

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 15: Celebrating Wisconsin

(Brief intro music)

Rachel: Hello, and Welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Rachel

Leah: And I'm Leah.

Rachel: At time of recording, the library building is still closed due to COVID-19 being the total jerk that it is, and Leah and I are recording via the online platform everyone is using these days—Zoom. If we sound a little bit different to normal—hopefully not too much different—that is why. Please bear with us. Just like you, we look forward to things going back to some semblance of normalcy, but until that time we're just doing the best we can. For instance, Zoom has a nifty video conferencing feature, and while I do own a webcam it doesn't work because of some issues with my PC's USB ports. So, instead, whenever we have work meetings, my avatar is usually of a stuffed animal or random knickknack. I try to change it up to keep my coworkers entertained.

Leah: And we are entertained! I'm boring- I just make everyone see my normal ol' face.

Rachel: (laughs) I don't know...I don't know if that makes you boring or just normal.

Leah and Rachel: (laughs)

Rachel: Today, for instance, Leah is seeing me as a stress ball in the shape of a milk carton anthropomorphized as a dairy cow. When you squeeze it, it smells like chocolate milk.

Leah: Which sounds pretty awesome.

Rachel: It is awesome. I may...I may be squeezing it too much as we speak.

Leah and Rachel: (laughs)

Rachel: Listeners, did you know that June is Dairy Month? And did you also know that Wisconsin is the Dairy State? I don't really why I am asking you questions when you have no way of responding in real time, but anyway! We thought we could fuse Dairy Month with Wisconsin by celebrating authors from & books about the state. Before that, though, let's talk a little about our own love for both of these things. Leah, how much do you love Wisconsin and—more importantly—cheese?

Leah: I...I really love Wisconsin, guys. After graduate school, I briefly moved down to Florida to escape the snow and missed my Wisconsin so much that I tattooed it on me. I think the state has so much to offer, especially when we can get outdoors and explore. One of my favorite places to go is Devil's Lake. There's such great hiking there. My family used to go camp there every summer. I even was caught in a flash flood there in the early '90s. I grew up in the town of Waukesha—so, way out in the suburbs. It's very interesting and slightly sad to see how the area I grew up is changing. There's so many more businesses and buildings and way less nature, but I...I guess that happens everywhere. If any listeners caught my mini-episode about Old World Wisconsin, you may already know that I love that place. So

many happy memories visiting there as a kiddo. If you're not familiar, it's a very large open air museum depicting life in the 19th century Wisconsin. Go ahead and listen to that mini if you want to hear me gush about it. I fully plan to drag my not-from-around-here boyfriend there as soon as it opens. Actually, I have a lot of very cool Wisconsin places I want to take him to. A business in particular I want to share with him is Humbird Cheese—or, Market Square Cheese, as it's called in Wisconsin Dells. My family has a long history of visiting Humbird Cheese, starting with my Grandpa Eddy stopping by regularly to pick up some swiss for my Grandma Avis from the actual cheese cave that the company used to be located in in the 1930s. And, actually, the owners sheltered my folks and brother from a storm in the 1980s, which is a pretty cool history. Rachel, what are your thoughts on Wisconsin?

Rachel: While we at the library are based in Oak Creek and I now live here with my husband, I actually grew up in Milwaukee. I was raised in a town called Town of Lake, which is a township that officially died off in a border war during the 1950s and was absorbed into Milwaukee.

Leah: Ooo.

Rachel: Yeah, pretty...pretty rad, right? People who live there still call it Town of Lake, though, so I don't know if that makes me part of an underground gang or what. (laughs)

Leah: Probably:

Rachel: Yeah, I'd like to think so. Maybe I should get a tattoo once again safe to do so again. Town of Lake is right near Airport Park and stretches to 6th Street. It's bordered by Tippecanoe, St. Francis, and the airport itself. You can find it on Google maps, still, so I am not making it up. It's a nice neighborhood to be raised in, a good distance to subdivisions like Bay View as well as the downtown metro area and Lake Michigan. Although, having lived so close to the airport, it comes as second nature for me to drown out the sound of engines overhead. Where I live now in Oak Creek seems really quiet in comparison.

