

# This Stream Meanders Through Something Red

By Christopher J. Unterberger

Illustrations by Eric Schiller

*For Wisconsin, our home.*

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## Introduction

“This Stream Meanders Through Something Red” is the true name of this wonderful land that I’ve been lucky enough to call home my entire life. Evolution of the English version of the French version of the Miami version of the name for the Wisconsin River, the title alludes to the waters that carved the red sandstone cliffs of the Wisconsin Dells—waters on which I grew up and drew me to all corners of this state. I wrote this collection of poems dedicated to my home state with the intention of detailing what makes it so great. To do so, I partitioned the state by its 72 counties’ borders, a decision that demoted some dazzling communities into having to share a page in this book with another. I do believe, however, that I was still able to capture the essence of each county in the following 72 poems accompanied by original illustrations by my good friend and fellow lifelong Wisconsinite, Eric Schiller.

I grew up in Adams-Friendship, Wisconsin (coincidentally the first poem of this alphabetized collection) appreciating the rural Wisconsin lifestyle that carved me into the proud Wisconsinite I am today. My formative years were spent swimming in those meandering streams as well as the less meandering lakes and more deliberate rivers of south central Wisconsin and the greater state. I followed my wonder of water to the Mississippi River, studying between the bluffs at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse where I learned to love the variety of landscapes that the state had to offer, sending me to all corners of the state from La Crosse to Eau Claire to Green Bay to Eagle River to Milwaukee to Platteville to Stevens Point and to Madison where I now call my home. Even with all this travel I still missed a tremendous area of the state.

To make a footprint on more of the state that I love, I set out to tour the eastern—and until that point, foreign—coast of the state. I toured the historic downtown of Cedarburg, poured beer in Sheboygan, walked along the beaches of Manitowoc, and looped my way around Door County. However,

even with this deliberate effort to see all of my home state, the vastness of Wisconsin keeps full exploration of the state from my grasp.

In an attempt to alleviate this shortfall, I reached out to everyday folks who call home the places that I was unable to visit. I thank Ceili Shields, Carolyn Myers, Holly Bolig, April Unterberger, Jared Verber, Will Hewett, Zoe Simon, Kristen Olson, Quin Coleman, Brannon Zochart, Allie Hren, Patrick Malchetske, and the numerous other Wisconsinites who have blessed me with stories of their hometowns and gave me ample material to write about their home counties.

I strongly believe that Wisconsin is the best place in the world: with the best communities, the best history, the best food, the best beer, and the best people. I hope to convince you that I am correct with the following 72 poems. I hope to convince you to one day yourself meander throughout the entirety of the state to places you never thought you would: through something red.

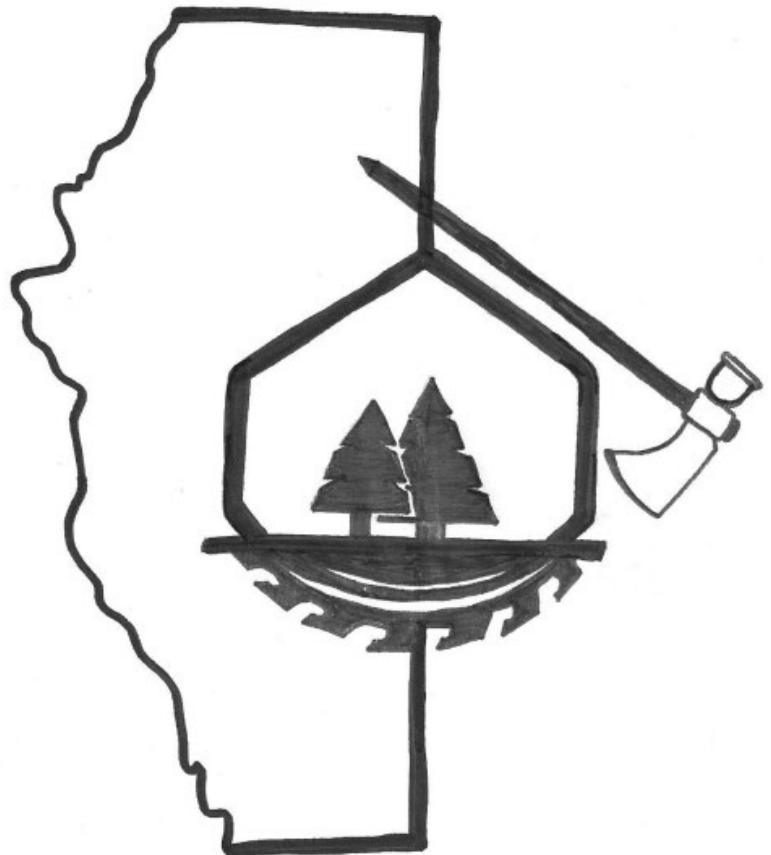
## Adams: Friendship

Just a mile and a half  
Stretches between nowhere and nowhere.  
But between,  
All walks come together to share  
Modest connections  
And small-town charms  
Between the soybean fields  
And cattle farms.  
Looking closely, there's a lively town  
A print shop, some banks,  
Baseball field, a church—  
Congregations giving thanks

To the little they have in this ship of friends,  
Neighbors, family, teammates, and kin

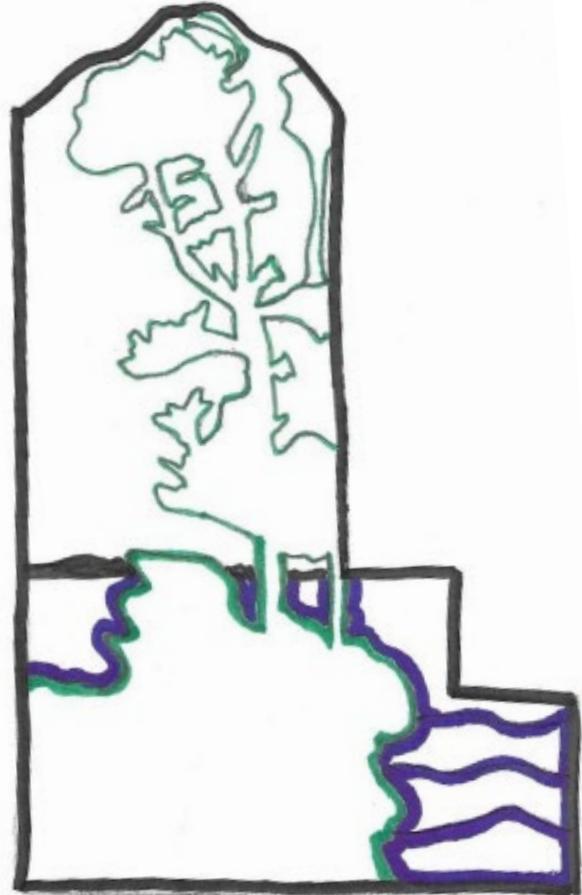
That have been locked up and bruised  
Left in this place, seemingly alone.  
Or they are doctors and lawyers  
Who now all call home.

And you don't say goodbye to home.



## Ashland: Up Nort

Crackling rocks beneath the tires  
Skip in every direction across the narrow,  
Rocky alley  
That leads to the cracker box—  
Tinted with mint shutters  
And the gaudy red door  
That opens to the always-too-hot living room  
Where the kids  
(Those 3-53 years old)  
Wrestle and play  
When the rain dances on the sheet metal roof  
And lather on sunscreen  
When rays skip off the lake  
And test the shades resting on our noses  
That nearly slip off  
When we scoop bass from each cast  
That will sit on our stomachs  
And soothe us to sleep  
In front of the only TV this place  
Has ever called its own,  
Flashing Scooby and Shaggy  
For the hundredth time—  
That, for the next 48 hours,  
Will serve us well.



## Barron: Void

A square county void—  
Barren, if you will (but don't)—  
Of all less than joy.



## Bayfield: Superior

North toward the border  
 As stars streak 'top my head  
 And I approach the lonely coast...  
 Before me lies a black hole  
 That eats the shore and turns it into fish,  
 Algae, and other weedy sea things.  
 This Great Lake constantly chomps at the sand  
 With waves pushed and pulled by the Moon  
 Far overhead.

The paddle boat I stole slaps her surface  
 Pushing forward toward her eye.  
 Without her blinking  
 I sit here thinking  
 Shrinking smaller for a while  
 Under the galaxies and stars draping the sky  
 All the while being swallowed  
 By her darkness.

I awaken by the first breath of dawn  
 Kissing port, and I roll over  
 To catch the birth of life beneath my boat.  
 Birth turns to death  
 And the water to a mirror  
 As a I lean closer still to see  
 Who that is beneath  
 But find it's only me  
 Before my face kisses the blackened glass  
 And she takes another victim  
 Called to her by her beauty.



## Brown: Misnomer

A misnomer, the name,  
For this place is Green  
(And Gold, to be sure),  
Where blue jays soak in the sun  
Pink skies drape the sunset  
Red cardinals sing “Go Pack Go”  
And yellow cheese sits atop my head.

But no brown.



## Buffalo: The Angel Buck

The rickety stand,  
 Perched high in an oak,  
 Is surrounded by dewy leaves  
 Of the morning  
 Soaking my sleeves  
 Of the coat I lugged through the trees  
 That encase me  
 In a cocoon of silence.

Burning coffee scorches my throat.  
 Through muffled gags, a snap  
 Of what I hope  
 And see  
 Is a twig beneath a toe  
 Of a brown target  
 Through a window in the leaves.

The scope is slow to reach my eye  
 But the wait is worth to spy  
 On the angel buck  
 300 yards out.

The crosshairs frame this angel's halo,  
 Sunrise peeking through the tines.  
 The crosshairs frame this angel's heart,  
 Trigger and my nail align.

The forest's filled with echoes  
 Of waves escaping from my barrel  
 Following close behind the bullet  
 That kicks up colors up ahead.

No red, only the white  
 Of his rear end saying goodbye  
 To bless another with his sight.



## Burnett: Below, Above, Before

Below,  
 Browned tires carry us across dirt roads  
 Into the heart of Crex Meadows.  
 The windows rolled tightly  
 To prevent any more foreign dusts  
 From pillaging my lungs.  
 The cold-blowing A/C pierces the left side of my face  
 When I'm looking at her  
 And the right side of my face  
 When I investigate the deepening meadows  
 Paced before me.

Above,  
 The clouds crinkle and clamor for my attention,  
 Morphing into shapes that only I can see.  
 Kingfishers and chickadees often obscure  
 The blue canvas stretched taut against the Sky.  
 My paintbrush eyes dart down only to find us  
 Touching a creek with our balding tires.

Before  
 Us sat the landing strip  
 For pelicans-a-plenty.  
 Eighty sea birds chose to touch down  
 On this remote prairie creek  
 In this northern, wooden, meek  
 Corner of Wisconsin.  
 For hours they sat resting,  
 Waiting for the moment they'd use all their strength  
 To take off from this unassuming bed  
 The last of whom tears night from day  
 Revealing nascent diamonds  
 That speckle the Sky.

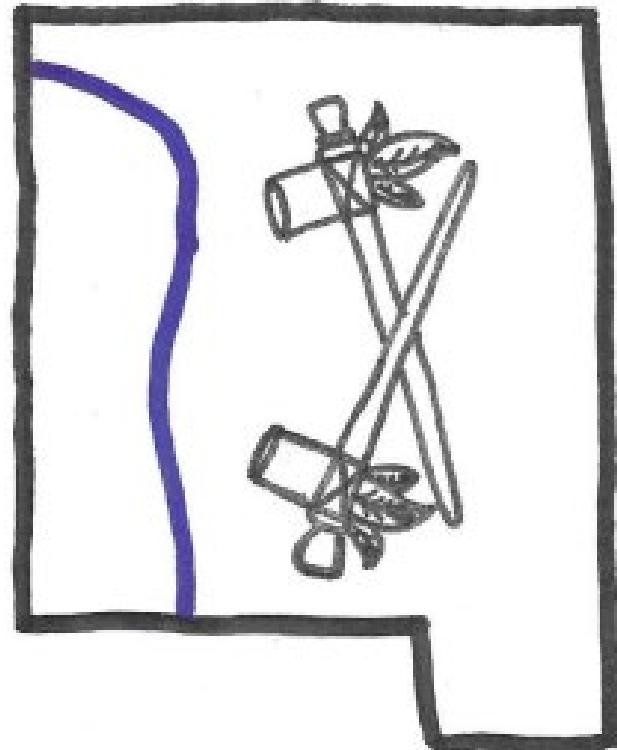


## Calumet: High Cliff

Climbing higher up the High Cliffs  
 Wind and waves whip at my back  
 Finding footholds  
 And handholds that  
 Were carved from the rock  
 By the Winnebago waves  
 The Winnebago winds  
 And the Winnebago rains

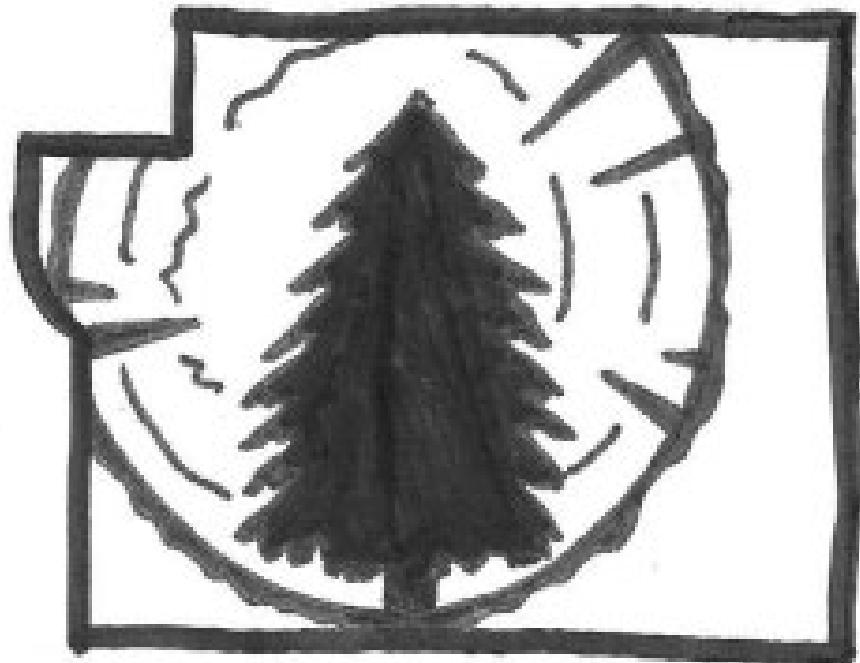
The cliff crumbles as I pull myself over  
 The final hold the final ledge  
 And I flip myself so my rear end  
 Plops down on the edge  
 Feet dangling above  
 Hawks below me circling  
 For field mice skittering this way  
 And that. Hurdling  
 Toward their demise  
 A woodpecker thumps the beat  
 Of my heart against a fallen log  
 And a red tipped blackbird spots my feet

The rhythm grows and the blackbird sings  
 My thoughts about the Winnebago  
 Growing louder within me and without me  
 Deafening. Until a broken twig says so  
 Suddenly that a whitetail is nearby  
 A doe. Still  
 Flashing her eyes  
 And minutes go by  
 Before I raise my hand to wave  
 And her not-before-seen fawns leap  
 From their beds  
 And hightail their whitetails from their heap  
 Out of view and out of mind  
 Only to be replaced by the Lake  
 Full of the givings she's given me  
 Thanking her for all she gives this place



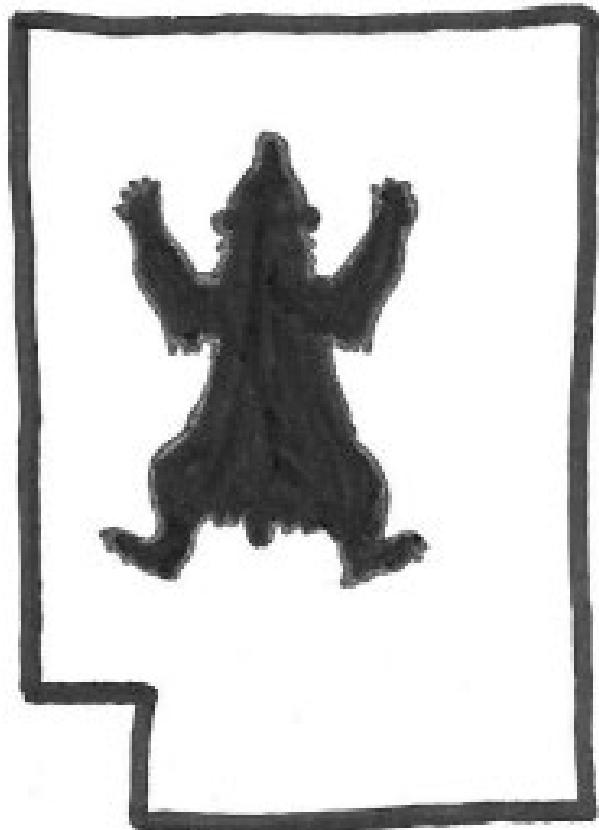
## Chippewa: Chip-wuh To You

That's Chip-wuh  
To you,  
Who  
Travelled from away:  
All the way from Dunn,  
Or Rusk...  
Or Dane!  
It won't matter you're not from 'round here  
And travelled all alone.  
'Cause "you're not from here"  
Quickly turns to "welcome home".  
Soon you become a local:  
Pouring our voluminous beer  
And eating our fried food.  
So next time someone comes 'round here  
Tell 'em "that's Chip-wuh to you"



## Clark: Trapped

The otters want to make escape,  
But I know I can't either.  
For there's too many creeks  
And too many lakes  
That house coyotes and beavers.  
This land has given for centuries  
To the Dakota and Ho-Chunk people,  
Menominee and Chippewa,  
Amongst the Dutch and Swedish.  
And to this day  
I feel trapped  
In adoration for my home here  
That I made with furs now strapped  
Around my waist. Proudly.

