



*Friends of
Lorine Niedecker*

*Issue #25
Winter 2017*

I was the solitary plover



Fort Atkinson Middle School Niedecker poetry/art project with artists Erika Koivunen, Cynthia Bliss, and Amy Zaremba. Also appearing is Amy Lutzke of the FOLN.

Photo courtesy of Daily Jefferson County Union. Used by permission.

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”

Fort Atkinson School Poetry/ Art Projects Continue

The Friends of Lorine Niedecker continue to work with the Fort Atkinson School District to install poetry/art projects in the schools. The group is currently working with teacher Cynthia Bliss and Principal Rob Abbott of the Fort Atkinson Middle School.

During the summer of 2016 Bliss worked with a team including Erika Koivunen of ACME Ironworks and painter Amy Zaremba, to create the mural and recycled metal sculpture in the main hallway of the Middle School. Bliss is currently working with a group of students on an additional paper art project that will hang in the IMC.

The high school that Lorine Niedecker attended is part of the current Middle School building which makes this project particularly special.

Niedecker Items Come Home

In late December, the telephone rang at the Hoard Historical Museum in Fort Atkinson. While not an unusual occurrence, the California man on the other end of the call had an unusual story. “He asked if we would like some Lorine Niedecker items,” said assistant director Dana Bertelsen. “He was willing to ship them to us if we were interested.” Bertelsen contacted director Merrilee Lee, who was visiting family for the holidays. “I was in my parents’ kitchen checking my email and saw Dana’s message about a man who was interested in sending Lorine Niedecker items to us. She was anxiously awaiting the rest of the story from him. It’s not every day that someone contacts us about Lorine Niedecker items.”

The caller, Tom, told Lee he had a collection of Lorine Niedecker books that had been in his possession for years. In 1972,



2 years after Lorine passed away, Tom visited the Hoard Historical Museum to research Niedecker as part of his Master's thesis. He met with curator Hannah Swart, who allowed him to borrow some Niedecker books from the museum for his research, after extracting a promise to return the books promptly. In 1976, Swart wrote him asking about the books but Tom didn't reply. The books remained in his possession, stored away for decades, until he rediscovered them and called to see if the museum would like them back. "I quickly emailed Tom and said, yes, we would definitely like the books returned!" said Lee. "Why would we not?"

The next week when the large box arrived from California, Lee and Bertelsen carefully opened it. "We still weren't exactly certain what items were in the box and opening it was a bit like the museum version of a Christmas present," said Lee.

It turned out they weren't books written by Niedecker, but books from her personal library. Niedecker's husband, Al Millen, had given a collection of them to the Museum after her passing in 1970. Opening the box, Lee and Bertelsen found works by Cid Corman, Louis Zukofsky, Ian Hamilton Finlay and many more. Many were inscribed to Lorine by the authors. But Lee and Bertelsen, both history museum professionals, soon realized an issue. "We knew they were important but also realized that we aren't familiar enough with the world of poetry to understand their full significance," said Lee. "So we contacted Ann Engelman. I asked her if she'd like to inventory a previously undiscovered box of Lorine Niedecker items."

President of the Friends of Lorine Niedecker and a tireless Niedecker promoter, Engelman jumped at the chance to inventory the box. As Engelman carefully sorted through the books, another surprise was discovered. After Niedecker's death, the bulk of her personal library was believed to be sent to the Dwight Foster Library in Fort Atkinson. However, her personal collection seemed to be lacking key works by contemporary poets. Niedecker was greatly influenced by Zukofsky and other contemporary poets, but their works were missing from the Foster Library collection. This gap in the collection was puzzling to many Niedecker scholars. But the surprise was that those "missing" works were with Tom in California. The books, part of the Hoard Museum collection, have rejoined the other Niedecker papers, books, photos, and works held in the Museum's archival secure storage.

In total, Tom returned 118 Lorine Niedecker items

to the Hoard Museum. "This newly rediscovered collection is an absolute treasure trove. It has the potential to re-write what we know about Lorine's relationships with other contemporary poets and authors," said Lee. "Niedecker scholars will be excited to delve into the collection."

Engelman spent days working on a master list of the collection, cross-checking and double-checking her work. Also included in the box were photos of Lorine's cottage and cabin on Blackhawk Island, as well as the 1976 note from Hannah Swart asking Tom about the loaned items.

The Hoard Historical Museum contains other collections of Niedecker items which are held in its archives. Scholars frequently travel to Fort Atkinson, the Museum, the Library, and Blackhawk Island to have a fuller appreciation of Niedecker's life, work, and story. "It's a pilgrimage for Niedecker fans. Lorine's work is read, studied, and appreciated world-wide. Standing on Blackhawk Island and seeing how the land is defined by the river, scholars are able to gain a new appreciation for her nature-inspired works. It suddenly makes more sense why so many of her works are based on or reference water and nature. She was surrounded by both," said Lee.

