

2021 West Salem High School Alumni Hall of Fame Inductee - Karla (Selbrede) Huston

Karla (Selbrede) Huston is a 1967 graduate of West Salem High School. After graduating from WSHS, she began college at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, but left after a year to travel with her husband who was in the U.S. Navy. After a few other moves, she ended up in Appleton, WI and decided to return to college in 1991 for an education degree. She earned her Bachelor and Masters degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and began writing poetry while she was teaching for fifteen years at Neenah High School. As she stated, she wasn't quite sure about how to write poetry. "I tried it. I agonized over the best word - sound and syllable. I was entranced. It was one of my best writing experiences. I'd written my first poem, and I was hooked."

Her list of published works is incredible with eight chapbooks of poetry. She has garnered a Pushcart Prize for the poem "Theory of Lipstick," along with an Outstanding Achievement Award from the Wisconsin Library Association. Additionally her chapbook Flight Patterns won the Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest in 2003, and she has been awarded three Jade Rings from the Wisconsin Writers' Association. She also earned residencies at Ragdale Foundation and the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. In 2017, she began an incredible 2-year trek around the state as Wisconsin's Poet Laureate. A Poet Laureate advocates for the power of poetry by traveling through the state to read, teach, and share the creativity and art of poetry.

For Karla a special project, the Memory Cafe, was to nurture the growth of reading and creative writing/poetry that connected people who suffer from memory loss and dementia with their caregivers. As she stated "Poetry can make valuable connections with those who suffer from memory loss, an often ignored population. That is a wonderful gift, and I'm happy to give it." Her poems, reviews, and interviews have appeared in many regional and national journals. Karla still has ties to where she started, right here in West Salem. While staying involved in the writing community as a presenter and reviewer, she loves to visit family and friends in West Salem and to keep sharing her passion for the creative, written word. She now serves as the Vice President and co-founder of The Mill, a nonprofit organization for Wisconsin writers.

-Written by Stacy (Klos) Mitchell, 1989 West Salem graduate and member of the Alumni Hall of Fame Committee