

Origin

fourth series

featuring

LORINE NIEDECKER

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Yes, true poetry occurs above all to us in our secretness. It's always happened this way. The more we come to transfer our emotion and the newness of our visions into words, the more the words come to hide within a music that will be the prime revelation of their poetic profundity beyond any limits of significance . . .

Having said this: what poets and artists, from Romanticism to our days have made and continue to make is measureless: they have felt the aging of language: the weight of thousands of years borne in their blood; they have brought back into memory its measure of anguish and, at the same time, mediating cruel and obstinate stresses have acquired the power of giving it the liberty of emancipating itself in that very same degree that affirms it.

Only poetry—I've learned the hard way, I know—poetry alone can heal man, even when every eye perceives, through the accumulation of misfortunes, that nature dominates reason and that man is much less ruled by his own labor than through the mercy of his Element.

WASTED ENERGY

Refinement of speech is a thing that we preach
All in vain it would sometimes seem,
For this is the age when slang is the rage,
And vocabularies, a dream.

I used to make rhymes; now I hand people lines
(And they're boresome and foolish, no doubt),
But however folks feel—one thing is so real—
A great many "expire and pass out."

When Tom, Dick and Phil are conversing,
The effect is entirely unique,
We can't quite make out what they're talking about
But we gather it's Sheba or Sheik.

I tell Tom of the quake that made Mexico shake,
"Well, ain't that the berries?" quotes he.
When describing a quail or a sunset or whale—
They're "wonderful!"—each of the three.

It's amazingly queer, but from all sides we hear
Of the "crooks" and "tough birds" in our town,
Of "wild women," of "guys," many "I wonder why's,"
"Juicy" tales and requests to "pipe down."

Any brains do you say? You may put them away
 By this modernized method of talk.
 An argument clinch? Say, "Oh, yes, that's a cinch,"
 "Absolutely" is still better—less thought.

The American tongue is found lacking by some,
 So they take a few words from afar.
 But "Pas auf" and "trez bean" are as common, 'twould seem,
 As Uncle Joe Cannon's cigar.

LORINE NIEDECKER

LORINE

Lorine Faith Niedecker was born on May 12, 1903, to Henry and Theresa ("Daisy") Kunz Niedecker (as L.Z. told—"knee-decker"). Delivered by Dr. Frank Brewer in the cottage just east of the Fountain House (Blackhawk Island, Route 3, Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin), she was named Lorine for the doctor's wife. Her maternal grandparents, the G. C. Kunzes, owned and ran the Fountain House Hotel (subsequently run by her parents for a time and taken over in 1925 by Edward H. Pfafflin).

Lorine was an only child, and like her mother before her, one of the few youngsters living year round on Blackhawk Island. Tiny and blond, she would present herself at the door of other cottages as "Weenie Koonie Niedecker". No one remembers her without thick glasses which required her to tilt her head to bring into focus anything or anybody not on eye level.

She had a lonely childhood and learned to love the outdoors. Growing up on a river where it empties into a lake (Koshkonong), "it seems" she was to write some fifty years later, "I spent my childhood outdoors—red-winged blackbirds, willows, maples, boats, fishing (the smell of tarred nets), twittering and squawking noises from the marsh." She always remembered "a happy, outdoor grandfather who somehow somewhere had got hold of nursery and folk rhymes to entrance me" and her mother "speaking whole chunks of down-to-earth magic". Since Lorine's mother was hard of hearing from the time her daughter was born, there could not have been a normal amount of communication between them. They were, nevertheless, very close—and in personality traits Lorine resembled her mother rather than her robust, gregarious, fun-loving father who seined carp for a living.