Leah: I totally know what you mean. When I lived in Orlando I lived very close to the airport. You get used to the noise pretty quickly. And it was always a fun game to see if I could spot my apartment when I'd be flying over, too.

Rachel: That is cool, yeah. (laughs) But yeah, Milwaukee County is great, and luckily I am not lactose intolerant. Cheese and ice cream for me, baby! Although milk just by itself does make me want to throw up. (clicks tongue) Is that...is that too much information? Maybe?

Leah: (laughs) No, we all get it.

Rachel: (laughs) I will kick things off by talking about some books that I grabbed from our library's Wisconsin Collection. For patrons who don't know, OCPL has a small-ish circulating collection of titles all about the state, this county, and the city itself. When Leah came forward with this idea for the podcast, I grabbed four of those books pretty much at random. Let's start narrow and then increase our scope by first going with "Images of America: Oak Creek Wisconsin" by Anita and Larry Rowe. This is part of the "Images of America" series through Arcadia Publishing, and you have probably seen copies not only in your local libraries and bookstores but at corner stores and petrol stations. They're great because they are largely photo-based, so if you're looking for a brief but interesting overview of a certain municipality then this has you covered. The one for Oak Creek goes into the region's farmland history going as far back as the 1800s, then the developing townships, schools and churches, subdivision development, and

finally the move toward becoming a fully recognized city in the 1950s. So, around the same time that all of the annexation was happening around the county, and when Town of Lake—as I mentioned earlier—was absorbed into Milwaukee. We own several copies of this title at OCPL, so be sure to check it out when you get a chance. Getting more into the surrounding area, I picked up a book called “Cream City Chronicles: Stories of Milwaukee’s Past” by John Gurda. This one is just under 300 pages and features an eclectic collection of stories from and about Milwaukeeans. I found the passages on the city’s brewing history the most interesting, from Miller and Blatz to Pabst. Obviously, we’re known as the Dairy State, but Milwaukee is nicknamed the Cream City, and that’s not because of the dairy industry. It’s not strictly because of beer foam, either. A lot of businesses and breweries in the city were originally made from cream-colored bricks. I used to work for a company housed in Schlitz Park in Downtown Milwaukee—actually what used to be home to Schlitz Brewery. The building is gorgeous, so either do a walkaround or just look up some photos if you get the chance. But yeah, Gurda’s book shares some nice little snippets of Milwaukee’s history. Before I move onto the other two titles, Leah, would you like to share some of your reads?

Leah: I absolutely would. My pick for a Milwaukee-based book is actually a fiction novel called “The Coincidence of Coconut Cake” by Amy Reichert. I guess it’s a bit of a double whammy: it’s set in Milwaukee and written by a Wisconsin author. I’m not sure where she lives, but she’s a cheesehead. I would hazard a guess that the author is relatively local to Milwaukee or at least has spent some time there. The book falls into the women’s lit romance kind of genre, but to me, at its heart, it’s a book about a woman finding her dream in Milwaukee. And that dream isn’t a man- it’s success at a restaurant of her very own. But the high notes of the book are woman meets man who isn’t local and takes him to a whole bunch of classic Milwaukee places to fully experience the city at its finest. They’re friends and then more, and yes, there’s some scandal and drama and second chances.

Rachel: Ooo.

Leah: I know. To be totally honest, it’s not my favorite read, but it’s earned a place on my bookshelf because it’s a Milwaukee book, I’m a Wisconsin girl, and there is a recipe for coconut cake in the back of the book that I desperately want to try. I really like coconut!

Rachel: Coconut is fantastic. (laughs) My last two titles are a bit more broad than the others I talked about, looking more at the state than the county. So, first there’s “Warriors, Saints, and Scoundrels: Brief Portraits of Real People Who Shaped Wisconsin” by Michael Edmonds and Samantha Snyder. At around 200 pages, it’s broken down into artists, politicians, entrepreneurs, reformers, scientists, and—my three favorite sections: thieves and murders, quote harmless eccentrics unquote, and mystics and mediums. Did you know that to this day there is a Psychic Academy in Whitewater?

Leah: I did! I went to college in Whitewater and people talked about it all the time! I even went on a few ghost tours while I was in college. They basically just walked us around Whitewater and tried to scare us a whole lot. The spot of the Academy was definitely on that route!