To view this and other collections in the archives, please contact the Hoard Historical Museum at 401 Whitewater Ave, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538 or 920.563.7769 or info@hoardmuseum.org.



Thrifty Lorine: Her Last Will & Testament by Margot Peters

Though Lorine Niedecker famously nursed "venom against property," she made a number of wills in her lifetime. In 1952, before being hospitalized for a hysterectomy, she left all personal belongings and \$3,000 from the sale of her cabin and land to her friend the poet Louis Zukofsky, his wife, and their child, Paul. She only revoked this bequest in August 1963, when she made a new will leaving everything to her second husband Albert Millen whom she had married that May.

On July 7, 1969, Lorine had her lawyer, Donald Smith, draw up another will because, since 1963,

for a wing-bone

she had spent more than \$7,000 for a new river-front cottage, and her property had increased in value. Also, that winter of 1969, she had been diagnosed with an erratic heartbeat and hardening of the arteries; she felt distinctly mortal. In fact, she would die sixteen months later on December 31, 1970.

On January 5, 1971 Al Millen filed petition “on the information and belief that the deceased left personal property of value.” Again, Lorine had left everything to Al or, should he die, to his children: Virginia, George, Alice, and Julie. W.F. Bienfang and Rollin Barfknecht appraised the estate, deducting \$838.75 for last sickness expenses, \$1,150 for her funeral, and \$984.71 for legal expenses. On June 8, 1971, they declared the Total Taxable Estate to be worth \$18,795. In 2017 money, that is \$111,886.

To keep herself afloat, Lorine had scrubbed hospital floors and eaten Malt-o-Meal for her supper. Yet, she had managed to save \$12,468.81 in cash and securities. From 1958 to 1970 she bought a total of eighty-five U.S. Savings Bonds worth \$25 to \$500. And though she had only \$131.93 in her First National Bank checking account she had managed to tuck away \$2,000 in bonds with Fort Atkinson Savings and Loan.

Those who wish to emphasize her poverty forget she had income from renting the two houses her father Henry had left her, as well as renting her cabin after she married Al. And we forget how thrifty she had been all her life.

Surprisingly, after her death, Bienfang and Barfknecht valued her Blackhawk Island homestead at only \$9,000. That didn't stop Al Millen from asking \$40,000 for the cottage, cabin and land. Bob and DiAnn Ruh thought the price inflated and held out until after Al's death in 1981, eventually buying the property from his daughter Julie in 1986 for \$28,000. Lorine therefore left a rough total of \$40,500 to Al and his children.

Another surprise: Lorine did not name a literary executor, though she would not have trusted that responsibility to Al Millen. Cid Corman, the poet and friend who had published her often in *Origin*, took over that duty.



Support the Friends of Lorine Niedecker

New-sawed
clean-smelling house
sweet cedar pink
flesh tint
I love you

Dear Friends of Lorine,

The Friends of Lorine Niedecker, Inc. continues to be dedicated to preserving and expanding the legacy of Lorine Niedecker, offering access to archives, educational materials, a growing semiannual newsletter, the monograph series “What Region” and a website full of resources for her fans all over the world. You can review the year's activities on the website, www.lorineniedecker.org, under the tab “about us.”

This year we look forward to a new relationship with Beloit College, Lorine's alma mater, and her cabin's addition to the National Historic Registry. Official word on that will come sometime this summer. The Lorine Niedecker Wisconsin Poetry Festival will be held September 29-30 and, back by popular demand, writing workshops on Blackhawk Island. This year the Hoard Historical Museum will host the Festival. The museum will also hold “A Birthday Party for Lorine” on May 13 in Fort Atkinson. In other exciting news, Jenny Penberthy, author of “Lorine Niedecker, Collected Works,” will join the Editorial Committee for the monograph. Welcome Jenny!

We plan and budget carefully for a two-year period. This allows us to take advantage of new opportunities and closely review our priorities. Please consider sending us a valentine – a donation to help us continue supporting Lorine's legacy and poetry. Your contribution is tax deductible.

The banks of the Rock River are always changing. We have a tour that includes her cabin on Blackhawk Island, collections at the Hoard Historical Museum, her personal library and gravesite. The Island Bar and Grill just opened at the old Fountain House location! Experiencing Blackhawk Island Road and Lorine's place on it is worth the trip. If you are ever in the area, please let us know.

Best to you,

Ann Engelman & Amy Lutzke
Friends of Lorine Niedecker

You can send your contribution to:

Friends of Lorine Niedecker
209 Merchants Avenue
Fort Atkinson, WI 53538

From the secret notes

POETRY

The Path to Here

A solo rengay

water striders
ripple the reflection
of turtle island

I try to guess the age
of the stone lantern

the toddler's exclamation
from the moonviewing platform—
hungry koi

mid summer—
bending closer to the garden
for each new scent

the tea house almost lost
in the Japanese maples

sandaled feet
crunching on gravel—
the path to here

Michael Dylan Welch



Phoebe

Tail thumper,
thrashing a clue,

its name centered
in a song.