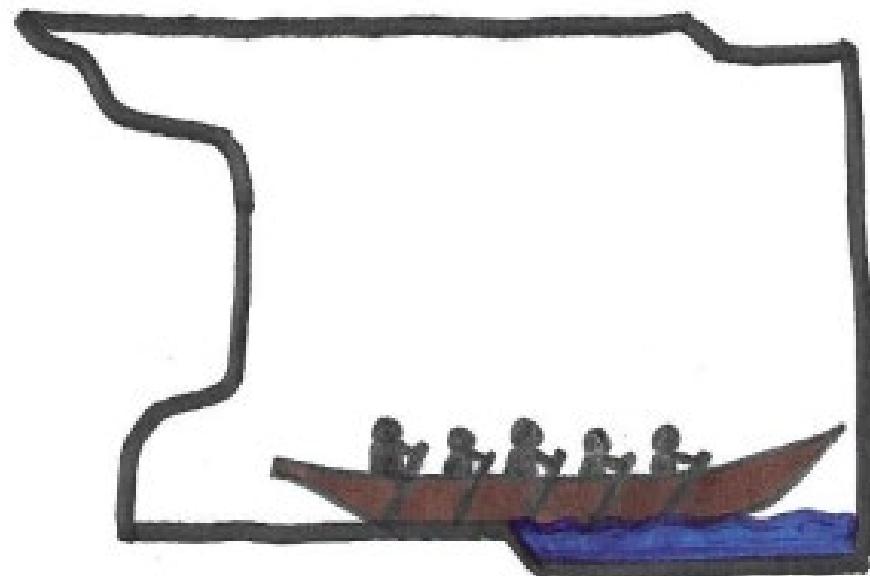


## Columbia: A Strip Once Churning

Between these dells that weave  
Through the upper left of my body  
I feel the dying light  
Of a star once burning,  
A strip once churning  
Full of life and the future.  
Alleys and fudge shops that  
Bowled and fed  
The engorged among us

But now they sit starving

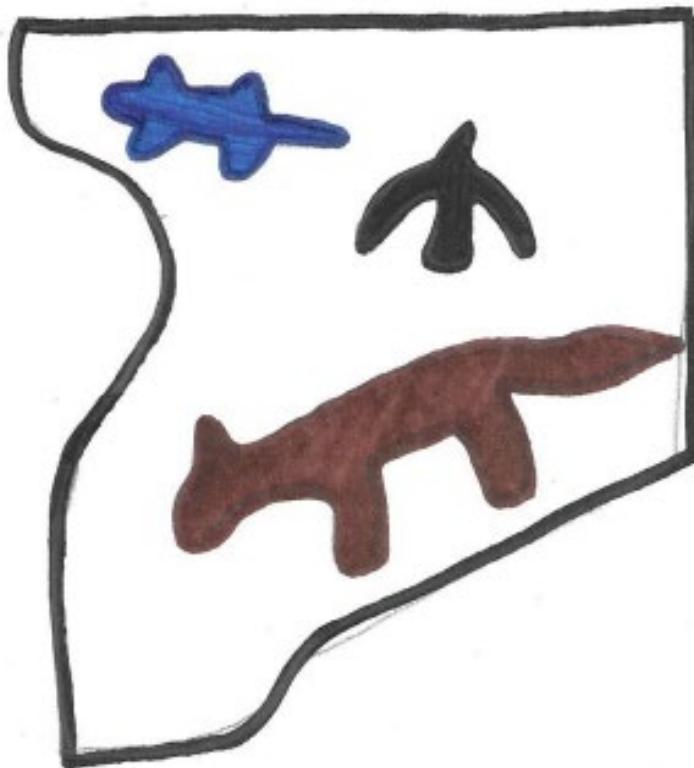
Beneath the Big Sky that once shown a star  
But now only plays the closing credits.



## Crawford: Praying for the Prairie

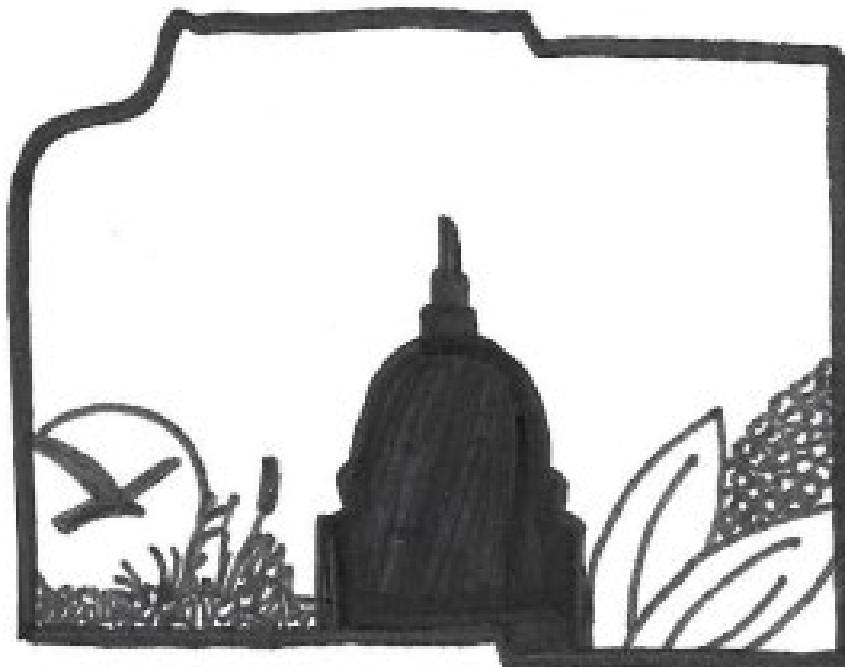
Peering out over the valley,  
Near the Prairie of the Dog,  
The kids pick crawfish crawling  
At the bottom of the river.  
One day they'll get the itch  
To pack their non-waterproof boots  
And shiny rings  
Headed for flashy lights  
And "bigger" things.

Tomorrow, though,  
They'll pack beaten bags  
In haste  
Headed for the prairie  
To pick on crawfish once again.



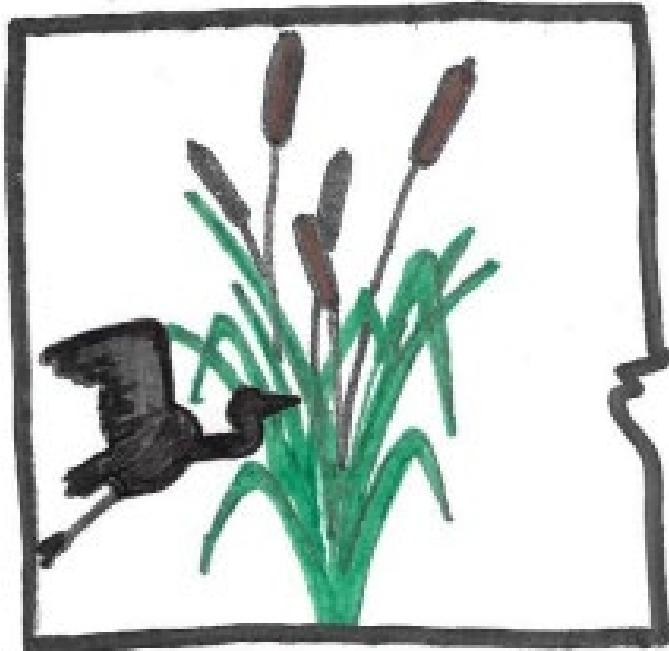
## Dane: Sitting with My Lady

Sitting at the top of the world,  
Lady Wisconsin at my side,  
Dome beneath my feet  
Pulling pictures from the pride:  
Monona to my left,  
And Mendota to my right,  
The ants that go a-marchin  
Down State past Orpheum lights.  
The isthmus concentrates this greatness  
To cast reflections in the sky  
Of the near mile that sits below  
Filled with busy badgers passing by.



## Dodge: Flooded

Damn these beavers  
Who made this place!  
Excitedly eager  
To build and replace  
What was once glacier,  
Plainly grass,  
Rolling hills,  
Rivers, bass,  
Whitetail deer,  
(And wolves to hunt them)  
Now's gorgeously flooded  
With all of that and then some:  
Neighbors, friends,  
Strangers, and folks  
That make up Dodge County  
To what it is from what it was.



## Door: Heaven at my Fingertip

I've got heaven at my fingertip—  
The tip of my thumb, specifically.  
The trailhead to this heavenly place—  
Of which I speak pontifically—  
Begins at Potawatomi  
Through Peninsula after the Ice Age  
And ends at Newport Beach  
Not on Washington (or so I say).

Few outside this place would know  
That jagged rock keeps Heaven bound in  
The frame of this county so paradise  
Never leaves Wisconsin.



## Douglas: Boreal

Holly hides amongst the pine trees,  
 The spruces, and the larches  
 That fill the forest in which she sits  
 Cross-legged in the middle of the city.  
 Nowhere near she'd find this peaceful  
 Meditation, breathing slow.  
 Surrounded by the forest  
 That will never let her go.

Even after leaving  
 Her meditated state  
 Holly's hugged by the bark—  
 Stained with green and smokey gray.  
 Even plodding down the streets,  
 Passing by her childhood home,  
 She's surrounded by the forest  
 That will never let her go.

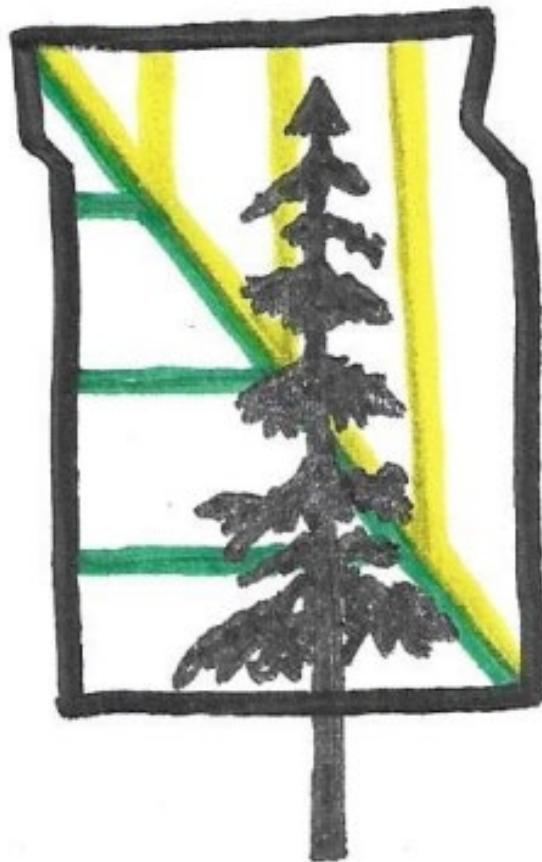
In her room her comforts are plenty:  
 Lapping water from the Lake,  
 An orchid candle casting smells,  
 And Taylor vinyls swiftly play.  
 The door is locked but even here  
 She feels the grip of roots on the floor,  
 Surrounded by the forest  
 That will never let her go.



## Dunn: Lost

Up here we get lost.  
For upon every crest of hill  
We only see more crests  
Waving across the county  
Trying to escape,  
But never fully leaving.

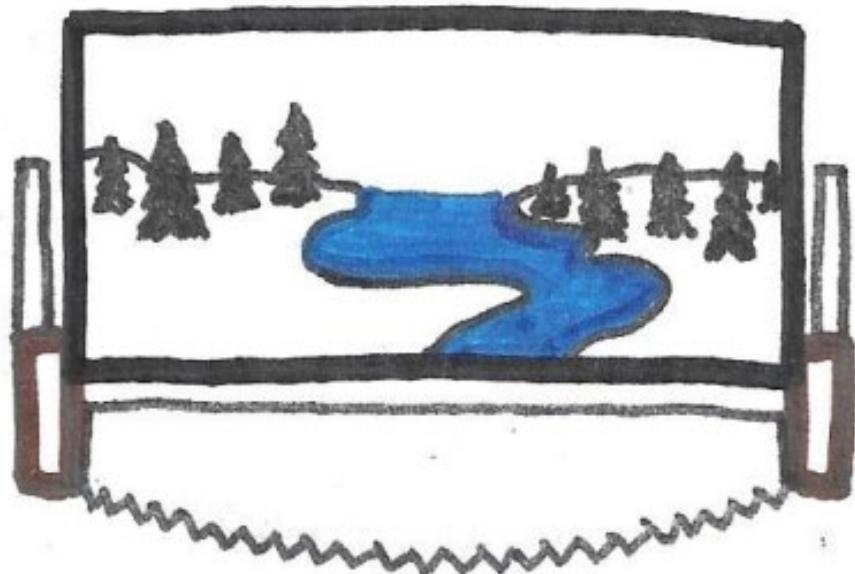
But I'm okay being lost here.