Rachel: That’s so cool. (laughs) But yeah, this dude named Morris Pratt—which is an amazing name—founded it in the 1850s, investing a fortune with proclaimed psychic healer and clairvoyant Mary Hayes-Chynoweth. And that’s just the tip of the iceberg in this book. There’s another dude, Eugene Shepard, who is credited with inventing the hoax known as the hodag. Have you heard of this, Leah?

Leah: I have! Only recently, though. I don't know anyone in the Rhinelander area, so I don't...hadn't heard about it.

Rachel: I have relatives who live up in Rhinelander, so I've been told about it a lot. A hodag is this mythical chimera, an animal mix between a wild boar and an alligator, and Shepard made it up just for giggles. I mean, if I was a lumberjack in the late 1800s, I'd probably be going out of my mind with boredom, too. There are a lot of fascinating biographies in this book, and I highly recommend it.

Leah: I do, too. I think it's a very interesting book to read.

Rachel: Finally, I want to talk about "Walking Home Ground: In the Footsteps of Muir, Leopold, and Derleth" by Robert Root. It's about Root's own experiences as he rambles through some of the places frequented by the three Wisconsin authors mentioned in the title. Now, I picked this one because my father is a huge fan of August Derleth's work, a man oft described as Wisconsin's Thoreau, so it was nice to find out more about where he walked in life. There's this quote, when Root locates Derleth's grave at St. Aloysius Cemetery. The quote is, "Across the road, Derleth's house, Place of Hawks, stood in deep shade behind the thick trees and a high, gated metal fence. From the shoulder of the road I could barely make it out. I saw no signs of life around the place. Together, the grave and the house seemed to emphasize Derleth's absence." The whole chapter is very descriptive in that way, so if you're interested in a more poetic view of history, I recommend picking up a copy of "Walking Home Ground." I...honestly, I thought of you, Leah, when I was reading it because I know you love to hike, so...

Leah: I do! Actually, I haven't read that one, but I think I might...might check it out.

Rachel: I hope you do. Did you have another book or author you wanted to talk about?

Leah: There is one specific local author that I'd like to mention. I have to admit I'm partial because I actually went to college with her at Whitewater. Her book is called "Seven Stones," and it's written by the one and only Julia Lee. Now, the book actually isn't set in Wisconsin, but starts in Chicago. So, pretty close? This book follows an Ojibwe teen as she moves from Chicago to Aberdeen, Scotland with her family. Keilann, a senior in high school, soon finds herself wrapped up in quite the adventure. You see, she's been having dreams. Dreams about the past. And she finds an old stone circle behind her house. When she visits there, strange stuff happens. The author touches on all the high school drama you might expect from a young adult novel, but she also introduces readers to what it's like to be Native American and a teenager, dealing with racism, serious culture shock, and some strange goings on. I do have to admit, this book isn't held at any Milwaukee County Libraries, but it would be available with an interlibrary loan if you were interested in reading it!

Rachel: That's a really interesting premise for a book, and quite a way for the character to move from Chicago to Aberdeen? I mean...

Leah: Yeah! It's a big move. And Rachel, if you want to read it I certainly would lend you my personal, autographed copy of it.

Rachel: This is why Leah's such a good friend.

Leah and Rachel: (laughs)

Rachel: And also, I did talk a bit about interlibrary loans in my latest mini-episode, so listen to that one if you guys want more info on how to go about securing one of those. With that I guess we will wrap up the episode. As per usual, be sure to check the show notes for a list of all the books and authors we just talked about. Please remember to subscribe and rate the podcast. It really helps us out to see who's listening. You can always reach us through OCPL's website or Facebook page. Just use the #notyourmotherslibrary. Thank you for joining us to celebrate Dairy Month, Wisconsinites. We will be back soon with another episode. Just a heads up that we probably won't be churning out any more mini-episodes as we have been downing the last couple of months. At least for a while, anyway, as OCPL works toward reopening at some point and figuring out how exactly that's going to work.

Leah: Lots of kinks to work out.

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, I assume it's really logistical, but as that gets sorted you can always go back and listen to past episodes of Not Your Mother's Library wherever you like to stream and download podcasts. Until later, happy reading.

Leah and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)

Rachel: And that is one in the bag.