

Coralville II: I Take it All Back

When people mention to me that they saw my latest column, I usually say, "I'm glad I'm not the only one reading them," but lately I'm not so sure.

I'm evidently not always getting my message across, and it worries me. Since I have a fragile ego, I spend a lot of time fretting about what people think - I don't want anyone mad at me. Trust me, if I was deliberately trying to make enemies I would run for City Council.

With this in mind, imagine my distress when I discovered many people took my last column about renaming Coralville seriously. Some of you may recall I harped at length about it being too bad a great town has such a silly name. One reader - evidently consumed with Coralville Pride - appeared in my office one day to angrily tell me I had a lot of guts to be making fun of a town I do business in. He demanded to know why - since I obviously hated Coralville so much - I didn't move my business to Iowa City.

I explained it didn't occur to me that some people wouldn't be able to disassociate my making fun of the name from the town itself, which I think is a wonderful place (I repeat: A Wonderful Place). On top of that, two former residents of Grundy Center informed me they do not see anything funny about ITS name.

To guard against further misunderstandings, I have decided to use the following indicator - [Joke] - periodically in these columns to aid the humor-impaired.

Now that we have that straight, I can start using things that were formerly edited out for fear they would be taken seriously. For example, in last month's column I removed the following paragraph regarding how feeble some city names sound that have "ville" in them:

"Louisville and Nashville have somehow overcome this handicap, although you have to remember what part of the country they are in - it doesn't take much to impress the locals. Velcro is very popular over there because the indigents have trouble dealing with shoelaces. But only on those special occasions once or twice per year when they actually wear shoes." [Joke]

In case you're interested, I did receive some entries in my contest for Coralville's new name. One entrant suggested following Des Moines' lead and using "West Iowa City." My favorite so far was submitted by Bill Kimmel, who said since I object to the smallish sound of "ville," we should simply shorten the name to Coral. He noted we already have a Coral Fruit Market, Coral Lanes, Car Wash, Day Care, Trailer Park, etc. - residents have already started the transition on their own. He ended his letter saying, "So mull it over for a while. Coral, Iowa. It could be worse, and it is."

Someone told me the best thing about my Coralville column was it diverted people's attention from some of my previous literary efforts. A recent letter to the editor I wrote took the Press Citizen to task for condemning Naomi Novick, who was concerned about directing federal funds to Habitat for Humanity. I had people mad at me who thought I wanted to stop the funding, which was not the case. If they had read the letter clear to the end (maybe their lips got tired), they would have discovered I thought Naomi was right to be concerned, but wrong if her concerns were serious enough to deny funding.

Before that, a column about my dislike of modern art generated some flak from cultural extremists who felt sorry for my lack of sophistication. In that same column a former Press-Citizen opinion page editor deleted a passage which he was afraid would be construed by some as racist - I was amazed. (I also found out you cannot write "pi**ed off" in a family newspaper; substitute "perturbed.")

Anyway, the "racist" paragraph in question was an actual Abbott and Costello-esque conversation I had at a reception unveiling the design for the then-new fountain sculpture ("Silver Lily") at Morrison Park in Coralville. I was trying to write down the name of the sculptor for a future column when the following exchange occurred:

Me: What's the sculptor's name?

Source: Professor Hung-Shu Hu.

Me (fumbling with my pen): Professor who?

Source: Right!

I then resisted the temptation to then say “What?” fearing the probable response, “Second base.” [Joke]

Not highbrow humor, I know, but nothing to get “perturbed” about.