## Eau Claire: Clear Water

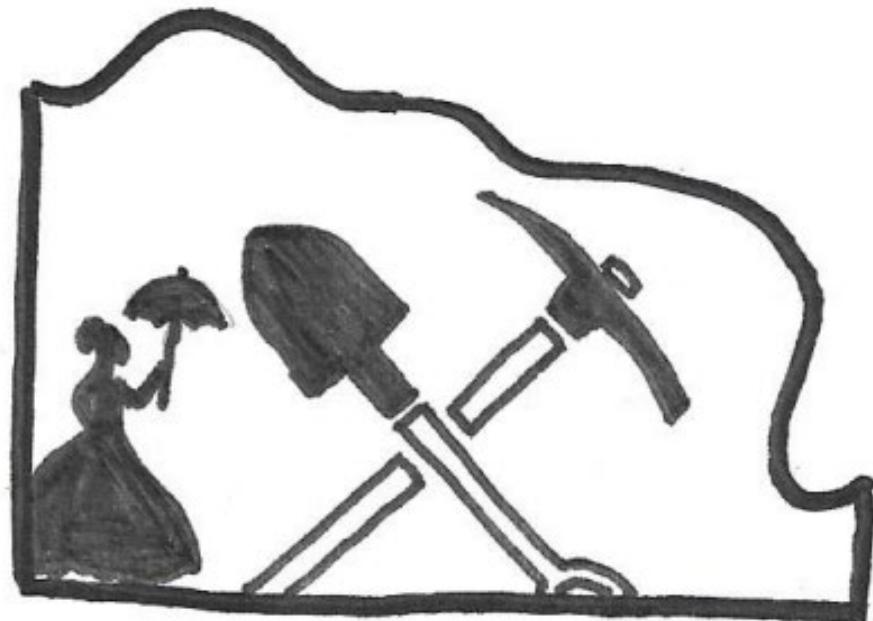
Roaming amongst the farmers,  
The urbanites, and  
Everyone in between  
Under the pitched windows  
Hovering overhead.  
Springing daises stop me dead,  
But the trumpets keep me cruising  
Toward the sunflower  
At the end,  
Poking its head  
Amongst its brothers.

He comes with me to greet the Chippewa  
That rushes past my feet.  
I find a bench to rest,  
Watching life fly by below the surface.  
The wind whips a petal from the sunny  
Dragging it to the water  
Where it will kiss the banks  
*Ad infinitum.*



## Florence: Unincorporated I

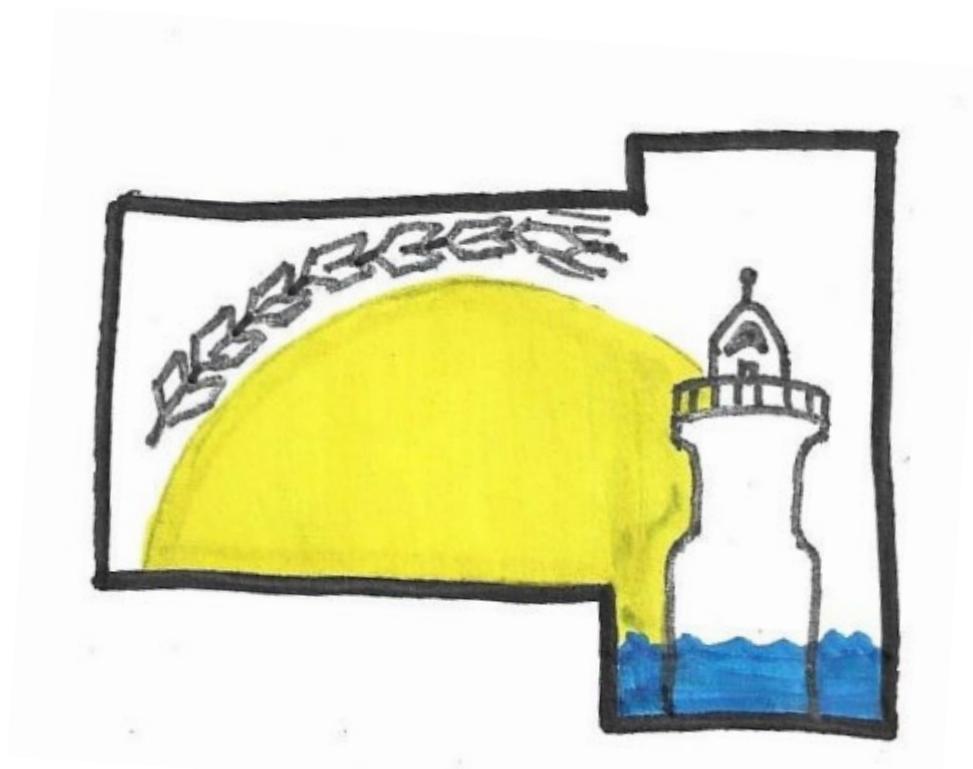
Here you'll find no slickers  
Only miners  
With blackened face  
Hurried to get to working  
Pulling graphite from the clay  
Working for the company  
From which we pull our name  
But up here we don't find many  
In Aurora or Long lake  
Really only loggers  
Or maybe miners  
With blackened face.



## Fond du Lac: Farthest End of the Lake, Closest to Your Heart

At the bottom of the lake  
You'll find weeds and junk we  
Toss and refuse to take stake;  
Plants whose skunky,  
Offending odor relates  
The distorted world  
The drunks see;  
And the memories of late  
Dreams abruptly  
Abandoned in the lake.

But there you'll also find my heart  
In downtown Fondy,  
At the farthest end of the lake.

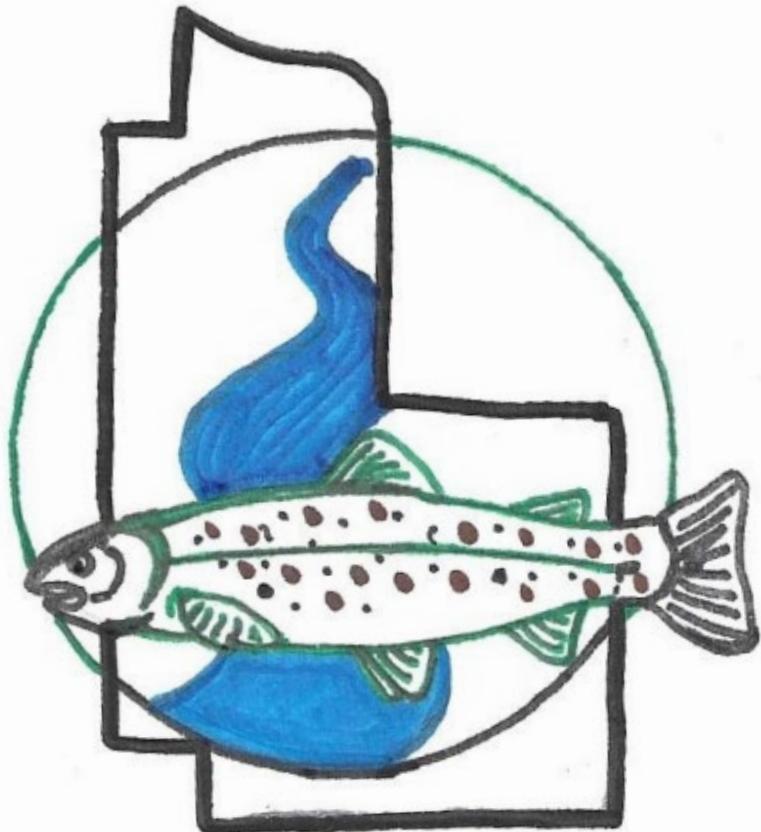


## Forest: For the Trees

Through the thick of the thistles  
Y'all see through  
To the U.P.  
But take a minute,  
Take a breath,  
And see Forest County.

It's more than trees. It's more than bark.  
It's more than leaves.  
Where do I start?  
It's my home: these twigs and branches.  
Leave the woods,  
And you'll find ranches.  
It's classic cars  
And Fall cash raffles,  
Bowling alleys,  
And lumber castles.

Anything you'd want or need,  
You'd find in Forest  
If not for the trees.



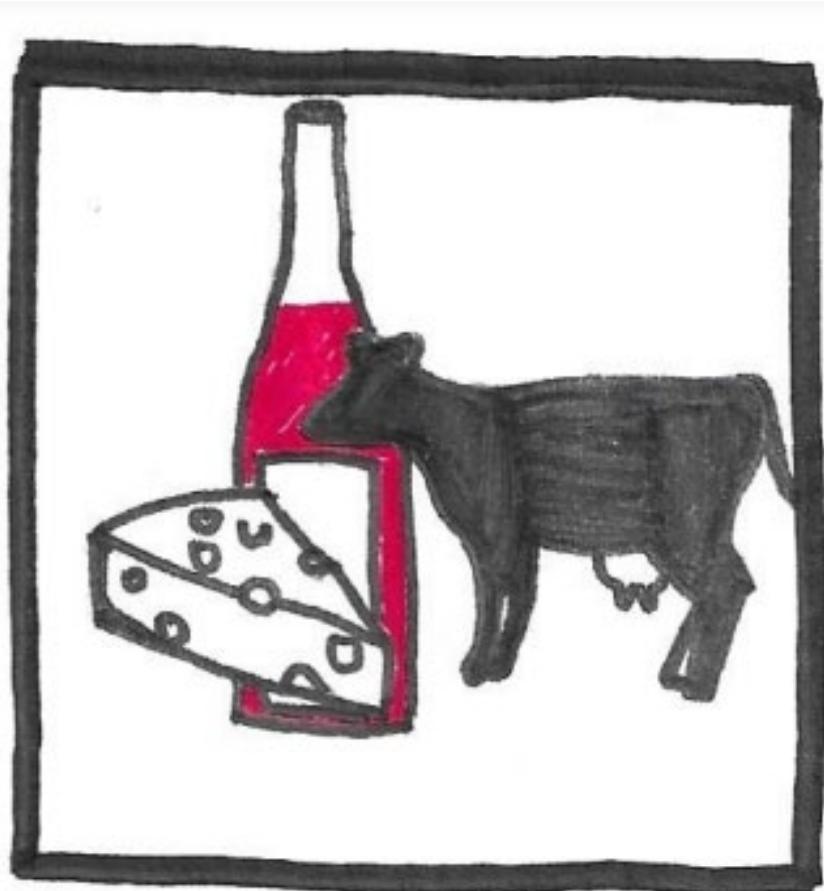
## Grant: Flow

It's only by the Grant  
That the Mississippi  
Flows strong.  
The walleye leave  
Only to yearn  
For the Grant River song.  
The cranes nest  
And feed the Grant  
And the Grant feeds forth  
Toward the Big River.  
The canoes not knowing  
Where the water was born.



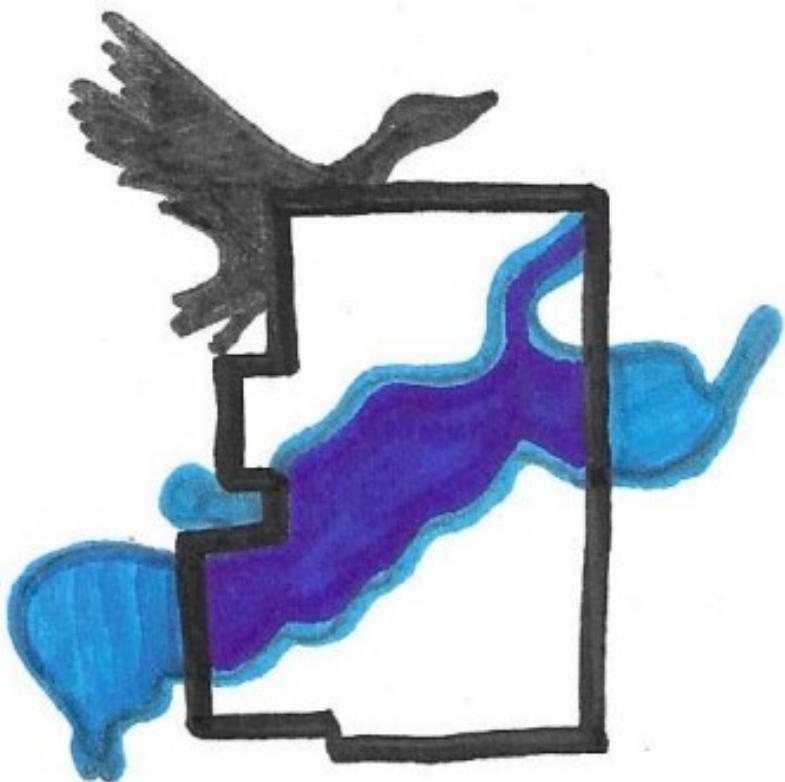
## Green: Fill Me with Spotted Cow

The Havarti and Brick,  
Gouda and Cheddar,  
Limburger, Swiss,  
Go better together  
With a mouthful of beer  
From the neck of brew fairest.  
So, tie me to the rear of a milk truck  
Heading North to New Glarus.



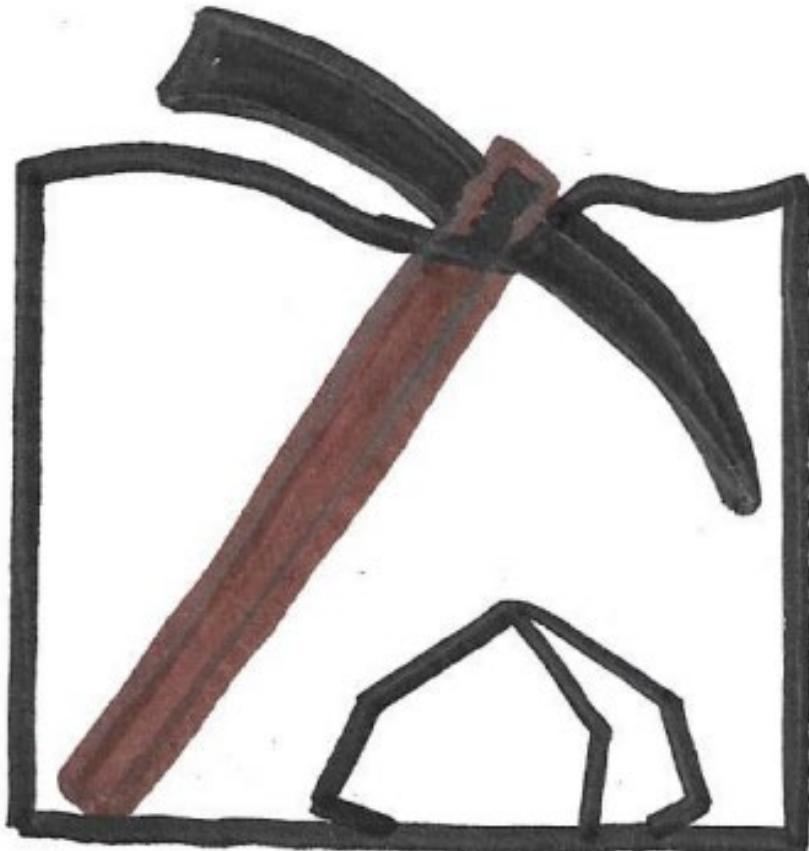
## Green Lake: Blue Water

The misnomer became apparent  
When my eyes lifted from the beach.  
They call it Green Lake,  
But it sparkles blue to me.  
And when the sun becomes bashful  
And clouds take reign of sky  
I can look into the rivers  
And see trout swimming by.  
The people here know it  
And I've come to learn it, too:  
Besides the pines and shrubby things,  
Green Lake ain't green, it's blue.



## Iowa: Loyalty

Oh,  
The sweetcorn across the border,  
Through Grant,  
tempts me  
so.  
Spotting Hawkeyes  
and Cyclones.  
I can see the tall pins in the distance  
Marking steeples in Dubuque,  
And west banks of the River  
Glisten.  
Beauty without refute.  
But my home holds me here  
In the emerald hills  
Of the driftless southwestern  
Nook of Wisconsin.



## Iron: Heaven, North of Here

The compass points due north

To heaven:

Iron County.

The path is laced

With villas and pricey counties

But beyond you will find the

Bad, winding river

That may distract,

But don't lose pace

For the magnet in your hand

Will guide you northward

Toward the gates.

