

Muscatine Proud.

My husband, John, and I recently visited a good friend at the Mother House in Dubuque. As we made our way through the lunchroom, we encountered many cheerful nuns and each posed two simple questions – what is your name and where are you from? With pride, we repeatedly answered, Muscatine.

As I reflected on our trip home, I am immensely proud to live in the county of Muscatine, and I think most of you would agree on the richness it offers as a berg to call home. Great sized community; close to the natural treasure of the Mississippi; immense heritage and special history; top-notch schools filled with caring educators; outstanding industry and business, including several global headquarters; comprehensive health care options, strong faith communities; talented local musicians; world-class art exhibits; diverse parks, recreation and sports complexes; extensive walking and bike paths; short commutes; high-caliber, affordable college; an array of restaurants; a short drive to any number of metros; and the people. Because of its size it's easy to build relationships with the people who choose to live here... to become friends; and from my perspective, that may be its single greatest richness.

But as it turns out, that is not the message we often hear about our town. When listening to the undercurrent of conversation about Muscatine, I think we would all agree, it can sometimes be somewhat negative in nature, focusing on limitations. It is curious when those who choose to call our community home, say they can't understand why people would live here. A bit paradoxical in nature.

Ben Winchester, University of Minnesota Extension, says, "People don't move to your town out of pity." Touché. There is a trainload of reasons we all choose to call Muscatine County "home". But instead, some talk about our hometown like they are a disgruntled spouse... waning about the weaknesses.

Let's say Karen is married to Steve. Karen could have picked anyone, but she chose Steve. Steve is kind, trusting, funny, innately family-oriented, and very smart – all of the things Karen was hoping for... but when she talks about Steve, she only mentions that he can't dance, doesn't pick up his socks, has a bad haircut, and forgets to let the cat in. Pretty soon others around Karen start to wonder what she ever saw in Steve. Now her friends quit talking about the solid, attractive things they notice about Steve, because through repetition it becomes quite clear the non-consequential negatives, now out-weigh the redeeming factors. And there you have it, through the choice of messaging Karen has managed not to celebrate her good fortune to have Steve in her life, but begins to feel a little melancholy, and her friends are starting to wonder why she stays with the guy.

Boom. Welcome to your marriage with Muscatine. The community is like Steve, easy to fall in love with and rich in strengths. Be proud.

I once started to tell my mother-in-law something I didn't like about one of her ten children. She abruptly shut me down and told me, with finger wagging, "All of my children have weaknesses." Well said. As it turns out, so do all spouses, all friends, and all communities. But we choose them to be part of our life because of the strengths they offer, because of how they make us feel. We fall in love with them because of the inherent good, but then we forget to talk about the positive, instead focusing on the small annoyances. It's unfortunately human nature, just like when your child gets 4 A's and a C – what do you spend time talking about? What should you? Let's celebrate the strengths. Celebrate the greatness. Celebrate the uniqueness. Celebrate your choice.

Stop and reflect on what is important about where you live. No place is perfect, but many are certainly closer to it. I challenge you to start talking about the strengths, the things you love about Muscatine, the things that set it apart – and you will quickly be filled with awe on how lucky we all are.

The next person that asks where you live – answer and tell them why this brings you joy!

By the way, my name is Charla, and I am privileged to live in Muscatine with neighbors like you.

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