niedecker, as well as, offering educational materials, access to archives, a semiannual newsletter and events as time and resources are available. We are supported through donations and grants.

Donations are always welcome and are fully tax-deductible.

The Solitary Plover is issued twice yearly, in winter and in summer. Sign up for the email version on our Web site.

Friends of Lorine Niedecker
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THIRD THURSDAY 2012

In April of 2011 the Friends of Lorine Niedecker began a monthly poetry reading, held at the Dwight Foster Public Library in Fort Atkinson. The program features a guest Wisconsin poet and a community open mic reading. It has proven to be a great success. Here are some of the scheduled featured poets:

March 15 – Def Jam - a film by Judy Leiff

April 19 – Marilyn Annuci and Jeanie Tomasko

May 17 – Lisa Fishman

June 21 - Fabu

July 19 – Tom Hibbard

August 16 – Brenda Cárdenas

September 20 – Robin Chapman

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