And you'll find it:

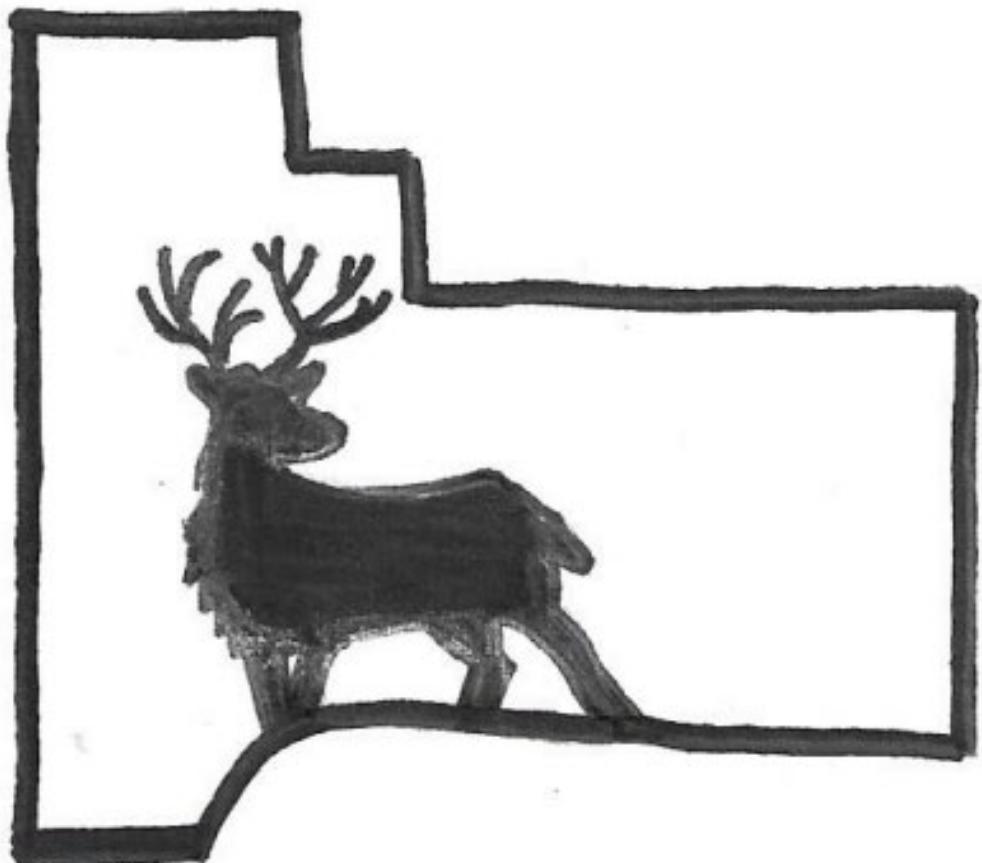
Heaven,

North of here.



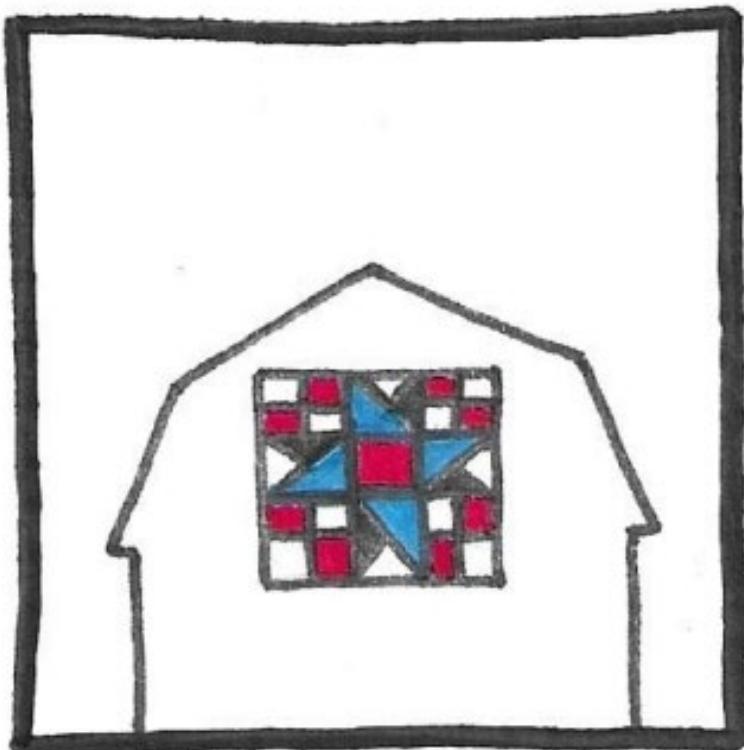
## Jackson: Unpresidential

This Jackson  
Is not the Jackson you know.  
Not the driver  
Of generational sorrow,  
But the driver of livings  
For the people  
Who now spit in the face  
Of the name.



## Jefferson: Manifest

Often forgotten—  
Passed over by planes and trains—  
Lies the gateway to the West.  
Through pastures and plains  
Cars take for granted  
The outposts placed here  
By mothers before them,  
Often steering clear  
Of the road signs and door signs  
Calling them to stay  
In the communities built  
Along the once unforgiving way.  
But now it seems that Jefferson  
Did little for the State  
Besides blazing trails and laying rails  
To get from place to place.

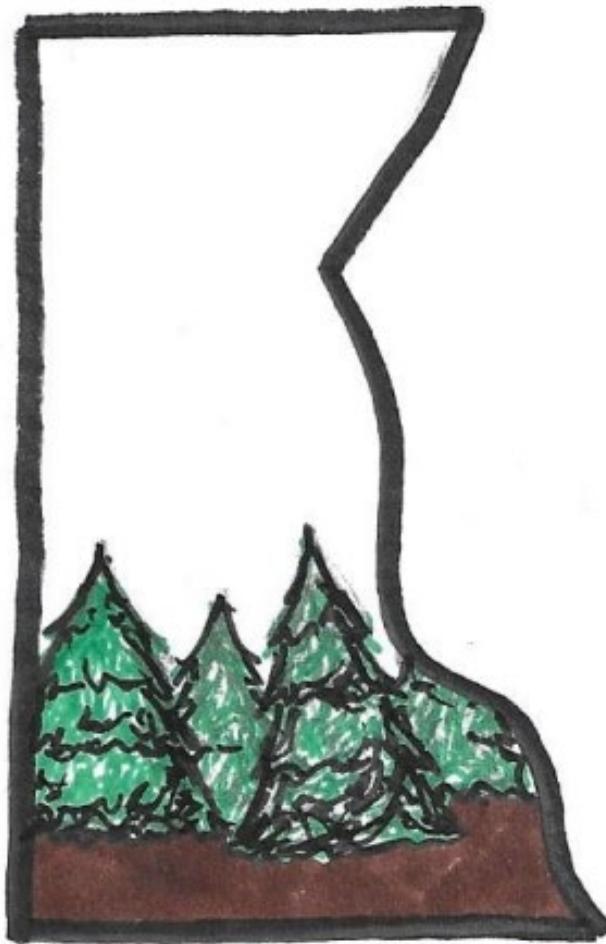


## Juneau: The Brothers Juneau

Here in Alaska,  
We have gold!  
And all the fish  
You've been told  
Of in this last frontier.  
Do let me be bold:  
The *best* Juneau  
Is named after Joe.

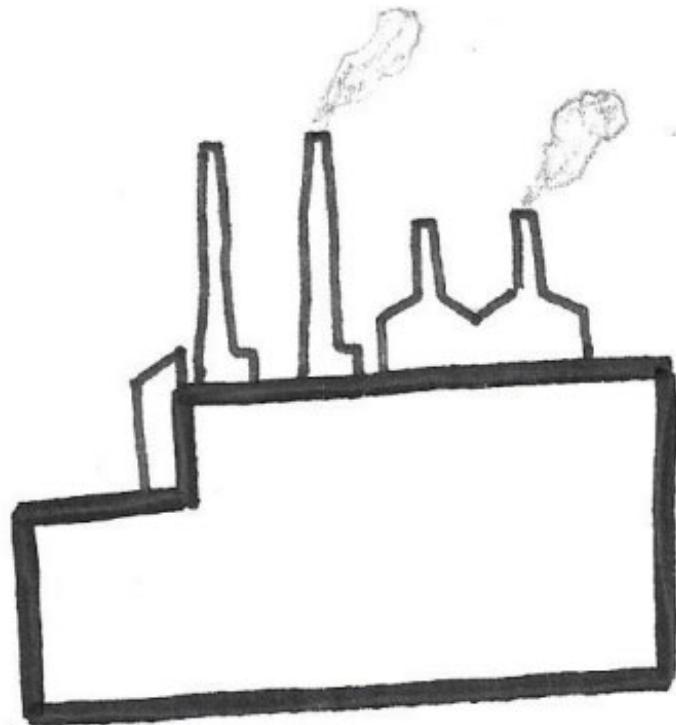
Maybe!  
But here in Dodge County,  
We have it all!  
Concerts and beer  
And farms that sprawl  
Across the county  
So let me recall:  
The *best* Juneau  
Is named after Paul.

I see,  
But here along the Wisconsin River  
We have openness:  
Pastures to prance through  
And general hopefulness  
So, gentlemen,  
I tell you with solemnness:  
The *BEST* Juneau  
Is named after Solomon.



## Kenosha: Inflamed

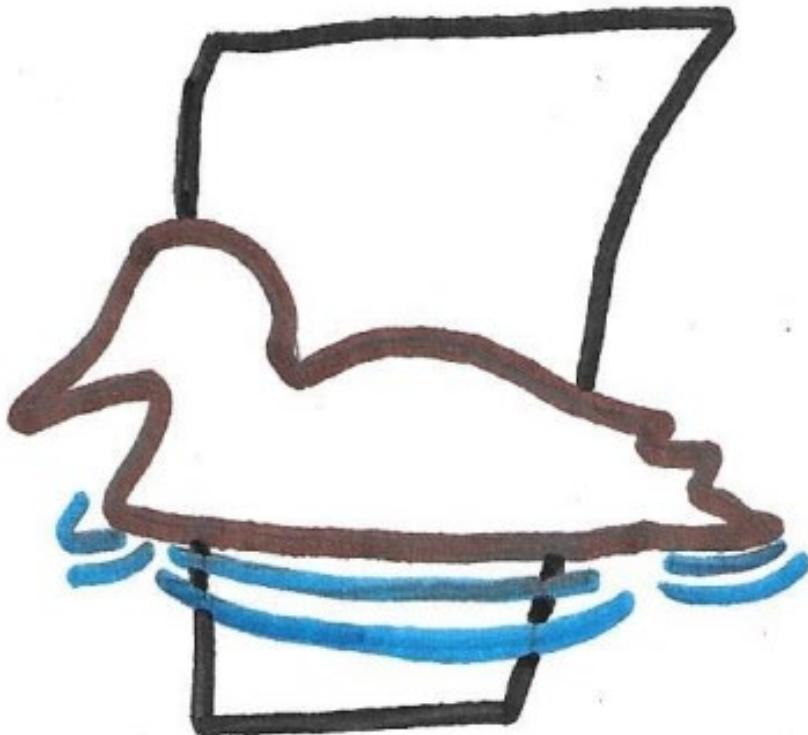
Ripping through the riotous  
Protests and pleas  
For unalienable rights  
And dignity  
Is a speck of lead  
Just a tiny speck  
Instigating  
By pulling flesh  
From bone and bone  
And meat from meat.  
From separate homes,  
But here they meet  
Demanding change  
As organs  
Of the city beat  
Inflaming the site of trauma:  
The city streets.



## Kewaunee: Frozen

The river's frozen over.  
Bits wincing beneath Will's feet  
As he trudges toward the center  
Of Kewaunee's muddied deep.  
He scrapes away the powdered snow  
To reveal the contents buried  
Beneath the window to the world  
Where time is frozen nearly  
As much as the ice that froze it there.  
There's garbage, but in it: beauty.  
A wristwatch where the second hand  
Doesn't do its duty.  
It's stuck at five, the hour twelve,  
And the minute mute at thirty.

Blessed here  
In the middle  
Of the river, Kewaunee.



## La Crosse: From Atop Grandad's Bluff

This view from Grandad's  
 Is grand as  
 I've ever seen.  
 Lights from campus  
 pass  
 and double back in a drunken stumble,  
 Humbled by their slurs and  
 ignorance to the world they're just now seeing.  
 The flashing strobes from 3<sup>rd</sup>  
 Drag with them booming beats  
 Of dancing, yelling,  
 cheering  
 For everything that wasn't left in the dorms.  
 The homes flicker,  
 Warmed by their fireplaces  
 Whose flames escape and meet us  
 Atop Grandad's Bluff,  
 Sharing the care  
 And warmth  
 They had seen in their honest homes.

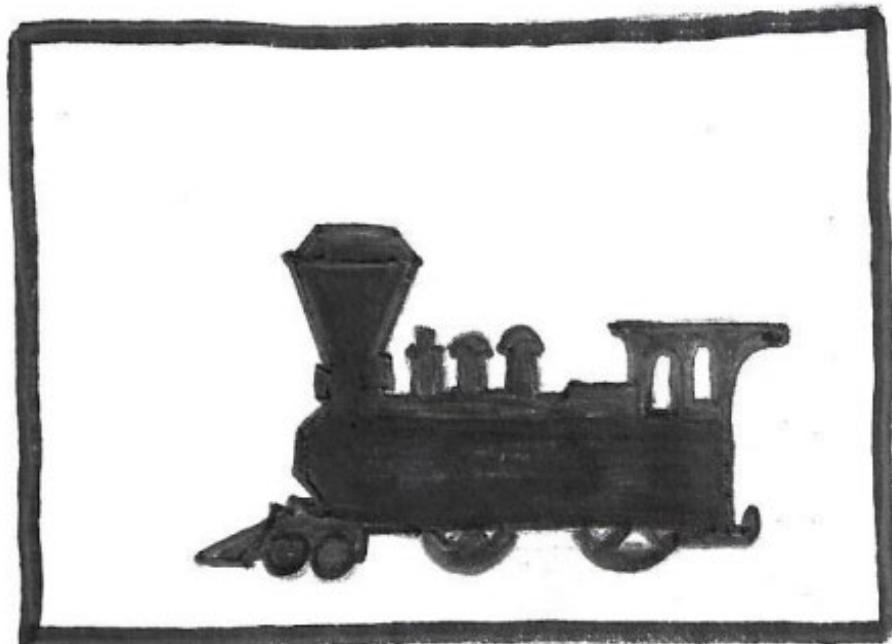
The black that is the River  
 is painted by the fish  
 Plotting to feed the city  
 And  
 The black that is the marshes  
 Is encumbered by groans  
 And snaps of crickets  
 And frogs  
 Calling for the light.



## Lafayette: A Savior

A broken plateau  
Littered with the conflicts  
Between nations  
Lays hopelessly  
In the South  
Resting in the West  
Envisioning a savior  
That sweeps the dreams to streams.

A horseback Frenchman  
Pulls them from the muck  
Of the rivers once gilded  
With the soils many riches.



## Langlade: Go, Gone, Went

Antigo  
To the lake.  
Dip your head below the water.  
Find fish,  
Pull back,  
Find this,  
Find that,  
Just below the water.

Antigone  
Is the sun  
From the lakeside days  
Now only drifting away  
In the rearview mirror.