We wake to rare music,
fledglings keening for food.

A leaf can be remembered,
anticipated across the snows.

Ronnie Hess

Late snow we reject

turn away from
make invisible through
calculated neglect
as we do with
misfits
the bitter old
those we detest

When we turn back
that snow,
those old
may still be there
or not
shock us or not

Maybe we forgot
they existed

Maybe they
forgot us

It's like looking
into a mirror at
haywire hair
a haggard face
a baby's lashes

Soften dear heart
to life's ravages
and to
snow's innocence
even in April

Georgia Ressmeyer



I must tilt

Move a River

Last winter
 three
mounded banks
lifted a mind of ice
same shovel twice

Borrow & Carry

Better subtract
 trim
as you go
less for the page
sharper with age

Elizabeth Savage



Blue Head, January 2017

Blue laundry
 bag
 lies on its side

on the red vinyl couch
blue head, blue back
blue

heart

Tortoise

Warming in the grass
tortoise's mouth stays open
honored guests, the flies

Elizabeth Costello

poem

when the last motor
stops
imagine such quiet

one can hear snow

fall

butterfly wings

a rose

open

clouds move

an ant

cry

sunrise

and

the sound

of the shape of

the water

Donna Fleischer



upon the pressure

a pencil for a wing-bone

a pencil

for a wing-bone
a limblet of sorts

graphite

stands in for
marrow

grandfather

advised me:
learn a trade

thoreau

& his kinfolk
crafted pencils

their livelihood

a way with words
a path

no layoff

from this
condensery

pencil & desk

wood &
more wood

both rooted

once
like you now

leave the new

unbought, same as
thoreau warned

beware of all

endeavors that require
new clothes

the woman tending

the counter at Vivienne last week
the small spaces between her knuckles each tattooed

liminal landscapes

like the
tender space between each inhale & exhale

her inky message

left hand :: make
right hand :: mend

for all the world to see

a manifesto, a prayer,
a call to arms

her headscarf

bedecked with golden
horseshoes all facing up

we all

preach by example
not always with words

women of good

wild stock and
wort cunning

equisetum jointed

like a wing-bone
& just as hollow

inhabits the

boundary
of earth and water

ancient

& silica rich
green mineral tang

grows near

water
ally to riverbanks and pond edges

thoreau

migrating for a time
to walden pond

same as lorine niedecker

the ease of less
a small cabin with no running water

porch-sitting

& stoking the fire
help muster attention

a natural habitat

grounded
with your solid bones

Polly Hatfield

execute and adjust

the bookmarks

the pine
a mind

full of
sparrows

three front steps
iced-over —
a bear trap

moonlit
sparrow
tracks

in snow
my

cave
painting

morning
in this

winter
brightness

Reflecting

thanks for
a furnace

I never
could have built

the bookmarks removed it's new again

we dream
it ends
with a meal

John Martone



After The Japanese (45)

Like a rowboater or kayaker
pruning the lichen-festooned dwarf
spruce on The Loleta Lake, or Lorine
intuiting dreams of Lynx mounds, how
one falls in love with a place's beyond me.

After The Japanese (47)

Water is form flowing green
in time Garcia says, so not the driven wave but
leaf drift downstream in green winter
Skagit, where only crashes are branches
of bare trees patient to wait for this here snow.

Paul Nelson

In us sea-air rhythm

Instructions for a Wisconsin Poetry Center

The satisfactory emphasis is on revolving.
-Lorine Niedecker, January 1935

James Liddy led students yearly
preacher/teacher like to Lorine's Rock River.
We followed the ring of flowers flow
catfish and carp seined from Lake Koshkonong
immersed in a flooded season.

James faith dropped students – baptized
with phrases, Niedecker's word world island,
the isolation even for birds. Black Hawk
wells up in us daily. We plunge and fish for
books/letters/poems buried in sand-mud over hills
the marsh cranes sing weather rain music.

Lorine, bird woman, sights verbal mud moons
condensation on pages, authors animated bulrush
stony undersides. Small cabin and bars, of course
she drank grasshoppers at Club 26, stories
of poets, town gravesites painted with quiet solitude.

Gem stones adorn the poet's eyes the surface
of her poems, her life. Shadows of Liddy
living poet into poet into water from branches
cling to and bend down rivers. For it was water
all the time. Dry pages curved from water's use
letters telling tales of natural days and nights.

