

Origami Fountains, Japantown, 1975 – 1976, 1999

LILLI LANIER: *My name is Lilli, and I am one of Ruth's grandchildren. I really love the two Origami fountains in Japantown because - we'd go to Japantown together. We'd go to the origami store, of course, because we both love origami, and we'd see the fountains on the way in, and they were just these beautiful geometric shapes.*

PETER COYOTE: The two bronze fountains, set in a “river” of stones, recall abstracted lotus or waterlily flowers. They're perfect for their setting, with echoes both of Japanese paperfolding techniques, and of forms important in Japanese art. The fountains have a commanding presence, but they started off as explorations in paper.

LILLI LANIER: *And she loved paper in general. She would tell me what a remarkable medium it is, because it could do things that other materials can't.*

PETER COYOTE: As for the forms of these fountains – here's Ruth's son Paul:

PAUL LANIER: *It's a bit of both worlds. It's a bit of Japanese origami and also of the paper folding technique from the Black Mountain College.*

PETER COYOTE: At this radical college, where Ruth studied in the late 1940s, resources were scarce. Paper was manipulated using accordion-fold techniques, to create strong, three-dimensional forms. Then smoothed out and reused. Nothing was wasted. And anything could be turned into art with imagination and persistence – an approach Ruth followed all her life.

LILLI LANIER: *Spending time with her was always fun. She was always busy working on a project, whether it was gardening, or sculpture, or painting, drawing, clay. And I got to learn a lot of things, just being around her.*

PETER COYOTE: Ruth taught origami to Lilli's fourth grade class.

LILLI LANIER: *And she brought a whole box of different samples - frogs and cranes and boxes and flowers. Everyone was so excited to have her come. And she let me stand up there with her and teach. So it was really my first experience teaching, which I ended up, growing up to be a teacher.*

LILLI LANIER *And she always wanted to make sure that there was the lesson, but also how you can push it forward.*

PETER COYOTE: Before leaving, Ruth reminded Lilli's classmates that origami works even with paper from the recycling bin - you don't need fancy materials to be creative. By the way, don't miss the cast-concrete panels depicting Japanese fairytales and festivals on the benches nearby. Ruth and the children of local storekeepers made them in Baker's Clay.