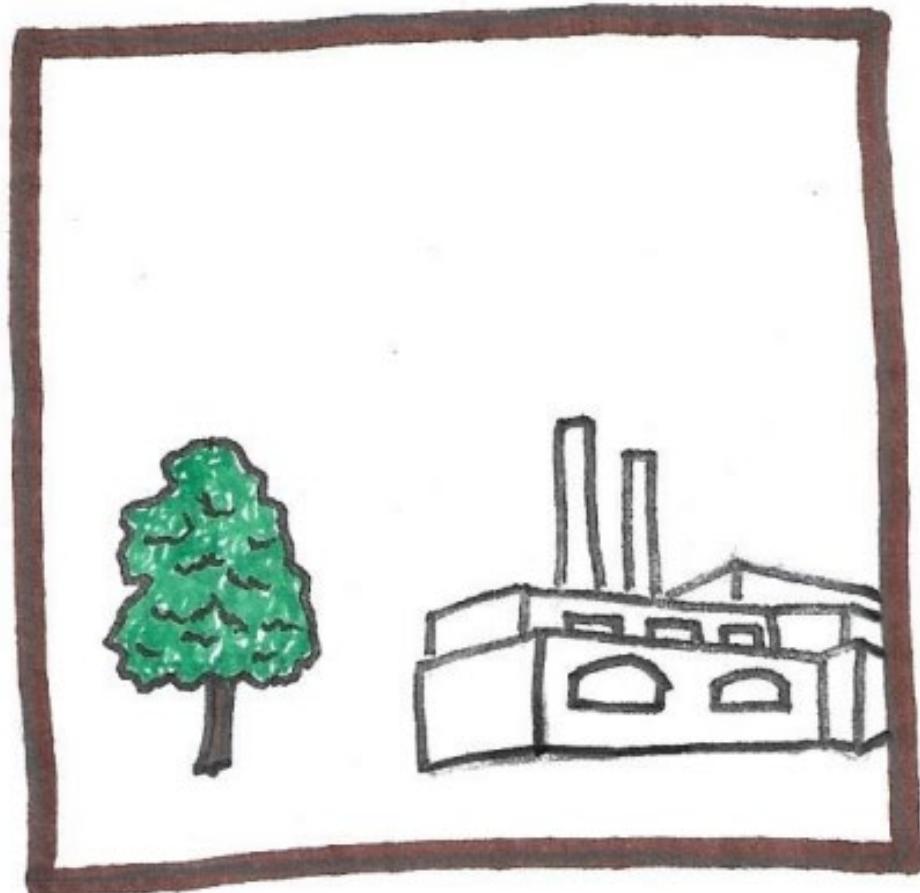
Antiwent  
By the hours  
That we never really taste  
While we're there  
Sitting by the lake.



## Lincoln: Liberated

Liberating Northwoods  
Form a near-perfect square  
Of freedom  
Enshrined by the namesake  
Of this land  
That is streaked  
With people of the same ilk:

Warriors of liberty  
And bastions of the Republic.



## Manitowoc: Reflection Across the Abyss

The smell of malts fills the air  
That is reflected off the Michigan waves  
Back to the shoreline  
To our noses.  
The first toes to sand are startled  
By squawking seagulls overhead  
Who are excited about the sweaty six-pack that's pulled from my bag.  
We've travelled far from the smokestacks  
To this beach that is shadowed by the resting sun:  
Through two rivers and  
Miles of anticipation.

Our warming beers and  
Our warming backs  
Contrast the cool air  
Attacking our faces  
From the seeming abyss  
That spans the horizon  
Giving birth to a land  
So distant, yet  
So similar.

The next caps are pried off  
As we both wonder  
Whether across the abyss  
Two lifelong friends  
Are looking back at us.



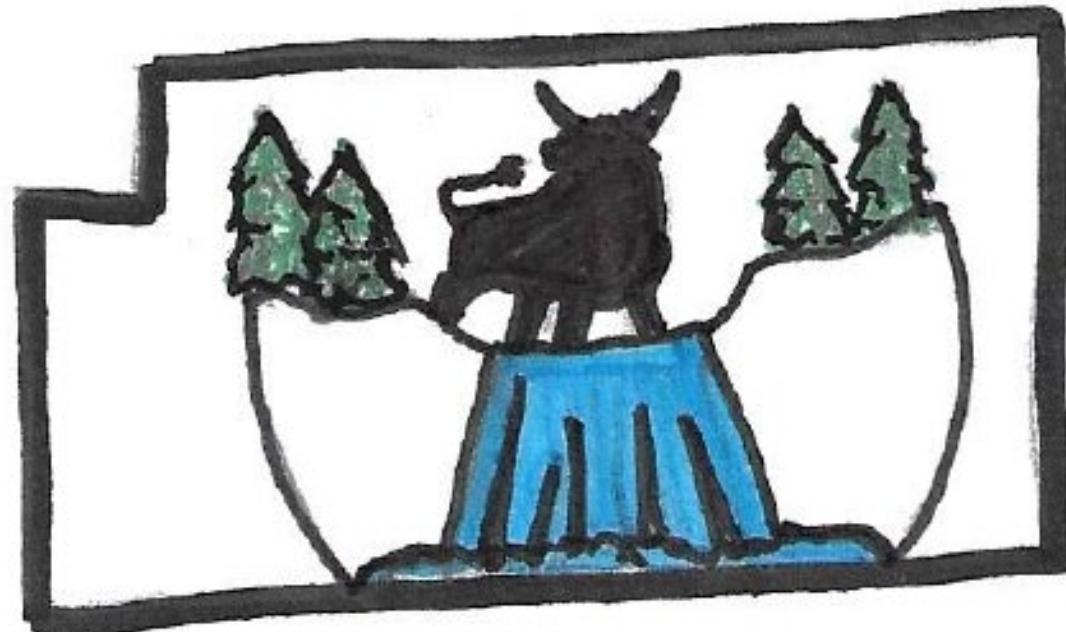
## Marathon: Trek

Each step closed  
The 26.2-mile gap  
That separated me  
From my home in Wausau.

This trek took its toll  
As I'd seen nothing but trees  
Towering over  
All the beauty I saw:

Homes full of families  
Living amongst the hills  
Not fancy, not gaudy,  
And not bourgeois.

No, the trek toured the hillside  
Of homes warmed by wood stoves  
That neighbored my mother's  
At my home in Wausau.



## Marinette: Just Across a River

Just across a river—  
Not too large  
But still too far—  
Lies another state.  
The same as me  
And yet,  
So very much  
An alien place  
Full of yoopers and pasties,  
And 'Ganders (those nasty  
Wolverines that bite and claw  
When you tell them they talk funny  
Kind of like us,  
But we  
Are sophisticated  
Down here  
South of the river  
Where fires roar  
But we endure,  
Where we live free  
From fields to shore,  
Where we call home:  
South of the river).



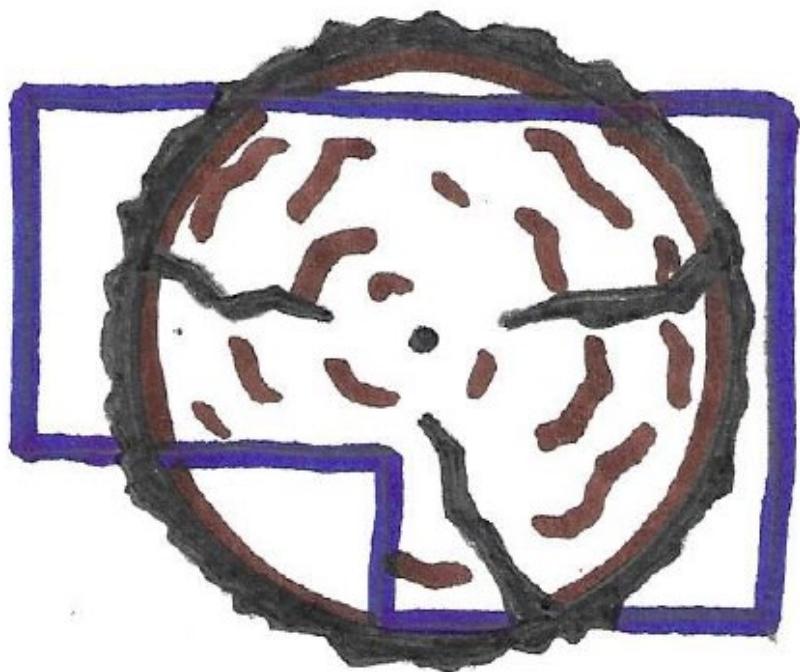
## Marquette: At This Pace

Who owns this land  
But the people  
To whom it was bestowed?  
Who can take it from them  
But themselves  
Who want it forever  
But dare not remember  
That it's most fragile?  
At this pace  
Grandsons and daughters  
Won't deal with the blood.  
Rather they would  
Pity those who do:  
The ones who own the land.



## Menominee: Unincorporated II

Here you'll find no Devastation  
Only Wild Rice  
Floating in the Waters  
Once destined  
To be inherited by a Great People  
Led by Oshkosh in the West  
And Ada in the East  
Here we Reserve  
This little Piece  
Set out for Us  
By Not Us  
From all of Ours  
To just this little Piece  
Of Wild Rice  
Floating in the Waters



## Milwaukee: Brewer of Beer (And More!)

The City is rich with history:

Brewing beer and baseball,

Wades and Seligs,

Harleys and Les Pauls,

Liberaces, Houdinis,

And mother to Ingalls,

And brewing beer!

(Did I mention that all?)

The City likes its breweries.

Only in the water this is hidden.

The City sure doesn't regret

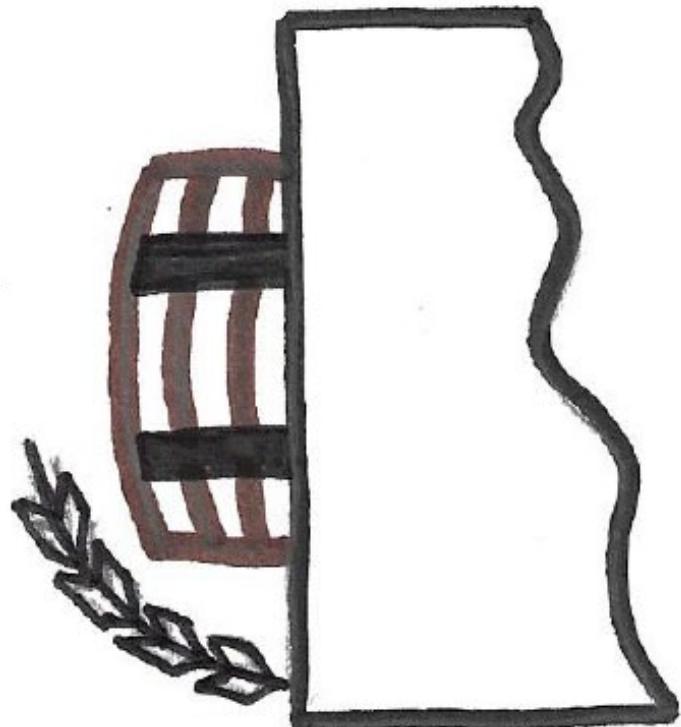
Sloppily kissing the Michigan.

The Brewers won the World Series!

(Even if you claim they didn't)

We're all winners in Milwaukee

For Bucks in 6 is winning.



## Monroe: This Is Monroe!

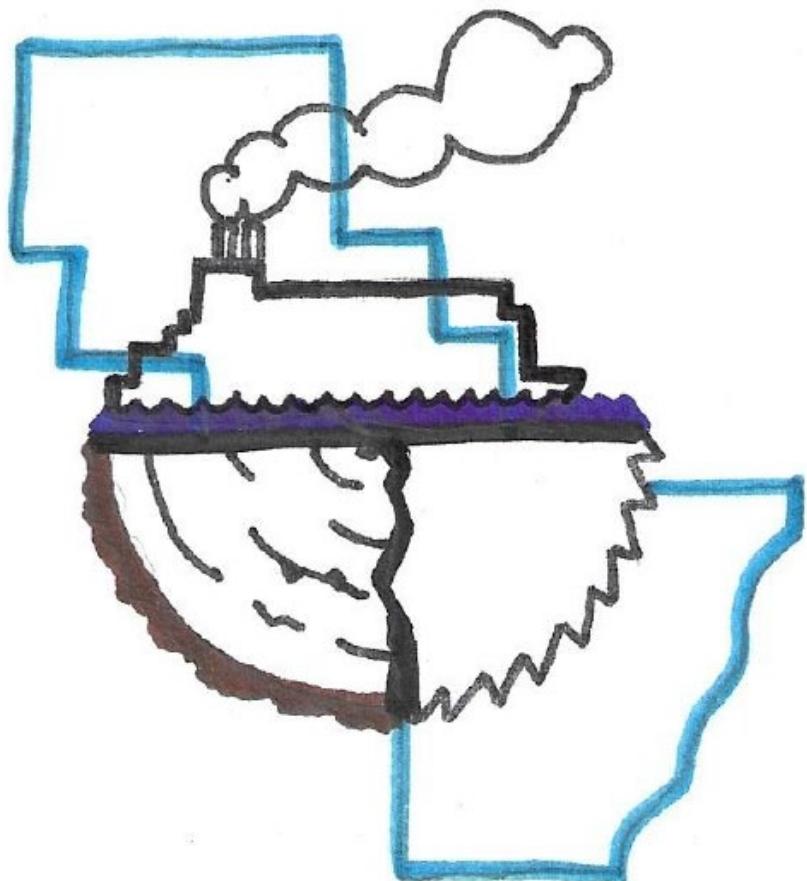
...I mean Sparta.  
(Or was it Tomah?)  
I know I should be smarter,  
So sit down let me tell ya:  
These are silly games we play,  
Naming places after  
The Greeks and the Romans.  
Nowhere near Troy,  
But somehow we're still Trojans...?

I love it here.  
Though it isn't Greece or Rome,  
This place is something special:  
This is Monroe!



## Oconto: Alluring

She kisses the bay—  
Smooth as the seas,  
Glossed with algae-green,  
Molded by waves from the sun—  
And comes back with green lips—  
Cracked and speckled,  
Moist and supple,  
Tinted and curved  
Matching her rolling backside.



## Oneida: All the Water

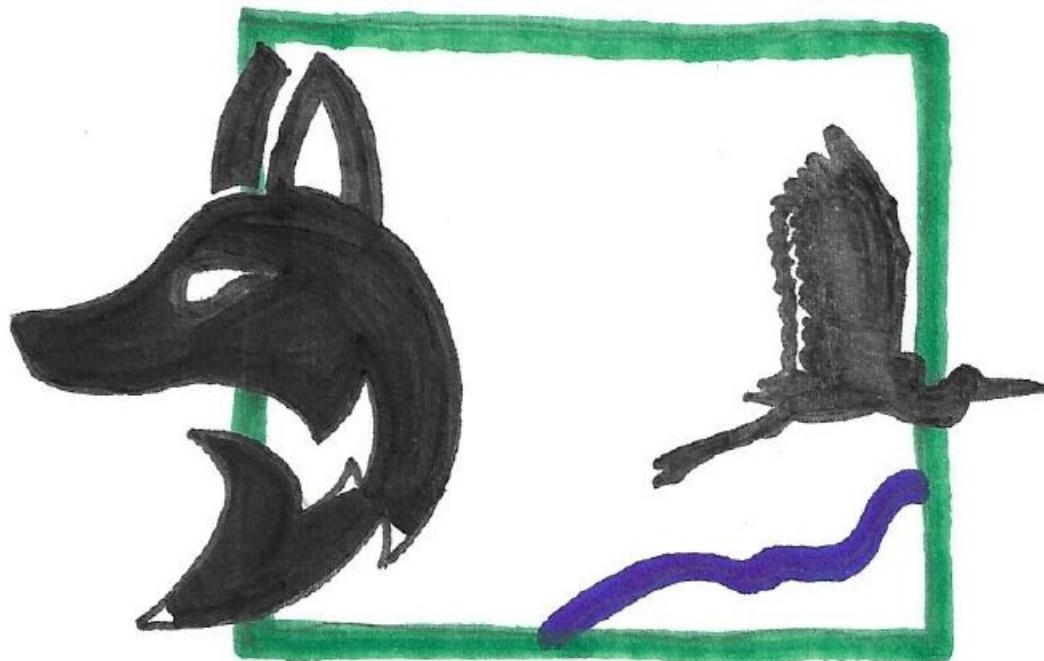
“Land of 10,000 Lakes.”  
Psh. Give me a break.  
I’m here in Oneida  
And I can’t even hide  
From all the water:  
Rivers (filled with otters),  
Lakes, Creeks, Ponds  
(Of which I’m particularly fond),  
Oceans, seemingly!  
I say that gleamingly,  
Because there are just Great Lakes  
That don’t seem to break  
Even here, all the way outta  
The way, in Oneida.