When it came time for the little girl to go to school, the Niedeckers took a house on the corner of what was then

Germany Street (now Riverside Drive) and Shirley Street in Fort Atkinson. Lorine walked a bit over a mile to Caswell School—a sweet, shy, likable, studious child with blond pigtails and thick-lensed glasses. She was learning to play the piano rather well, had a good ear for music. In fourth grade she sang the part of the fairy godmother in the operetta *Cinderella* (Harriet Westphal Vance was *Cinderella*—and still has the dress Lorine wore), was later to write a friend "...in the early grades a teacher told me I'd be a 'noted singer'!..." By the time she was in fifth and sixth grades she was bringing bird books to school, spending recess time and walking time identifying birds and learning their songs and habits. A Campfire Girl, she earned her torchbearer rank in nature lore (particularly birds).

When Lorine was ready for seventh grade—seventh through twelfth met in the senior high school at that time—Hank and Daisy Niedecker moved back to Blackhawk Island and Lorine stayed during the week with Charlie (blacksmith) and Barbara Bowen, also on Riverside Drive. Fine-boned, always thin, Lorine grew to medium height. Adequately dressed and neatly pigtailed, she cultivated the intelligence which was to shine through her poetry later. While other girls were developing and practicing maidenly wiles, Lorine divided free moments at school among studying, writing, and reading in the library. A bona fide intellectual, she was naive. Shy, she was nevertheless fervent in defense of a cause she believed in. She had a delightful sense of humor, uncompromising honesty, and a curiosity which enabled her to ask questions in complete unselfconsciousness. Always, of necessity, she was peering through thick glasses.

As long as she remained in school, mathematics was her unfavorable subject. However, since she was an honor student, she must have done well enough in what math courses she was required to take. Her strongest subject was English, and a year or so into high school she encountered the

English teacher whose understanding and encouragement firmed her resolve to be a poet. Indeed, if it had not been for Miss Lieberman she might have considered a career challenging enough to keep her from "scribblin", as she termed her literary efforts. As she was later to write:

Grandfather
advised me:
Learn a trade

I learned
to sit at a desk
and condense

No layoff
from this
condensery

and, as for her father:

To bankers on high land
he opened his wine tank
He wished his only daughter
to work in the bank

But he'd given her a source
to sustain her—
a weedy speech
a marshy retainer

Toward the end of her life Lorine was to write a friend: "...I wonder if Miss Lieberman who must have married is still alive and would want a copy of the book. Funny how I think now of the old days—what influences in a person's life—not only the Place [Blackhawk Island] in mine but somebody like Daisy Lieberman...." Unfortunately, Miss Lieberman (Mrs. Arnold Maxwell) had died

before the publication of *North Central*.

With sixty-nine others, Lorine Niedecker graduated from the Fort Atkinson high school in the class of 1922. By all accounts—and especially according to fellow members of that group—that was quite a class. The 1922 yearbook *Tchogeerah* featured on page 98 what was probably her first break into print, a longish poem entitled “Wasted Energy.”

For two years after high school Lorine attended Beloit College, in the Wisconsin city of that name, where she still exchanged help in English for assistance in math. During this time her mother became totally deaf, and Lorine felt needed at home—so she went back to her life by water.

In order to in any way understand this remarkable woman, one has to appreciate life on the Island: buildings old before their time because each spring the water rose and came in, people old before *their* time because spring housecleaning meant salvaging and reconditioning and redoing or redecorating not because they wanted to, but because they had to. Wildlife abounded, though even the rabbits moved to higher ground while humans if at all possible sat out the floods. Each front door, during this season, had a boat tied to it for emergency. Snakes were plentiful, too, taken for granted among the myriad swamp life.

River rising—flood
Now melt and leave home
Return—broom wet
naturally wet
Under

soak-heavy rug
water bugs hatched—
no snake in the house
Where were they?—
she

who knew how to clean up
after floods
he who bailed boats, houses
water endows us
with buckled floors

The “he” in this verse, Henry Niedecker, made a good living with his launch and two scows. The carp he seined were shipped to New York, and one year he made such a fantastic haul that when his nets froze to shore it appeared as if the entire riverbank were made of the big yellow fish.

