



Friends of
Lorine Niedecker

Issue #14
Summer 2011

I was the solitary plover



Along the Rock River Community Art Project

The Friends of Lorine Niedecker co-sponsored a recent community art project installed in the entryway of the Dwight Foster Public Library. The Daily Jefferson County Union described the project: “From March through June, organizers collected memories, stories, photos and poetry about the river composed by Fort Atkinson-area residents of all ages.

“The effort included an artists-in-residency program that allowed the public to take a hands-on role with the final project: a paper collage drawing on the themes contributed via both pen and ink. Hanging in the library entrance, the collage contains different aspects of how the Rock River affects life in Fort Atkinson, with drawings of everything from herons, frogs and turtles to the the downtown bridges to the late Lorine Niedecker’s Blackhawk Island cottage.

“From June 13 through June 20th community members young and old were able to help make the paper that they then turned into buildings, plants and animals. These were also decorated with different paper designs, sequins, glitter and feathers. Then artists Sally Koehler and Kirsten Christianson went to work organizing these many pieces into a triptych collage of images.” The picture above shows the portion of the work that includes Lorine’s cabin and words from her poetry.

Funding was provided by the Friends of Lorine Niedecker and the Friends of the Library. In addition, The Fort Arts Council, in partnership with the Dwight Foster Public Library, received a \$4,880 Wisconsin Arts Board-Artist and Community Collaboration Grant and a \$10,000 Fort Atkinson Community Foundation grant.

More photos on page 4.

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”



Save the Dates!

Friday, October 14
Saturday, October 15
Sunday, October 16
Dwight Foster Public Library
209 Merchants Avenue
Fort Atkinson, WI

**Lorine Niedecker
Wisconsin Poetry Festival**

The Lorine Niedecker Wisconsin Poetry Festival is gearing up for October 14 - 16, 2011. The schedule has been posted to the Web site and will be updated as invited poets are confirmed and any adjustments made. We consider Festival evaluations carefully and also listen to our trusted advisors as we plan the agenda. This year "Verse Wisconsin" magazine is playing a larger role.

There are several highlights.

- Opening night will again be at the Cafe Carpe. This year we have music from "Obvious Dog" joining our open mic readings. The pacing and presentation of the evening will be especially energizing.
- The "Nature of Wisconsin Poetry" panel is being moderated by Sarah Busse and Wendy Vardaman, Editors of "Verse Wisconsin." You can bet that will be lively.
- A Poetry Film Festival on Saturday night. Storytelling through video is becoming more accessible. This presentation of films will be curated by Cathy Cook, award winning filmmaker and producer of "Immortal Cupboard: In Search of Lorine Niedecker."
- Margot Peters' new book "Lorine Niedecker: A Poet's Life" will be published by UW Press this fall. She will read from the book and answer questions about her research and writing.

The complete schedule, to date, is on pages 6 & 7. Updates will be available at www.lorineniedecker.com or Google "Wisconsin Poetry Festival."



**Announcing Lorine Niedecker: A Poet's
Life by Margot Peters**

Lorine Niedecker (1903–70) was a poet of extraordinary talent whose life and work were long enveloped in obscurity. After her death in 1970, poet Basil Bunting wrote that she was "the most interesting woman poet America has yet produced . . . only beginning to be appreciated when she died." Her poverty and arduous family life, the isolated home in Wisconsin that provided rich imagery for her work, and her unusual acquaintances have all contributed to Niedecker's enigmatic reputation.

Margot Peters brings Lorine Niedecker's life out of the shadows in this first full biography of the poet. She depicts Niedecker's watery world on Blackhawk Island (near Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin), where she was born and spent most of her life. A brief college career cut short by family obligations and an equally brief marriage were followed in 1931 by the start of a life-changing correspondence and complicated thirty-five-year friendship with modernist poet Louis Zukofsky, who connected Niedecker to a literary lifeline of distant poets and magazines. Supporting herself by turns as a hospital scrubwoman and proofreader for a dairy journal, Niedecker made a late marriage to an industrial painter, which gave her time to write and publish her work in the final decades of her life.

During her lifetime, Niedecker's poetry was praised by a relatively small literary circle, including Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, and Allen Ginsberg. Since her death much more of her surviving writings have been published, including a comprehensive volume of collected works and two volumes of correspondence.