## Outagamie: Everyone is Welcome!

Filled with Grand Chutes and Little Chutes,  
Kimberlys and Kaukanas.

Center in center  
And Chicago at Corners.  
Villed with Stephens and Macks,  
Hortons and Greens,  
Bear Creeks and Black Creeks  
And all in between.  
Tons of Apples,  
For all to eat and see.  
Everyone is welcome  
In Outagamie!

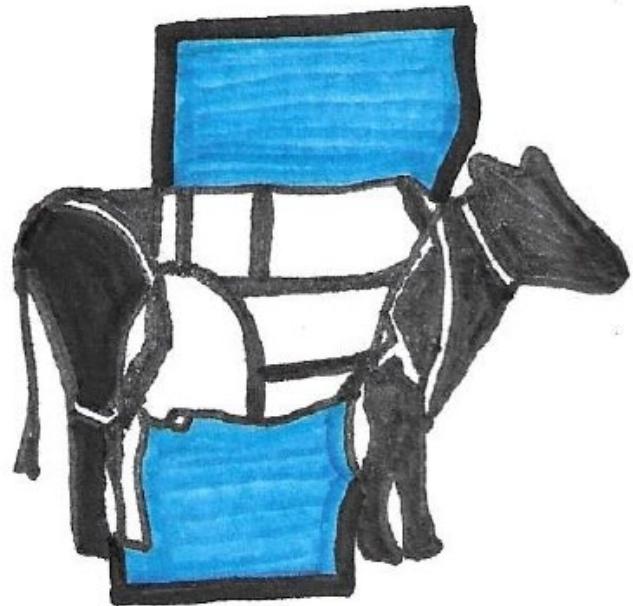


## Ozaukee: Strawberry Fest, Forever

The warm town of Cedarburg—  
 Where City Hall reads “High School”,  
 Where boutiques line the streets,  
 Where moonshine’s clear haze  
 Is distilled only neat,  
 Where ice cream is eaten with pigs,  
 And a park that tilts and leans  
 Overencumbered by kids and teens—

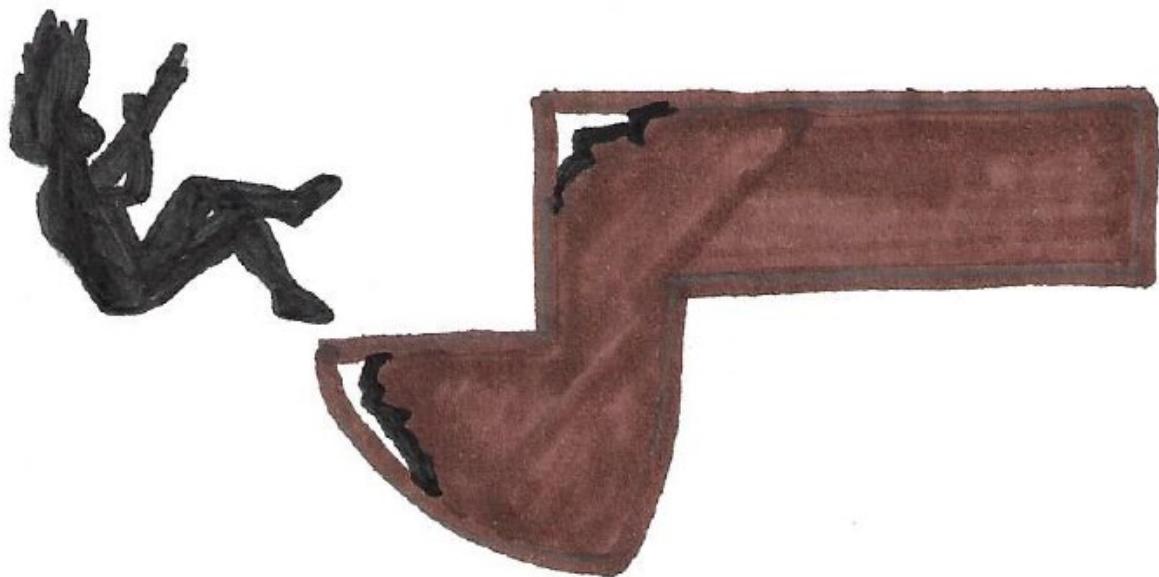
Is swarmed by species from the globe—  
 Strawberries and berry berries,  
 Bees and boys,  
 Those who like cinnamon,  
 And those who do not  
 But prefer turkey legs instead,  
 Those who can  
 (And will)  
 Drink their weight in infused blends of alcohol and fruits  
 While dancing to bands  
 They’ve never heard  
 And with friends  
 They’ve never met,  
 Those who watch their daughters timidly approach a goat  
 Intended for petting  
 While their sons sit atop a camel,  
 Those drunks who dress up as a strawberry  
 So people don’t push him away  
 But instead grip him with a hug  
 And ask for a picture.

Here in the warm town of Cedarburg.



## Pepin: Unordinary

An unordinary shape  
For unordinary people  
With pep in their step  
And nowhere near feeble.  
For they may be weird  
But they're damn sure proud of it.  
In fact, prepare your ears  
Cuz you'll surely hear 'bout it.  
Whether you have a farm in the East  
Or live on the river out West,  
We're all Pepin people!  
The certified best!



## Pierce: Through the Surface

At eye level, the breaking waves  
Reveal squawking hawks  
Reeling for cod  
That lurk beneath  
Above the reefs.

Below the foamy surface  
Shy turtles dance with the weeds  
And crawdads weave sunny threads,  
But even more magic lies beneath.

Even further,  
Crystals live  
In a cave far down below,  
Hidden from the thieving eyes  
Belonging to the unenrolled.



## Polk: Falling Waters

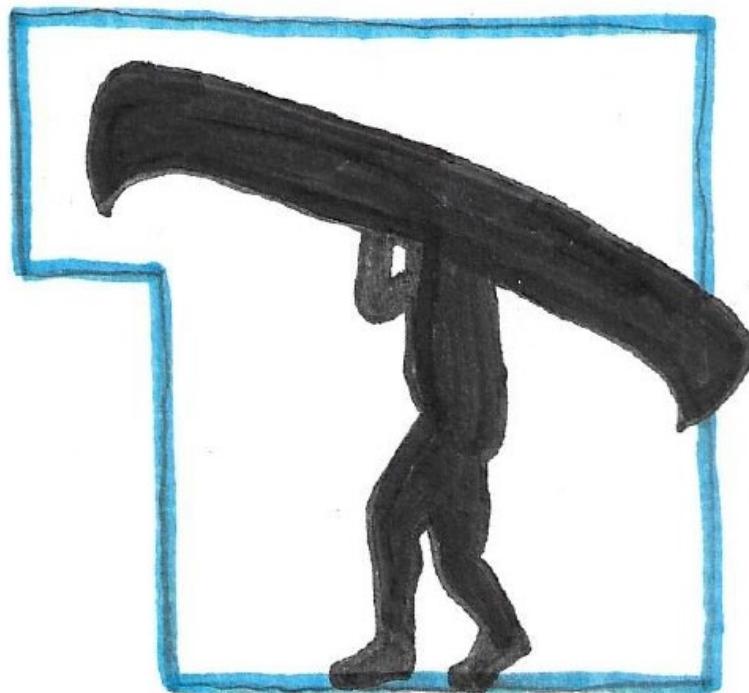
Even the rivers  
Can't stand  
This close to heaven.  
Their currents fall  
Toward the core  
Bruising and smoothing  
Rock along the way,  
Testing roots' strength,  
And pounding  
The hardened earth  
Below.  
Always rushing,  
These falling waters,  
Toward their lower home.



## Portage: Here on the Square

Here on the square  
We run circles  
In play  
Bouncing from bar to bar  
And place to place.  
Losing ourselves,  
We kick our feet  
If to say:  
“We have nowhere to be  
Except for here,  
Today.”

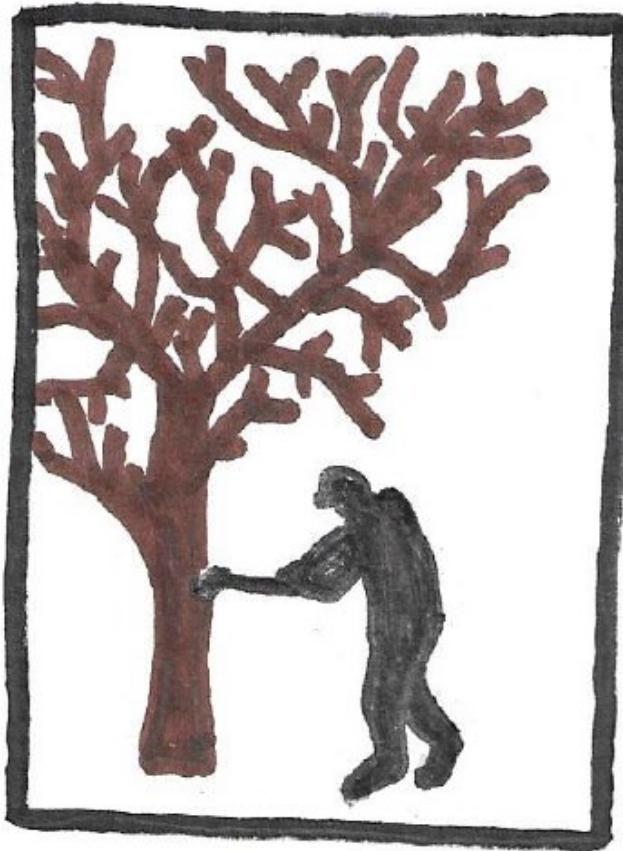
After piles of pretzels  
And barrels of beer,  
We cap our tough day  
With a mind clear  
Intent on relaxing  
After our tough day—  
Finding ourselves at Rusty’s  
To push our cares away  
From our tough day on the square.



## Price: Frozen in Concrete

Frozen in concrete  
Is life  
And art  
Forever confined  
To a box  
In northern Wisconsin.  
Come  
Witness  
Frogs frozen  
And encased elephant thrills,  
Dogs' paws paused  
And banners waving still.  
All these wonders,  
Never to leave.

But you must come here  
And risk  
Being frozen here, too.



## Racine: Just a Kid from Racine

Born to a mom  
(But barely a mom)  
Raised by her mom  
Protected from  
The failures of blood.

Soon lost  
In chemicals  
Seminal  
To leaving  
But quickly gated  
In detention for youth

Where a kid from Racine found  
(And gripped tightly)  
A semi-orange sphere  
That could pull him from here

To Maine or Connecticut,  
All over the league,  
Finally at rest in South Beach,  
Far from his state but  
Not far from Racine.



## Richland: Golden Soil

The wheels' weight rolling atop  
The surface  
Pushes through the grass  
Into the soil  
Exposing riches underneath.

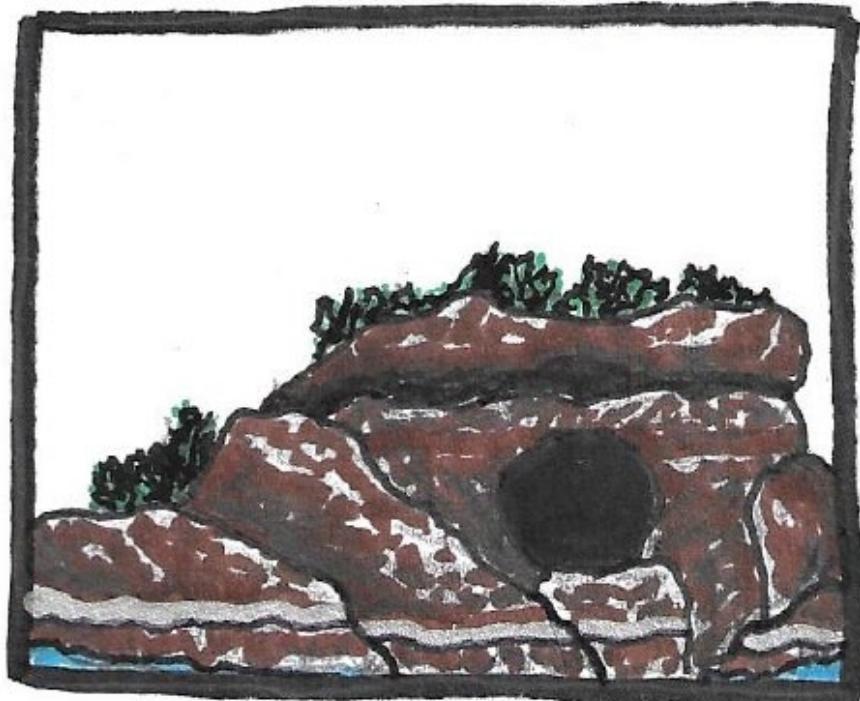
Feet—  
Trampling on future plants, trees,  
Floors, and homes—  
Pay no mind to the damage done to treasure.

This rich soil brought them here  
And will keep them here forever.



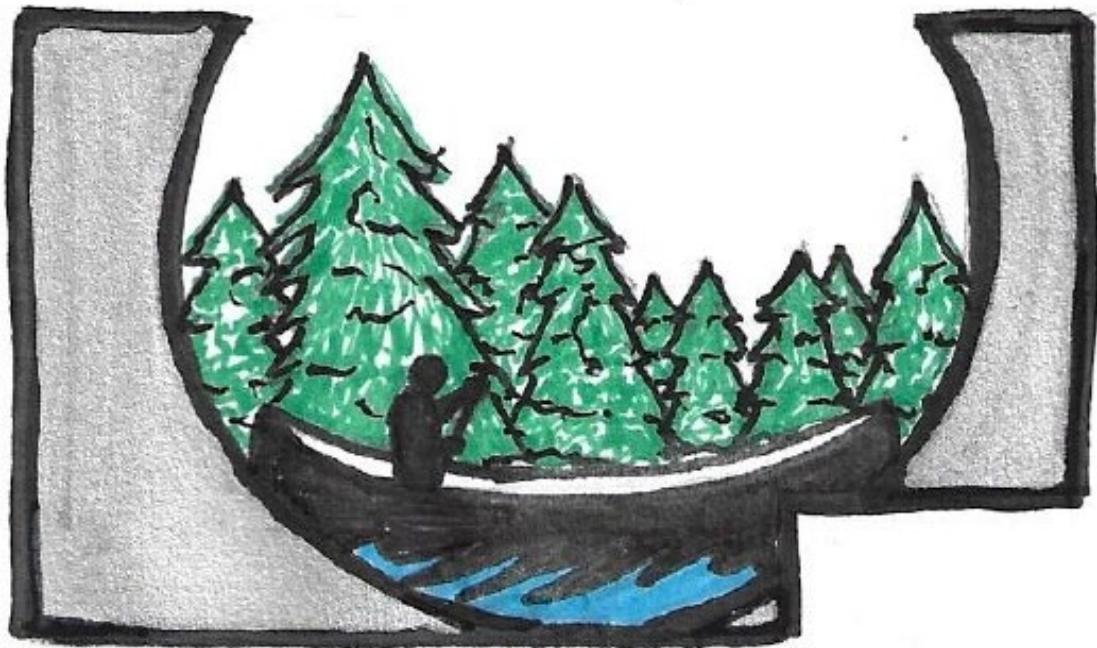
## Rock: Layers

The layers  
Building up this body  
Of land  
Are made of  
Sandstone  
And limestone,  
Orthoquartzitic  
And exquisite,  
Giving rise  
To the three-dimensional  
Parties raging  
On the surface  
That do more than live and die.  
They grow and thrive,  
Play baseball and drink beer.  
For there are layers to this land.



