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Review of *Flight Dreams: A Life in the Midwestern Landscape*, by Lisa Knopp.

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Flight Dreams: A Life in the Midwestern Landscape. By Lisa Knopp. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998. xi + 286 pp. \$22.95 paper.

Lisa Knopp's story will be encouragingly familiar to those who struggle to find meaning in the muddle of family, education, mistakes, insights, and loves we encounter growing up.

Flight Dreams is part of Singular Lives, the Iowa Series in North American Autobiography, whose editor asserts in a foreword that Knopp's Way parallels ancient Oriental definitions of the *Tao* and its three parallel paths. The book proceeds through the writer's childhood, through various work and religious experiences (including Transcendental Meditation and augury), and finally to her writing about nature and her interpretation of her past. Its three major sections show internal unity, but were clearly written at varying times and for assorted purposes.

Winningly, *Flight Dreams* opens with Knopp's youth in a working-class family in Burlington, Iowa. Turning a keenly analytical mind on family matters, the author observes that family and community stories are "literally life-shaping" and that her version of events contains "the rainbow of fiction as well as the granite of fact." These stories shimmer with details likely to reverberate in the minds of Great Plains readers with similar backgrounds: how "card-carrying" Methodist children envied the Catholic kids, for example, and the importance of the ritual of death.

In the book's middle, Knopp surveys the jobs she held while searching for a challenging career. Though she changes names and omits events, her narrative exposes more than

I wanted to know about past lovers. Still, she is equally candid about other matters, including a manuscript on Transcendental Meditation, unfinished because she cannot expose its teachings.

The volume's final third begins with the essay "Real Work," explaining how Knopp began to write. "Poetry was just too lean," so she turned to essays about the healing powers of nature. In homage to the influence of Annie Dillard, she signals her breakthrough with a description of starlings in a maple tree closely modeled on Dillard's famous "tree with lights" passage from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. Her thoughts and experiences as she describes the beginning of her writing career are interspersed with quotations and citations, revealing an eclectic taste and a mind well-equipped for research. Woven among astute observations about the importance of the natural world ("I did not have to leave the city limits to find nature. Literally, it was in my own backyard") is evidence of her continued search for meaning in references to ornithomancy (seeing augury in birds) and other spiritual matters.

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