Portland Society for
CALLIGRAPHY

NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 1983

LOIS McCLELLAND
A Special Kind of Artist

"Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue."

Proverbs 31: 25, 26

LOIS McCLELLAND, teacher, calligrapher, prober of mind and matter, died of cancer, August 29, 1983, in Portland, Oregon, leaving her family, friends and community with a rich heritage in letters, their origins, their content; in designing that is moving toward a fine art; and in the encouragement and freedom for her students to develop and discover new techniques and individual talents. Our feeling of loss is balanced by Lois's inspiration and strong faith in each individual's potential; therefore, we all must continue examining and reaching, because Lois was a master teacher.

Lois's calligraphy began when she studied with Yvonne Bianco from 1965 to 1972, as well as studying one year later with Lloyd Reynolds at the Museum Art School. She began teaching children's classes at the School of Arts and Crafts Society (now OSAC) in 1966 and taught from that time until August in classes ranging from beginning to intermediate and advanced. She was chairman of the Book Arts department at Oregon School of Arts and Crafts, where she developed a three-year program of calligraphy classes and the related book arts. During her tenure these classes, in conjunction with liberal arts classes, qualified a student for a BA in Crafts through OSAC's program with Marylhurst College. She has also taught extensively in many other areas of the Pacific Northwest as well as Utah and Hawaii. Her work is found and recognized locally, nationally and internationally.

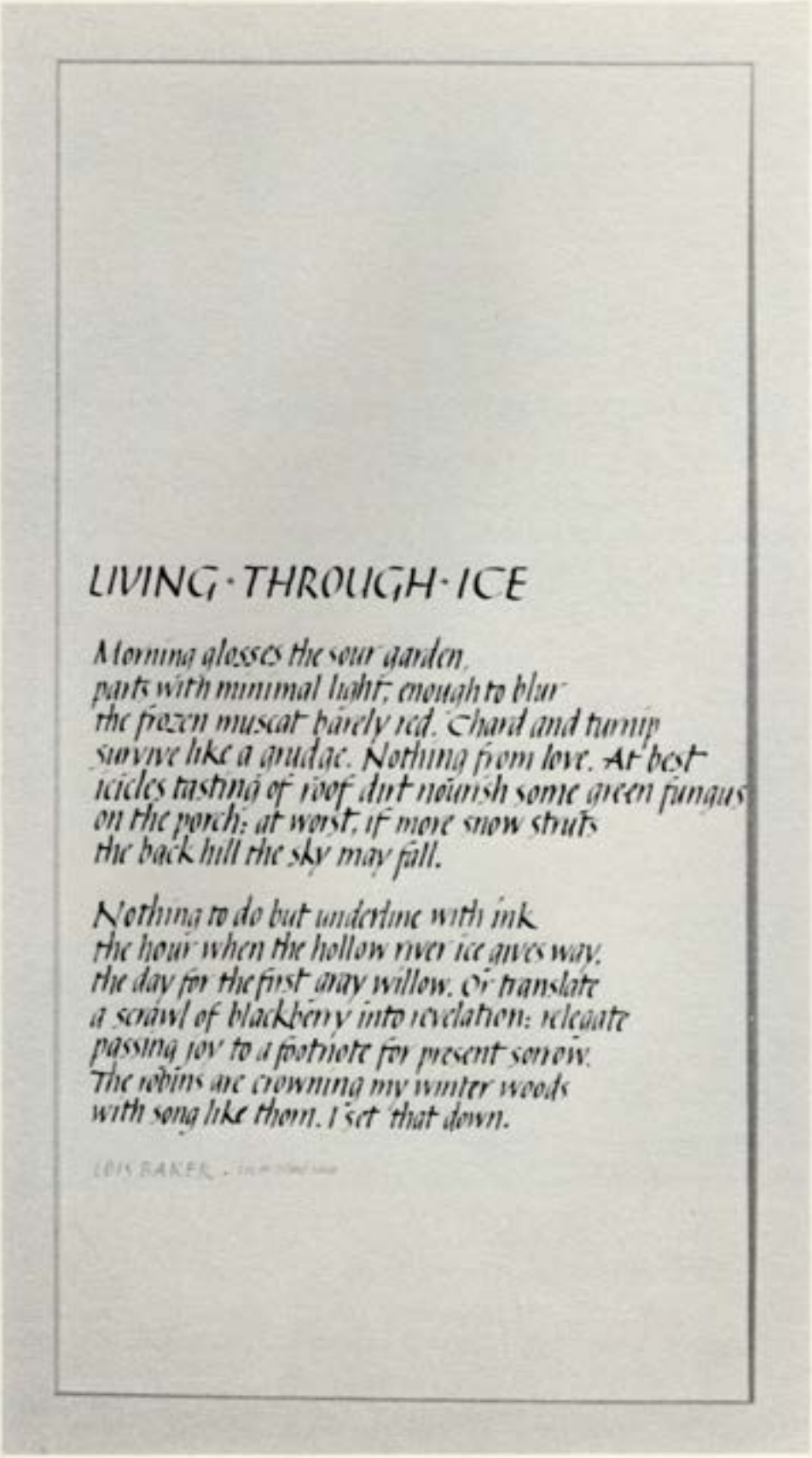
Mary Greeley, friend, colleague and calligrapher, has written: "She [Lois] believed in strong hard work in the fundamentals: study of letterforms, the shapes, the result. She was interested in the historical background and development of the letterforms, and most often used the historical forms as the starting point of study. . . . She was just as skilled at teaching the ways of freedom once one had achieved the necessary discipline. . . . She was a gentle, supportive teacher, always encouraging, pointing out differences, not mistakes.

