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Lorna

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Lorna¹

Mary Dengler

In a simple classic yellow dress,
she stood inscrutable and tall
and smiled “welcome”
to our two-week summer book affair.

From that auspicious start,
I’d hear of Lorna now and then
as editor for years, she worked
to educate the Christian world with articles
on pedagogy, scholarship, and faith,
and wrote her poetry, still teaching all the while.

One winter day we met again
somewhere—a college ladies’ room—when she
was interviewing for a job and I
uneasily secure was teaching there.
A moment’s sympathetic smile and word
we gave, then went our separate ways,
both drifting on uncertain seas.

Returning to the institution of her youth,
she later welcomed me, newcomer
to a world she’d helped to shape.

At Dordt, she carried students to the truth
and form of fiction, poetry, and journalistic prose.
Not static or imperious, her way
encouraged independent thought, a love affair
with books. Her quiet conferencing each day
bought students to maturity and grace.
Her other work—liason bridging Anglo and Hispanic race
and worlds through words and guiding works,
translation of the Holy Word,
and teaching in Hispanic schools—
helped weave together kingdom strands
on one small loom.

She wove the cultures well,
like language in her poetry.
We feel the texture strong
enough to bear the strain of years,
and watch her passage
to another sphere of work,
bereft but grateful for the friendship and support
of this well-tempered teacher, artist, guide,
and graceful child of God.

¹This poem is dedicated to Professor Emeritus Lorna Van Gilst, who taught in the English Department at Dordt for many years and is now teaching in Costa Rica.