## Rusk: The Sun Poking Through the Canopy

The army of beards and flannel  
March in step toward the tree line  
To combat the wooden menace,  
Leaving ladies and lookers behind.  
The loggers line the limited plain  
Between themselves and the trunks  
Where tooth by tooth they'll top the trees  
To expose the sky far up above.  
As limbs and branches crash to Earth  
The ceiling starts to expand.  
The sun that once was blotted out  
Now bathes this unknown land.



## Sauk: A Circus For Sure!

“A circus for sure!”  
That’s what the yankees say  
As they trample our homes  
With frolic and play,  
Like elephants trumpeting  
All around the ring,  
But they have no Ringlings  
On which to place blame.

We may be a circus  
But that comes from our roots.  
We’re lions and tigers  
(But not Bears,  
That’s just rude).  
We may be hoopers, magicians,  
Musicians, and clowns,  
But our big top still stands  
At the center of town.



## Sawyer: Winter Incarnate

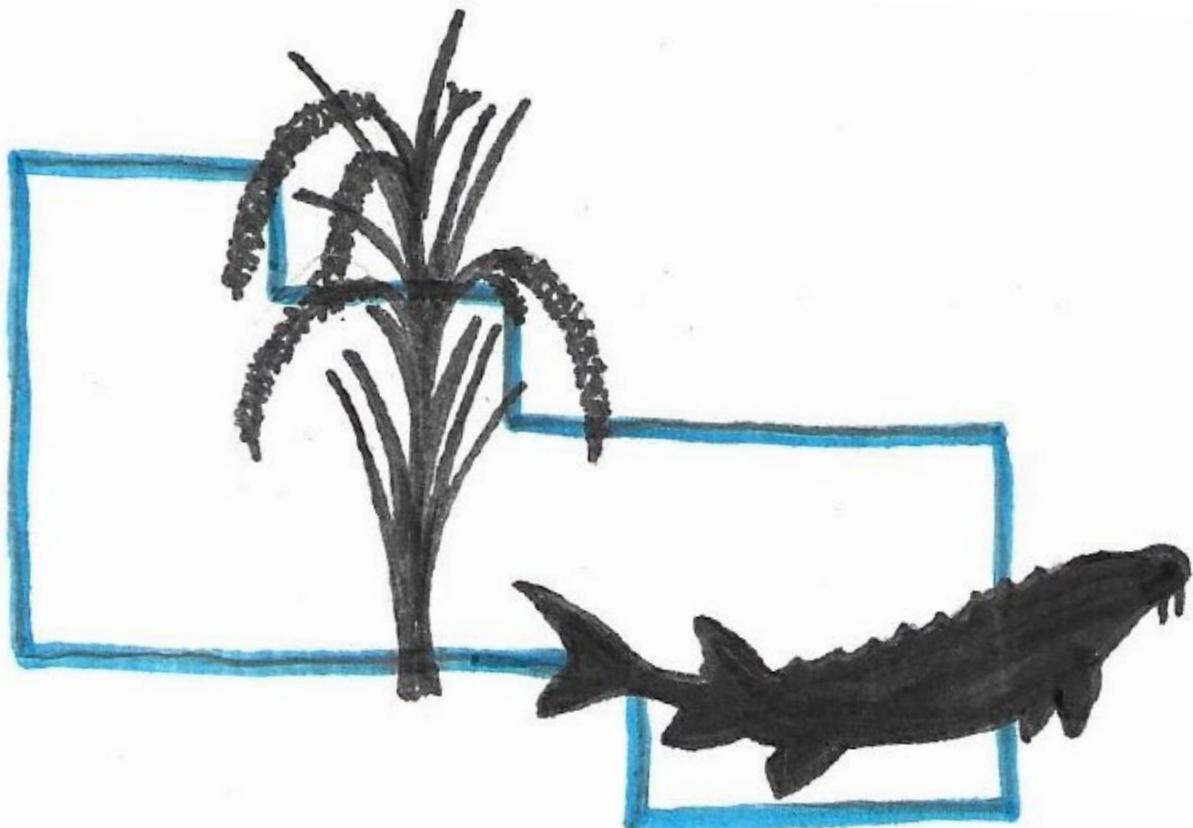
The cold weather embraces you,  
And you embrace the cold.  
The shivers shake and often quake,  
And the chattering teeth grow old.  
The wind, it sings,  
Can even howl,  
And at worse it slaps your face  
To make you wonder why you left  
The sun for this cold place.

But then you see  
Just up ahead  
A fire roaring loud,  
Circled by friends huddled together,  
Keeping warm for they are proud  
To withstand the weather others can't  
And brag their skin is thicker, too  
For they have not quit  
On Winter Incarnate,  
And it will not quit on you.



## Shawano: The Prince of Shawano

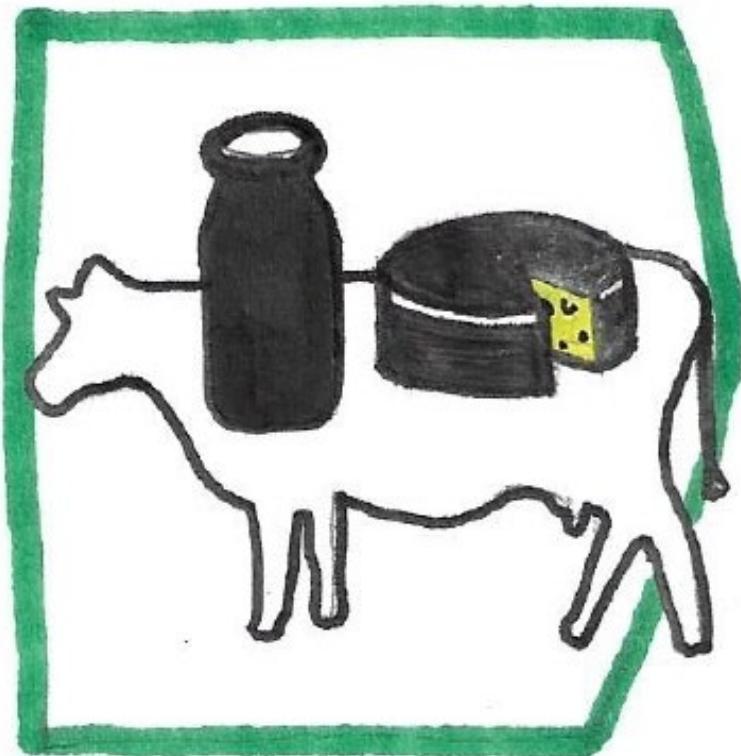
The Prince of Shawano  
Is burnt by the sun in the fields  
But more by the sun on the lakes.  
He's surrounded by friends that he buys  
And those that he makes.  
He bathes in Sun Drop  
That he drinks by the bottle.  
He sits on his throne  
As the Crown Prince of Shawano.



## Sheboygan: Dunes

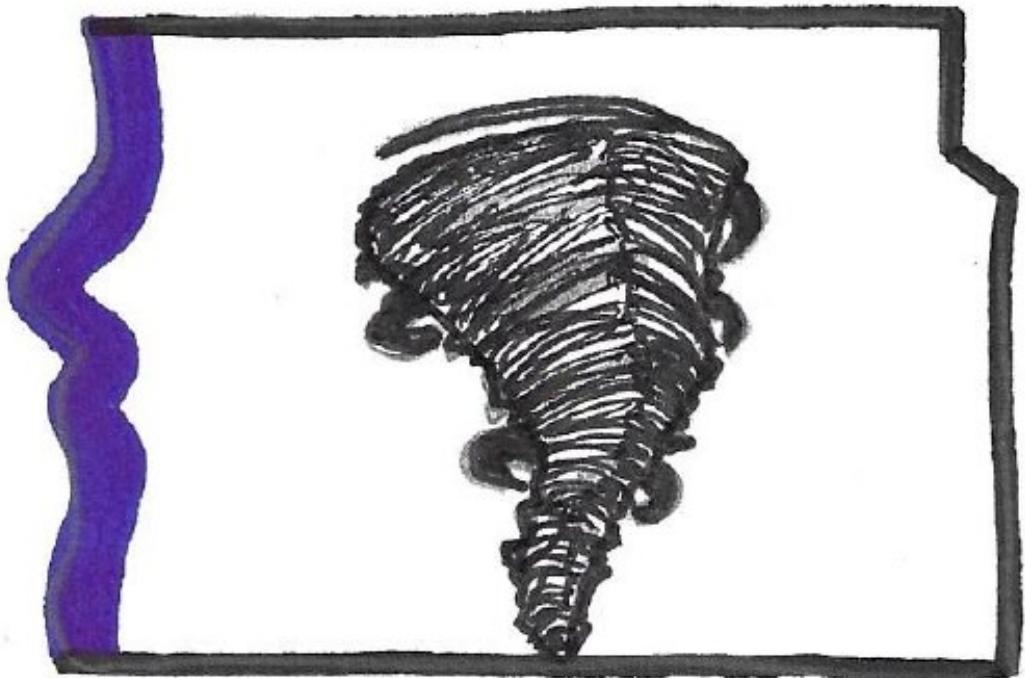
Waving to Lake Michigan,  
The dunes,  
Piling years of sand  
And earth  
And history,  
Mark the port of entry  
For the Irish and German  
Wanderers  
Stepping into a place  
They'll give to their kids  
And their kids' kids  
And their heirs who share  
The same love for pilsner  
So strong that  
They'll breed 3 sheep  
Just to tap the keg.

Those dunes split just enough  
To give them enough passage  
To settle this lakefront land  
Not far from their boats.



## St. Croix: Bubbly

The flowing  
*Bubbly*  
River  
Weaves from horizon  
To horizon  
All the while  
*Bubbling*  
In the face  
Of its older brother  
To the West.



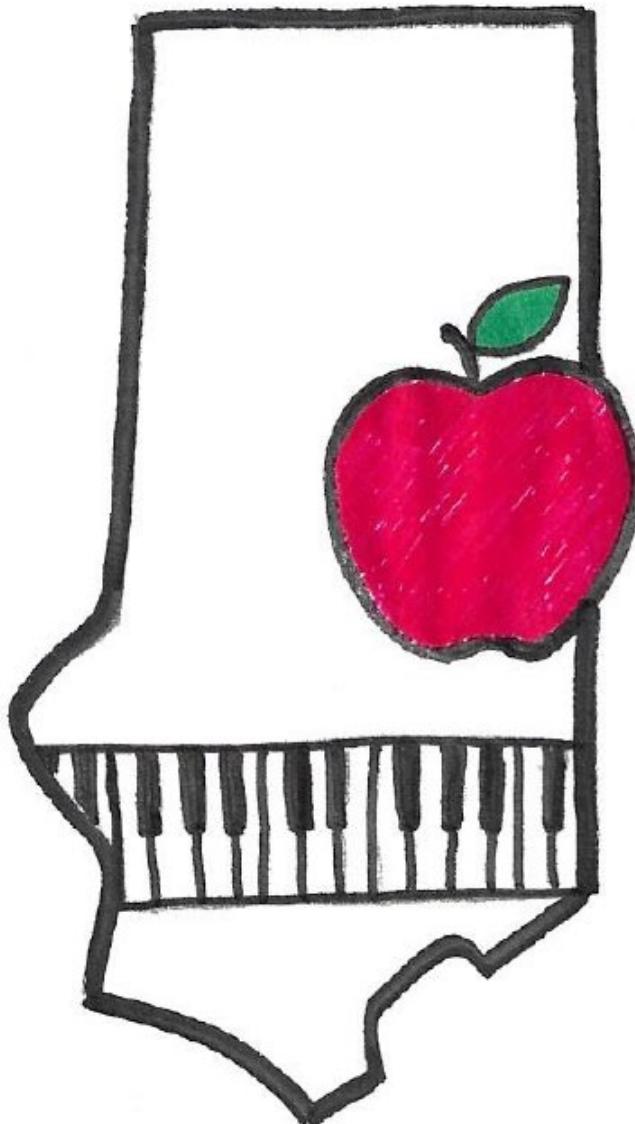
## Taylor: No Sound but the Gusts

It's quieter here  
In this simple place  
Where we stare at the sky  
And count the rabbits  
Fluffing their tails.  
The grass grows greener  
When it's neighed at,  
Not honked.  
The rhythms of scratches  
Of dead leaves dancing  
Across the lonely road  
Stretching between  
Gilman and Medford  
Must give hints to the wind  
Of deafening snow.  
We'll settle here in silence,  
By and by.



## Trempealeau: So Foreign to This Place

You sit in the heart of Arcadia  
With tongue not native to this land.  
In Tortas y Tacos New Sunrise  
Saying words most don't understand.  
But the owners, they speak your language  
Here on the Oeste side of the state  
Where the Tamarack grows  
And the river is young  
In its march toward its fate  
To the gulf of your home far from here  
This Norte portion of River.  
Even in this place where any hope  
Seems little more than a glimmer,  
It may not look it—but trust me—we like  
Your unexpected face  
To more than me,  
You seem to be  
So foreign to this place.

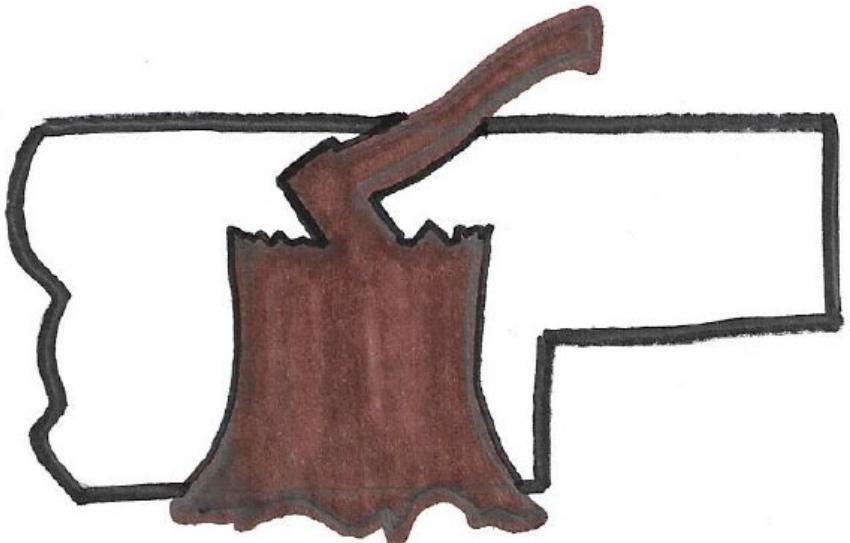


## Vernon: Peak of the Bluff

Legs pumping. Breaths come quick.  
 Sweaty, blurry eyes.  
 Nearly sick.  
 The bluffs are built with pines and oaks  
 That are passed by with every stroke  
 Of swiping hand up this land  
 That curves toward the sky.