“Paeon to Place”, from which those and the following stanzas are quoted, Lorine described in a letter to Florence Dollase (postmarked August 4, 1969) as a “longish poem which is a kind of *In Memoriam* of my father and mother and the place I’ve never seemed really to get away from. Reviewers esp. in England,” she continued, “confuse Lake Superior with L. Koshkonong-Rock River but I love both and all waters (except when they come into my house). . . .

“Wd. like to see it [*Paeon*] in print in a little book all by itself—a Japanese publisher wants to do it, but it is ‘owned’ by the London man. All my poems are copyrighted by me but I sometimes don’t know what good it does—the publishers seem to be able to ‘give permission’ or refuse.”

The autobiographical “Paeon to Place” begins as follows:

Paeon to Place

and the place
was water

Fish
fowl
flood

Water lily mud
My life

in the leaves and on water
My mother and I
born
in swale and swamp and sworn
to water

My father
thru marsh fog
sculled down
from high ground
saw her face

at the organ
bore the weight of lake water
and the cold—
he seined for carp to be sold
that their daughter

might go high
on land
to learn
Saw his wife turn
deaf

and away
She
who knew boats
and ropes
no longer played

His wife's deafness may or may not have caused the rift,
but in their daughter's mind this was the turning point in

her parents' life together, and Henry's subsequent philandering is seen in several of the poems—most of them compassionate, as if he had a blind spot, but the one below showing the bitterness of the wife.

What horror to awake at night
and in the dimness see the light.
Time is white
mosquitoes bite
I've spent my life on nothing.

The thought that stings. How are you, Nothing,
sitting around with Something's wife.
Buzz and burn
is all I learn
I've spent my life on nothing.

I'm pillowed and padded, pale and puffing
lifting household stuffing—
carpets, dishes
benches, fishes
I've spent my life in nothing.

From May, 1928, through August, 1930, Lorine Niedecker worked at the Dwight Foster Public Library, Fort Atkinson, as library assistant. During the week, until after Thanksgiving, she stayed in town with the Roland Hartel family, Roland being the son of her mother's sister. Weekends were spent at home on the Island.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1928, Lorine's first marriage took place—and shortly dissolved. Since both parties are gone, we can know for sure only that they were incompatible. She may have taken for granted that since he had been raised on a farm not far from her beloved swamp and was perhaps similar to her father in outward characteristics he was the one for her. And the young man no doubt expected

his bride to place complete emphasis on domesticity, neglecting the poetry he may not even have known about and related intellectual pursuits.

In 1931 she was published in the February issue of *Poetry* (Chicago).

In 1936 *New Directions* first published her work, five short verses, including

For sun and moon and radio
farmers pay dearly
their natural resource: turn
the world off early.

and in the summer of 1939, *Furioso* published:

We know him—Law and Order League—
fishing from our dock,
testified against the pickets
at the plant—owns stock.

There he sits and fishes
stiff as if a stork
brought him, never sprang from work—
a sport.

In 1942 she was writing radio scripts for WHA in Madison. (WHA has no record confirming this, although H. B. McCarty remembers the name.)

On May 8, 1944, she went to work for Hoard's Dairyman, working for some time on their Junior Club and then becoming a proofreader.

I worked the print shop
right down among em
for folk from whom all poetry flows...

I was Blondie...

But what vitality! The women hold jobs—
clean house, cook, raise children, bowl
and go to church.

What would they say if they knew
I sit for two months on six lines
of poetry?

In 1946, her first book, *New Goose*, was published in Illinois. It sold for two dollars. Most would be proud to see themselves in print, but the little note stuck in the copy given to Florence Dollase reads:

Dear Florence:

A little book herewith. Since you are one of three to receive it in Fort I don't know if you should be puffed up or suspicious about something. I have to ask that it be kept mum—folks might put up a wall if they knew ("she writes poetry, queer bird etc. . .") and I have to be among 'em to hear 'em talk so I can write some more! Believin' as I do that poetry comes from the folk if it's to be vital and original.

