



Our Oshkosh

Chapbook

Edited By Thomas Cannon

This book is dedicated to the City of Oshkosh.

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Introduction

In 2021, I was named the first poet laureate of Oshkosh. I consider the position of poet laureate to be a voice for all of us that believe in the importance of poetry

By sharing and creating poetry, we can foster common ground between people with different views. I have dedicated myself to using poetry for healing. Yet, full disclosure, I once put together a collection of poems I called Poems of the Pessimist.

I am, however, optimistic about people writing poetry and then finding an audience for it.

Right now, we are in a difficult time and wonder how to move forward. I believe we do that by writing poetry. We know through science that when we are stressed out, we think bad things and make bad choices. In a bad situation, we may be only able to access anger.

However, writing a poem, okay, anything, but as poet laureate I am going to focus on poetry, helps a person process what they are going through. It is cathartic. You get the emotional release of expressing yourself while also allowing you to choose what and when to share what is on your mind. It also helps you to look at things on your mind in a different way by accessing a different part of the brain. So, writing can unlock the solutions to your problems.

Writing a poem about something painful provides catharsis. It helps to look at things on your mind in a different way. It is a way to share it on your own terms. I believe that by going back to shape your poem, your pain becomes clay. You gain power over it by shaping it into something beautiful.

Poetry does not have to be about problems. There is value in sharing your happy times. However, sometimes we find this as difficult as talking about pain. We don't want to jinx ourselves and it can be another type of vulnerability. And sometimes we just don't make time to do so.

However, writing a poem about something good in your life is an opportunity for gratitude. Studies have shown that people that express gratitude are happier. Whether it is a person, a walk in the woods, or your life as a whole, trying to describe it provides you time to savor it. The act of savoring is a habit of happy people.

The poems I have written in this chapbook have been inspired by my role as poet laureate and by Oshkosh itself. Other poets contained in this collection live or have lived in Oshkosh. They all have a message for their neighbors (or former neighbors). Communication is what brings people together and while poetry may not be the easiest form of communication, it is powerful.

Tom Cannon
-adapted from my reception
speech November 4th,
2021

Menominee Park

When I was a boy, we'd ride down to the park,
Pony rides and long, tall slides, and sno cones by the beach,
Gridirons and diamonds and elm trees filled the sky,
I couldn't wait to go back to the park, Menominee Park again,
Menominee Park, the zoo and the train,
How I long for Menominee Park, Menominee Park again.

When I was in high school, we'd drive down to the park,
Summertime and Boones Farm wine and drinking on the grass,
Stereos and Sawdust Daze and frisbees filled the sky,
I couldn't wait to go back to the park, Menominee Park again,
Menominee Park, the laughter and the friends,
How I long for Menominee Park, Menominee Park again.

Then one day I moved away, and forgot about the park,
The big old world was calling me and I could not go back.
Stressful jobs and grown-up games and problems filled my mind,
I didn't think much about Menominee Park, Menominee Park again,
Menominee Park, I miss you my old friend,
How I long for Menominee Park, Menominee Park again.

But now tonight, as the sun goes down, I close my eyes and then,
I smile and go to Menominee Park, Menominee Park again.
How I long for Menominee Park, Menominee Park again.

-Mike Zahn

Picasso on a Quarter Panel

I crept into his shop, his studio, his jungle,
He waved a hairy finger toward the bench;
I rushed to put the paint down dutifully
Like an awed apprentice for his master.

I watched awhile, perched in the corner—
Behold, the artist at his masterpiece!
He grunted and turned back to grinding,
Pounding mangled flesh to polished steel.

The smell of lacquer and of sanding dust hung thick
And clung to walls and posters, hands and lungs;
The very odor that can make a body sick
Seemed to inspire his art and lubricate his tongue.

His shirt untucked, pants sagging at the hips,
He told deer hunting stories through the smoke
Of cigarettes attached to drinking lips—
Then suddenly, the genius awoke. . .

Bright colors splashing off the palette
Blending into dark and light
Upon the smoothed quarter panel,
Sprays of jewels glistening with gloss. . .

