



## Joseph "Joe" O'Connor

October 13, 1941 - April 13, 2020

### Joe O'Connor, "One Good Man" Who Came to Poetry Late in Life

Joe O'Connor would have first liked to thank you. "Thank you for being with me in this," he might have said in his terrific Brooklyn accent, a stamp of authenticity that never faded from his voice. So he thanks the reader in his book of poems, published last December. For Joe, words, shared, were sacred. And he never forgot to thank you for the privilege of sharing his words with you.

Joe O'Connor died on April 13, 2020, of complications of the coronavirus.

In one stint as a substitute teacher, Joe would open class by shaking hands with every student—an expression of personal interest and respect. Joe was a "face-to-face kind of guy," and his heart-on-his-sleeve sincerity and humor won many friends. With his signature phrase: "Here's the thing..." he would cut right to whatever mattered most. He made casual conversations more urgent, electric. "You always felt like you were the only person in the room," his friends say. I assume an audience of one—You," Joe wrote.

Without a doubt, the most important "one" in Joe's life was his wife and soulmate, Holly O'Connor. For more than twenty years, Joe was the "good man" behind the scenes at Holly's coffee and tea business, "One Good

Woman,” a start-up that blossomed into a beloved establishment in their home of Harrisburg, PA. A retired advertising entrepreneur, with a knack for words, Joe was quick with a name, inspired by one of his mother’s favorite sayings: “It only takes one good woman.” One Good Woman was, according to one patron, “the best store you’ve ever stepped foot in, a store brought to life by the indomitable Joe and Holly. It was perfect. They are perfect.”

When Holly retired, the pair turned to supporting Joe’s lifelong passion: poetry. This adventure landed them in the quiet Eastern Shore town of Chestertown, MD, where Joe committed to a daily writing practice. In his poetry life, Joe’s inspiration again came from the joy of supporting others. Instrumental in developing a “teaching press” at his alma mater, Joe hoped to empower students with a passion for poetry who lack the resources to pursue writing—the kind of student he once was.

In his honor, Saint Vincent College started the Joe O’Connor Poetry Series, an annual publication of chapbooks by people in the college community “whose serious commitment to poetry merits broader recognition.” Last fall, Eulalia Books produced his chapbook “Why Poetry” as their first work in the series. Fifteen undergraduate creative writing students printed and bound the book by hand, and in the process, Joe did what he did best: talked to them, encouraged them, made them feel loved. When he heard that many of the students didn’t have the money to eat at restaurants, Joe insisted on treating the whole crowd to a dinner at “any place with a tablecloth.”

Joe O’Connor was born in Brooklyn, NY, on October 13, 1941, to Rose Mary Diegan O’Connor and John J. O’Connor. He attended Don Bosco Prep School in Ramsey, NJ, and went on to receive his Bachelor of Arts from Saint Vincent College (Class of 1965) and Masters of Arts in History from Saint John’s University.

He served in the 19th Combat Engineer Battalion in the Republic of Vietnam from 1966 to 1967.

He is preceded in death by a daughter, Jennifer O'Connor; his brother John O'Connor, Jr.; and his sister, Mary E. Lynch.

Joe was a continuously active member of Alcoholics Anonymous for 35 years. In a rich life of service, he mentored students, befriended children, volunteered for the Leukemia and Lymphoma society, ran for public office, and sat on advisory boards—making friends from all walks of life and across generations.

In addition to his wife Holly O'Connor, he is survived by his brother, James J. O'Connor, as well as by many cousins, nephews, and friends.

Joe O'Connor made many people feel loved, and he would end here by reminding you: "You are loved."

Contributions in Joe's memory can be made to:

The Joe O'Connor Poetry Series, Eulalia Books, Saint Vincent College, 300 Fraser Purchase Road, Latrobe, PA 15650.

or to

The Kent County Community Food Pantry, 401 High St., P.O. Box 346, Chestertown, MD 21620.

A celebration of his life will be held at a later date.

# Tribute Wall



“ *Joseph "Joe" O'Connor*

October 26, 2023 at 06:42 PM



“ *Joseph "Joe" O'Connor*

January 28, 2023 at 12:44 PM



“ *Joseph "Joe" O'Connor*

January 28, 2023 at 08:03 AM



“ *Miles Norris lit a candle in memory of Joseph "Joe" O'Connor*



**Miles Norris** - April 27, 2020 at 07:47 PM



“ *We miss you Joe. And thank you for the kind words that you left with us, spoken and written. The elegy captures Joe's essence very well. May his kindness resonate and echo for a long time. With Prayers of Peace, Serenity, Courage and Strength to Holly, Joe's extended family and many friends.*

*James*

**James** - April 22, 2020 at 09:01 AM