



The CONNECTION

Issue



EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear Readers,

This past fall semester, The Collegiate Staff wanted to focus on the idea of connection and what it means to college students. There are over 12,000 students here at Grand Rapids Community College and we all have our own unique stories and reasons as to why we chose to be a Raider.

There are many ways humans connect and in this issue of our magazine, you'll find a collection of stories on topics including dating, sports, college life and music. As well as many personal narratives that document the lives of some of the writers here at The Collegiate.

We often hear that college is the time in our lives to meet people and build relationships. But in today's society, that can often be challenging for students balancing family, work, school and other life challenges.

While it can be difficult at times, reach out to an old friend, family member or even a classmate and ask how they are doing. Humans thrive off of interaction and communication.

We want to thank you for taking the time to read our magazine and hope that you can connect with some of our stories.

Sincerely,

Blace Carpenter

Collegiate Editor-In-Chief



COLLEGIATE MAGAZINE

Fall Semester 2023

143 Bostwick Ave. Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Room 314 RJF

Website- www.TheCollegiateLive.com

Instagram: @thecollegiate

**Editor-in-Chief/ Magazine
Layout**

Blace Carpenter

Illustrator
Abby Haywood

Managing Editors
Kevin Lopez
Pierson VanGorp

Collegiate Adviser
Jennifer Ackerman-Haywood

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Why I joined The Collegiate, and why I stayed

By Brandon Smith

It is Aug. 26, 2023, and I'm standing behind a table at the Grand Rapids Community College block party to welcome new students and represent The Collegiate. It is two days before I officially leave and become a student at Grand Valley State University.

When people come near, I gesture to all of our free stickers and invite them to take one of our magazines. Some people thank me and leave. Others stay and talk. They ask a ton of different questions, like who we are and what we do. I explain to them that we're student journalists, and that The Collegiate is GRCC's student paper. I tell them that it's a good chance for writers to experiment with journalistic writing and it helps develop social skills for the socially anxious.

"Okay," they ask me, "why did you join? It's a good question. I was never into extracurriculars. I was the kind of student who couldn't wait to get home at the end of the day. I grew up with my mom and grandparents out in the country. My father wasn't around. With nothing near the house except swampland and cornfields, I passed the days by reading. I had a small collection that I read over and over again, and soon I started to dream about having my name on the cover just like the authors I idolized. As I would later find out, plenty of writers including Twain and Gaiman started as journalists before becoming novelists.

I started writing short stories in middle school, back when creepypasta stories were all the rage. It took almost 10 years for me to feel confident enough to write a novel.

I got through a number of drafts before I started querying agents to get it published. All of them told me the same thing: it was good, but it wasn't good enough.

I didn't try to give up, it was something that just happened as every response that came back was a "No." My manuscript wasn't getting anyone's attention the way I hoped it would. At this point, COVID had taken over the world and I had taken a year off from college. I was closer to my degree, but who really cared? It was just an associates', not a fancy bachelors' or masters'.

I wanted to ask about joining the school newspaper once. I stumbled across their office before they relocated to the room with a view on the third floor of Raleigh J. Finkelstein Hall. I stood outside, but I couldn't bring myself to knock on the door. I was afraid that they would say I wasn't good enough.

So at this point, it all came up snake eyes. I had failed with a novel. I was about to drop out of community college so close to the finish line. I was about to spend the rest of my life working in a kitchen that I hated, and I didn't know what else to do. Everything was piling up with no end in sight.

Then, right on cue 20 years after leaving, my father unexpectedly came back. And there was that small moment, that little selfish moment, that I thought he was there for me. He was not. He wanted me to meet his kids. He said it was too late for us to have a relationship, but he hoped I would have one with his new family, the one he stuck around for. And I wanted to tell him it wasn't too late. I had always wanted to meet him and ask what I did wrong.

There was a face in the mirror that day. When I looked into his eyes, I could see that he was broken. He had always been broken. He tried to pretend like everything was fine, but the truth was, he wanted somebody to come and fix those parts that didn't fit right. When I looked down, I realized that nobody was going to fix me. This is just how I am.

I went out to see my father, but the moment that my eyes met his, I didn't want to talk to him. There was nothing to say. Two strangers at a bar. I was supposed to be so much further along than I was, and he decided to arrive when I was at a dead end. We never spoke, but something had changed.

I got mad. And I've gotten mad before, but this was a special kind of anger that burned through my entire being. I had to be better. More than anything, I wanted to be more than I was, because if he saw me, he would feel guilty. "Look at how I've ruined this child," he'd think to himself.

That anger carried me home that night. I was going to fully commit to community college to finally earn that goddamn degree. I signed up for journalism because I didn't care anymore if I was good enough. I registered for every class that would get me where I wanted to go, and I didn't stop until I had the credits to earn my degree. Above all, I plunged into my next novel. So what if the last one didn't work? So what if this one doesn't work either? I wasn't stopping. Never again.

I felt like a champion walking into journalism on that first day, but when I saw the rest of the class, I started to feel more like a statue. Not a cool imposing one in the middle of a park, but one of those cheap ones that grandmas put on shelves. As the class went on, I saw how supportive everyone was and I felt some regret for not joining sooner. I told myself that it was better late than never, and I tried to make the most of it while I could. I volunteered for special assignments, I interviewed more than I had to, I did what I could to show that I was taking this seriously.

I was never good at speaking to people, but I wanted to be better. I had to be better. The Collegiate gave me the opportunity for that. By the end of it, I was conducting interviews with published authors and gladly took on each new challenge without that familiar icy hand of anxiety tightening around my heart.

The editors looked out for us. Mine in particular was always there when I needed him. Our adviser was always inspiring me to reach a little further. I wanted to make all of them proud in the way that I had never been proud of myself, so I kept pushing.

I joined The Collegiate because they weren't savvy journalism experts who would laugh at me for thinking I could be one of them. They were students like me who were passionate about their work and wanted to share that passion with anyone who wanted to learn.



Photo courtesy of Brandon Smith (Left)

They asked me to interview people, which made me anxious. They invited me to speak on their podcast, which terrified me. They never stopped challenging me to do better. At the end of it, our adviser asked if I would be interested in staying over the summer to do more work. I pounced on the opportunity.

I stayed because I had always felt like I was different in a way that no one would understand or accept, but here I was welcomed in when the newspaper staff could see that I was trying. I stayed because my fiancée told me that she was glad I was writing articles I cared about because she saw me smiling more. I stayed because I was doing more than I ever thought I could.

In the end, I understand that it doesn't matter if you feel like you're not good enough. What matters is that you never stop trying to be better than you are.

Why do we root for sports?

By Jack Walker

Sports fandom has quite a wide range of people. On one hand, there are people who simply do not care and wonder why others dedicate so much time to athletes and teams who have no idea they exist.

On the other hand, there are the die-hard fans. The fans who paint their face when going to sporting events, the fans who absolutely cannot miss a game and even fans who will fight each other over a college team that neither attended. There are even fans who will burn their own furniture after a big win.

There are fans in between, the ones who will check in on the score of a team they claim is their favorite, but if they miss a game it won't affect their mood. If they lose, they shrug it off, even if they win, it's just another day.

If I had to put myself on the sports fandom scale, I would place myself pretty close to a die-hard fan. I'm not the fan who will fight someone in the stands, or the one who will paint their face, but I am the fan who has to know when my favorite team is playing and I have to know what the score is. Depending on how my team does, it will probably affect my mood for the rest of the day.

Growing up as a fan of Detroit sports teams, Michigan State athletics and Arsenal F.C. I've seen a lot of bad teams, emphasis on a lot.

Due to my favorite teams' lack of success, I have asked myself these two questions multiple times, "Why do I even root for these teams? Why do I do this to myself?"

I am not from Detroit, I have not attended Michigan State University and I've never been to London let alone England. Basically, I have zero connection to my sports teams. But yet, whenever the Detroit Lions have a game, I find myself seated in front of a TV, with my eyes glued to the screen. I've done this for as long as I can remember, despite the little success I've seen my teams have.

Year after year I watch my teams lose, but year after year I tune in and buy into a fake hype machine from the prior offseason. Typically, the hype machine doesn't last long, and

before I know it, I find myself looking up hypothetical draft scenarios for an event that is months away.

So I had to figure out, why do other people root for their sports teams?

Hailing from New Jersey, Michael Remschel and his family moved to the Grand Rapids area when he was 12 years old. Despite this, Remschel has remained a fan of all things New York. Remschel is a fan of the Knicks, Giants, Yankees, and Rangers. For him, being a Yankees fan was a given from birth,

"If you are a Remschel you are a Yankees fan, doesn't matter where you are born, it's a requirement," said Remschel. "You don't have to be a baseball fan, but you have to be a Yankees fan."

However, his path to choosing his favorite NBA team was a bit different. Remschel owned a Dwayne Wade jersey before he had ever watched the NBA. Because of his jersey, Remschel became a fan of the Miami Heat star and would follow the Heat. Followed by the Nuggets because of Carmelo Anthony, the Lakers because of Pau Gasol, and the Knicks because they were local and because of Al Harrington.

In February of 2011, it all changed because Remschel's local team had acquired Carmelo Anthony in a trade.

"I was a Knicks fan just because they were close to me, but I wasn't much of a fan. But then Carmelo got traded and it stapled my loyalty."

Remschel spoke of his worst memory as a fan of New York sports teams.

"Tom Coughlin's firing situation. That was the worst moment of my life. Tom deserved significantly better for two Super Bowls."

After the 2015 NFL season, Tom Coughlin "stepped down" as coach of the New York Giants. It was later revealed that Coughlin was forced out. The whole situation didn't go over well with Michael.

Zachary Rizzo of Grand Rapids had a different path to sports fandom. Rizzo did not have a sports team until he was 13 years old. Searching for a team to follow, he tuned into the NBA Dunk Contest during All-Star Weekend in 2014. A young and explosive player named John Wall took home the win for the contest, and with that Rizzo had his new favorite player and team, the Washington Wizards.

“When John Wall won the Dunk Contest he instantly became my favorite player. Originally, I was just a John Wall fan, but decided to stick with the Wizards.”

Because of the Wizards playing in the nation’s capital of Washington D.C. Rizzo became a Commanders fan, due to them also playing in D.C. Sarcastically calling his decision to become a fan of the football team a “terrible mistake.”

Rizzo’s worst moment as a fan however is when his favorite player, John Wall, tore his achilles, also calling it “the worst moment of my life.”

I asked Rizzo if he had ever contemplated switching teams,

“I contemplated switching to the Clippers when (John) Wall signed with them. But at the end of the day, I stuck with the Wizards, and I never contemplated switching from the Commanders.”

Rooting for a sports franchise is not easy, but rooting for a specific player and following them where they go, may be even more frustrating (unless the player is Kevin Durant.)

Yosof Abden, 23, is a student at Grand Rapids Community College. Abden is one who follows his favorite player, that being soccer superstar, Neymar.

Abden is a fan of French-based club, Paris Saint-Germain. I asked Abden how he became a fan of the French club,

“Because about five years ago Neymar went there, he’s my favorite player. Neymar used to play at Barcelona, I used to like them.”

But it’s been a lot of ups and downs for Neymar in the past few years. Abden doesn’t follow PSG as closely anymore due to Neymar’s move to Saudi Arabia. To make matters worse, Neymar has had his run-ins with injury.

Jokingly, Abden said that he “might retire” from following Neymar around. Despite this, Abden remains a huge soccer

fan and will continue to have passion for the game whether he follows Neymar or not.

So, why do we root for sports teams?

There are plenty of different reasons as to why myself and others root for sports teams. Whether it was passed down by a family member or following a favorite player around, the reasons can be countless.

Loyalty, hope, rivalries, friendships, and just having pure love for the game are all reasons sports fans like myself stick with our squads.

There is something different about rooting for a sports team after committing to them. Once you’re in too deep, there truly is no going back. Sure, you may lose interest if the team starts to lose for a long time, but that sense of hope will always be there. Trust me, when a bad team gets turned around, lifelong fans are not going to want to miss it. If that hometown team starts to win, yet again, the lifelong fans won’t want to miss it.

I believe the best way to describe being a sports fan is with a quote from Michael Corleone, portrayed by Al Pacino, in “The Godfather Part III”

“Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in.”



Photo by Blace Carpenter



Illustration By Abby Haywood

Why living with your family can be as beneficial as living on your own

By Pierson VanGorp

Living at home compared to getting a dorm or apartment in college is not very common nowadays, but many Grand Rapids Community College students, including myself, can relate. Many GRCC students decide to go to college to save costs for the future, which includes deciding to live at home compared to getting an apartment.

Leutrim Sahitoli, a 19-year-old Business major at GRCC, agrees there are many benefits to living at home compared to an apartment or dorm.

“As much as I’d like freedom, I don’t mind living with my family at all,” Sahitoli said. “I love my family and it is always great to be around them.”

As Sahitoli mentioned, one benefit of living at home is continuing to connect with your family and learn how they live before moving out on your own. There are other benefits as well, like saving money, getting a nice meal cooked for you,

the satisfaction of helping your parents and the cozy feeling of being at home.

Ervin Musinovic, a 22-year-old business major at GRCC, noted that one of the main reasons he still lives at home is to help out his parents.

“Honestly, I still enjoy living at home just so I’m able to take care of my parents and make sure they’re always doing well,” Musinovic said. “I love putting a smile on their faces and checking in on them as much as possible. They treated me with so much care throughout my childhood so the least I could do is return the favor in the final years of living with them.”

Not only does helping your family out feel rewarding, but those who live at home can save money and have more to spend on items that aren’t groceries or rent.