He sees another job done, money in the pocket,
Time left over for a cigarette.
I see a work of art, Picasso at his canvas,
Mighty talent, heaven-sent.

*There's artistry in everyone,
Nobody is exempt;
The eye of God sees through us all,
No matter how unkempt.*

-Mike Zahn

A Collage of Oshkosh

Oshkosh, a collage of winter images
Christmas trees marking the road home
on the frozen lake
Shanties against a gray sky
Red ice boats scratching blue.
People zipzooing in snowpants
gathering under tents on the ice
for the Fisheree.
Just down from a dark pool
cut into the ice so people
in coordinated costumes can
hold hands and fling themselves
into frigid for the Special Olympics

Oshkosh, a collage of summer images
Boats burble as they dock
at a downtown restaurant or
at the Leach to listen to music
Perhaps they jostled the fishing boats
bobbing under a bridge.
or a family of ducks floating
along the Fox River.
Seasoned citizens shopping for rutabagas
Mix with newly minted adults in sundresses
waiting for Bubble Tea,
the smile exchanged between
shopper and Hmong farmer
the best teacher of harmony.
Local musicians at the intersection draw
an audience on white plastic chairs-
their music drifts into the open doors
of the art galleries and the hardware store
while further down someone busks
an instrument, an open case, and patience.
Oshkosh, a collage of the change seasons
Kids in distressed jeans and team jerseys

posing for senior pictures
against the battered wooden doors
of the downtown alleys
or on the grassy square
with an instrument or their team ball
Piles of belongings all in a line
waiting to ascend into the dorms.
Down the street from the university
all ages stroll through
the tulips and the art shows
of a mansion's garden.
The Memorial Day March-
gray-haired men and women
wave from Cadillac SUVs
in the solemn procession
down Algoma Blvd.
We stand, put our hands to our hearts
out of respect for what we have
and what others have lost.

Oshkosh, diverse, in some ways divided
Yet we have no shortages of bridges
that can bring us together. After all,
at times opposing views can both be true
It's probably what makes us strong.
All of our kids deserve the best school
yet new isn't what makes ours good
Even as we complain about roads narrowing
we find comfort that our own crosswalk is safer.

Oshkosh, a city with what it needs
Good companies to work for.
Skilled people to make them good.
Safe roads to bring us home.
Homes to give us a sense of ourselves.
while striving for better.

Oshkosh, the city
with its name on the trucks
in the 4th of July parade.

Oshkosh, a city of adapted promises
The shore of the river once dusted with prosperity
shines better with entertainment
Sawdust city gives way to Event city.

Oshkosh, a city of wards with histories.
You can tell which neighborhood
by the types of homes lining the street.
But I also believe that if you close your eyes,
neighbor talking to neighbor sounds the same.
we are one community
growing stronger with concern
for those on the opposite
side of the street.

Can Oshkosh become all of its promises?
The answer is simple
If this small city, can become
The busiest airport in the world.
We can do anything.

-Thomas Cannon
(Written for the state of the city address 2022)

Overwatch

Nothing so boldly owns the night
as owls patrolling treelines.
Tiny heartbeats, huddle below,
Trembling in the moonshine.

At dawn, the watch is taken by
the eagles of the lake,
Who surveille the landscape far and wide
for unwary tread or wake.

The fox slides through dusk's shadows
treading strips of light
Hunting for the foragers
slinking through the night

Most of Oshkosh lives a life
In varied grades of lumens.
Under sharp eyes rarely seen,
They own the world, not humans.

-D Jarchow

Oshkosh Overnight

Ink bombs surround the planet, release their contents over the course of minestrone soup, Roman feasts on 6th Street, false vomitoriums, stoned litigation, the bridge that sang a soul to sleep.

The dresser speaks with a stack of Beatles albums hidden in its jowls, wish-dreams in its throat.

Sponges absorb the black silk in time to spot yesterday's socks next to our cell phones, loose staples in the box spring.

Shirtless, we discuss the meaning of a bedsheet.