Yours,

Lorine

The *New Goose* on the library shelf is not autographed, nor is it as worn as one might expect after twenty to twenty-five years. Whether or not the library was counted as one of the three recipients, the inside of the wrapper notes:

"She speaks and sings
against all that's
predatory in 'Mother Goose'.
Whatever in it is still to
be touched or felt she
recreates for people today
to feel and touch in her—
their—own way.

Lorine Niedecker is a young

Wisconsin poet whose work has appeared in *New Directions*, *Furioso*, and such discriminating publications. This is her first book."

And, locally, our poet continued to hide her light in her "swamp" as long as she lived. Only a few were aware of her poetry—and fewer still really appreciated it. Lifelong friends and confidants (several have concurred that no one got really close to her unless he or she had known her for years) did not necessarily understand her verse, perhaps because she was ahead of her time in the use of new forms and rhythms. (Even Albert Millen, whom she married in 1962, did not realize she wrote poetry until the day some time after the wedding that she said, "Look, there's something I ought to tell you. I'm a poet." His reply: "You're... a what?"

One word everyone who knew her uses in reference to Lorine Niedecker. That word is "independent". While she worked at Hoard's she floated a loan and built herself a tiny cottage up on blocks in the swamp just off the road through Blackhawk Island. At this time of year the little house is in plain sight, as are all of them—but when the leaves are out the cottages in the Niedecker-Millen enclave are secluded from view. This is expressed so succinctly in

Fall

We must pull
the curtains—
we haven't any
leaves

The work at Hoard's held Lorine until June 14, 1950. Toward the end of that time she remarked that her eyesight was so poor that glasses could no longer completely correct

it, but she did not say this complainingly. Along with the reading glass she now used in addition to glasses it was a fact of life, like her mother's "Big blind ears..." and the statement that she herself

rose from marsh mud,
algae, equisetum, willows,
sweet green, noisy
birds and frogs...

In 1951 Daisy Niedecker died. She had once been happy and loving, quietly hard working—but time and again in the poetry Lorine dwelled on the unhappiness of her mother, trapped by deafness which cut her off from all she loved: her husband, their friends, songs of the birds and other sounds of the outdoors.

I've wasted my whole life in water.
My man's got nothing but leaky boats.
My daughter, writer, sits and floats.

In 1954 Henry Niedecker died. He was 75. He, too, had worked hard, had tried to fill the loneliness caused by the failure of his marriage, probably could not in the least understand his daughter's penchant for poetry.

Anchored here
in the rise and sink
of life —
middle years' nights
he sat

beside his shoes
rocking his chair
Roped not 'looped
in the loop
of her hair'

Had he not been so generous to "friends" and relatives he

would have accumulated quite an estate to leave his daughter. Yet he left a legacy:

I walked
on New Year's Day

beside the trees
my father now gone planted

even following
the road

Each
spoke

Following the death of her father, rumor has it that Lorine had a sort of breakdown. Things outside of her environment and poetry meant absolutely nothing to her, and people had let her down. Her marriage had not worked out, and the family who had loved her even if they had not completely understood her was gone. She had one small volume of poetry on the library shelf, but her peers were not impressed. The following verse reveals how undistinguished she felt:

The clothesline post is set
yet no totem-carvings distinguish the Niedecker tribe
from the rest; every seventh day they wash:
worship sun; fear rain, their neighbors' eyes;
raise their hands from ground to sky,
and hang or fall by the whiteness of their all.

On February 1, 1957, we find her starting work at the Fort Atkinson Memorial Hospital—work classification: dietary position, cleaning. To Lorine, a job was a job—qualifying her eventually for social security, and paying

for food and taxes and the purchase of books on Leonardo, Chief Blackhawk, Audubon, Van Gogh, Thomas Jefferson, Charles Darwin—or whomever or whatever she was researching at the time with future poetry in mind. She was frail, yet tough—and determined to conserve what vision she had left. We have to realize, too, that she had never shown particular interest in job advancement—perhaps because a position commensurate with her intelligence and ability might have drawn too heavily on the creative energy she needed for her writing. She wrote more about labor than management, and living as she did—practically a hermit—only her work afforded her the opportunity to be among the people she wrote about.