“I enjoy living at home because my family and I have

great chemistry and they have taught me to be smart with my money,” Sahitolli said. “I am not bound by any bills or payments outside of college, allowing me to save money for the future.”

Musinovic agrees with Sahitolli and also mentions he has purchased some items he might not have been able to if he lived away from home.

“Living at home has allowed me to be intelligent with my money but also spend it on things that I truly wanted,” Musinovic said. “I recently bought one of my dream cars with some of the money I saved up and I definitely would not have been able to do that if I hadn’t lived with my family. Now I’m on the cycle of saving my money up so I can buy my family and I a trip to Paris.”

According to Point2homes recent data from July of 2023, the average apartment rent per month in Grand Rapids is \$1,437. The trend line shows that rent is slightly increasing per month as it was under \$1,200 as of January 2021.

Mohamed Tamour, a 19-year-old student athlete for GRCC soccer, lives by himself in an apartment. He notes that paying bills on his own is tough but likes the responsibility it entails.

“Of course, it is the bills and expenses I have to pay for which allows me to be more mature and responsible,” Tamour said. “It is hard when you are alone (like myself) and only got yourself so nobody is coming to save you and you have to learn to be responsible and think ahead in every situation.”

The data from Point2homes also shows that the cheapest apartments in the area rented by about 15 percent of the population start at \$700- \$1,000 per month. Likewise, a majority of the people in Grand Rapids are paying in the range of \$1,000- \$1,500 per month.

Nearly 50% of the renter-occupied apartments in Grand Rapids are in the age range of 15-34 years which is the common age of a GRCC student. About 60% of the people renting apartments in Grand Rapids are non-family households, which means they are either living on their own or with other roommates.

Tamour acknowledges that living without a family figure can be tough but there are positives and negatives to his situation.

“There is a good and bad side to living by myself,” Tamour

said. “I feel more independent but sometimes I feel lonely wishing I had a family member to be there with me. However, I’m used to being alone so don’t mind it.”

Tamour noted that groceries is one of the most expensive things he has to pay for.

“The price of groceries depends on each month and what I’m craving but I don’t cook a lot so it costs a lot of money,” Tamour said. “I can’t put an exact number on how much it costs but it does cost a lot which makes me have an allowance for groceries every month.”

One of benefits of living alone, is privacy and being more independent as an adult.

Tamour says that he is familiar with being on his own and enjoys privacy throughout his day.

“I am happy about living on my own and I also know how to live on my own and survive,” Tamour said. “I’ve been on my own since I was 10 and I had a foster family to take care of me during part of that process but I also went through all the phases of being alone. I like to have my own time and have privacy which allows me to focus on my school work while training as an athlete at GRCC.”

Not only does living on your own allow for more privacy, but you can have visitors on your own time without having to get permission from family members.

Both Tamour and Sahitolli say they wouldn’t change where they live and the qualities of how they live.

“I wouldn’t change the situation I’m in at the moment because I’m used to being independent and I believe it sets me up to be successful in the future,” Tamour said. “Obviously, I miss my family but there is a point in a person’s life where they have to survive on their own.”

Sahitolli believes that living at home is one of the smartest decisions he’s made and would do it over again if he had to.

“I’m okay with living at home for as long as I have,” Sahitolli said. “I don’t regret making this decision and if I had to I’d do it again. I enjoy being around my family and friends for essentially free which allows me to be smart with my money,” and helps me prepare for a day when I do have to live on my own.”

How to travel as a college student



Story and Photo by Mya Maloley

Traveling the world can often be tied to wealth and status. But, it is absolutely possible to explore the world on a budget. Better yet, it's even possible to do so as a college student.

I won't deny the fact that traveling can be much easier if you have loads of money to spend on food, activities, flights and hotels. But, regardless of the potential obstacles traveling brings, it is possible to see the world on a budget while in college. It just takes a little extra planning. But, in the end if your goal is to travel and see the world, a little extra budgeting is worth the memories and experience.

My trip destination was to Berlin, Germany. While I was there I also planned a small trip to Amsterdam, Netherlands and Paris, France. My trip including travel time totalled 13 days. This trip was just planned in August, so I had only about two months to plan my stay, and it was absolutely possible to do it.

Choosing your destination

My destination was chosen for me, since the reason I was visiting was to see my boyfriend, Blake, who is studying abroad in Berlin. But, once you get to Europe, the flights and transportation are much cheaper to get around. So, if you plan to travel somewhere in Europe,

plan to go to a few surrounding places as well. Blake and I chose Paris because it seemed like a staple place to go at least once in your lifetime and Amsterdam because we wanted to see the pretty leaves in the fall.

Preparing before your trip

If you plan to travel out of the country, you NEED to make sure your passport is not expired. Something I learned was that even if your passport is valid for the duration of your trip, you have to ensure that your passport is valid at least six months after you return from your trip. According to the U.S. Department travel website, it states; “Some countries require that your passport be valid at least six months beyond the dates of your trip. Some airlines will not allow you to board if this requirement is not met. Check our Country Information to learn about entry and exit requirements for the country or countries in which you are traveling.” If you realize your passport will not be valid for enough time, make sure to allow yourself enough time before your trip to renew your passport, as it can take up to 10 weeks or longer if you apply to renew it during a busy season.

It’s important to understand what currency is used, and how you plan to pay for things once you arrive at your destination. Any local bank will offer to exchange American dollars for different currencies for the most minimal cost. It’s also important to ensure that the credit card you are using has very small international fees. You cannot just bring your card to another country and expect it to not charge you any interest fees or flag your account. Notify your bank that you are traveling abroad and opt for a card that is made for international travel. It may seem obvious but with all the

smaller details that go into planning a trip, it can be easy to forget.

The factor of being in college can make this planning a little more difficult. I am not encouraging you to blow off your classes to galavant around Europe. But, I am saying it is possible to manage your time right so that you can align your classes with your trip. Try to schedule a semester with classes you know you can be successful in. If you are bad at math, maybe opt out of scheduling it until next semester. Work ahead, read the syllabus and plan accordingly to complete your assignments before you leave. And most importantly, communicate with your professors and let them know your plans. Ask them if they offer any extra credit, or if there was any room to work ahead in the class. Communication is key when it comes to juggling both school and travel.

While You’re There

Budgeting food expenses is a huge way to save money. Planning to book a hotel that offers breakfast in the morning can really help you save. Also, I packed over 10 of my favorite breakfast bars and it helped me save a lot of money on airport snacks.

Taking public transportation will be your best friend. It is affordable and arguably one of the easier ways of transportation. Some tickets are as low as two euros one way. Compare that to an Uber or Lyft in Miami as high as \$50 for a 20-minute trip and two bucks is looking much more appealing. Using Apple Maps or Google Maps made navigating so easy. All you do is type in where you want to go and switch the method of transport from driving to transit, and it will tell you all the stops and stations to get off at and hop on to get to your final destination.

Learn the language. Although English is the world’s standard language, it’s important to learn a few key sentences for the place you plan to visit. When I went to Paris, if you didn’t at least try and make an effort to speak to locals in French, your interaction could be a little cold. I noticed a 180 in interactions when I approached someone and asked them in French, “Excuse me, hello, do you speak English?” versus walking up and asking them right away in English, “Do you speak English?” It truly made a huge difference in conversations, and people love to see you making an effort to respect their culture and learn their language.

If you really set your mind to it, you can do it!

I do not come from money, my family has gone on a spring break trip two times in my life and I am grateful for those trips alone. But, it isn’t something that my family does. I knew if I wanted to travel, I had to make it happen myself. Nobody can make it happen other than you. I picked up a ton of extra shifts at work, created multiple side hustles and babysat on weekends to save up for the trip. For a thirteen-day trip, including travel, hotel rooms, food and transportation, my trip totaled around \$1,424. I did purchase around \$200 worth of souvenirs and shopping as well, but that number can vary depending on the person. I genuinely believe I could have shaved down that number even more if I planned to stay in hostels more often than hotels, and I splurged on overpriced airport food on the way back. But, my point is, that if you plan accordingly, traveling doesn’t need to be as expensive as people can make it out to be. Choose your destination, find a friend as crazy as you, and go do it!

Home is where the heart is

By Noah Henson

Anytime I'd hear a family member tell me "Home is where the heart is" I'd scoff or roll my eyes. I hated that phrase. Most people just chalked it up to me being an edgy teenager resentful at the world as most are. Truthfully I just never knew where my home was supposed to be.

I was always told by my parents that my home was Michigan. Why wouldn't it be? I was born in Detroit. All of my family lived here. My dad made a name for himself there as they hoped I would in the future. I loved Michigan, but none of this made it feel like home. Before even starting middle school, I had lived in seven cities. None of them felt like home.

When I was younger, moving so much didn't affect me. I wasn't old enough to be able to comprehend object permanence toward my relationships, so it never mattered. It was just on to the next adventure in a new state. As I entered my formative years in elementary and middle school, I realized how great it was to settle down.

In 2012, in the middle of the school year, my parents announced that we were moving from Fort Wayne, Indiana to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I was in 4th grade. This move made it my seventh. This was the first move that I can recall being genuinely upset about.

To my dismay, throwing a fit did nothing to prevent the inevitable.

I actually really enjoyed Pittsburgh the second I got there. It wasn't difficult to make friends, I had quite a lot only a few months in. It was here that I really got to understand what it was like to have consistency in my life. Finishing a school year knowing that I'd be seeing the same people after summer break for the first time was surreal. I started to actually gain a sense of community. I started to feel like this was home. I breezed through the remainder of elementary school in Pittsburgh, happy that for once I got the experience of stability.

As middle school started, I began falling into the wrong crowd. At least that's what my mom told me. We weren't bad kids, but rather the type that your mom advises that you avoid for being bad influences. I didn't care though. I had a tight-knit group of friends that had each other's backs no matter what.

2016 was one of the best years of my life. I was in eighth grade. Me and my friends were set on making the most of our final year in middle school. After all, who knows if we're going to share the same classes in high school. We spent the year exploring abandoned buildings, stealing Pokemon cards from gas stations, and most importantly doing just barely enough to scrape by in school. We were total losers, but at the time we thought we were so cool. These memories albeit completely illegal and certainly irresponsible were the ones that made me feel like I finally fit in somewhere. Even if it were among idiots.

That same summer my dad announced that our family would be moving again. The destination this time was Lincoln, Nebraska. I didn't believe him at first. I laughed internally thinking that this was some cruel joke and that he'd tell me he was just kidding. It felt like everything I had built in the last five years came crumbling down. Breaking the news to my friends was one of the single hardest things I've ever had to do. The night I told them, we reflected on all the things in high school and beyond that we would never get to experience together.

I tried my hardest to put on a facade for my father, telling him that I was completely fine with moving. We both knew I was lying. The guilt of knowing the moves were robbing me of a normal childhood weighed heavy on his conscience.

The day of the move came, and I had to say goodbye to everything and everyone I had known for the past half-decade. We promised to keep in touch. The long drive from Pittsburgh to Lincoln gave me 15 uninterrupted hours to negatively



Photo by Noah Henson

stereotype everyone and everything in Nebraska. I had convinced myself that I hated Nebraska before even leaving Pennsylvania.

I arrived in Lincoln in May, meaning I had to spend the summer completely by myself. Seemingly in the blink of an eye, the school year was here. It turns out that summer flies by quicker when you do nothing but watch anime and draw. I was determined to make my stay in Lincoln as great as it could be. I had developed a mindset that nothing matters and that people will like me for who I am. I never cared about if people didn't like me, I probably wouldn't be in their city for long anyway. I carried that mindset with me into my first day.

My first day of high school in Lincoln went well. My first whole semester went flawlessly actually. I had tons of friends, I was passing my classes like never before, and I was actually involved in the school for once. I started to feel like a better version of myself. Throughout the turmoil of daily life, not a single day went by where I wasn't in touch with my Pittsburgh friends. They were all happy to hear that I was bettering myself. It turns out that while I was undergoing my teenage transformation, they were undergoing theirs.

I was excited at the prospect of staying in Lincoln. I just wanted to finish school with people I liked, and go

to college for something I loved. I had made plans with some of my new friends to join the school newspaper next year. I really loved writing stories, poetry, anything. It was the summer after my freshman year of high school that I found out we would be moving again.

At this point it was just comedic. I couldn't help but laugh at the absurdity of leaving people behind again. At this point, I was numb to it and was ready to just keep pushing forward. I had become a nihilistic drifter, just moving with the wind, settling wherever the world's cold and uncaring grasp cared to drop me off. It just so happened that this time, I would be dropped off in Richmond, Virginia.

I carried that same optimism with me, knowing that there will be people at school who like me for my personality. I was wrong. For some reason, I didn't fit in in Richmond no matter how hard I tried. I made one friend, who I'm still in regular contact with now, but that was it. It was here that I was over the social aspects of moving, I just wanted to get done with school. I worked as hard as ever to try to pass, so I could escape the cycle of moving, and settle down at a university somewhere.

The COVID lockdowns started in my junior year, the most inopportune timing imaginable. It didn't interrupt my already nonexistent social life, which I had long given up on since moving to Virginia. It did, however, completely tank my GPA. I went from a solid A or B student, to just barely doing enough to graduate. Being at home made me lose motivation. I was bad at school, stuck at home and had no friends. It could not have possibly gotten worse. Or so I thought. It was at this point I found out that my friend group back in Pittsburgh was falling apart while I was gone. It was all so overwhelming. I had never felt more alone.

