

**Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now Remembering writer Meridel Le Sueur, two decades after her death  
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HOST: Some folks may remember the name Meridel Le Sueur. She was a force. She was a talented writer in the early 1900s who needed to make ends meet at a time when women were not given much opportunity to work outside the home.

She was a Hollywood stunt woman and the voice of Betty Crocker on the radio for a time. She was also blacklisted for being a communist. She wrote about workers, and women, and her work resonated with generations of women.

In today's installment of Minnesota Now and then, we remember Meridel Le Sueur who died today November 14 back in 1996 in Hudson, Wisconsin. She was 96 years old. This is audio from the MPR archives when Meridel spoke with host Mara Ann Tapp back in 1982. Our excerpt begins with Le Sueur then in her 80s, talking about her work being rediscovered by the women's movement of the 1970s.

**MERIDEL LE SUEUR:** I think that the feminine-- what I call the circular feminine, is very important to return. And what I call the new young women, I think, are doing that. I'm feeling that.

**MARA ANN TAPP:** How?

**MERIDEL LE SUEUR:** Well, it's wonderful to me, the things that they've freed me from. I call myself Mrs. Lazarus. I was dug up out of the grave by the new women, literally.

A bunch of young women came to my house and said they were from Boston. And they said that they had been xeroxing my old stories of the '30s and they asked if they could make an anthology. And I said, well, I wasn't interested in my past work because they wanted to come to my daughter's house and the basement was all my work. And they came and stayed a week. And they collected all the stories that they liked or that was valuable to them and they raised money and printed them.

**MARA ANN TAPP:** And now that was what, the '60s? Beginning of the '60s?

**MERIDEL LE SUEUR:**

**MARA ANN TAPP:** No, it was the '70s more like.

**MERIDEL LE SUEUR:**

**MARA ANN TAPP:** Did the women's movement, which was renewed in the '60s, create a new audience for you? Give you--

**MERIDEL LE SUEUR:** Gave new audience for all women in the arts, in all the arts. This great thing is happening here now. It's just incredible to me that there should be two months, actually, of honor to creative women. I never heard of anything like that.

And I was just thinking, I'm going to make a list of the women in Minnesota who were trashed, and lost, and gone, and their work not known because there was nothing like this. I mean, this is a concept that is-- well, it had to be built up with the women's movement and with women. It's very hard to find forms for women circular creative work like writing, or painting, and music.

And you young women can't-- you really can't know how that fits into the drouth of my life. Nobody ever in Minneapolis-Saint Paul celebrated me as a creative woman. Well, the women's movement is great in the Twin Cities, I think.

**MARA ANN** In the '20s and '30s, you also did reporting. You were a journalist. The story I'm particularly thinking of, is *Marching*, which is about the 1934 trucker strike here.

**MERIDEL LE** Yeah.

**SUEUR:**

**MARA ANN** That journalism, that reporting was very different from the stories that you wrote, but how was it important, especially that strike?

**MERIDEL LE** That strike?

**SUEUR:**

**MARA ANN** Mm-hm.

**TAPP:**

**MERIDEL LE** Before the '34 strike, the average wage in Minneapolis was \$12 a week for a six-day week, 12 hours a day. There was no unions. The White fathers here, the Pillsburys, they fought unions. You couldn't organize a union.

They tried to organize unions here from 1912. It was a great strike, all part of that raising of consciousness in the American people. Of course, the whole depression did that.

They learned how to organize. They learned how to get food. They learned how to demand. Here in Minneapolis was some of the Great Depression strikes for food, just for food.

One of the first demonstrations we had that was before the New Deal, before Roosevelt. But we had these people in bathing suits walk up Nicollet Avenue, all skin and bones with big signs that said, we live on Minneapolis relief. A woman fainted around 7th Street or something.

**MARA ANN** How did those years change you as a writer, as a person?

**TAPP:**

**MERIDEL LE** I don't know if it's a change. It was more growth, I would say. For all my life, I was identified with-- on the range before the First World War, I was there at the strike of the iron miners. I'd always identified myself with the people's struggles.

I think I began writing more about it and having an audience for writing it. But we wrote as partisans, we call it. You're on the side and like I was marching. I don't say anything about the troubles of the manufacturers association, or any sympathy for them. I just identified with the strikers.

And I think that's a very poetic piece. I mean, I didn't write objectively either. I mean, I didn't make the distinction of poetry and prose, which I think also is a masculine-- is a patriarchal idea.

That was an excerpt from a 1982 interview with writer and activist Meridel Le Sueur from our MPR archives. She died on this day in 1996 after her long life writing about life in the Upper Midwest.