From the secret notes I must tilt

Through Margot Peters' compelling biography, readers will discover Lorine Niedecker as a poet of spare and brilliant verse and a woman whose talent and grit carried her through periods of desperation and despair.

Lorine Niedecker: A Poet's Life will be published by The University of Wisconsin Press in September. You can preorder a copy by calling (800) 621-2736.

Margot Peters is an accomplished and award-winning biographer whose many books include *Unquiet Soul: A Biography of Charlotte Bronte*; *The House of Barrymore*; *Design for Living: Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne*; *May Sarton: A Biography*; and *Bernard Shaw and the Actresses*. She lives in Lake Mills, Wisconsin. Visit her at margotpeters.wordpress.com



POETRY

George hands
rhubarb over
the fence to Anne

the spring ritual
between neighbours
I've seen enacted

many times before
ever since I was
a child.

M. R. Appell

M. R. Appell has been a correspondent with the Friends of Lorine Niedecker for many years. His little homemade books are always a pleasure to receive.



There Is So Little Left

There is so little left of mom anymore
That when my granddaughters raid the attic
They clatter and chatter down the stairs
with only a small felted jewelry box
an old vinyl wallet
and a broken porcelain doll
The box holds just a few earrings, mismatched and cheap
Inside the stiff wallet
the children are excited to find a five dollar bill!
I look in the wallet and I find
a social security card
an insurance card
a driver's license
some scraps of paper that say
My phone number and
Marianne's phone number
tiny black and white pictures of mom and dad
taken very long ago
in a photo booth machine
and a yellowed florist card that says
Happy Anniversary Sweetheart
The doll cannot be mended
It's cracked china baby
and pieces are missing
My sister sighs and says
Mom never had anything of value
This morning I am thinking
She had dad
She had us and
She was someone of value

Elizabeth Harmatys Park

Elizabeth Harmatys Park was a family life educator and suicide prevention therapist whose interest in religion and gender in society led her to earn a PhD in sociology at the University of Wisconsin Madison. She teaches part-time, travels, and volunteers with her husband. Family times, a Book Club, and lively friends keep her smiling.



upon the pressure

Who Are About To Die

Even though pitted by woodpeckers
and its plates of bark loosening,
the maple tree marked for removal
opens feathery red buds as it
has done since its first spring.

Thomas R. Smith

Thomas R. Smith's most recent book of poems is *The Foot of the Rainbow* (Red Dragonfly Press). He is chief editor of a new collection of papers on Robert Bly, *Robert Bly In This World* (University of Minnesota Libraries). He lives in River Falls and teaches at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis.



near the firefly
part of the night
missing

Gary Hotham

Gary Hotham lives in Maryland. He has been writing for a long time now and his poems have appeared in a variety of literary journals and magazines. His book *Breath Marks: Haiku to Read in the Dark* was published in 1999 and his latest chapbook, *Missed Appointment: The Haiku Art* in 2007. Both books received a Mildred Kanterman Memorial Merit Book Award from the Haiku Society of America.

These photos show two of the full panels from the *Along the Rock River* community art project. Below, artist Sally Koehler shows off one of the completed panels. Right, the full panel with Lorine's cabin in the upper right.



execute and adjust

The Other Husbands Are Dead

Now there are no men but you
to cloak and shovel, to unfreeze
the pipes or open tight things.
Now these young widows
gather at the toolbox of you,
tight as screws, a harem of hollow.
You are no MacGyver, are best
at calling other men to repair
such broken things.
But with no one left to ask
and the women on their knees,
you hold out your smooth hands
and help them to rise, to unfold,
to learn their own loosening.

The Consequence of Kooser

Maybe the long walk in that Nebraska sun, that tomb of June.
Maybe the three flights of stairs,
Maybe the stiff-backed chair,
Maybe the breath, held too long,
Maybe the stories he shared to fill my silence,
 About pine blight and a neighbor's dumb son
 About slammers, how their poetry stops beating with their hearts,
 About beating stage four carcinoma.
Maybe it was dumb luck, karma, coincidence, or
Maybe there is only collusion;
Maybe this meeting at this moment was exactly the plan:
Causing me to see stars—the swoon, the faint, the hopskip in my heart,
Causing a doctor to see cancer—the mass, the web, the stage four in my sister's brain,
Causing a collision of such precision,
Causing this tumble from daylight to dark.
Maybe the first time I read *Ted* I saw *Dead*.
Maybe I always need a reason to be devastated.