In March of 2021, I was emitted into a psychiatric evaluation center after a failed plan to take my life. It took hitting rock bottom for me to see what a blessing my life experiences have been. While in the psychiatric facility, I finally had someone to talk to about how much moving has affected me. I got my own therapist. Truthfully that's all I needed. I credit him with showing me how much of a blessing moving around has been.

Recovering was far easier said than done. After getting out, I traveled back to Michigan for a few weeks with my dad, to see my family for one, but mainly just to get out of the state. This trip back home changed a lot. Being able to see my extended family made me feel far less alone. The feeling of knowing there are people out there who cared about me was one that I had taken for granted. I somehow talked my dad into letting me meet up with what was left of my friend group from Pittsburgh just a few weeks later.

Meeting with the few remnants of my childhood group felt cathartic. I hadn't told them about the circumstances of which we were meeting. I didn't want to worry them. I didn't want them to think less of me. This is where my feelings around moving began to change.

As I sat and listened to them talk about how nothing in the city has changed, I pitied the experiences they had. Is it possible I didn't miss anything? How boring must it be to wake up to the same routine day in and day out. I started to think about how everyday felt different, I started to feel lucky. I wasn't tormented by the monotony of daily life, rather the craziness of the unexpected. I started to think of everything I've been able to experience that they hadn't while they stayed in a dormant city.

I had never thought about how much of the world I had seen, or how many people I've been able to form connections with all over the country as a result of moving. I had always been too focused on the negatives. My social perception. My anxiety surrounding meeting new people. Most importantly, I was scared of not knowing where to go after high school. I didn't want to stay in Richmond, truthfully I hated Virginia, but did I really want to move again? Even if I did, where was home? The answers were clear to me.

After I graduated high school, when my dad announced he had a job opportunity in Michigan, we all urged him to pursue it. I was excited to move this time. It was finally on my own terms.

The beauty of always being on the road is that you're never trapped in the jaws of life. Anywhere can be home. I settled on the idea that home is where the people who care about me reside. I'm lucky to have a family in Michigan who love me unconditionally. If home truly is where the heart is, then my home is with my family in Michigan, and my friends in Pennsylvania. I know that no matter where I physically live, whenever they're around I feel at home.

“The beauty of always
being on the road
is that you're never
trapped in the jaws
of life. Anywhere
can be home.”

What exactly is a GRCC Raider?

By James Herold

Grand Rapids Community College was founded in 1914, and was the first community college in the state of Michigan. But since then one thing has remained a mystery, what is a GRCC Raider?

GRCC has gone through a few different mascots. The first being a character resembling a Civil War soldier with a mustache, which is still featured on the GRCC baseball team's caps. The second being a fedora wearing Raccoon. The Raccoon itself is also wearing a trench coat with a white button-down shirt and what appears to be a satchel.

"Often mistaken for a Scrubbing Bubble or Keystone Kop, the baseball mascot was modeled after a Union soldier. Webb Marris drew the split-chinned character with a mega-mustache in 1961 while working as a cartoonist for the college's student newspaper, "The Junior Collegiate."

"The second mascot was a raccoon which looked like the adventurous tomb raider, Indiana Jones, and even featured a fedora. In 2001, the Grand Rapids Press interviewed then-GRCC President Juan Olivarez about the raccoon mascot, which appeared to be a Dumpster-diving scavenger donning a fedora. At the time, Olivarez said, "The scavenging is really a survival skill," admitting that some of the raccoon's annoying

traits came up in mascot planning discussions, but the positive attributes outweighed the negative. "I think a lot of people are fascinated by raccoons," Olivarez said.

GRCC spent \$7,500 on the raccoon version of the Raider, but his mascot days were short-lived as it was just a matter of time before he was quietly retired.



Photo courtesy of GRCC Library

Most recently, GRCC a lion logo has been popping up around campus, which is believed to have been inspired by the lion fountain at the Juan Olivarez Plaza seating area outside the south end entrance to Raleigh J Finkelstein Hall (RJF).

Mary Slafkosky, GRCC Vice President for College Advancement gave some insight on the history of GRCC's mascot

"GRCC in 2001 hired a local advertising company to design a mascot with an Indiana Jones-inspired raccoon. The design never became popular with students and was quietly retired in 2012. Our student body is the visible reflection of what a Raider is and the spirit of Raider Nation, whether determined, resilient, creative, successful, etc."

She also explained how having a mascot can benefit our campus., "...the basketball team began calling itself the Raiders based on its wild fans," Slafkosky stated. "The football team picked up on the name the following year, followed by the rest of the athletic teams. A college mascot becomes a recognizable symbol for the college - on campus and in the community..."

Mascots provide entertainment and build spirit at campus and community events. Mascots add personification of the college brand. The best college mascots provide marketing and public relations opportunities.

Slafkosky provided a TikTok video from Oct. 14, 2022, which shows GRCC social media staff interviewing students on what they think should be a Raider.

The Collegiate recently went out and asked students what they think a Raider is, too

Mariana Zaragoza, 18, an exercise science major, knows this much about GRCC's mascot: "It's a Raider," Zaragoza said. "I believe they changed it to a lion or it's a raccoon."

She said she feels like a Raider best describes a raccoon but thinks that a lion is the best mascot to represent our school.

"I feel like the raccoon fits the Raider the best but I like the lion the best because raccoons are chunky,"

Natalie Brown, 18, a theater major from Ada, knew we had a mascot name but not an actual mascot.

"We have a name but not the actual mascot," Brown said. "The Raiders."

Brown thought the Raider represented a combined energy. "It had a connotation of a combined energy," she said. It's a shared high energy."

Even after the Indiana Jones-style raccoon was silently removed from the GRCC campus, Brown thought that a raccoon makes sense. "It shouldn't be basic, a raccoon makes sense," Brown said.

Ruth Kauffman, 19, of Rockford, was a little unsure of what the mascot is.

"I'm guessing a raider?" She

questioned. "An attacker of an outside city? I don't know, you caught me writing a fantasy novel so I'm picturing a gladiator."

When asked what they believed the school mascot was, Emily Deryll, 18, of Grand Rapids, replied, "I'm pretty sure we don't have one, my professor was off on a rant about how we don't have one the other day."

When asked what they believed a Raider is, Deryll admitted,

"all that comes to mind is someone that robs people."

After being assured that a Raider is not a robber, but rather an animal, Deryll pondered what GRCC's mystery mascot is.

"When I think of a Raider, I think of someone raiding the fridge," replied Deryll, who was creeping closer to uncovering the raccoon mascot. Once Deryll realized that GRCC's mascot is a Raider, they were asked what they believed the school mascot should be.

"Definitely not a bird because that was my mascot from high school," Deryll said, adding "Honestly, the mascot should be a broke college student."

What is a GRCC Raider? That's been the question for students today that attend Grand Rapids Community College. Since the school's opening in 1914, the term Raider has been used throughout its marketing life. Although to students, exactly what their school mascot is continues to be a subject of



Photo by Blace Carpenter

conversation.

Not many truly know, some are familiar with the Racoon character that came about a few years back, but some people, like 20 year old Mason Vanderklipp had a different idea of what a Raider is, “Why did I think GRCC Raiders were Knights?”

GRCC recently has tried making reinforcements for the Lion character to be the Raiders logo, Financial Aid at GRCC’s Student Center Office will soon be decorated with a lion theme to hone in on the campus spirit.

Gabriel Jordan, 20, from Kentwood took a guess at what the school’s mascot is, “Is it a lion?” When asked what he thinks a Raider is, Jordan responded with, “All that comes to mind is a Spartan from Michigan State.” Jordan added, “I think a lion would be good.” Jordan spoke on what mascot he would choose to represent the school, “I would pick a lion. I think it goes with the gold and blue letters.”

Sheena Weaver, 33, of Grand Rapids, is the head of Student Life and Conduct. One of few who has seen what the GRCC mascot is, and what they’re trying to change it to. Weaver believes that being a raider is being resilient and strong because students would face lots of challenges while being on campus.

“I think the Lion would be cool and this is why, because there’s a Lion fountain on Fountain St, and this is Lyon St,” Weaver said. “But a Lion is also strong, so yeah I think the lion should stay.”

Timmy Nguyen, 22 is a Dental Assistant major at GRCC. When asked if they knew what a Raider was, he replied “No.” When asked what he believes a Raider to be, he said, “Isn’t it like a viking going with brute force into another person’s territory, taking for gain.”

Robert Wilson, 35, is a prospective GRCC student, looking to see if the school is a good fit for him. The Detroit native was not too familiar with the mascot that currently represents our institution.

“Umm..I don’t know what the mascot is here,” Wilson said. “I think a raider is like someone who takes, like an invader.”

Once he became aware that the face of his potential school was a anthropomorphized raccoon dressed like Indiana Jones, he said that he was vaguely familiar with that logo. The Detroit native has gone back and forth between Grand Rapids and Detroit since he was a child and he remembers going to football games at houseman field where the schools own disbanded football team formerly played and seeing the slyly dressed raccoon. Wilson thinks that the school should ditch the current mascot for something that many others may not usually think about,

“Everytime I’m in Grand Rapids I see a crane in the middle of the river, like a blue Heron, I would like to see that,” Wilson said.

It seems like GRCC should take a some consideration into changing the long touted Raider moniker for something that gives the the school a bit more of a recognizable identity

Brooke Moran, a 20 year-old from Jenison is a student at GRCC. She is one of the several students here at GRCC who doesn’t know what the mascot actually is. Moran had already known that GRCC’s mascot was a Raider, however, she wasn’t exactly sure what it actually was. When asked if she knew what a Raider was, Moran said “No, not really” while laughing. She continued by saying “Honestly, I’m indifferent about it I guess... I think the only reason why I’m thinking of eagles is because Hudsonville kinda has the same colors as us... or a bear,” Moran suggested when asked about her opinion on what GRCC’s mascot should be.

Yasmin Diaz, 20, of Grand Rapids was unfamiliar with GRCC’s mascot(s). She was not happy to hear that they were a



Photo courtesy of GRCC Flickr

raccoon cosplaying as Indiana Jones and the fountain of a lion that she was sitting in front of.

“I don’t think they fit,” Diaz said. “The raccoon is just a little odd, like, that (doesn’t) make sense. How (are) you guy’s colors blue and yellow and you got (a raccoon)... it doesn’t go with it.”

Diaz suggested that the school rebrand to a robot mascot and sort out its identity crisis ASAP.

“We need to find a mascot soon,” Diaz said. We don’t want to be embarrassing.”

“Isn’t it that f***ing racoon?” said Chiyanne May, 21, when asked what GRCC’s mascot is.

When asked to elaborate on what she thinks a Raider is, she said, “Gosh it makes me think of a thief breaking into my house, stealing all my stuff.”

During a GRCC Student Government Town Hall on Oct. 16, GRCC President Charles Lepper weighed in on the mascot issue after GRCC student Evodie Djunga, who attended the town hall, asked a question about the topic. She said it would be nice to settle on a mascot to boost school spirit among students, noting that at this point “if we change from a lion to something else, it would be kind of confusing.”

Lepper replied, “...I hear that part of why we are where we are is the school’s mascot is a Raider, however someone

prior to my time working here, who is no longer at the college, just made the decision that they liked the lion and started printing it on things without any input from anyone. And that’s not how that decision should have been made and so we are going to pause on that and say ok, if it is the lion then that’s ok, but we need to have other voices at that table instead of a person making that decision for the college.

Payton Calati, Lillian Hernandez, Abby Haywood, Abigail Ramirez, Antonio Ewing Jr, Kaliyah Witherspoon, Jack Walker, Naima Contreras, Alexa Cheaney and Noli Brown contributed to this report.



Photo by Blace Carpenter



Illustration By Abby Haywood

GRCC students discuss the struggles of modern dating

By Kevin Lopez

The dating world always seems to be changing and evolving, with different generations having different expectations and ideas of what relationships should look and be like.

Modern dating looks completely different than five years ago. During that time many young people started using dating apps to meet one another, which only became more common after the pandemic isolated people and discouraged them from looking for love in person. Lockdown has changed people's perception of dating, according to a Pew Research Center survey that found most singles view dating more difficult now than before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The dating apps are a popular way to meet people according to an article by Forbes magazine, three in 10 U.S. adults say they

have used or are currently on a dating app, and nearly 40% say that online dating has made it easier for them.

Still, the perception of online dating and the pandemic have left many feeling that dating is harder now. The Collegiate talked to students about dating apps and how they feel about dating post-pandemic.

"I see a trend of app hopping. Not only are people on dating apps, but they are like 'oh I don't like Tinder, I'm gonna go to Hinge, or Bumble and I don't know what exactly that says,'" said Joey Crowley, 19, of Flint. "Like maybe people want to date and want it to go well and I think different people have a specific idea of how they should meet people and I think that's why people struggle."

When asked about whether dating apps are good or bad, Crowley said, “I think it can go either way. It’s not for me because I am not a good texter. I feel like if you are on a dating app you need to be a good texter and people struggle with communication.”

Likewise, Kaimarie Evans, 20, of Byron Center, feels that the biggest problem with modern dating is communication.

“I think it’s always been an issue because communication is hard,” Evans said. “Being vulnerable is hard, but even now people are so quick to talk to others about their problems.”

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Evans said the trouble starts when couples don’t discuss issues directly with each other. “People will talk to their best friends and other people and then you hear what someone said and it’s not fun because it starts an argument.”

Lila Sweet, 18, of Grand Rapids, said she feels that the pandemic and social media have harmed modern dating.