-Nathan J. Reid

**First published in Thoughts on Tonight (Finishing Line Press, 2017)*

Sawdust Days

Eat chocolate soft serve in a cone.
Skip rocks against the waves.
Ride tiny trains with tiny people.
Get your walks in before this warm day burns away.

Love that gal in the summer green dress.
Love that guy in the blue shirt, the khaki shorts.
Grab that hand through cotton candy, the calliope.
Lock those kissing memories inside the season, buried in
the sand
whispering on and on and on from shore.

-Nathan J. Reid

**First published in Persistence of Perception (Finishing Line Press, 2020)*

Punky's Funeral Pyre: Grandpa Reid

My grandpa used to put the pontoon top down
on thirty acres of land he simply called The River.
He was a farm boy WWII vet who worked for Guernsey Dairy
back when milkmen were still in high demand.

We used to get chocolate chip cookies from Kwik Trip, roast beef
sandwiches from Hardee's, he would tell me stories of silver fishing
line
threading its way through marble currents a-swirl like a sawmill
and he'd call me *Jimmy Jim James, The Meanest Kid In All The Land!*

...But the boat dock soon gives up all its hitch knots, pontoon
drifting like a downriver song.

Bury this sawblade, his wedding suit no longer fits right.
Scatter the sawdust, the landscape no longer dreams.

My grandpa no longer knows my name.

He searches in the night for items he never lost
trying to conjure up a wife he barely remembers. She hides
in his wallet, in the rolltop desk, beneath the cushions of the
davenport,
calling his name. He searches for her
until the neighborhood drips out no more angels.
He searches for her until all the ice cream is gone.
He searches for her until ghost-shaken hands guide him back to bed.
He searches for her until his war medals are found.
He searches for her until he falls through the diamond earth,
becomes infinity,
awakes in church portraits and VHS tapes, where I hear him calling
my name,
where I hear all of them calling my name through family reunions
these tablefuls of dead relatives, they say
The daylight dims

The cornfields scheme

The worms will soon be biting

Then their voices go like exploding gravestones.

My memories are on fire.

- Nathan J.Reid

**previously published in Bramble Lit Magazine (Winter/Spring 2020)*

Poem about Oshkosh

When I was a kid
We drove by the lake
To Oshkosh!
We loved it, shouted
“It’s great!”

The boat playground was
Where we
Spent a lot of our time
With Mom and Aunt Mary
Along for the ride.

In 2008,
I moved to this city
to marry my love
and make a new life
with the kiddies.

Now Oshkosh is our home
Our happy place
To make new memories
That puts a smile on my face.

-Kate Kaiser

In April 2022, Tom Cannon was on the podcast- *The Kosh* hosted by Timber Smith. THE KOSH spotlights interesting people associated with Oshkosh, WI and the surrounding Fox Cities area. Timber jokingly said he had to ask for a poem about the Kosh. However, the podcast is worthy of a poem. Here it is.

The Kosh

Oshkosh has it all
A wedding venue
In a bank and a mall
A neighborhood bar or two
where you can throw back a few

Our city is working class
It can dress up and be Posh
And let's talk about this contrast
On the podcast, The Kosh.

Oshkosh has a storied past
So spin your yarn on Timber's podcast
you'll play the word association game
and what Oshkosh needs is yours to proclaim
If you have a grievance
you can complete this sentence
What in the world is going on with...
Again, the person to tell is Timber Smith

Here's your chance to discuss or uncover
An Oshkosh hidden gem
Or a local place you need to rediscover.
On The Kosh, get the 411 on eating local
But it's Wisconsin, so it won't be low-cal
Guests have to call out a villain to condemn
However, most don't focus on the zeroes
They want to name one of Oshkosh's heroes

If your conversation muscles are limber
Then invite yourself to talk with Timber
Have a conversation on The Kosh Podcast
You'll be amazed how the hour will go fast.