Cathryn Cofell

Cathryn Cofell has published five chapbooks, most recently *Kamikaze Commotion* (Parallel Press). She's currently running about, performing with Obvious Dog from the newly released CD called Lip, a blend of poems and music. Her work stands a bit more still in places like *North American Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Oranges & Sardines* and *Dirty Napkin*. More at www.cathryncofell.com.

In us sea-air rhythm

Lorine Niedecker Wisconsin Poetry Festival Friday, October 14 thru Sunday October 16, 2011 Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin

FRIDAY, October 14, 2011

5:00 Café Carpe opens for dinner

6:30 – 8:30 Welcome Gathering, Music, Poetry Open Mic Café Carpe
Music: Obvious Dog – Bruce Dethlefsen and Bill Orth with Cathryn Cofell

SATURDAY, October 15, 2011

TBA Publishers Breakfast

8:30 Poetry Café and Poetry Store Open Library Gallery
Registration, Poetry Publishers, freebies, exchanges

Hoard Historical Museum is open from 9:30 – 4:30. 1 block walk
Exhibits: Lorine Niedecker, Mysteries of the Mounds, Dairy and Civil War History

9:00 - 10:15 How To Make a Poem Your Own – John Lehman Community Room

10:15 – 10:30 Poetry Café Break Poetry Cafe

10:30 – 12:30 Nature of Wisconsin Poetry Community Room
This traditionally lively panel gets everyone thinking about poetry, their own and an overview of the state of Wisconsin poetry. How are poets and poetry best supported and what improvements might be made? Are there divisions separating poets that should be bridged? How should good writing be encouraged to raise the bar in general, and raise the profile of Wisconsin poetry nationally, even internationally? Discussion, questions and maybe even answers.
Moderators: Sarah Busse, Wendy Vardaman, Editors, Verse Wisconsin, Panel TBA

12:30 – 1:30 Welcome and Box Lunch Poetry Café and Community Room

1:30 – 3:30 Wisconsin Poetry Showcase Community Room
Moderator: tba

3:30 – 5:00 Poetry Round Tables - A new small group format this year
Invited poets will read and discuss their work in small groups. Participants will then have an opportunity to read and discuss their work. Two invited poets per table will rotate every half hour.
1. Group A Poetry Cafe
2. Group B Community Room
3. Group C Friends Room
4. Group D Pre-event area

5:00 Poetry Café - Gathering for dinner connections. Poetry Café

5:00 – 6:30 Dinner on your own or with groups.

6:30 – 8:00 Poetry Film Festival Community Room
Master of Ceremonies: Cathy Cook

"We live by the urgent wave"

SUNDAY, October 16, 2011

- 9:00 – 10:15 Understanding Lorine's Poetry Community Room
Lorine Niedecker took words and weeds and water and sky and made of them something which resonated far beyond her marshes, poetry which speaks across all boundaries and borders. What does Lorine do in her poetry, and how does she do it?
Moderator: Tom Montag
- 10:30 – 11:45 Oriental Elements in Lorine Niedecker's Poetry Community Room
Moderators: Tom Montag, Michael Nichols Wisdom
- 11:45 – 12:45 Lunch (Box Lunch) Poetry Cafe
- 1:00 – 3:00 Blackhawk Island Writer's Workshop Blackhawk Island
For those who are interested in writing "in the spirit of Lorine" this workshop is being held on the property that was Lorine's home along the Rock River. This location is full of inspiration. Participants will create new work. Free, registration required. Limit 20
Moderator: Faith Barrett
- 1:00 – 2:30 Wisconsin Poetry Showcase II Community Room
Moderator: tba
- 3:00 – 4:00 Margot Peters Presents "Lorine Niedecker: A Poets Life" Gallery
This biography will be published by UW Press this fall. Margot will be reading from the book and answering questions about her research and writing.
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CORRECTION

In my article "Niedecker or Neidecker, No Longer the Question" I wrote that Mary Rockenfield's grandfather was Charles Niedecker, Jr. Her grandfather was, in fact, George Neidecker. But my point stands: though George changed the spelling of his name, he was christened George Niedecker.

Margot Peters

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
209 Merchants Avenue
Fort Atkinson, WI 53538
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www.lorineniedecker.org

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*Friends of Lorine Niedecker
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