“Social media is a part of the problem,” Sweet said. “I think we try to take a lot of influence from other people, like, their relationship looks great, but behind the scenes, it’s actually a mess. I think dating apps and the pandemic made dating harder, 100%. We are social creatures and being in isolation is very detrimental and that is how people tried connecting with each other with dating apps. And people built a strong connection without ever being around a person and they end up not being who they thought they were. I think COVID-19 and quarantine

affected dating.”

Fellow student Xitlali Martinez-Perez, 18, of Grand Rapids, agreed with Sweet, but also felt communication and commitment were problems.

“The commitment and the communication is a problem, whether it’s verbal or nonverbal, you see people’s behaviors when they are in the relationship and they will act single because of a lack of commitment and communication,” Martinez-Perez said. “People have a lot of choices these days and also past relationship trauma can have a big impact on dating, but I feel a lack of commitment and dishonesty are the biggest problems.”

Abie Kenyon, 18, of Grand Rapids, traced the dating woes of some college students to a lack of socialization. “I think a lot of problems for dating came from the pandemic and just being online and not socializing with people,” Kenyon said. “And now that we’re able to socialize and be around everyone it’s hard to get back to that social norm of communication with people and it’s one of those things where you wonder if we’ll ever get back to it. You never know.”

Dillon DeVries, 21, of Grandville, had a different perspective on dating apps based on his experience.

“For me and people I know, dating apps have helped get people in good and healthy relationships. I am in a relationship that has been going on for awhile and we met on a dating app,” DeVries said. “My friends have met their sig-

nificant others from dating apps and everyone has different experiences from dating apps, but I’ve really only seen the positive side.”

It still seems that there is still a negative perception of online dating apps among some students.

Kyran Breimayer, 19, of Belding, said, “I feel like people don’t take dating seriously because of social media and dating apps. Hookup culture is the problem and if you talk to older generations they always say that we dated to marry, but people nowadays don’t take it seriously.”

Nolan German, 20, of Belding, agrees with Breimayer.

“Social media is the biggest problem with modern dating,” German said. “The trend of being on your phone causes problems for relationships. There is a lot of misuse of trust when it comes to that. Dating apps are bad. We are losing that human interaction. For me, I’m much better in person and I’m a bad texter and I love talking to people in person.”

Breimayer felt that the only way for young people to fix the problems with modern dating is to change the way it’s seen.

“Get out of your comfort zone and put yourself out there,” Breimayer said. “Be more social and don’t be scared to talk to someone because that might be how you meet your someone.”

Bad first dates

By The Collegiate Staff

Dried Bugs on the First Date?

As people get older, the more dates some tend to go on. And unfortunately or not for most people they tend to run into at least one bad first date.

Nathaniel Smith, 18, of Grand Rapids, recalled a bad first date that started to veer off course when he had some money troubles and had to sort it out while he was with the girl.

“This one probably scarred me for life, but we had went to the theater and I did not have enough money at the time to get the ticket so we had to take an additional 30 minutes, because I had to sort something out with my money,” said Smith.

After sorting his finances out, they went back to the theater and were able to get the movie tickets but they did have a good spot so they ditched the idea. Then Smith decided to buy some edible bugs in an attempt to get things back on track.

“I tried to salvage the bad movie date and we went to this candy store,” he said, recalling that he bought “cockroaches that were dry - not cockroaches - but it was some type of other bug.”

In hindsight, Smith realized, “That was not the most attractive thing you could do on a first date.”

Third Wheeling and Weed Dealers?

Jacob Pewee, 18, majoring in creative writing from Grand Rapids had quite the first bad date experience. Pewee described his date as a “Hello Kitty girl” and said he would never do that again.

It all started out “smoothly.” They went to a restaurant and then headed back to her place to “chill and play on the Nintendo Switch.” But the vibe changed when she got a phone call.

“We were playing Smash Bros and were doing pretty good and then she’s like ‘hold on I got a call from someone,’ and I’m like ‘what you talking about?’, and she says ‘it’s my weed plug,’” Pewee recalled.

The weed dealer came into her apartment and “she basically spent most of the time talking to them while I was just sitting there inside of the room for the whole time.” said Pewee, recalling wondering “why am I even here?”

Pewee said the situation was “crazy” and only remembers that his date was busy chopping up weed while he sat all alone.

Aside from abandoning him to spend time with a drug dealer, another deal breaker for a first date for Pewee is anything located in the middle of the woods. “If we go somewhere in the middle of nowhere or the country, I feel like that’s a little sus. We gotta stay in the city,” Pewee said.

Self Confidence is Key

Jess Hunter, 34 of Kalamazoo, like many of our other fellow Raiders has also fallen victim to the seemingly revolving door of bad dates. Hunter was able to recall a date that seemed to be more of a teaching moment rather than romantic one.

“One was bad right off the get go” Jess said when asked if she’s experienced a bad date.

Jess and the mystery man that she met online went on a routine first coffee date so that they could get to know each other and talk a bit more in person, and the first thing that he says to kick off this prospective romantic relationship was “normally the nice girls don’t go for me, this is so rare,” and Jess immediately took that as a huge red flag.

“I kinda left the date like this isn’t going to work out, but here are some tips for next time,” Jess said. She was able to share some of those dating tips she suggested to The Collegiate “Confidence is the first one, secondly DON’T bring up your ex, and lastly start light and focus on the person you are on a date (with), all the heavy stuff will come as the relationship progresses.”

My experience as a man in the middle of two races

By Koy Flores

My name is Koy Flores. I may not look like it to some people, but I am Latino. I have a white mother, and a Hispanic father. Many people call it Mexican-American, but it sounds like a strange, unnecessary label to me. I think they created it in an effort to maintain one's nationality as American, while also respecting their family background. Except, I remember my dad questioning it one time, he didn't understand why some Americans have found it necessary to differentiate other non-white communities in this way. It's almost like they're trying to appear to be better with this categorization.

"Why can't they just be called Americans?" My dad asked me once.

The thing with me, is that I don't have the caramel complexion, nor do I have dark and strong facial features that are characteristic of Latinos. I don't speak Spanish, except for what I've picked up from school classes. I don't eat meatloaf, I'd rather eat an empanada. I don't know how to dance to Hispanic music at parties, but I'm always singing 2000's rock songs in my car with the windows down.

I have allowed myself to Americanize to the point where I don't ask my abuelita (my little grandma) if she can yell at me to translate household appliances from English to Spanish anymore. I don't go to many parties on either side but if I do go, I feel out of place. It's a feeling that doesn't exactly instill any pride in my culture.

I remember being a kid, and having pride in being Latino. In middle school I had what was the best friend group I've ever had. I don't keep in touch with them anymore. Now looking back, one of the coolest things about the group was the variety of races we represented. Some of us were Latino, others were Asian, Filipino, or white. I didn't really notice it then because we were so young, but now that I'm older, I realize how pure and rare that was. Because you don't really see that these days. Most kids think with the mindset of, "I can only be friends with people who look like me."

Back then, I actually stuck around my friends a lot. I was particularly close with a pair of twins, Mexican boys. The three of us along with a Vietnamese boy were the pioneers of library nerds who would read in secret during lunch time. After a while I was the only one who wanted to read, so we became the pioneers of playing awful computer games. Coolmathgames.com was all the rage back then. It was a free pass to goof off in the computer lab.

The one premier thing that we all did as a group was play soccer, or futbol, which is what my father had insisted on me calling it. I've since learned that "futbol" is what it's known as everywhere outside of the United States. So much so, that in other Spanish speaking parts of the world, people would refer to what The United States calls football as "futbol americano." Back then, we were a band of nerds who swore that we would kick our tickets into the pro soccer scene!



I was never particularly good at soccer, but hey, I had the lungs to run for a long time at least.

For me, joining the soccer team meant two things: I got to spend more time with my friends, and I was able to embrace my Hispanic culture by playing. Soccer, to my knowledge, is the most pervasive sport around the globe. This is especially true in Europe, Africa, and Central and South America. I can't speak on behalf of all Latino kids, but in my childhood, whenever we went to parties with other Hispanics, there was always a

soccer ball sitting outside in the yard.

Us kids would kick the ball around, "passing it to each other." The most exciting part of the game, though, was that we had no idea where the ball was going to end up. It was fun, relaxing even, and gave me a sense of pride in my culture. My father played soccer growing up too, and dreamed of playing professionally at one point, his ambition was more genuine than the whistle-in the wind proclamation I made with my friends though. That didn't stop my father from coaching me on techniques

and strategies of playing the game though, all the while chastising my "idiotic" middle school coach.

I played soccer for two years, before dropping the sport in favor of wrestling, which I had also been doing since the sixth grade.

In the eighth grade, I made another conscious decision to learn more about my culture. Granted, 99% of us have probably had to take a Spanish class at some point, but that number drops off a little bit when I tell you that I've taken a Spanish class in eighth grade, all the way up to my high school graduation, even into college. I was always fascinated by the language, and I felt more connected with my culture the more I learned.

I understand that to a degree, high school Spanish isn't the same as Latino Spanish. I realize that there are entirely different words and rules between the two of them.

Despite that, I still relish in learning what I have at my disposal. I've always done exceptionally well in the class too, and spent my time studying it from both the book and the internet. I'm taking my third collegiate Spanish class at the time of writing this, where the our professor delivers our lectures in almost entirely Spanish. She even makes us ask questions in Spanish, which can be painful to both perform and watch sometimes. Truth be told though, I actually welcome the challenge, as I feel like it pushes me into a healthy grind to get better.

One day I want to talk to my abuelita in Spanish again, hopefully about

more than just household appliances. After all, immersion is probably the most effective way to naturally adapt to speaking it. I want to try speaking it in front of other people too, but I'm still trying to get over the fear of being laughed at.

Despite my reservations, I do try speaking the language with strangers, an opportunity that I've often had, having grown up in an area with many Hispanic people.

One of those times involved me taking an early trip to my local supermercado, right as it was opening for the day. There was a line that was building up outside the entrance, and the owner was talking to his customers in front of it, making small talk with them. He hovered over me and asked me how my day was, in which I exchanged a few sentences with him in Spanish. He had greeted me in the language, so I took the opportunity to continue practicing it, instead of telling him, "No hablo español."

Unfortunately, at one point he asked me something that I didn't understand. I'm not sure if it was due to me not knowing the words he used, or if he was speaking too fast. I knew that I had taken a loss when he apologized to me in English,

"I'm sorry, I didn't know you didn't speak Spanish."

I kind of laughed at his comment and murmured out something like,

"Solamente sé un poco de Español."

There have been a few other times where I have spoken a few sentences to strangers in Spanish, but all of those times either went smoothly, or ended in a way that wasn't quite as abrupt or embarrassing as my supermercado experience was.

My father never taught me how to speak Spanish, I asked him once why he never tried. "I just never had the patience to," he responded.

That was the most I ever heard him say on the topic. I've also heard him telling other people the same reason as well, which legitimizes it. I can't be certain about this, but I have my theory on another reason why he never tried teaching his kids.

My dad moved to Texas from Mexico when he was very young, and he was able to learn both languages simultaneously

by himself. I think he expects the same thing for his kids, which to a point, I can see where he's coming from. My dad has always had the Do-It-Yourself mentality, a trait that I've tried to condition myself to, which brings me to my final topic.

The final thing about my culture that really stuck with me from my childhood was my father's adurance on the Latino work ethic. As kids, my siblings and I would help my father with a lot of home projects. We didn't really have a stable home until I became a freshman in high school. My parents used to fight a lot, and us kids would bounce to our grandparent's houses while the fireworks ensued.

At my abuelita's house, we spent about a week at a time fixing it up. There was a couple of weeks one summer where we had to smash down every wall in every room in the house to put in new insulation and drywall. It was an itchy and messy process, one which became characterized by my father's encouragement to, "Work like a Mexican."

It might sound silly, but to me, "Working like a Mexican" inspired me to work a little bit harder in every task that I do. It instills pride in me to this day, as I recognize my Hispanic community as being some of the hardest working people around. I also identify my community with the drive to persevere against adversity and for some, against minority limitations as well.

My father would push me to do more tasks to develop my ingenuity and work ethic. Painting, yard work, mechanical tasks, car tasks, cleaning, he would even coach me during wrestling season. Throughout all of this, I was establishing a mental resolve to "Work like a Mexican."

It's not always easy growing up as a man in the middle of two different races. At times it can feel very isolated and lonely. I can still say that I am proud of my background and I want to embrace it in any way that I can. But now that I'm older, I realize that staying grounded in "Who Koy is" is a more important question to take with me. I will also say that I am becoming a more rounded person because of my life and that feeling this way and having these experiences has only contributed to that. I am an American, I am Latino, but most importantly I am Koy Javier Flores.



Illustration By Abby Haywood

By Antonio Ewing Jr

In the complex world of human connections, some relationships can turn toxic, endangering one's mental, physical and emotional well-being. What defines a toxic relationship, however, goes beyond mere conflict. It may be easy to ask "why do individuals stay entangled in such destructive bonds?" But, the answer isn't as simple as the question.

I, too, have found myself ensnared in the web of a toxic relationship. The comfort of familiarity and the misconception that love should be difficult kept me tethered to a sinking ship. It took introspection to realize that love should not be a constant battle but a source of support and growth.

Understanding the Roots

At times, the roots of toxic relationships delve deep into the soil

of childhood trauma. The desire for love and validation during formative years can lead some to normalize unhealthy behaviors. Childhood trauma, often manifested through emotional abuse, creates a vulnerability to what psychologists call a "trauma bond." This bond can later shape adult relationships, perpetuating toxicity.