We dreamt those wooden green art walls
pictured her poor grey gulls, borrowed
words and books from her library.
James instructed with Lorine. We answered
every spring with markings on habitat
tree trunks with high water marks
at a distance like millions of Lorine's ducks
taking off suddenly, a dark wave of embrace.

Tyler Farrell



CONTRIBUTORS

Elizabeth Costello is a Berkeley-based writer and yoga teacher. She writes about arts and culture for *SF Weekly*, and her poetry has appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Fourteen Hills*, *The Buffalo Evening News*, and elsewhere. She is a big fan of the work of Lorine Niedecker. She's on the web at: www.elizabethscostello.com.

Tyler Farrell has published poems, essays, and reviews in many periodicals and anthologies and a biographical essay for James Liddy's *Selected Poems* (Arlen House, 2011). Farrell is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Marquette University and teaches writing, poetry, literature, and drama. He also leads a summer study abroad program to Ireland. Farrell also has two collections of poems published by Salmon Poetry (County Clare, Ireland), *Tethered to the Earth* (2008) and *The Land of Give and Take* (2012) and a forthcoming collection entitled *Stichomythia* (2017). He lives in Madison, WI.

Donna Fleischer's poems and essays appear in literary anthologies and journals worldwide, including *A Vast Sky*, *Kō*, *MayDay Magazine*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Otoliths*, *Poets for Living Waters*, *Spiral Orb*, and *The Marsh Hawk Press Review*. *< Periodic Earth >*, her fourth chapbook, is available from Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press, Pueblo, Colorado. She makes her living by assisting the University of Hartford's departments of biology and chemistry as an office coordinator, and by living on a small traprock mountain ledge.

Polly Hatfield calls Portland, OR home. Her back fence borders an old pioneer cemetery and she remains grateful for the quiet. Her words have been published in *Alltopia* and *Sugar Mule*. She shares a bountiful parcel of land with her partner and one beloved striped cat. She continues to shirk cell phones and instead opts for the simple magic of handwritten mail. She encourages you to write and send more letters.

Ronnie Hess is a journalist and poet. She is the author of three poetry chapbooks: *Whole Cloth*, *Ribbon of Sand*, and *A Woman in Vegetable*; as well as two culinary travel guides: *Eat Smart in France* (2010) and *Eat Smart in Portugal* (forthcoming, 2017). She lives in Madison, WI.

John Martone's work can be found (among other places) at his scribd page -- <https://www.scribd.com/john-martone-2968>

"We live by the urgent"

Poet/interviewer **Paul Nelson** founded SPLAB (Seattle Poetics LAB) & Cascadia Poetry Festival, wrote *American Sentences*, *A Time Before Slaughter* and *Tiovivo Tres Amigos*. Engaged in a 20-year bioregional cultural investigation of Cascadia, he lives in Seattle, WA in the Cedar River watershed.

Georgia Ressimyer, a Pushcart Prize nominee in poetry, has published numerous poems, an award-winning poetry chapbook, *Today I Threw My Watch Away* (Finishing Line Press, 2010), and a full-length poetry collection, *Waiting to Sail* (Black River Press, 2014). Her new poetry book, *Home/Body*, is due out in 2017 from Pebblebrook Press. She lives in Sheboygan, WI.

Elizabeth Savage is the author of *Grammar* and *Idylliad* (both from Furniture Press) and a new chapbook, *Parallax*, from Dancing Girl Press. In 2016, her poetry won the Denise Levertov Memorial Prize and, with Ethel Rackin, the Thomas Merton Prize for Poetry of the Sacred. She lives and teaches in West Virginia.

Michael Dylan Welch has served two terms as poet laureate of Redmond, WA, where he also curates two monthly poetry reading series. His poetry, essays, and reviews have appeared in hundreds of journals and anthologies in at least 22 languages. He is also proprietor of National Haiku Writing Month (NaHaiWriMo.com) and shares his poetry and other writing at Graceguts.com. The solo rengay in this issue was written in the Seattle Japanese Garden, where he judges a haiku contest for the garden's annual moon viewing festival.

Save the Dates!

2017 Lorine Niedecker
WI Poetry Festival will be
September 29 and 30.

Details available in the
Summer Solitary Plover
and online as information becomes
available this spring.

NEWS

Friends of Lorine Niedecker 2016 Activity Report

The FOLN have posted their activities report to the website. You can find the information at:

http://lorineniedecker.org/documents/Activities2016_000.pdf

Amazon Smile Account

Are you familiar with Amazon Smile? It is a website operated by Amazon with the same products, prices, and shopping features as Amazon.com. The difference is that when you shop on AmazonSmile, the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible products to the charitable organization of your choice. The Friends of Lorine Niedecker have joined the Smile program so when shopping on Amazon be sure to select us as your Amazon Smile recipient.

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 website.

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Find Lorine on Facebook



Fort Atkinson Middle School main hallway Niedecker poetry/art installation.
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