In 1961 her second book, *My Friend Tree*, was put out by the Wild Hawthorne Press in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The hospital job lasted until she remarried in 1962. Not far into that year Albert Millen came to the door of her snug little cottage set high and near the road. He wanted to buy a cabin belonging to her father's cousin, Lawrence Niedecker.

Albert Millen's early life had been spent off the beaten path, a red I.W.W. membership card his pass in "riding the freights"; his middle life he lived in Milwaukee raising a family; and now, alone again and close to retiring, he was seeking a retirement spot away from the city. He was a big, bluff, gregarious outdoor man who had the highest recommendation possible as far as Lorine was concerned: he wanted a place on her beloved Island. Since he was, by trade, a building painter, he saw nothing unusual about her scrubbing floors at the hospital. Minus his right hand, he could understand the handicap she felt with her restricted vision. Her love of books he shared, though not in kind. He still gets lost in science fiction, while she pored over informative and historically significant volumes. She had no car—and he took her places in a luxurious automobile. He offered companionship—and he could share

with her something she had thought beyond her reach: a family. He had four grown children and, at that time, a half dozen grandchildren.

They were married May 24, 1962, by Rev. Alban G. Tippins at St. John's Community Church, and she subsequently wrote:

I knew a clean man
but he was not for me.
Now I sew green aprons
over covered seats. He

wades the muddy water fishing,
falls in, dries his last pay-check
in the sun, smooths it out
in *Leaves of Grass*. He's
the one for me.

The change in Lorine after the wedding gladdened the hearts of all who knew her. Fifty-nine years old, the lifetime loner became gay and light-hearted as Al's "little Lorrie". Hand in hand, they shyly and delightedly called on Lorine's good friends and invited them in return. Al was a good cook, and taught Lorine (who, her father's friends agree, "couldn't cook for sour apples"). She took an interest in clothes: Sewing a dress

The need
these closed-in days

to move before you
smooth-draped
and color-elated

in a favorable wind

She amused her friends with tales of her newly-acquired grandchildren, endeared herself to her new family. The Millens lived in a Milwaukee apartment to be close to Al's work. He worked nights, and on many weekends they drove out to Blackhawk Island Saturday morning, returning to the apartment Monday afternoon. They stayed in Al's cabin, learning the vicissitudes of being landlords renting out the two places owned by Lorine.

The Millens made several trips, a new and delightful experience for Lorine, who stuffed the glove compartment with notepads—and was always scribbling as they drove along. Each morning they left the motel early to see the wildlife, and her husband got a bit exasperated with her at times. He would spot a moose pulling up lily roots—and by the time she looked up it was gone. And the deer near Grand Marais vanished by the time she got through writing whatever she was jotting down. She pokes wry fun at herself:

I'm sorry to have missed
Sand Lake
My dear one tells me
we did not
We watched a gopher there

By nine o'clock in the morning the traffic would have scared away all roadside wildlife and Lorine would be asleep on the back seat of the car. She might awaken to find a horse tied next to the parked Buick somewhere in South Dakota, her husband and the range rider deep in conversation.

At night she always arranged a flashlight and pencil and paper on the motel bedstand just in case.

Together they planned and built their retirement home not far off the river, between it and the little cottage of Lorine's. Lorine, says Al, kept insisting the house be built

high—and he respected her wishes—and now he wishes he had put it one block higher still.

In 1968 the third book, *North Central*, was published in London. It featured the long poem "Lake Superior", written as the result of one of the Millen trips. The long "Winter-green Ridge" which concludes the volume should brighten any ecologist's day.

Also in 1968 Al retired and they moved out to their home on Blackhawk Island. It was comfortable and convenient, and when Lorine had a windfall from the sale to the University of Texas of her letters from her mentor Louis Zukofsky (not to be published until after his death) they added a garage which they named the University of Texas.