"Lois's attitude of love and respect for her own work, her calligraphy and her teaching, and her love and respect for the capabilities of her students and colleagues, set a tone that is important for all of us. We are aware of it, and we need to continue to incorporate it into our own lives. She gave us a spirit of excitement, reverence, and compassion for life and for work; we now need to carry that spirit forward and share it with the next generations."

Lois is remembered as saying, "There are no mistakes, only beginnings."

Lois's strength as a teacher, as an artist, and as a human being, especially as she waged her strong fight against physical odds, makes her indeed a special kind of artist.

Lillian Pierce



black ink on white handmade paper, 16 x 25

LET ME TELL you of my affection and respect for the woman:

I had met Kannie French in a series of calligraphy classes held in the pump house at the old Reservoir Park Art Center. Kannie was going to the Oregon coast to renew friendships and take a week-long workshop, "Caps and Colors," from a former teacher, Lois McClelland. She urged me to go also. I was apprehensive about being thoroughly intimidated by an instructor whom Kannie had studied with a few years earlier and by calligraphers working in the very heart of our contemporary western revival. But fool at heart as I am, I went for the adventure.

The Oregon coast at Neskowin is green, green, green, the problem being that it's all the same shade of green and gluts the eye. Our workshop was held in a warm brown wooden schoolhouse, two stories high with a loft around the outer walls which was lined with windows. A most pleasant indirect bright light spilled onto our main level work stations.

Our morning was spent in a rather formal review of cap proportion, shape, direction and sequence of strokes. I remember redrawing a cap B half a dozen times as Lois stood by my work space suggesting succeeding corrections. I redid the bowls to get them lobe shaped, worked to get their junctures to the stem at a ninety degree angle until Lois finally said, "That's more like it; now the entire letter could be narrower."

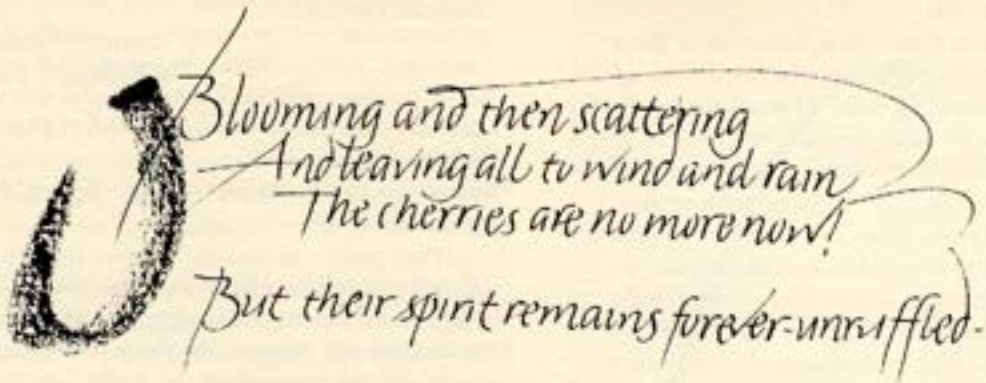
When we broke for lunch we moved out onto a wood deck and lounged in sun which shone daily for a week, a rarity for Oregon. (I took credit for bringing good weather from Utah.) Friends lunched together but before the end of the first break circulated and befriended strangers. Before lunch was over that day, Lois had learned everyone's name. Typically our afternoons were spent working individually on design projects. The quiet concentration of calligraphers working imparted an energy still but firm, like noon bathed in light.

We attempted drawing versals in the tradition of the English calligraphers. At one point Lois indicated an obviously awkward terminal on my page. I responded that it had looked awkward to me as well, but that I had measured it, and it was exactly the three pen widths that she had specified. Lois said simply, "We are designing, not counting pen widths."

My fondest memory of Lois is her saying goodbye to our class at Sitka in the summer of '79. She was overcome with the love she has for her work, her students and this special experience of sharing and growing through calligraphy. She continued talking through her tears trying even to laugh as well as wipe them away. An intense silence followed her farewell in which we self-consciously looked down or averted our eyes or otherwise avoided contact with one another knowing the fragile hold we had on our own composure.

Applause broke the long silence.

Orlan Owen
Utah



Bettye Lou Bennett