-Thomas Cannon

Deb Martin, a leader in many philanthropic organizations in Oshkosh, asked the Poet Laureate for a poem for Transit Equity Day. The day not only marks Rosa Parks' birthday but advocates for public transportation as a civil right. For people in poverty and people with disabilities, public transportation may be their only access to employment and healthcare. Tom wrote *A Ribbon Through The City* and the *Equity of Moving Together* for the cause.

The Equity of Moving Together

In 1941, my Grandpa bought a small farm
from the man who homesteaded the land.
that farm became my father's

These men earned the American dream.
Can you guess though, the ratio
of black homesteaders to white?

In 1941, would the bank have given a loan
to my grandpa, had he been black?

Red lines tell the answer.
Prosperity is in subdivisions
because that is where the houses are

In 2021, a bank would have given a loan
to my grandpa, had he been black.

But wealth accumulates like mud
on the bottom of our shoes
We walk taller in boots inherited.
Once enough soil slows us down
We grow roots and get planted.

Those who's forebearers
walked the sidewalks
of designated streets,
wore boots that held no dirt,
gathered no nutrients
for future generations.
Any soil was swept
To the front of the bus.

Today, there are no signs on seats.
From our tinted SUV windows,
we find it hard to see
the inequity of selected prosperity,
The first leg out of poverty
is a bus leaving the station.

The great thing about public transit
is that we ride the route together

-Thomas Cannon

A Ribbon Through The City

Mother with her boy
Slung on her hip
Slog over the road
to the bus stop.
would we stand with her?

His boots bang on her leg
The wind cuts at their cheeks
5 after the hour comes quickly
Cold seeps thoroughly
on mornings so frigid
we let our cars warm.

Is it two stops
One at the daycare
then a walk to the next shelter?
a wait for the next bus to work
while we get our latte coffee.

Their world is too small
It's a ribbon through the city
along the bus route.
Without those humming
buzzing, beeping buses
the world would be so much bigger
their world would become even smaller.

-Thomas Cannon

Good Trouble

Before an action, I have to think.
Some thoughts may lead to drink
so I choose good ones to double.
Good thoughts lead to good action.
To stop others from bad action,
I also want to get in good trouble.

-Deb Martin

A Line Meant is a project originated by Wisconsin Poet Laureate, Dasha Kelly Hamilton. It employs lines from published poems to connect the creativity of neighbors and the humanity of strangers. This is Tom Cannon's contribution to the project.

Every Distance seemed like an opening

Life begins today and stretches out
like a stage whisper, like a heavy fog
This is why now matters.

There was a time, long ago
when our visibility was infinite
yet didn't we still white knuckle it?
The horizon, too far away,
was slow motion panic.

Each day more roads appeared.
Every distance seemed like an opening
at those ever-looping intersections of fate
We could step off in any direction.
We feared every direction was wrong.
When every direction was right.
If only we had known

-Thomas Cannon

My Oshkosh

My Oshkosh was the slow swivel of the rusty train bridge.
The bang of the back door of Tony's pizza,
the Hour Bar clinging to its basement walls

I watched Oshkosh atop a Baslers' gas truck
WWII planes screaming over JCPenny's parking lot.

My Oshkosh, my home, became holiday pageants
with the clatter of little feet on risers in tiled gyms.
Parent teacher conferences on tiny chairs.

My Oshkosh became standing on shore of Menominee Park
with my back to the fireworks shielding my daughter from the wind

My Oshkosh is the smell of kettle corn, the two-person band on
Main Street
decorated lion statues in the Public Square, granite timeline around a
steel fountain

Find my Oshkosh at a South Park pavilion, a half barrel of beer
under canvas.
It's in my bones after a volleyball game
It's the child wrapped in a towel after the splashpad.

In the middle of the mixture of
downtown churchgoers and Roxy diners,
you'll be immersed in Oshkosh.
As much as those houses that once lapped at the train tracks on
Division Street.

Our Oshkosh runs from the fairgrounds to Parnell's,
just past Ardy's and Eds
Our Oshkosh extends as it meanders.
Our Oshkosh sits on lawn chairs in the open garage
at your grandma's house facing Bay Shore Drive mansions.