The two gardened together, he doing most of the vegetable growing and she finding a great outlet in raising flowers, shrubs, and trees. Together they watched the carp swim about them when the water was high, tying up a sturdy wooden boat at their front door to provide emergency high-water transportation. They cooked their meals in partnership, although she was enjoying it and taking over the kitchen more and more. Evenings they often sat watching television, Al with a science fiction book at hand, Lorine with a hospital-type table across her lap. On the left her latest interest in books lay open, and at her right paper and pencil so that she could take notes. She who had earlier written

O my floating life
Do not save love
for things
Throw things
to the flood

ruined
by the flood

Leave the new unbought—
all one in the end—

even began to accumulate a few "things". A horn and shell clipper ship, a few mementos of the trips she and Al had made, some paintings (two by Gail Roub), and a growing collection of beautiful books.

When the Millens came to town they did their errands together; then Al deposited his "little Lorrie" at the library. She would browse among the stacks, examine new books, check out any that particularly appealed to her. Next stop was Gruner's (book store) window. Then she would go in to pick up a volume she had ordered. Marion Gruner remembered her as a "honey", the best customer she had ever had. The last book ordered, according to Miss Gruner, was a beautiful one on Beethoven. . . . Ready to go home, Lorine would walk to the tavern on the corner of Sherman and North Main where Al was waiting. She would slip up on a stool for a few minutes, although the only alcoholic like she had was a very occasional late-night "grasshopper".

In 1969 her fourth book came out: *T & G*, published by the Jargon Society, Penland School, Penland, North Carolina, beautifully accompanied by the plant prints of A. Doyle Moore. A grant from the National Council of Arts made this publication possible, and the University of Wisconsin library classifies it under "rare books". Jonathan Williams, director of the Jargon Society, wrote:

"Lorine Niedecker is the most absolute poetess since Emily Dickinson. She shuns the public world, lives, reads, and writes, very quietly, near the town of Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, by the Rock River on its way to Lake Koshkonong. . . .

"Miss Niedecker is as faithful and recurrent, as beautiful and homely as my favorite peony bush. Every year for over thirty years she has been putting out these blossoms. Perhaps other eyes are ripe for

them now?"

Lorine tried painting, writing Frank Brewer (son and namesake of the doctor who had delivered her and for whose mother she had been named) in November of 1969 concerning two small watercolors she was sending him:

"...The boats—I don't see the man o'war on Rock River. The other boats were fished up out of subconscious—Milwaukee. For a moment one year I thought I might become an artist. Better stick to my poem-knitting...."

Another letter, dated January 19, 1970, gives us an idea of the way she worked, as well as the warm concern bestowed on her friends:

Dear Frank and Annie Laurie:

The winter has had a good cold start. How are you? Drop me a note as to how you are.

Just thought I'd let you know (the enclosed) how I spend the hours from 5:00 to 11:00 mornings. (though a poet carries it all around in his head pretty much all the time, such a queer critter he is!)

We are both sticking indoors pretty much—going up to the mailbox today (15 below at 6:00 a.m.) will be my only fresh air.

Keep warm and take care
on sidewalks—

Lorine

Enclosed was her "Thomas Jefferson".

In 1970 her fifth, and last volume in her lifetime, was brought out by a London publishing house. In this 126-page book is her life's work up until 1968. Called *My Life by Water*, it features her "Paeon to Place" which has been quoted so many times in this biography.

During the winter of 1968 Lorine Niedecker Millen was having dizzy spells and headaches, and spent ten days in a hospital. Her blood pressure down, she was released and—

except for brief periods of illness which caused no alarm—was apparently in, for her, good health. She seldom missed her long morning walk, and after they retired to the Island Bonnie Roub often accompanied her until the birth of Roub's first child.