The Fear of Starting Over

Another reason people remain in toxic relationships is the fear of starting anew. Long-term commitments can breed dependence, making the idea of being alone or rebuilding from scratch terrifying. Verbal abuse, such as belittling remarks and manipulation, reinforces a distorted self-image, and can make the victim believe they are unworthy of love outside the toxic relationship.

Recognizing the Signs

Toxic relationships often leave subtle but telling signs. Isolation from friends and family, controlling behaviors, a lack of trust, feelings of inferiority, a state of heightened anxiety, emotional abuse, blame, gaslighting and manipulation are red flags that indicate the relationship might be toxic.

Taking the Leap

If you find yourself in a toxic relationship, breaking free is crucial. Seek support from friends and family outside the relationship, consider therapy, and, if necessary, leave – ensuring your safety is a priority. Identifying toxic behaviors, expressing your feelings, and deciding whether rebuilding the relationship is healthy are pivotal steps toward a safer and healthier mindset.

Toxic relationships may feel like an unsolvable puzzle, but recognizing the signs and taking decisive steps can lead to freedom. In the journey towards healthier connections, remember: you deserve love that nurtures, not love that corrodes.

Getting Help

If you suspect that you are in a toxic relationship, help is available through the National Domestic Violence Hotline and can be accessed at thehotline.org, or by phone at 800-799-7233, or by texting START to 88788.

THINGS I OVERHEARD ON CAMPUS

Eavesdropping + Art by
Abby Haywood

Voices by
Jamie Miller



Arm day every day! My leg day
is carrying around my arms.



I never actually ate a penny
but I would always look at
them in a way that would
make my parents nervous.



Sometimes you just gotta look
at a cat poster and say,
'Yeah, I'll hang in there.'



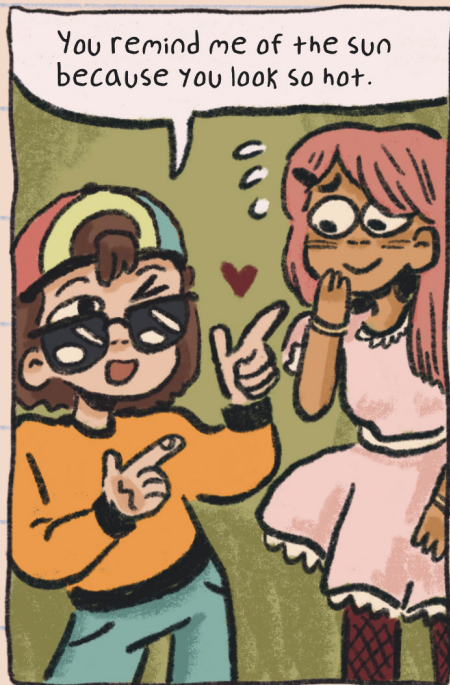
When asked what was the
most surprising thing they've
ever done:



Pass my drivers test a
few weeks ago.

I haven't read a book
in five years!





A passion for music

By Lillian Hernandez

Music inspires, moves, and changes lives every day. Grand Rapids Community College has many opportunities for students to show their talent through the courses and ensembles in the Albert P. Smith Music Center.

Radtke

The Collegiate spoke with GRCC musicians, Sage Radtke, Claire Galloway and the band Sickroom about their passion for music.

Radtke, a business administration major, began his music career as many do, in the sixth grade because taking a band class seemed more entertaining than music appreciation. But for Radtke, it soon became so much more.

“Music is the foundation,” Radtke said. “Everything that I do, all of the people that I know, all of my friends, my connections, are all somehow based in music.”

Radtke started off playing the trumpet but eventually switched to French horn. “I was around a lot of people ... who were also excelling at the exact same time I was, and when you’re a little fish in a big pond... you get really excited when you are good at something,” Radt-

ke said, laughing to himself.

When it was time to choose what career path to follow it was obvious. Radtke described feeling a deep passion for teaching people and helping them to see the wonders of music like he had and so Radtke enrolled for the first time as a music major.

Life doesn’t always go to plan, Radtke soon found out and he ended up dropping that path and taking a lengthy break from the musical aspect of his life.

“I took 6 years off, I didn’t touch an instrument, I didn’t want to touch an instrument, I felt like a failure after failing music school, the pressure was huge. But, one day I woke up and I said ‘I wanna play some notes,’ and immediately I was right back in it, better than ever,” Radtke said.

And that’s exactly what he wants you readers to know, that music will always be there. It’s never too late to pick up where you left off. Now that Radtke has come back to school he is obviously taking a much different approach majoring in business administration but is a musician at heart.

Radtke described his closet of brass instruments and the motivation behind his degree.

“I’m wanting to go into non-profit



Courtesy Photo of Sage Radtke

administration working with musical groups,” says Radtke

Even though on the outside his academic path may not be directly tied into music he has found ways to incorporate his passion into a lifestyle that is sustainable for him. In his free time, he is heavily involved with Beer City Winds and Northern Lights Drum & Bugle Corps. You can find both of those ensembles on Facebook. Radtke still holds that fiery passion for teaching shown by his work with the Comstock Park Marching Band.



Courtesy Photo of Sickroom

Sickroom

Just a few blocks away at venues like Skelletones, a local Grand Rapids music venue, you can find a very different type of musician, and a whole new scene as well. Sickroom, is a Sludge Metal band formed by a talented cast of teens, some GRCC students.

Alan Wells and Parker Henrion on guitar, Eli Lee on bass, Emma Puls provides the vocals, and Eli Aalderink is on the drums. Henrion, 17, and Lee, 18, who is attending GRCC to be a vet technician, are currently students at GRCC, and the rest of the band plans to join them in the near future.

For this group, music has been much

more than a hobby. For Henrion it is an expression of himself, “It’s given me an outlet to express my thoughts and emotions in a healthy way. Playing heavy music like we do in Sickroom is effectively expelling built-up stress as an art form, and it’s a beautiful thing.”

For many people, performing is a challenging task and can invoke some pretty unpleasant nerves but for Wells performing is nothing of the sort.

“Performing feels electric.” says Wells. “It’s gratifying to know that there are people out there who care what you have to say, and the connection that comes with that is powerful.”

It’s apparent that the strong sense of

connection is what draws most members of the band to perform. Lee, can definitely relate.

“It makes me feel good, like I’m something bigger than myself and the band,” Lee says. “There’s a very strong sense of community. When I see people really enjoying our music I feel so real and alive.”

Puls, who is the lead singer for Sickroom, says, “I love the idea of getting really amped up in front of a crowd and being part of a community who loves and supports one another.”

For Eli Aalderink, 16, who attends Hopkins High School and is GRCC bound, music has an impact on everything in his life.

“Pretty much everything I aspire to do circles back to (music). I’ve got Sickroom, I’ve got the school band, also Vortex percussion. Every moment of my life is tied back to music,” Aalderink said.

Aalderink opened up about dealing with some difficult aspects of his life lately and how listening, creating and performing has greatly helped him through that.

“It’s a lot of how I process everything I experience in the world,” Aalderink says. “It ends up getting processed through making music or consuming it....I think a lot of my mental state can be reflected by how I’m interacting with music.”

When asked if he saw himself so heavily involved in performing and creating as a young child, he confidently responded yes. Music grabbed his attention from as early as he could remember and has held on tight and he has no plans of changing that.

After Aalderink graduates high school, he plans on heading to GRCC and taking courses to become an audio technician and has separate plans of composing his own scores. Aalderink joked about hoping to describe himself as a “tortured artist” type in the future.

The band is currently working on their demo and preparing for their upcoming shows on Dec. 2 details on their Instagram and Jan. 18 at Metal Frat in Ann Arbor.



Courtesy Photo of Claire Galloway

Galloway

Claire Galloway, 20, performs alongside Radtke in some of GRCC’s ensembles. She too has been playing since the sixth grade and what started as just a fun experience has transformed into a lifestyle.

For Galloway, a music therapy major, music has always been a huge part of her life. All of her family are involved in some type of music scene and so music and performance came naturally.

“Music has been very prominent throughout most of my life,” Galloway says. As she

continues on in her career Galloway says she never wants to stop making music. “Music has created so many new friendships that I do not take for granted, and I’ve gotten to know myself a lot more through it. It made so much of a difference and I don’t know where I would be if I didn’t choose to pursue it.”

Galloway has a passion for performance, starting out can be difficult for her but the reward is worth it.

“The initial feeling is nerve-racking when you first walk onto the stage,” Galloway says. “But as soon as Dr. Shaker raises her arms, I feel a sense of relief and calmness. I’m in my element.”

REWRITING THE SCRIPT: *A Father's Pursuit of Success in Parenthood and Education*

By Antonio Ewing Jr

In the bustling whirlwind of life, where the relentless demands of college, the challenges of a full-time job and the impending arrival of my child often seem like an insurmountable mountain. In this chapter of my life, I find myself on a remarkable journey of self-discovery, that's both thrilling and demanding.

As I prepare to welcome my first child on Dec. 24, 2023, I'm navigating uncharted waters with unwavering determination, revealing a story of resilience, purpose and the impregnable commitment to rewrite my life's narrative.

For me, the realization of impending fatherhood served as a profound catalyst for change. It ignited the flames of ambition and a relentless pursuit of a better future. Having dabbled with higher education three times in the past, this journey back to the hallowed halls of learning was not just about earning a degree but proving to myself that I could persevere through the challenges of academia. My chosen path, majoring in multimedia journalism, embodies my passion for storytelling. With an eye on the future and a growing family to support, this decision also reflects a strategic move to maximize my earning potential, setting the stage for a brighter future.



Photo by Blace Carpenter

My drive to succeed is not just for personal gain but for the betterment of my soon-to-arrive son.

With a 40-hour workweek at a cell phone store plus the days that are not dedicated to school and a full-time course load of 13 credit hours, my life is a tightly orchestrated symphony. Balancing the demands of education and work often leads to moments of overwhelming anxiety. Yet, it's the intense commitment to provide the best possible future for my family that keeps me pushing forward.

I often reflect back to how my own childhood played out, and I draw strength from the lessons I learned from a remarkable woman – my mother. A single parent who worked two jobs while she pursued her own education, she donned a cape of a super mom, my very own wonder woman. Even as a latchkey kid, her staunch commitment to me meant that she never missed a game, concert or a parent teacher conference all while she carried two worlds on her shoulders. She is my guiding light, teaching me the true meaning of resilience and genuine humanity. Growing up without my father's presence, I felt the void keenly, especially at school events where his absence spoke much louder than words. The ache and longing for a "Father and Son day" echoes from my past to this day, a



Photo by Antonio Ewing Jr

poignant reminder that some promises are destined to be broken. My father's upbringing in Detroit, as the protector of his younger brothers, offered him no blueprint for fatherhood since it seemed that their dad lacked that same blueprint. It was a generational cycle I've found my breaking as I venture into parenthood myself.

My father's struggle with absent fatherhood weighed heavily on my young heart. Resentment lingered for years until I looked beyond my own hurt to understand his journey to fatherhood. Raised in 1970s Detroit, he grappled with a parenting style we would deem

neglectful today. How could I blame him for the sins of his father when he lacked a model to guide him? This realization prompted a shift in perspective. I chose not to perpetuate the cycle but instead to learn from it. As I prepare to become a father, I internalize the lessons of unconditional love, protection, and the need to be present, even when it seems unnecessary. Fatherhood, I believe, is akin to directing a movie – a script you write, characters you mold, a story you live. You may not be seen in the forefront, but your influence permeates every frame.

This imminent journey to fatherhood

has shifted me into a higher mental gear, unleashing an unprecedented level of motivation to be a great father and a successful man. In the face of adversity, my journey is a testament to the remarkable strength of the human spirit and the enduring power of a father's love and determination. But to fully understand the depth of my journey, we need to rewind and look at the events that led me to this pivotal moment in my life.

My story is one of multiple attempts and a relentless drive to overcome obstacles. As a young adult, I embarked on the journey of higher education

multiple times, only to find myself discouraged and ultimately giving up. Life's responsibilities, the fear of failure, and the lack of a clear purpose all played their parts in my decision to postpone my educational aspirations. Albeit, life has a way of delivering unexpected curveballs. In my case, that curveball was the news that I was going to be a father. It was a turning point, a moment that forced me to reevaluate my priorities and rekindle my academic ambitions. I realized that to provide the best possible future for my growing family, I needed to maximize my earning potential. And what better way to do that than by obtaining a degree? So, with newfound determination, I made the choice to return to the world of higher learning, to face my past failures head-on, and to prove to myself that I could succeed. It was a decision not taken lightly, as it meant balancing the responsibilities of being a father-to-be, a full-time employee, and a dedicated college student.

It's a delicate juggling act where time management, discipline, and a constant drive to excel are the keys to success. On the days when I'm not attending classes, I put in forty hours at my job, providing for my family's present needs. Then, I shift gears to become a student, tackling a demanding course load of 13 credit hours. Every minute of my day is accounted for, and every task meticulously planned. The anxiety of providing for my family's future often looms in the back of my mind. It's a weight I carry daily, a reminder of the responsibilities I've willingly embraced. But it's this very anxiety that fuels my determination to succeed.

My goal in parenthood is to be everything that I needed and wanted within a father figure. I want my son to know that everything is possible as long as he works at it and believes in himself and the process that may take him to success. These words have become my mantra, my guiding principle. They remind me that the sacrifices I make today are investments in a future where my son will have every opportunity to achieve his dreams.

