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ELLEN KORT

1936-2015

City: Appleton, Menominee,
Glenwood City

County: Dunn, Outagamie, St. Croix

Ellen Kort was Wisconsin's first poet laureate.

Kort was born in Glenwood City and grew up in Menominee. She wrote her first poems while she was an elementary school student, and continued to write poetry as well as prose throughout her life. Known as a “godmother of Wisconsin poetry,” she believed that the art of poetry was not exclusive, but belonged to everyone. Her writing honored the people and natural beauty of Wisconsin, as well as the passages of life and love. Her published collections include *The Sacred Grove* (an ode to trees) and *If Death Were a Woman*. She is also the author of *Wisconsin Quilts: History in the Stitches* and *The Fox Heritage: A History of Wisconsin's Fox Cities*.

In 2000, Wisconsin governor Tommy Thompson appointed Kort as the state's first poet laureate, and she held the position until 2004. Kort fulfilled the responsibility and mission of the poet laureate—“to contribute to the growth of poetry across the state”—by sharing the art everywhere and seeking to make it accessible to all. Quotations from her poems are inscribed in such places as the Green Bay Botanical Garden, the Milwaukee Midwest Express Center, and the Fox River Mall, and stamped into the cement of Appleton sidewalks. She even carried around glow-in-the-dark chalk for impromptu sidewalk writing. She received the Pablo Neruda Literary Prize for Poetry, the Columbia Pacific Review Poetry Award, and the Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Prize for Poetry. Kort encouraged people to write and to use writing as a way to heal. She held writing workshops for troubled youth, for example, as well as for survivors of AIDS, cancer, and domestic abuse. She also co-founded the Fox Cities Book Festival, a gathering to connect regional authors with readers and celebrate literature.

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/ellen-kort



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