

Muna Hirschberg

“Why Wisconsin” Essay

What is a Wisconsinite?

with apologies to Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur, author of “What is an American?”

In this great Midwestern asylum, the German, Hispanic, Polish, and Norwegian immigrants have met together. Urged by a variety of motives, they came to Wisconsin!

Everything has tended to regenerate them: the Packers, the Brewers, and the Bucks. Scray’s Cheese, Johnsonville bratwurst, and Leinenkugel’s. Kwik Trip and Culvers. Here, they become neighborly; in their old countries, they were as so many useless plants, wanting sustenance and refreshing showers; they withered and were mowed down by want, hunger, and war. But now, by the power of transplantation, like a Wisconsin sugar maple, they have taken root and flourished! What attachment can I, a poor German exchange student, have for a place where I formerly had nothing? The knowledge of church potlucks, the love of a Friday Van Abel’s fish fry, and a view of the sprawling Wiese Brothers Farm cornfields. My new country is what gives me bread, protection, and consequence. *Ubi panis ibi patria* [where my bread is earned, there is my country] is the motto of all emigrants. What then is the Wisconsinite? He is the jovial old worker who helps me find duct tape at Menards. He is a farmer, up at daybreak to milk his cows. She is the genial mom of a friend who offers me pickles every time I eat at her house.

Here, individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of people, whose Midwest Nice and up north deer camps will one day cause great change in the world.

The Wisconsinite is a new person, who eats Uncle Mike's Kringle and Zesty's custard and washes it down with a brandy old fashioned; they make pilgrimage to Lambeau Field and the Bronze Fonz; they pray for snow days and hydrate at the Bubbler.

Coming here, the knowledge of the language and a few acquaintances were the only cords that tied me to Wisconsin. Now this state has offered me not only its lush farmlands but also its diverse cities, its cheddar, pickles, and perch, and most importantly its people who have inspired me with their kind and open ways. Who then has this German girl become after living in Wisconsin? Wisconsin taught me kindness, the love for family and appreciation for tradition. I have seen the work of my neighbors, all supporting our Wrightstown community, and now it is my turn to bring this back. Monday through Friday they work for what they believe in, whether it is on a farm, at Bellin or Aurora Health Care, Kwik Trip, or Festival. On Friday after work they go to a Fish Fry at their favorite supper club or directly jump over to the bar and get their Bloody Mary. On the weekend they then go Up North, hunting, fishing, golfing, or boating. They have their own way, and in a crowd I will always be able to recognize the Wisconsinite with the loudest voice and the widest smile.

For me, a poor German exchange student, THIS is an American. THIS is a Wisconsinite.