As the due date inches closer, a profound mental shift has occurred. I find myself becoming more analytical than ever before. I constantly ponder ways to be a better person, and to ensure a brighter future for my family. Looming fatherhood has ignited a fire within me. It's a fire fueled by a desire to be the best father I can be. This transformation is a mental and

emotional shift that's taken me by surprise. My thoughts are more deliberate, my actions more purposeful, and I've found myself worrying about the state of the world more than I ever have before. Parenthood has brought clarity to my life and a newfound sense of responsibility. There's also another mental hurdle I must navigate daily. Suffering from ADHD, focusing on the demands of both school and work can be challenging. It requires a level of motivation and discipline that sometimes feels elusive. There are moments when I feel overwhelmed, even borderline depressed. But, in those moments, I look to the future. The thought of my son's future, filled with smiles and everything he could ever want, is my driving force. It's the motivation that helps me overcome the challenges and keep moving forward. It's the fuel that powers me through sleepless nights, exams, and work deadlines.

As I stand on the cusp of parenthood and the completion of my education, I am humbled by the journey I've undertaken. It has revealed the depths of my determination, the power of love, and the extraordinary capacity for personal growth in the face of overwhelming responsibilities. The path ahead remains uncertain, but I approach it with unwavering resolve. As I approach my directorial debut in less than five weeks. I find solace in the fact that I've spent years preparing for this moment. While it's not impossible to be a great man without a father, my journey exemplifies the challenges of navigating life without a paternal guide. Yet, my father's and grandfather's sins won't be bestowed upon my son. Instead, I've chosen to face those sins head-on, breaking them down and learning from them. My son won't inherit the burden of generational mistakes but will witness a father who defied the odds to create a different narrative. This premiere isn't just my story—it's a legacy rewritten, a testament to the strength of a father's determination, and the steadfast commitment to break free from the sins of the past.

As I prepare to step into the role of a lifetime, I know the journey ahead won't be easy, but it will be uniquely mine. The director, the writer, the leading man—all rolled into one, ready to shape a story of love, resilience, and the triumph of breaking the chains that bound generations before. My son's premiere is my magnum opus, and I'm ready to watch it unfold, frame by frame, scene by scene, with the hope that it becomes a masterpiece of a lifetime.

From childhood to adulthood, best friends come in many different ways

By Payton Calati

Friends come and go throughout everybody's lives, but it takes a special person to stay throughout many stages.

Grand Rapids Community College is filled with students of different lives and paths. Some were born with their best friend right down the road, others did not meet them until later in life, but as time moves on these people still have a high title to them

Carolina Noriera-Martinez, 20, of Grand Rapids, defines her relationship with her best friend and a golden retriever and black cat duo.



Photo courtesy of Abby (right) and Carolina (left)

“A lot of people have told us like when-ever we’re hanging out they always tell us like (were the) golden retriever and the black cat that’s basically what a lot of people tell us and were like ‘oh okay thanks!’” Noriera- Martinez said.

She and her best friend, Abby, have known each other since freshman year of high school but didn’t start becoming good friends until sophomore year.

“It’s been, I would say, six years we’ve had our friendship. We met freshman year, we didn’t really talk to each other and it wasn’t until sophomore year (that) we got closer,” Noriera-Martinez said.

Abby holds a very special place in her heart. She considers her more of a sister than just a best friend.

“She’s probably the closest people I know since then. She’s someone very, very dear to my heart, she’s always there for me. Anytime I ever need someone to talk to she’s always there. At this point in my life, I don’t really consider her a best friend, I consider her a sister. So it’s really nice to have a 2-in-1 like a sister and a best friend,” said Noriera-Martinez.

Kate Nuffer, 18, of Grand Rapids, was able to keep her trio since middle school.

Her group started as a duo of her and her best friend Emily since the first grade, then Tori popped in their lives and changed it for the better.



Photo courtesy of Kate (left), Tori (middle) and Emily (right)

“Emily has been my friend since first grade and then Tori moved to Michigan from South Carolina in eighth grade, so we’ve all just been friends since then,” said Nuffer.

Nuffer said her trio works because they each bring complimentary attributes to the friendship.

“Our dynamic works because Tori is a very talkative extroverted person and she just talks all the time and it’s really easy to talk to her,” Nuffer said. “Emily works because she’s a very empathetic person and she has feelings for everybody and I feel like I’m kind of like the glue of the group. I keep everyone

together and I love doing stuff and like getting together with everybody.”

Nuffer speaks very highly of her best friends and is proud of their achievements..

“They’re both great people, awesome people. Emily’s hilarious, like one of the funniest people I’ve ever met in my whole entire life. And Tori is this super smart person. ... I just love them both,” said Nuffer.



Photo courtesy of Lauren (left) and Nik (right)

Lauren Wilkinson, 18, of Grand Rapids, met her best friend right by her house. “He lives right around the corner of my house, and we met when I was probably in like fifth grade,” said Wilkinson.

Nik Schumaker is not only a best friend to Wilkinson but a brother to her. Lauren was able to make a family out of friends and that bond is nothing like anything else.

“He is just like my brother. He’s like family basically and he’s just really down for anything and he’s just someone good to talk to. He’s really funny and we became so close it’s like his family is my family,” said Wilkinson.



Photo Courtesy Raegan (left) and Payton (right)

Photo courtesy of Jordan (left) and Cooper (right)



Cooper Hemmes, 19, of Grandville, grew up in all stages of his life with his best friend Jordan. They met in kindergarten and hang out all the time.

“Just growing up with him, knowing him since I was super young (helped keep them in contact),” Hemmes said. “We knew each other since we were super young so hanging out with him every day, just seeing him every day was something that kept us together,”

Hemmes and his best friend Jordan were able to see each other grow up. They got to live through both good and bad things together and continue to live with each other in their lives.

I met my best friend, Raegan, in eighth grade. As crazy as it may seem, we met through my ex-boyfriend but she was by my side when he would break my heart (twice) and always make sure that I was okay. I liked to call her my soulmate. Nothing romantic, but someone I was meant to be with through thick and thin. Someone I would do anything for and I know she would return the favor. We fight like enemies, bicker like an old married couple, laugh like nothing happened, but at the end of the day we both know we are each other’s person.

As you grow up it seems to be harder to maintain those friendships you thought were really special to you but the best relationships come from those who help you in those harder times and those are the people others like to call their best friends.



Photo by Blace Carpenter

The choice to get better or stay bitter

By Alexa Cheaney

I grew up in a small midwest town, the sleepy kind that you see in the movies. It had the cute downtown that's always festive, the folks that somehow know everything about everyone, the maybe once-in-a-decade murder in central park, you know, run-of-the-mill kind of stuff.

What they don't tell you about these towns is that they get stuffy. If you spend long enough there, like I did, you start to notice how much repetition is around you. Every house is a cookie-cutter copy of the one next to it, and to an extent, so are the people inside.

With a population of about 6,000, there was a strong sense of community. Most of the kids I grew up with had lived there for their entire lives like me.

But for some reason, I didn't feel like I was a part of it. Most days I couldn't really tell you what it was, I could just tell you that I didn't belong. It was as if something in my mold was missing, or even present in excess.

I have siblings, but they're upwards of 15 years older than I am, so I grew up as an only child.

I had friends, I had people I talked to at school, but I would go home to a house that was essentially void of all other life.

Growing up, my mother struggled with addiction and my father worked over 70 hours a week. To say I was lonely was an understatement.

Some days it was a comfortable kind of lonely, the kind that almost feels like a warm hug.

Other days, it threatened to swallow me whole, like a hug where you've gotta tap the other person to let go because they're squeezing just a bit too tight and you're starting to see stars.

When it came time for me to graduate I was more than ready to get out of Metro Detroit.

In August of 2021, I moved up to the west side for my freshman year of college at Grand Valley State University.

I wanted so desperately to be excited, I wanted to reinvent myself and be successful and leave the past behind and start anew. Everything was new. I had every opportunity.

But I found myself nervous more times than not. I was excited, I was having fun but I was also deeply uncomfortable.

Welcome Week at a new school can be a lot. You're meeting hundreds of new people in a new setting each day and then going to bed in an unfamiliar place.

I had a familiar face with me though, my best friend of six years and I had gone to the same college.

We fell into a groove after the first few weeks. She and I lived in the same dorm building and we became friends with four other girls who lived there as well. Before we knew it, the six of us were spending more time together than not.

Then Halloween rolled around, and that was the last weekend I would ever speak to the person I thought would be my maid of honor.

Resentment grows without conversation, and with alcohol, frustrations tend to come loose. College can be hard, and leaving home can be hard. Your head has to be in the right place for you to be successful.

In the wake of everything I expected to be devastated, but I was oddly okay. She was there for me through so many critical points in my life, and I got to be there for her as well. It was over. The friendship had run its course. It felt like everything was new again. All traces of my hometown were officially gone.

Leaves fell from the trees and snow fell from the sky, Halloween music turned to Christmas music, and our group of six became a group of five. The year kept going.

Through the rest of the year, my mental health took a slow but aggressive nosedive and my grades began to slip in response.

With the end of the semester slowly creeping up on us, I had to start thinking about where I would live when it was time to go back home.

I lived with my aunt and uncle during my senior year of high school in response to the peak of my mother's addiction and my father's avoidance. After some rather uncomfortable conversation, it was decided I would live with them again.

I had been dismissed from Grand Valley State University due to my grades.

“Things got worse after moving home.”

My family and I immediately jumped into an action plan to get me back on track.

I took a study skills class that summer and went on antidepressants, and I decided to move back to the west side that upcoming fall and enroll at Grand Rapids Community College with the hope of reapplying to GVSU the next year.

At this point, I wasn't even trying to “make things better”, or live a fulfilling life. I was trying to fix myself, and that just made me fall apart a little bit more.

The study skills class felt belittling. It was meant for kids years younger than me and truthfully being there was a hit to my ego.

The antidepressants didn't help, but they did change me. I felt like part of my brain was roped off, and instead of feeling bad and having the opportunity to process and deal with my

thoughts it just felt like a door had been shut. My negative emotions had no way out, so they just bounced off the walls of my brain. My internal monologue had become an echo chamber of negativity.

The summer passed, and I moved into my first apartment at the end of August 2022.

It took about two weeks before it reached the point where it was unsafe for me to be there.

I had told my friends before moving that I was struggling pretty severely. After the move, they expressed to me that they were concerned about my mental health and asked if they could speak to my therapist in confidence.

That day turned into a string of phone calls. My friends spoke to my therapist, I spoke to my friends, I spoke to my therapist, my therapist spoke to my family and my friends and then I spoke to my therapist and my family.

Somewhere in there the concern was raised that due to how much weight I had lost, my prescribed sleeping pills were counteracting with my liver and I was experiencing organ failure.

I was required to go to the emergency room and get checked out.

In the ER they ran blood tests and everything came back okay. My physical health was fine, but my mental health clearly needed more attention. It was decided that night that I was going to withdraw from school and seek out more intensive therapy.

I spent three months away from the west side and was faced with the inescapable choice to get better or stay bitter.

I chose to get better.

I had to change my outlook on life and then, and only then, was the real moment when everything was new. By clearing out my past traumas in my head, I made so much room for love in my heart.

When it was time for me to return to Grand Rapids I was scared. I didn't know how I would be received when I came back. I had put my friends through a lot, and they had valid reasons to cut me out but instead, they taught me a few things.

They taught me that shame is no match for empathy, the importance of space and boundaries and that the right people stay.

I don't think I would have survived it if they didn't have

the courage to call my therapist that day. It has truly been the greatest privilege of my lifetime to have people who love me so fiercely.

Another thing they taught me is that love is the most transformative property on the planet, both in void

and in excess.

I've been back in Grand Rapids for nearly a year now and they continue to teach me these lessons, and many more every day.

They show me the way that love is present in small gestures, too. There's love in sitting in silence together, in someone filling my water bottle when they go to fill their own, in the conversations you have at 3 a.m. that nobody may remember.

I think everyone feels out of place at one point or another, but I also think everyone does have a place. If you feel lost, it may be an uphill battle to find yours, but it can be one of life's most rewarding experiences.

“I spent three months away from the west side and was faced with the inescapable choice to get better or stay bitter. I chose to get better.”

I do most things alone, and I love it

By Lindsey Soet

I used to be scared of running errands on my own. I convinced myself that everyone around me would be judging me, thinking I had no friends. If I made plans to go to the mall with a friend and they canceled, I would find another time to go with them, even if I desperately needed to replace my worn-out shoes.

My best friend and I made plans to go shopping one day. An hour before we were supposed to leave, I received a call from my friend saying that she had a family issue and couldn't make it. I desperately needed new clothes, but I was terrified at the thought of going shopping by myself.

Despite it being my worst nightmare, I decided to go to the mall by myself. As soon as I walked through the doors, I noticed that almost everyone either had a friend or significant other with them, which didn't ease my anxiety. Nevertheless, I powered through and walked into one of the stores.

After the initial anxiety of being at the mall alone faded, I discovered that shopping alone was much easier for me. I quickly realized that nobody cared that I was alone, they were focused on running their own errands. I could try on or pick out anything I wanted without fear of being judged by anyone.

I could spend \$300+ at one store without someone saying "Are you sure this is the best use of your money?" I could go into Lush and try as many lotions and soaps I wanted just for fun. I could spend as much or as little time shopping as I wanted, I didn't have to coordinate my schedule with anyone else's. I could get lunch without the hassle of agreeing on a place to eat and splitting the check even though my food accounted for a fifth of the bill. Everything was up to me.

I began to do more and more things by myself, by choice. I would stop by Aerie to see if there was a sale, grab lunch or a snack and many other things that I would have only done with someone else accompanying me. I still ask friends to come with me from time to time because I enjoy seeing them, but I still run those errands if they can't make it. I've found completing tasks outside of my house alone to be therapeutic. I can pop my AirPods in and take a break from my day while accomplishing something at the same time.