It did not disappear just because Buckstaff's Observatory, Leach
Truck, Morgan Doors, Rockwell crumbled away-
like the bridge to the lighthouse.

Our Oshkosh sings, dances, paints,
flies on handcrafted wings,
protects and defends.
Our Oshkosh
remembers and honors.

-Thomas Cannon

One Step, One Minute, One Mile (At A Time)

As my shoes are tied,
I become my own guide.
Through the neighborhood
Of true and falsehood
Forget I must not
Forget I ought not
Forget I will not
The lesson bought
With many a mistake.
I feel somewhat awake
On this ordinary run
Underneath the blazing sun.
I make a slow turn
Creeping is the yearn
To do it all, right now, today-
No, no, that's not the way!
In such a rush
I turn to mush.
I hear the pitter-patter
As my legs turn to batter.
Eager to do all,
I simply fall.
Going without pause
Hungry for applause,
Is a way most swift
To find myself adrift.
Remember, as they say,
Rome wasn't built in a day.
The lesson in mind,
Avoided is another bind.
Faster I wish I ran
But it followed the plan.
Wiping sweat off my face,
For now, completed is the chase.
I permit myself some rest

On the morrow, attempt my best.
No matter what it may be
Business, poetry, philosophy
I hope you agree-
One step at a time
One minute at a time
One mile at a time
Is the only way to climb

-Patrick McCorkle

My Hometown Library

Before
I had to study
Before
I had to work
Before
I had to mature

I remember
calm lions staring.
I remember
a dome reaching for the sky.
I remember
pillars thick as tree trunks.
I remember
books stretching on forever.

I remember
this place

Beckoning
Luring
Enchanting

From
Sunrise
To
Sunset

During
Frost and chill
Rain and bloom
Sun and heat
Wind and leaves.

I remember
The lights arranged
The book selected
The bench hosting
father and son
experiencing

knights clashing blades
ships parting waters
wizards casting spells
spacecraft finding life
friendships strengthened
foes vanquished.

language assembling
technology developing
culture forming
religion spreading
civilization risen
civilization burned.

20 years later

The silent carnivores
The sky-spearing dome
The thick, stocky pillars
The endless tomes

Still
Beckon
Still
Lure
Still
Enchant

From
Dawn
To
Dusk

Through
Ice and snow crunching beneath my feet
Flora and fauna blooming in the fields
Warmth and sand spreading between my toes
Red and orange crinkling in the breeze.

I will not forget
The drafts constructed
The table arrayed
The writers presenting

Essays
Epics
Fables
Memoirs
Novels
Op-Eds

Poems
Songs.

I will not forget
the structure
that stays
the same.

I will not forget
the building
that inspired me
to read
and
to write.

I will not forget
my
hometown
library.
-Patrick McCorkle

Wings of Glass

Peace is a Dove that flies on wings of glass
The wind shifts and
Peace crashes and breaks
Becomes merely glittering shards
That threaten to slice flesh
Bloody-fingered men try to assemble hope
Their children urge them on,
Will the chore be done
Before they must try?
Blood makes glass slippery
Shards fly through the air.
Some wedge under fingers,
The pain will possess that life.
Some shards enter mouths
They will speak through a veil of blood
But some will enter hearts.
And then we will remember
That blood is the glue that holds all together.

-Joyce Frohn

Found poetry can be found anywhere. It is simply taking words and phrases out of text and arranging them into poems. The following poem is based on Looking back: Supermarket Stickup Stuns City December 15th, 2021, of the Oshkosh Herald. This article recounts a stickup of a grocery manager, Victor Helstrom.

Supermarket Stickup

A typical Friday, Sept. 1953
In the Krambo grocery store
business was bustling
as shoppers cashed paychecks
picked up groceries for the weekend
Victor Helstrom was making sure
shelves were stocked

Victor decided to spend
A quiet evening with his wife.
Around 11:45, the doorbell rang
A man pulled a short-barreled gun
“You are going to the store,
open the safe.”