On December 1, 1970, however, she suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, and was unable to communicate vocally after one last, "Al, I don't know what's the matter." When the Campfire Girls carolled at Fort Atkinson's Memorial Hospital just before Christmas they left her a small tree. Juanita Schreiner, a classmate and longtime friend, had decorated the tree all in natural-looking birds, with a squirrel at its foot. She was certain that Lorine, former Campfire Girl herself, could hear the caroling and see the little tree—though of course she could not tell anyone directly.

On December 30 the critically ill patient was ambulated from the local hospital to a Madison hospital, where she died the next day—her condition complicated by lobar pneumonia.

Lorine Niedecker Millen was buried in a blizzard January 3, 1971, in the Niedecker lot of the Union Cemetery, town of Sumner, by the same Reverend Tippins who had married her to Albert Millen. She lies in the family plot beside her father and mother.

Albert Millen, unable to face visitors at the Hayes Funeral Home and too grief-stricken to attend the burial service, was represented by his son and family. Because of the weather none of his three daughters could get there, although even the one in Australia wanted to come. All would miss Lorine.

In the box of Niedecker memorabilia loaned by Gail Roub are two manuscripts, one the final version of the long poem "Thomas Jefferson" not included in her five books, but appearing in *Origin* 19, 1970 (Cid Corman, editor), published in Tokyo, Japan. The other manuscript is "Darwin", another long piece which grows on the reader with each re-reading.

How many other unpublished works she left I do not know. She did leave little slips of paper in a chest of her things, instructions for disposal in case of her death. Her journals were to be burned immediately—and her husband, respecting her wishes, did so. Gail and Bonnie Roub were to choose any books they wanted and the remaining ones were bequeathed to the Dwight Foster Public Library in Fort Atkinson. Unpublished manuscripts go to the University of Texas. It was almost, her husband feels, as if she knew her time was short—and a quote from her letter to Florence Dollase bears out this feeling:

(postmarked August 4, 1969)

... I suppose we're getting old—thoughts of the past in your mind, too?—but we've both had pretty good lives.

Lorine Niedecker was a poet's poet. This was, of course, largely her own doing. Like Emily Dickinson, who had an unfortunate love affair at 23 or 24 and spent the remainder of her life as the family recluse, Lorine was—much of her life—a loner. She no doubt learned early that writing poetry leaves one open to ridicule from the thoughtless among those who do not understand it. She had few hometown friends not of long standing—and the new ones were arts-oriented people like Gail and Bonnie Roub, the Ron Ellises, Fred Hobe, and Aeneas McAllister—the “boy” (almost thirty years younger than she) who used to play an old piano in their garage. On winter nights he'd play with gloves on, just the tips of his fingers out.

Over the years she acknowledged as teachers primarily William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky. Zukofsky she had “the good fortune to call friend and mentor”: without the February 1931 issue of *Poetry* (Chicago), which Zukofsky edited, she felt she'd “never have developed as a poet.” A whole section of *My Life by Water* is titled “For Paul”, Zukofsky's son, now a well-known concert violinist.

Basil Bunting's cataract operations she mentioned in

correspondence, noting that the first had been a success and he was going back to England for the second. Cid Corman, editor of *Origin* (Kyoto), and his wife stayed two nights at the Blackhawk Hotel, Fort Atkinson, in November of 1970 and spent the day in between out at Millens' on the Island. She had entertained Jonathan Williams at lunch in Milwaukee when he came on a poetry-reading engagement at UW-Milwaukee and Madison.

Whole chunks of her life are still undocumented and perhaps always will be. A word from herself, however, at the close, may tell what is most vital: her sense of poetry—

“... I like planting poems in deep silence; each person gets at the poems for himself. He has to come to the poems with an ear for all the music they can give and he'll hear that as Beethoven heard though deaf...”

JANE KNOX

This piece was presented originally as a talk to the Tuesday Club of Fort Atkinson in April 1971.

The editor has made slight changes here and there—correcting slight literary slips—some grammatical constructions—but not tampering with the content in any important way.

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