Going somewhere alone doesn't make you friendless or lonely. People do more self dates/errands alone than you think. The next time your plans with a friend fall through, consider going out anyways, you just might enjoy it.

Big Sister Act: balancing college and while taking care of siblings

By Kaliyah Witherspoon

As I finish this semester, I start to think about the struggles that I had in life that led me here, Including the struggles that I'm having now. It has been a long, dreadful path that I've had to walk on alone. Others might say I came out victorious, I'll call it surviving. As I drop the classes that I chose for next semester to spend more time with my grandmother who's suffering from cancer, I got the sudden urge to share what I went through to get to this point.

When I was just 14 years old, I realized there was still so much in life that I had yet to understand. I learned that life was never filled with smiles and rainbows like how they show in movies and TV shows. My reality was filled with suffering and sorrow. I learned that superheroes didn't exist in a world filled with villains and civilians. Once my parents finally split up, things went downhill fast. This resulted in my mother taking her anger out on me, and I was left feeling disoriented and solitary.

It ultimately left me with only two choices: choosing myself and running away and never looking back, or staying back and pushing through the pain for my siblings.



Top: Karmello Garrison, 12, Kevin Garrison-Witherspoon, 17 Bottom: Kaliyah Witherspoon, 18 Ke'Sean Garrison, 13

I chose the latter.

My three younger brothers mean so much to me that I couldn't abandon them. It wouldn't make me any better than the adults in our lives.

As the eldest child, not only did I have to navigate the complexities of growing up and figuring out my own life, but I also had to take on the responsibility of raising my younger siblings. Assuming the role of a parent can be an incredibly challenging and overwhelming experience, especially being a child yourself. But I somehow managed to make do with what I had.

This meant providing them with love, making sure they got the attention and care that they needed, supporting them to thrive in life, and even encouraging them to do things that they wanted to do but didn't have that parental acknowledgment that they craved. While all of this is going on, I'm also trying to fill the void left by absent, neglectful adults who should have been there to protect and guide us all. I wouldn't call it a heavy burden, but it is more of a life-changing lesson that left me feeling isolated, frustrated, and uncertain about the future.

It's a common experience to receive a lecture from parents about not having a boyfriend or girlfriend. However, being informed that you and your brothers cannot visit nor live with your father due to a personal dispute solely between the parents is a depressing experience that I wouldn't wish upon my worst enemy. Being in between two adults and having to choose a side is exhausting.

After my father left, my mother neglected the bills which resulted in us being evicted. Having nowhere to go, we turned toward our grandparents, who welcomed us with open arms. As we settled in our grandparent's house, we started a new rhythm in our lives. My brothers and I naively thought we'd live there until our mother got back up on her feet.

We knew our mother was struggling with something, we just didn't know how bad it was. It's not my story to tell, but I will say that whatever she went through, she sure as hell dragged her kids through it.

The rhythm that we created at our grandparent's house was eventually broken due to our mother fighting with our grandfather. We got kicked out which then put us in a never-ending loop, where we go back and forth between hotels, relatives' houses, and even back to my grandparents' house. All it did was leave me in a bitter mood which negatively affected me in school. I became more snappy and distant, and every time I left the classroom to go to the bathroom, I would just return with puffy red eyes.

It felt like I was drowning in a bottomless ocean with no lifeguards willing to save me as I sunk deeper and deeper. With no smiles and dead eyes, I felt like a zombie going to school every day. Yet, I treated the school day as an escape from my mother and what was going on at home, if we had a place to call home that day.

I hid my pain from everyone around

me so I wouldn't have to burden them with my problems. Time went on and my dad finally had custody over my siblings and me. In my head, I thought that I was finally safe, that I'd escaped the clutches of my mother. But I didn't escape the battle without any scars. I had many. Spiraling down in depression, I started to wonder what was the point.

Why be placed in this world if we're meant to suffer? It was the main thought racing through my head. I lost the motivation to do anything. I lost many friends, and I even tried to commit suicide.

As I got worse, I started to try to seek comfort in the friends that I still had: family members who loved me dearly and were willing to do anything to bring the old me back. My grandmother was the person who always believed in me even after I told her I had to go to an alternative school to graduate with my class.

"Do what you have to do, baby. I'll always love and support you no matter what," said my grandmother to me during a phone call.

Hearing those words, ignited a fire in me. Every battle I was facing, I ended triumphantly. Beating depression, graduating high school, signing up for college, and even going to college, I did it all to make my grandmother proud and prove a point to others. Even when things seem hard like you can't keep going, don't stop. Never stop.



GRCC students and staff share their stories, inspirations

Story and photos by Blace Carpenter

College is a pivotal turning point for many students looking to further their education for a better future, and with a little over 12,000 people enrolled at Grand Rapids Community College, every individual on campus has a story to share.

Johnny Zamudio chases his passion for cooking

Choosing a major is never easy especially when looking into a future career. Some students are fortunate to study their passion in hopes of making a living off of it. This would be the case of 20-year-old Johnny Zamudio.

Zamudio had originally attended Muskegon Community College to pursue pre-law in hopes of becoming a lawyer but quickly decided that he wanted to pursue his passion for cooking.

“Growing up I always loved to watch people cook. I was watching them make food when I was eating at home but I didn’t want to chase that. I graduated in 2021 and I was gonna become a lawyer. So I studied pre-law at Muskegon Community College, but the classes were boring and I hated it,” Zamudio said. “I was like, ‘I can’t do this for the rest of my life’ so let’s do something I want to pursue.”

Zamudio said he loves Japanese culture, even having a couple of tattoos from some of his favorite animes and he hopes that he can travel to Japan in the near future.

“Right now I am working at Mura Sushi on Bridge Street, so my final goal is Japan. After I graduate from culinary school, I’m going to study Japanese and hopefully, by the time I’m 25, I’ll be heading over to Japan. And from there I’ll come back, open my own Japanese eatery here in Michigan hopefully.”



Lukes Greimsman explains why science rocks!

Luke Griemsmann, 49, of Grand Rapids, is a lab assistant here at GRCC and has a master’s degree in education.

He sets up labs across the entire fifth floor and handles all the chemicals needed for GRCC lab students to complete their work. Griemsmann explained that he’s always had an interest in science which he pursued as a career.

“I taught science at the secondary level and I taught chemistry and really fell in love with it,” Griemsmann said. “I taught for only a couple of years and now I’m deciding to work in a lab...with chemistry I really enjoyed working with Stoichiometry, using math and conversion factors to figure out the molar volume of things.”

Mackenzie Oberlin builds a career to help others

Mackenzie Oberlin, 26, of Lakeview, is a sophomore here at GRCC and is currently studying occupational therapy.

Oberlin, who is currently bartending, wanted something more fulfilling and decided she wanted to pursue a career after going to occupational therapy due to a car accident.

“I’ve always been interested in healthcare. I was in a car accident in high school and I spent a lot of time in occupational and physical therapy,” Oberlin said. “I really didn’t want to go the nursing route and I kinda read up on occupational therapy a little and I just went for it.”

While she didn’t expect the workload going into this major, Oberlin is glad she chose this program.

“We’ve learned about being hands-on with patients and that’s just heightened my passion for working with people a lot.”



Griemsmann stated that science is important because it is vital to understanding the workings of the world and how everything is created. He never thought he would be fascinated by science when he was younger but years of teaching persuaded him to pursue science

“I believe it is so important to everything we touch and have nowadays... It’s a critical piece of education and technology. When I was (college)age I didn’t really think I wanted to go into science at all. I never took classes, I thought I was more of the writing mind and the speaking mind and then I was a teacher for some time and said, ‘I’d really like to know more about science’ and started getting educated.”

Joe Roy dreams about the life of a rockstar

Joe Roy, 40, of Wyoming, came to GRCC in pursuit of his passion for music. As a kid and even as an adult, Roy idolizes the life of rockstars.

“When I was younger, I thought the idea of being a rockstar was the only thing I could see myself wanting to do in life. I thought rockstars were cooler than actors,” said Roy. “They both could potentially make a lot of money but rockstars never seem to have to apologize for things. Like they would destroy hotel rooms and stuff and they don’t have to come out with any apologies, but actors always have to apologize to people... rockstars were always like, ‘They’re rockstars and that’s what they do.’”

Roy explained that he is captivated by musicians, instruments and music in general.

“I like to just listen to anybody who plays drums, or guitar, or bass guitar. It’s super impressive to me and always made me feel. Music makes me feel. It puts things in motion and I like it. I’ve always wanted to do that, but my life didn’t really go that way. So I’m trying to pursue it now.”



Nate Smith is sculpting a life as an artist

Nate Smith, 22, of Grand Rapids, is a recent graduate of GRCC. She received their fine arts degree just this past spring and is currently the lab monitor for the pottery studio on campus.

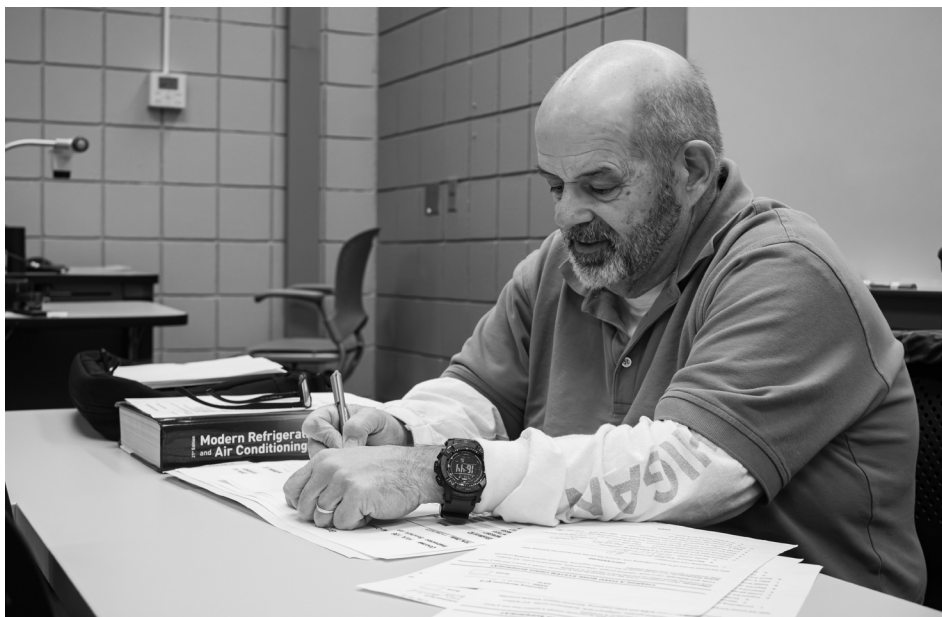
Smith has been called a jack of all trades by her friends but particularly enjoys pottery the most.

“Taking sculpture here has been my total favorite. We did a project where we did tiles and we got to do some rubber casting, which was my favorite because I sculpted four faces,” Smith said.

Smith was drawn to art back in middle school, sketching pages full of eyes and other drawings. This passion for creativity made them want to explore different types of art.

“I had pages full of just drawings of eyes because I like faces and people, so that’s how it started, and then lots of art classes. The fine arts department seemed like the best bet for me here...”





Professor Benchich helps create opportunities for trade students

GRCC opens many opportunities for students with several courses to help them get licenses and certifications in various fields. Professor Jon Benchich works in the Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning/Refrigeration (HVACR) department. He teaches HVACR theory and how to become proficient in the skills necessary to work as an HVAC mechanic.

Benchich has around 30 years of experience in this field and is even a GRCC alumnus.

“Many, many, many years ago, I graduated from CC with an electronics degree...I spent 11 years working for a company that does high-performance refrigeration and for the last 20 years, I’ve worked for a wholesale distributor of heating and air conditioning commercial parts. I’ve got like 30 years in the industry,” Benchich said.

Benchich explains how many of the trades do a great job in training but further education is required to move up in their job. He says that he enjoys helping these students move further in a field he has many years of experience in.

“A lot of kids who don’t go to four-year colleges end up getting a job in the trades, electrician, mechanical, refrigeration, welding, you name it...Quite frankly, a lot of employers, contractors and mechanical contractors types, they do a great job at training. They have apprenticeship programs. A lot of the contractors are union shops, and the unions do a great job at training guys... A matter of fact, a lot of contractors send their people here to GRCC for school and more training. Most of them end up getting an associate’s (degree) out of it.”

Benchich says that he enjoys helping these students move further in a field he has many years of experience in.

“I think it is important to give back. I enjoy helping the younger people, the people just getting started. Now I say younger, I got a couple of guys who are like 21, 22 years old but I always have guys who are in their 30s, maybe 40s, who are taking this to get promotions and get better jobs and move ahead...I like helping people.”



Elena Mealing shares her hobby of making jewelry

Elena Mealing, 22, of Grand Rapids, is undecided on her major but enjoys making jewelry in her spare time.

Currently working as a hall monitor in the Jewelry Room on G1, she uses the space to create rings, necklaces, and other accessories.

“I’ve been doing it at home for a handful of years. I have a whole bunch of beads. I never tried metalworking before this class,” Mealing said. “That was really cool to add to my arsenal...I just like to make things. I like to draw. I originally thought I was going to be an animator when I was in high school but then I realized they get way overworked and way underpaid.”

While she enjoys making jewelry, Mealing doesn’t want to make a career out of her craft.