Then he ordered Victor and his wife Arlene
to their car, holding her at gunpoint.
On Oak Street, Helstrom was directed
to flash his headlights twice

Helstrom was ordered inside to collect
money and checks, the bandit continued
to hold Mrs. Helstrom at gunpoint

Officers pulled behind Helstrom
With lights flashing
Before the boys in blue came,

the bandit told Helstrom
“give a good story”
told Mrs. Helstrom
“keep your mouth shut
or you’ll get it.”

The officers suspected nothing,
releasing the car with a warning.
The bandit ordered Helstrom
to Sacred Heart Cemetery
Secured the Helstroms to trees
With tape and rope

Before the bandit in their car
was out of sight, Mrs. Helstrom
freed herself, released her husband

After being “on the lam”
the culprit was identified as
Murl R Jarvis who escaped
while being held for trial

He was captured
In front of a small town bank
in Iowa
with two loaded revolvers.

-Thomas Cannon

Contributors:

Thomas Cannon was selected as the inaugural Poet Laureate of Oshkosh, WI. He is the author of the books *The Tao of Apathy* and *Shattered*. He and his wife have three children and two grandkids. Learn more about him at thomascannonauthor.com.

Joyce Frohn has been published more than two hundred times. She has been paid for about half of those. She is married with an adult daughter. She also shares a house with two cats, a gecko, a guinea pig and too many dirty dishes.

Dixie Jo Jarchow lives in Black Wolf, WI with her long-suffering husband of 37 years and writes creepy short stories and sweet romance with a twist.

Kate Kaiser moved to Oshkosh when she married her husband, Paul. She is a nurse and mother to three grown kids.

Deb Martin is a community advocate who helps others speak up for organizations and issues they care about. She is a public speaker with topics ranging from continuous improvement, change management, to management skills. She is also an author.

Patrick McCorkle is an Oshkosh resident working on an epic Fantasy story. He graduated from UW-Oshkosh and has a blog entitled Primacy of Politics located here: <https://theprimacyofpolitics.blogspot.com/>

Nathan J. Reid serves on the boards for WPLC, CWW, and WFOP. His work has been published widely, translated into Chinese, and performed for the stage and radio. Learn more about him at nathanjreid.com.

Mike Zahn spent the first 35 years of his life in Oshkosh and now lives in Wausau. Menominee Park is pretty straight forward; Picasso on a Quarter Panel is based loosely on the many body shop workers he called on when he worked for my dad's paint store in Oshkosh.

The Poet Laureate Program

Giving voice to community

The Oshkosh Poet Laureate serves as the leading voice for poetry in the Oshkosh community, promoting poetry through publication, performance, education, workshops, and digital and social media.

Mayor Lori Palmeri introduced this idea to the Oshkosh City Council after being inspired by poet and activist Amanda Gorman's poem, "The Hill We Climb," which she read at the inauguration of Joe Biden in 2021.

Palmeri stated, "A strong history of poet laureates, as ambassadors of the spoken and written word, inspired the idea of a city initiative for sharing hope and healing in our community. The arts are an important part of the creative Oshkosh culture and a unique way to promote literacy. The collective voice of our community brings us together as human beings."

Thomas Cannon was named the inaugural poet laureate of Oshkosh. This role is to highlight the importance of literacy, spark creativity and foster artistic expression. The city of Oshkosh hopes to weave old and new cultures together to form one resilient community tapestry.

Tom Cannon has called Oshkosh home since graduating with a major in English and a minor in writing from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. His wife Linda have raised three children and have two grandchildren.

As the author of two books and many poems published in journals, Tom is eager to bring people together through poetry. His presentations can be tailored to your organization and range from how to write poetry to using writing for mental health.

If your organization is interested in hosting the Poet Laureate, contact Tom in the following ways:

Email: oshkoshpoetlaureate@oshkoshpubliclibrary.org

Phone: (920) 236-5206

Tom would also like to invite you to the Facebook group *Poet Laureate of Oshkosh*. Together we can create a vibrant community of poets.