At the peak  
 Passing bikes  
 Litter the trails  
 Designated for quick appreciation  
 Of the mountainous bluffs.  
 The cycling tires  
 Swipe berries from their branches  
 Sending them to the forest floor  
 Waiting to be found and  
 swallowed whole.  
 Outside the canopy  
 The river winks in the distance  
 Enticing hikers  
 Down.

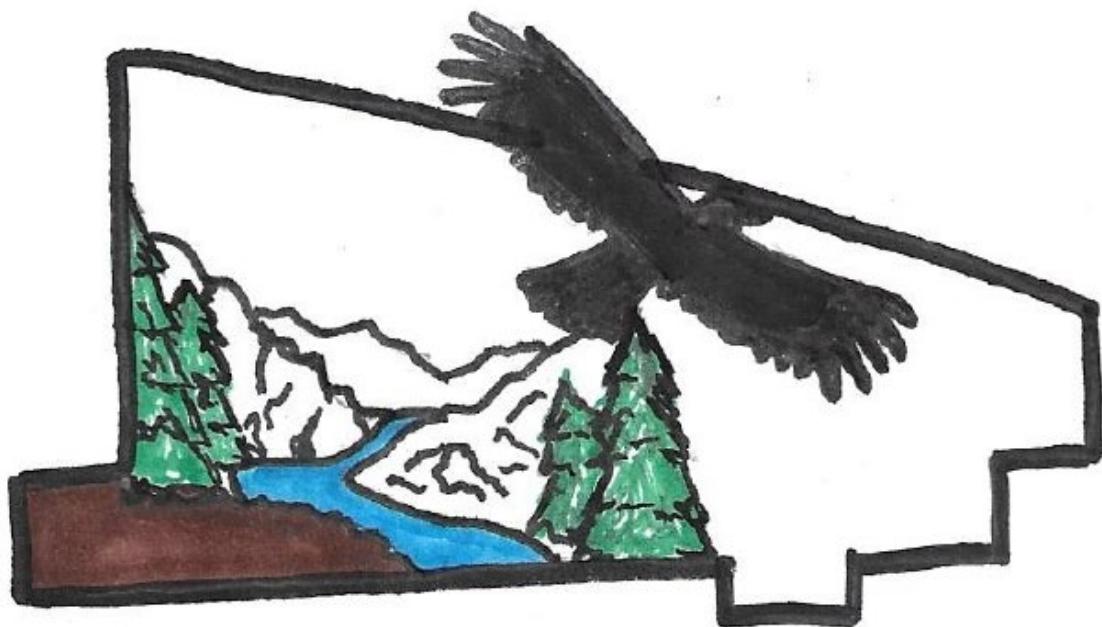
Increasing speed  
 Toward the bowl  
 Is soon deemed  
 Out of control.  
 Runs turn into falls  
 And falls turn into rolls.  
 Rolls turn into bleeding  
 From legs, back, and elbows.  
 But the running, rolling, bleeding  
 Comes to a stop down below  
 The peak of the bluff.  
 Swallowed by the bowl.



## Vilas: Derby

Intoxicating fumes  
From the 87-octane  
Spilling from my Ski-Doo  
Only heighten my senses  
That had already peaked  
Around that last corner  
That throws me into  
The final,  
Deafening  
Stretch that is checkered in black and white.

Before I even tear the tape  
I lift my hand in victory  
Ignoring the dusted snow  
Blinding me  
To the competition  
That I didn't even know was there.



## Walworth: Where Time Lays Still

As we step our first steps  
 Onto the first brick of Main Street,  
 I stop to reflect  
 On the times laid behind me:

The wooden panels glistened  
 On the Lake Geneva seas  
 That held me and my skis  
 Aloft with blinding speed.  
 The laughter and lounging  
 Out on that lake  
 Was only temporarily ruined  
 By one glaring mistake:  
 The loss of my sunnies  
 That now lay at rest on the sand,  
 Forever enjoying the warming waves  
 Rippling overhead.

Now the light red darkens deeper  
 From drips of Geneva flowing down leg,  
 Like a fleshy waterfall,  
 Onto the brick now dark red.

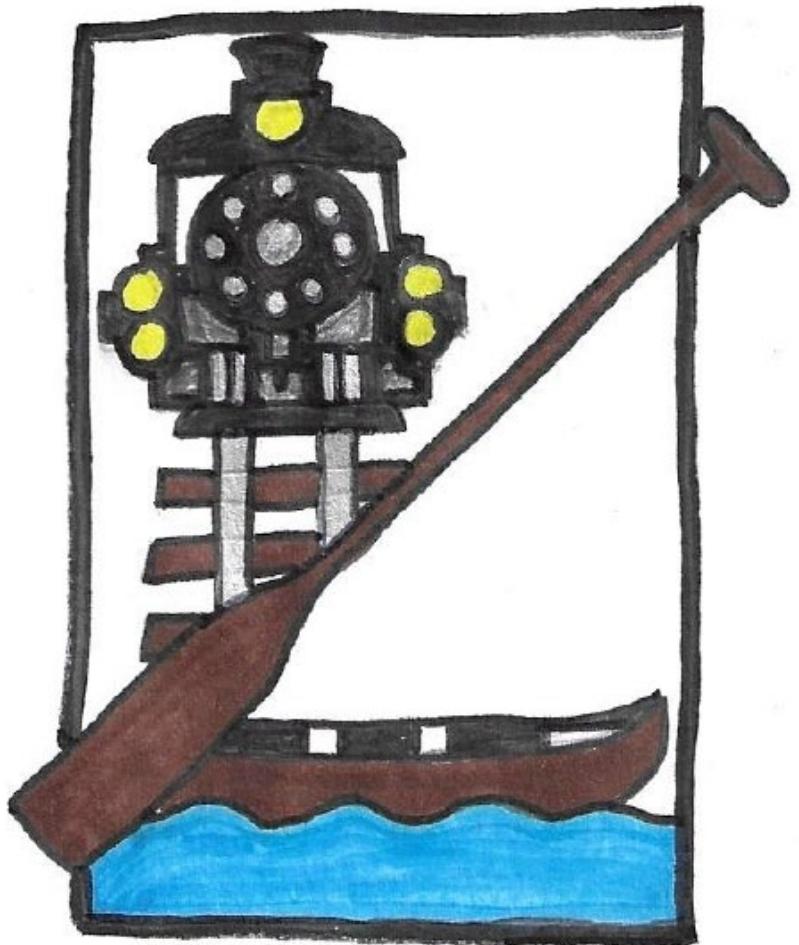
The times lying before me  
 Are sprinkled with ice cream and fudge,  
 Or singing and dancing  
 (Hopefully all the above).  
 But who knows?  
 The plans could change wildly!  
 A pretty girl, for example,  
 Just winked at me mildly.  
 It doesn't matter,  
 'Cause if you can, then you will  
 On the land in Lake Geneva,  
 Time lays down still.



## Washburn: Of the Same Bark

Among these maples and oaks,  
Owls creep  
And ravens think,  
Beetles shuffle up and down  
And scitterish squirrels quietly shrink,  
Caterpillars make their homes  
Between the branches of the birches,  
At daybreak the hawks awaken  
And predatory birds begin their searches  
Through the thicket of the foliage  
For the field mice and the shrews  
Scurrying along the forest floor  
Finding grubs nibbling on the roots

Shared amongst these maples and oaks.



## Washington: Not Far From here

Stuck in traffic,  
But I'm okay.  
Got cut off,  
But I'm okay.  
My radio's broken,  
But I'm okay.  
It starts to rain,  
But I'm okay.

Because even in this car  
I'm close to the trail  
That leads me to Out Of The City:  
The Ice age Trail  
That takes me back in time  
To a world long lost  
To the footsteps of concrete,  
Noise, and Smog.  
The trail's guidance winds  
In escape from the encroachment  
That I myself need to break.

My foot touches down on the softened dirt,  
And now I'm okay.



## Waukesha: Egged

Four boys  
 (No good, no doubt)  
 Sat in the garage,  
 Figuring out,  
 Just what to do  
 With their Saturday night.  
 "Let's egg some place!"  
 Brad said with some might.  
 They carefully planned it:  
 The egging of 412 Silver.  
 Todd would go to the Kroger  
 And soon would deliver  
 Four dozen eggs  
 (Free range, of course).  
 They were led by Art  
 (Who they called the worst).  
 Then the four of them  
 (Derek in back)  
 Crept up to 412 Silver  
 And quickly attacked.  
 Whistling missiles  
 Of unfertilized chickens  
 Littered the siding and windows.  
 And so it was written:  
 The floodlights exposed them,  
 And they ran for the house.  
 Galloping gayly  
 Laughter shot out their mouths.  
 Back at the garage  
 They gathered their breaths.  
 Three—no, not four—  
 Were all that was left.  
 Todd was here,  
 Art and Brad made it three.  
 Derek was missing!  
 (He'd gone back for his keys.)  
 The three boys all went home then  
 Not sharing a thought

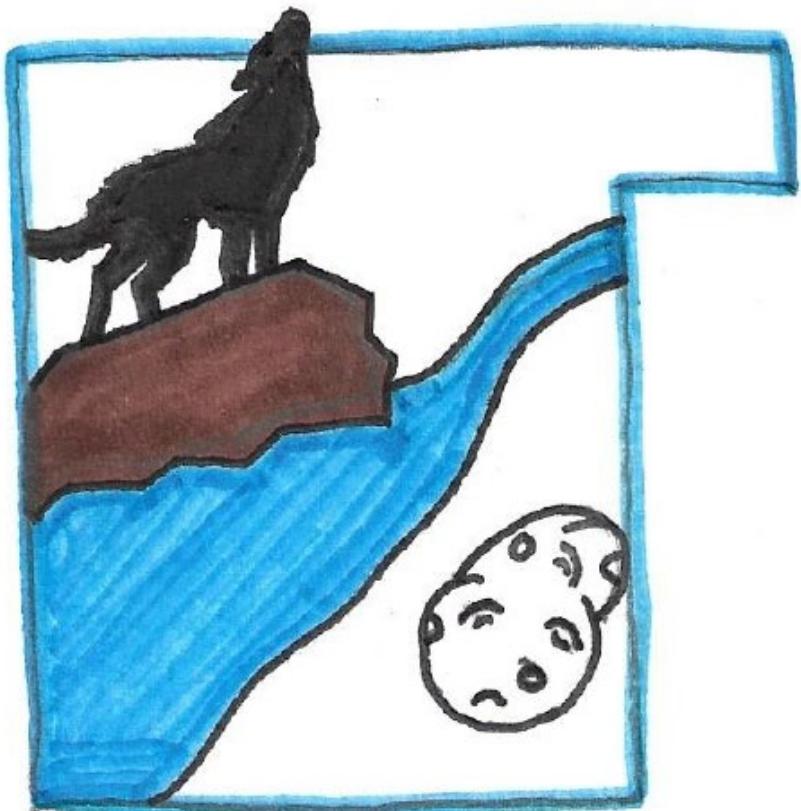


About what had just happened  
 And prayed to their God.  
 The next day at school,  
 To their surprise,  
 Todd, Brad, and Art  
 Found Derek alive!  
 Beaten and bruised,  
 He recounted his night:  
 Going back for his keys  
 The homeowners caught him in flight.  
 They bound him and beat him,  
 Tied him with rope to a chair,  
 Poked him with needles,  
 And yanked at his hair.  
 After hours of this  
 Improv interrogation  
 The captors called the police  
 And proudly launched their confession.  
 It didn't take long  
 For the cops to arrive  
 To find a teenager smiling  
 Because he'd known he survived.  
 Moreover, he smiled because  
 He knew (and believe me, he flaunted)  
 That he could sue this couple  
 For that new bike he had wanted.  
 Right there in school  
 The four all agreed:  
 No more egging houses  
 (Unless bikes were guaranteed).

## Waupaca: Chained

Lakes chained together make for fun trips and sunny skies!  
The first toe of the day gets dipped around 8  
Into the pale water fitted with a white sand bottom.  
The minnows scatter at the breaking of reflections  
With boats and tubes  
And all sorts of inflatable toys.  
Speeding Sea-Doos skip across the surface—  
That once was soft and now is concrete—  
Towing tubes of fun and games.  
A child dunks his head to spy for fish,  
But the real fun's up top.

The Sun bakes these memories into hardened treasures.  
For when the snow commandeers this place  
They will only be totems of laughs long past  
And hopes for a summer to come.



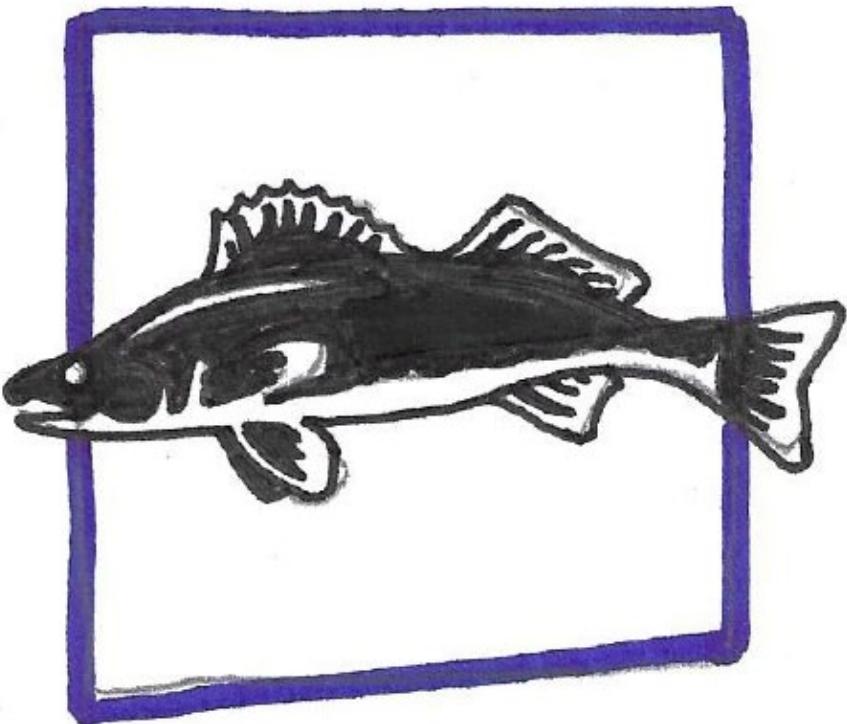
## Waushara: Gem

I'm frantically searching  
...but what am I searching for?...  
That hidden gem,  
That last piece of untouched land  
That defines this place.  
The last frontier – barely explored.  
The last dirt road – often ignored.  
The last virgin land – pure to the touch.  
The last piece of home. There's no thing as such  
A hidden gem:  
One I'd love to find,  
But I've been swimming in it  
All this time.



## Winnebago: Calling Foxes

Pointed noses pointing east  
Toward the Bago we tread to feast  
Along the slippery (almost greased)  
Banks littered with fish and geese.  
Our energies, they will deplete  
Unless we reach Omro, at the least.  
Where we can lay our heads and stress release,  
Though that will not help the ones deceased.  
After nights and nights, we reach our peak:  
The mouth of the Bago,  
Where we'll rest in peace.



## Wood: The Waters of Central Wisconsin

The running, rabid water  
Rushed rapidly through  
The Rapids of central Wisconsin.

They pushed northward to Marshes  
But not before marching  
Through the paper mills of Nekoosa.

All the while they adopted aroma  
Distinct to central Wisconsin:

That some find repugnant  
But I find relieving

For nowhere more centered am I in Wisconsin.