“I think this class was more just for me. I feel like I couldn’t work fast enough to make it a sustainable career... I mostly just make stuff for myself, things that I like to wear...I wouldn’t say it’s my passion but making stuff is my passion. It’s something I do for myself. I would consider it a hobby. I get very invested in creative hobbies.”

Mikeece McIntosh’s journey from the classroom to the court

Student-athletes not only have the hardships that come with being a college student but they also have to dedicate a lot of time to practices and games. Mikeece McIntosh, 19, of Grand Rapids, is currently studying marketing but is also a redshirt for the GRCC men’s basketball team.

Starting in the fifth grade, McIntosh played throughout middle and high school and wants to continue throughout his college career. He originally played football but quickly fell in love with basketball.

“I used to be tough at football and I don’t know what changed my passion but I found my way towards basketball,” McIntosh said. “I remember in fifth grade, everyone stopped playing football and just went to playing basketball. I just adapted to that environment and started trying new things and I ended up liking it.”

Being a student-athlete all his life, McIntosh is used to the pressure.

“I’ve been practicing this my entire life. I’ve been a student-athlete for a long time, so I’ve really adapted to the feeling of work and basketball.”



Cultures and Diversity at Grand Rapids Community College

By Naima Contreras

In an ever-growing society, no one has the exact same upbringing. College is a place where people from all different backgrounds and experiences can come together and be a part of something.

However, there's an obvious disconnect between students and people in general, often stemming from just that, our differences. Not feeling comfortable enough to interact with people outside of our regular friendship circle can be hard enough. Add in factors like a language barrier, cultural norm differences and misunderstandings can make that much more difficult.

Our perception is our reality, and our realities are shaped by our experiences.

The goal is to provide an expansion of knowledge for those who come across these pages. For students, faculty, friends, friends of friends, family, or anyone at all to be consumed by the words that almost smell like warm, home-cooked meals or the sounds of family gatherings.

On the quest to achieve insight into the lives students live off campus, students at GRCC were encouraged to speak about their home lives and a little bit about their upbringings. While finding a balance between home and school or work is essential, we are also a breathing piece of our ancestry. We are all walking forms of those who came before us, and many cultures take that precedent and incorporate it into their everyday lives.

Ashpreet Kaur is a 20-year-old GRCC student who in 2015 made the move from Delhi, India to Grand Rapids with her family. Within the process of moving comes, of course, leaving friends and loved ones back home. However, Kaur describes the importance of family orientation throughout her community, even though she and her family are in the states.

"Especially once you are away from your country, community is all you have," Kaur said. "You have no relatives in America at all, everything we have is community, so we treat them as family."



Courtesy Photo of Ashpreet Kaur

Kaur remembers the festivals she and her family would attend back home that illuminated city streets in bright colors and seas of people, including- friends, family and neighbors who come to show their community appreciation. Some of her personal favorites are Diwali, a festival that symbolizes the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance, and Holi, the festival of colors. Everyone leaves with colored powder on them in some form on Holi, where these are times and places for anyone, regardless of status, to come together as one whole instead of focusing on our divisions.

Kaur explained what it means for her to -embrace her culture

"To embrace your culture, I think, is to include it in your daily life - a lot of the time I do it by adding a little Indian touch," Kaur said. "I'll put on a Bindi or wear Indian earrings or wear an Indian dress to class, because then that gets questions like- 'oh, what's that thing on your head?' - and it's okay to ask that."

Asking questions opens a world of answers that may

surprise you, hearing stories and cultural norms that may differ greatly from your own can open up your awareness to the world outside of your own backyard.

A simple question can go a long way, although it's important to remain aware some questions may come across as rude or ignorant. But how does someone know if what they are saying may be easily taken the wrong way? Properly, just don't make fun of it. Instead, it's an opportunity for an expansion of knowledge. Again, it's okay to not understand. As an individual without first-hand knowledge of a culture, it's completely normal to have questions and some misunderstandings. How would you want someone to ask you about how you grew up?

Outside campus walls, we don't know what happens unless we ask. Kaur points out some traditional staples in her family home, for example, should you walk inside you may be greeted by the smell of Curry and other delicious home cooked meals on the stove, as well as golden artifacts and photos of their Guru's (religious teachers in Sikhism.)

The use of gold is a staple in traditional Indian culture, a glimpse of this is shown with the Golden Temple, located in Punjab, India, as one of the holiest sites in Sikhism. Serving thousands of individuals every day, the community preserves the importance of inclusivity by holding daily Lagar meals in the community hall. Lagar is an all inclusive meal where, by virtue in Sikhism, the Gurdwara (holy space for congregational worship) is open for all and welcome regardless of status, race, age, gender, wealth-gap, or any other social class division.

In terms of inclusivity, Student Body Diversity, on GRCC's website, was last updated 6/29/21. According to IPEDS Fall Enrollment Full Time and Financial Aid Components, the data on race/ethnicity is collected by the IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey.

The data presented in percentages state: Hispanic/Latino 15%, American Indian/ Alaska Native <1%, Asian 4%, Black/ African American 8%, Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander <1%, White

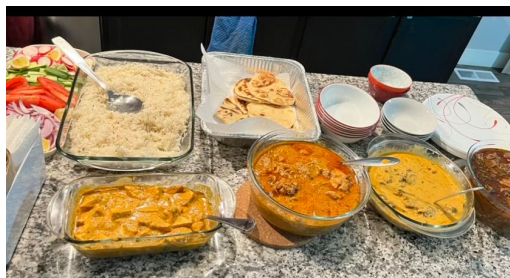
62%, or two or more 3%.

This is simply a glimpse into the varieties of students here that share the space. In order for each and every student here to feel comfortable and welcomed, representation is crucial.

Emily Sanchez is a Mexican-American and student worker here at GRCC, as well as the president of the college's Society for Advancement of Chicanos / Hispanics & Native Americans in Stem (SACNAS group), sheds light on her Mexican culture and how it has helped shape her into the person she is today. Sanchez is a first generation college student, where in her story she speaks about the divide between her culture and where she lives. While living in a home where her parents embraced their

roots and living in an area completely the opposite, she states,

"You never get that sense of belonging anywhere," she stated. "They don't want you here because you're not enough of that or vice-versa. It's such a struggle trying to figure out - 'okay where do I belong?' - But at the end of the day, you have to embrace it."



Courtesy Photo of Ashpreet Kaur

That sense of belonging can be essential for many individuals, in a friend group or in a classroom setting, however, it's okay to be nervous. It's okay to not know how to open a conversation if you know nothing about the person. It's okay to ask questions, it's okay to be curious, and it's okay to not know. It's a matter of being comfortable enough to open up that first interaction with a question, where most people are happy to answer when there's genuine curiosity.

In speaking to students about their cultures, it's revealed how much importance inclusivity and kindness for one another is within communities and cherishing one's roots. Sanchez expresses the importance in not forgetting where her family is from, for she would never have the opportunities she has today if it weren't for them. Whether she's in the car listening to traditional Mexican music like Bandas and Rancheras or at her family cook-outs eating Carne Asada, she expresses the beauty in growing up immersed in her family's norms.

There's a list of cultures that utilize clothing as a signifi-

cant part of their culture, both Kaur and Sanchez speak about the bright colors typically incorporated in traditional clothing. Kaur touches on traditional Indian clothing like beautiful Sari's that are long cuts of fabric a woman wraps around herself, and Salwar Kameez, usually a tunic-like top worn with loose pants and a shawl. In Mexican culture, embroidered Huipiles are worn amongst women, as well as Ponchos are universally worn as a woven fabric laid on one's shoulders with a hole in the middle for the head. Different colors and patterns are incorporated, creating these wonderful, intricate, and detailed pieces of artwork worn for separate occasions or events.

Students at GRCC were incredibly open and welcoming of questions when approached by The Collegiate when asked about their upbringings. With an opportunity to shed light on their favorite childhood memories, one can visualize worlds across blue oceans touched by the same sun that greets us every morning. Our "favorite" things may be subjective, but it's safe to say humans all across the board like to laugh and to dance, to learn and to grow, to fall and to stand back up.

Like when breathing in air that smells like home, it awakens memories of being young like the nostalgia behind our parents' favorite song. A sense of warmth follows finding home in our environment.

Evelyn Nguyen is a 20-year-old student at GRCC where at the age of 8, she and her family moved to the U.S. from Vietnam.

Getting acclimated to her new environment didn't take long, however at home, her family life remained immersed in their roots. Speaking mainly Vietnamese at home, Nguyen talks about not even knowing the word "yes" or "no" when she first moved here. The beginning of her education was consumed within learning the language,

"The words were different, the letters, everything was different," she mentioned, laughing.

In speaking to Nguyen about some of her favorite parts of her culture, the conversation naturally shifted to the topic of food. Throughout the regions of Vietnam (North, Central, South, and Rural) they have different foods as well as sharing versions of the same dishes. For example, her family enjoys variations of Pho, as well as Bánh Xèo, or "sizzling crepe" that

can be eaten in a variety of ways depending on what meats or vegetables are incorporated.

The yearly celebration for New Year's is highly regarded in Vietnamese culture, the theme being set with the color red. Red envelopes are stuffed with money and are gifted with good wishes and resolutions for the new year, symbolizing good luck and good fortune. These are generally gifted to children from adults, however, the practice often remains among adults as well. The celebration is accompanied by cooking lots of food for the family and extended family, so much family gathers for New Years that Nguyen states, "even if you don't know you have that cousin, you will on New Years."

The reunion is topped off at the end of the night, often, with family karaoke. Nguyen directs a mental movie of the adults of the gathering huddling together, pairing up into coupled teams that will continue to sing the songs of their prime years. At the end of a long day of cooking for guests and hospitality, this is the time for the adults to get their groove on. The night thereon is spent with laughter, in a well-received beginning to the new year.

GRCC students have already taken steps to promote cultural appreciation, with SACNAS as an example, as well as the Indian language club. Ten different countries are represented, with more to come as they decorate with artifacts according to each country's traditions.

But what can the average person do? Well, they can educate themselves. Not only through the internet or TikTok, it starts much smaller in our own daily life.

On a college campus, students are encouraged to create those friendships and connections that may last a lifetime. Students are in the perfect place to widen their horizons and exposure to knowledge from all different places, where simply placing oneself in such an immersive environment may be the hardest part.

It's a blessing and a curse walking into class that first day and sitting next to a random person, but that random person might be really, really cool. That moment might be the push needed for a two-way learning opportunity, where two different worlds collide that might turn into the meaningful connection every student, and every person deserve.

GRCC athletes connect despite busy schedules

Story and Photo by Noli Brown

Student-Athletes devote their time, dedication, and life to sports. Between school, practice, working out, games and a possible part-time job they still have time to make connections whether that be with their own teammates or people outside of sports.

Alena Amaya-Rodriguez, a midfielder for the Grand Rapids Community College women's soccer team, has been playing soccer since she was just 4 years old. Being a student-athlete for her means a combination of things.

"Putting in all my efforts towards my studies but as well as what I'm passionate about, so just combining the both passions I want to do which is my career and sport," Amaya-Rodriguez said.

When she is not playing soccer, Amaya-Rodriguez is focused on her career.

"Working at the hospital, I need clinical hours for my career, so I'm just focusing on my next steps for when soccer is over," Amaya-Rodriguez said.

Amaya-Rodriguez follows a routine that involves attending classes from morning to mid-afternoon. Afterward, she returns home to freshen up before heading to work, reserving the very end of her day for completing homework.

When it comes to making connections, Amaya-Rodriguez connects with both her teammates and other student-athletes

plus people who don't play any sports.

"Some players from our team, depending on work schedules, will go out to eat or meet up at someone's house to have a movie night," Amaya-Rodriguez said.

She said she sees other student-athletes more than people who don't play sports due to being in the Ford Fieldhouse and other training facilities.

"We all dedicate some sort of time to conditioning or weight lifting," Amaya-Rodriguez said.

Looking into the future Amaya-Rodriguez has goals for her career and sport.

"My plan is to play soccer for as long as I can and then pursue a career as a registered nurse," Amaya-Rodriguez said

Avery Jirous, who plays guard for GRCC's women's basketball team, has been playing basketball since she was in second grade. When she is not playing her sport she spends the majority of her time coaching both boy's and girl's basketball at different levels, officiating games and also weightlifting in the gym.

Being a student means a lot of things for Jirous.

"I get to make different connections, learn a lot. it's challenging and it just really means pushing myself to the next level to become a better me and to meet different people and create new experiences for myself."

Her daily schedule consists of waking up at 5:30 a.m. to go to work and then the gym or vice versa. Following this, she attends basketball practice, and afterward, she returns home to focus on homework.

When it comes to connecting with her teammates she's always putting in effort and doing more than just playing basketball with them. Jirous helps her teammates with homework and is there to talk about mental health as well.

"I connect with my teammates on and off the court. We work really well together when we are in practice and games," Jirous said. "All of us get along really well together, we always hang out with each other after games, at hotel rooms, wherever we are. We talk about everything."

When it comes to other student-athletes she crosses paths with them in the training room talking about things like sports, what we do outside of sports, and how to help each other with homework.

In the future Jirous plans on stopping her career in basketball after this year is done so she can focus on her job career.

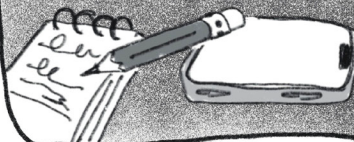




What the heck is THE COLLEGIATE

By Abby Haywood

The Collegiate is the student publication here at GRCC!



We are Journalism students, contributing artists, and photographers who cover stories that affect our campus community.



We cover:

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