



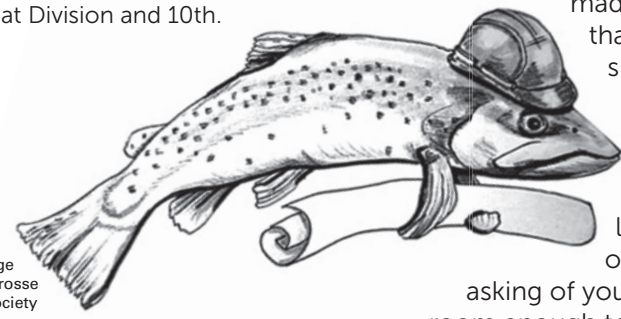
**An Introduction**  
by  
*Rachel MacFarland*

Why these spaces? Well...why *not* these spaces? When Ariel, Roxanne, and I sat down together at Bean Juice in Jackson Plaza, these are the five spaces we landed on in our brainstorming. Maybe if we had met somewhere else, or at a different time of day, we would have come up with different spaces, because there are others. There are so many; there are infinite ways to reimagine the world. But these are the five places we assigned to the students, and the students unearthed what they unearthed, digging into the past, into archives and records, sparking conversations with a roaming range of people relative to their particular site. So even if you think any or all of these spaces sound terribly dull, just wait. These nine young people—Xochitl, Lucas, Chloe, Kylie, Oliver, Ella, Connor, Kelsey, and Blake—have worked for months to breathe life into these desolate city spaces, covering breadths of past, present, and future. As an aside worth noting here: Dr. Beaujot was working through a parallel project alongside and outside these fish wishes—she made a number of ceramic rings (and zines that are already around town: look for the small folded zine with a black “donut” on the cover) that will be placed around La Crosse on the weekend of July 4th, the country’s 250th birthday. The rings, like this zine series, speak to local buried pasts, with considerations of the present and future. So, all we are asking of you, dear reader, is to give all this work room enough to breathe. You might like what you learn. Who knows, maybe you’ll even start to spin your own donuts, wish your own fishes.



**10th St. and Division St.**

*Dreamt by*  
*Oliver Cleveland & Ella Tarwid*  
The Mayo employee parking lot at Division and 10th.



Stoddard Hotel image courtesy of the La Crosse County Historical Society

Kmart image courtesy of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections/ Area Research Center, La Crosse, WI

**124-128 N. 4th Street**

*Dreamt by*  
*Connor MacKinnis*

The State Bank parking lot (formerly the Stoddard Hotel), across from the Rivoli Arts District .



**1552 Rose Street**

*Dreamt by*  
*Xochitl Grimm & Lucas Larson*

A small lot across from Iron Physique Gym at the intersection of Rose and Gillette.

**1 Oktoberfest Strasse**

*Dreamt by*  
*Blake Eder & Kelsey Johnson*

The downtown Oktoberfest grounds, just east of Riverside Park at the confluence of the La Crosse and Mississippi Rivers.

**2415 State Road**

*Dreamt by*  
*Chloe Malinowski & Kylie Lemke*

The old K-Mart (soon to be Copper Rocks) site.



La Crosse is a city built into and against convergences of flowing waters, long upheld a place where three rivers meet. It's no wonder, then, that we at *Opel* would eventually have to say something about fish.

With that: Welcome to *Opel's* latest series: **If Wishes Were Fishes**. This zine in your hands is both an intro and a test run: our plan is to release five zines over this coming summer season—from late spring into the fall—with each zine featuring a different La Crosse locale. By producing and distributing this introductory zine, we also get to test run how the work of this series will play out, the rhythm we'll have to set to keep the series releasing smoothly. In a way, it's like you caught our first fish.

In this folded stretch of pages (the cover fish-in-hats courtesy of the wonderful artist Tiana Traffas), you'll get a sense of our summer plans as a small zine press—our sixth summer as a small zine press! We'll be releasing these little wish-fishes out into the loose, papered flootsam of our drunken river town. As you read this introduction—flipping the pages, opening it up for the hidden image within—you'll get a sense of our intent. If you dig it, even a little, maybe you'll recognize and pick up the next in the series, or the next. Maybe you'll come across some revelation about La Crosse that hits a particular sweet spot, because there are lots of La Crosse in this series. Within each of these little folded fishes are numerous convergences: of expectations, of inexperience, of research, history, hope, and wishing. If none of that appeals to you much, you can simply dig the experience of catching a fish, because you got one: now you can let it go, or you can keep it. Your call.



If you're still on the hook (that flips the metaphor, but I can't resist the image), let me tell you what we did to bring this series into being. First, we did it wrong: for a whole semester, we did it wrong. We as *Opel* went to several of Dr. Ariel Beaujot's classes at UW-L, working with a pack of her history students, talking about zines and having the students design zines, and then at the end of the semester, nothing came of it: not one zine was made. Shit and whoopsie daisy.

This time around, in this spring semester of 2026, with this particular pack of students, we got it to work. The students did the work. We did the work. We all got up for 7:45 a.m. class (Ariel and the students more than Roxanne and me), and we brought our ideas to an industrially-carpeted room inside Murphy Library on the UW campus. The students split and formed into four groups of two, plus one young man working solo (his partner dropped the class somewhere near the middle of the semester). We gave them five specific locations around La Crosse, all under- or ill-utilized voids within our city's jurisdiction; spaces that almost audibly beg for reimagining. The following is a list of these spaces, places you'll learn about if you stick with this storyline, see it through to the finish:

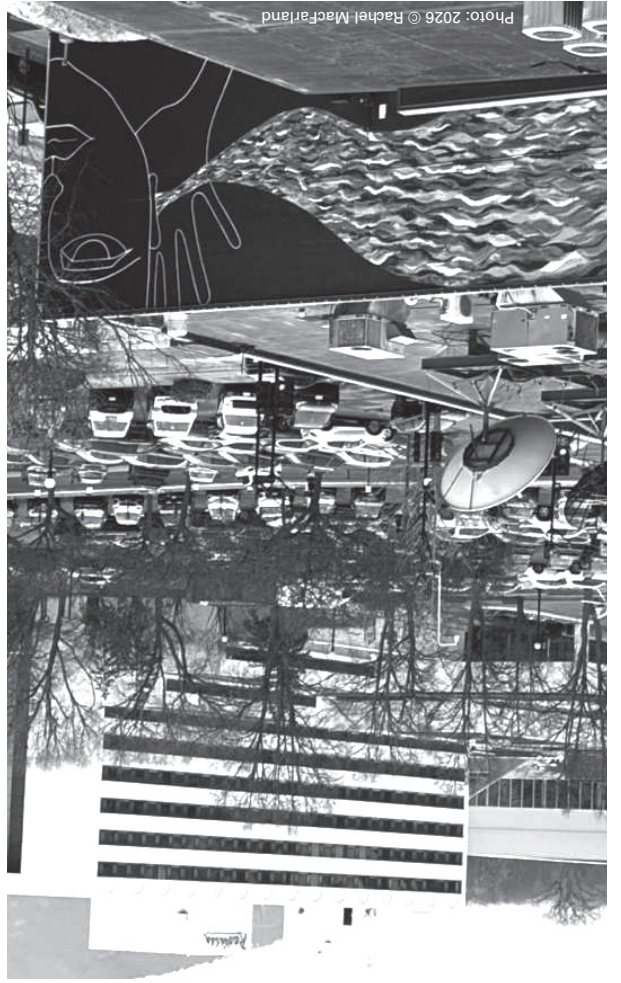


Photo: 2026 © Rachel MacFarland

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