



Letter from the Editor

Dear readers,

To say we live in a time surrounded by uncertainty is an understatement.

The reality is that most of us college students have grown up never knowing what the next step is. A rising cost of living, a global pandemic and political tension to an unknown degree. In the midst of so much change, it can be difficult for young adults across the country to find solace in community and stay rooted with consistency.

Grand Rapids Community College has not been immune to the whirlwind of change that seems to be encapsulating our world this year. And when compiling this magazine, The Collegiate chose to focus on change, community and consistency.

It's a known sentiment that the only constant in life is change, and that is proven with each passing day in college. Many people find themselves adopting a new level of academic rigor while also coming into adulthood and trying to find a solid support system.

Community is a must-have for anyone, regardless of age. However, it is increasingly difficult for Generation Z to make genuine connections. The lack of third spaces and increasing dependency on technology, along with numerous other factors, have led to a disconnect between human beings. This disconnect can lead to a loss of humanity, and nothing good comes when that perspective is lost.

The hope is that at the end of the day, we can look at each other and recognize our humanity. The hope is to build healthier habits and a plentiful future, where all feel as if they have a seat at the table. The hope is to engage in healthy disagreement and learn from it.

But without consistency, all is lost.

All we can do is hope.

Alexa Cheaney



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How did we get here?

By Marc Stoufer III

A town hall in Washington on March 10, 2025 was interrupted by a group of angry citizens protesting President Donald Trump's recent executive orders. At a Mississippi protest on Feb. 17 regarding the administration, a crowd chanted "Stop the coup! Stop the coup!" 49% of Americans say the country is going in the wrong direction, according to a Reuters survey.

Tensions between the government and its people are nothing new, having existed since the beginning of American democracy. The national temperature, however, seems to be changing.

Many believe a major turning point was when Trump was first elected president in 2016. Trump's aggressive persona, white-nationalist-endorsed policies and lack of political experience made him an incredibly divisive leader for many outside the Republican party and even some within.

Trump's presidency was marked with a number of initiatives that garnered praise from his supporters and shock from those who opposed him – but perhaps none more so than his handling of the 2020 pandemic.

The impacts of COVID-19 quickly infected nearly every facet of existence.

"When we heard things were shutting down, I thought it wasn't real," Grand Rapids Community College nursing major Olivia Pontarelli told The Collegiate.

Psychiatry major Sumayah Hanson said she saw a culture shift towards fear – fear of illness, fear of others, fear in general – as the disease gripped the world.

"There's a lot of fear mongering, things being pushed that aren't realistic. And people believe anything with fear," she said.

On a larger scale, the pandemic was uniquely devastating. Over one million people have died as a direct result of COVID-19 in the U.S. alone, according to the CDC.

The Trump administration's response to this was divisive. Trump publicly compared the virus to the standard flu while privately saying it was "deadly stuff" to journalist Bob Woodward, though he later admitted he downplayed its seriousness.

The CDC's recommendations to wear a face covering and stay at home to mitigate the spread of coronavirus each became the subject of intense political debate and protest, likely fueled by Trump's description of masks as a voluntary practice he wouldn't be participating in and his publicly stated desire to reopen the nation's economy as quickly as possible.

While the world has mostly gotten “back to normal” in the five years since the outbreak, with 44% of polled Americans telling the Pew Research Center they had “mostly recovered” from the pandemic, the same study found that 72% of Americans believe that it drove the country apart.

Eight months after COVID-19’s outbreak, the U.S. held its presidential election. Given the strife that occurred during the lockdown, roughly 75% of Americans saw this election as critical to the future of democracy. Analysts at the time predicted a close race.

On Nov. 7, the election was called for Joe Biden.

Hours later, Trump tweeted, in all caps, “I WON THE ELECTION... BAD THINGS HAPPENED WHICH OUR OBSERVERS WERE NOT ALLOWED TO SEE.”

In an unprecedented situation, over a third of the nation believed the election had been rigged, and that Biden’s win was illegitimate. This political fracture culminated on Jan. 6, 2021. As Congress was certifying Biden’s win, Trump delivered remarks to a crowd elsewhere in Washington, D.C.

“We will never concede... you don’t concede when there’s theft involved,” he said. “We’re going to walk down to the Capitol, and we’re going to cheer on our brave senators and congressmen... Because you’ll never take back our country with weakness... We have come to demand that Congress do the right thing and only count the elec-

tors who have been lawfully slated.”

About one hour later, a large group of pro-Trump protesters broke through barriers around the Capitol building, overtook Capitol Police and gained access to the building by shattering windows and opening doors from the inside for further protesters, according to timelines from NPR and The Washington Post.

The protesters were eventually removed from the Capitol and Biden’s win was certified on Jan. 7 at 3:44 a.m.

“In an unprecedented situation, over a third of the nation believed the election had been rigged, and that Biden’s win was illegitimate.”

The Biden administration focused its efforts on economic recovery, climate initiatives, and the transition out of the pandemic.

A major part of that transition included the phased reopening of

schools. In July of 2020, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed Executive Order 2020-142, which instituted options for a return to school and standards for maintaining safety in doing so.

“We aren’t out of the woods yet. But if we get vaccinated, and if we keep using science-based prevention strategies, we can be,” Miguel Cardon, Education Secretary at the time, said of the national push. “We cannot let mask fatigue, pride or politics get in the way of doing what is right for our students.”

Despite Cardon’s enthusiasm, some took issue with the mask mandates in reopened schools and

many states introduced legislation to ban them, citing personal freedoms and parental rights.

Democrats, for their part, praised Biden's efforts for schools and in general, with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi saying he'd done "a spectacular job." His public approval rating, however, had dropped from 67% in 2021 to 37% in 2024.

In response, Biden announced in July 2024 – less than five months before the election – that he was taking himself out of the running for reelection and endorsing Vice President Kamala Harris as his replacement. She campaigned against Trump, who was aiming for a second term.

At 12:15 a.m. on Nov. 9, the Associated Press called the election for Trump, who had won 49.9% of the popular vote.

On his first day in office, Trump signed 26 executive orders – more than any president in history – that he calls "common sense" initiatives.

These have ended affirmative action, declared that the U.S. recognizes only two genders, ended federal remote work, reversed "every one of Joe Biden's... anti-American energy regulations," withdrawn the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement, directed the Pentagon to deploy troops to the southern border, renamed the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America, opened offshore drilling in Alaska and pardoned everyone involved in the Jan. 6 breach of the Capitol.

He also changed which outlets would be allowed in the White House Press Room, created a national stockpile of Bitcoin and introduced DOGE under Elon Musk's leadership.

This department has removed government web pages that refer to gender identity or the LGBTQ+ community, ended nearly 29 federal DEI programs – and threatened to pull funding from schools that didn't end their DEI programs, reduced the federal workforce by offering employees a financial buyout to leave, taken control of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, cut \$900 million from the Department of Education's budget, fired multiple officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, cut more than \$4 billion from the National Institutes of Health's research budget and fired multiple employees and made a move to shutter the U.S. Agency for International Development and any humanitarian work they were doing.

Additionally, the department has been in contact with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Department of Defense, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Federal Aviation Administration and the Internal Revenue Service.

Political scientist Jeffrey A. Winters has called this era of politics "'in-your-face oligarchy."

After years of working to get his students to accept that America has had historical oligarchs, he now finds he has "a very hard time getting students to accept the idea that there's democracy."

Others, however, believe that Trump's initiatives are democracy working exactly as it should.

"The way that they've been able to move and upset (the norms)... I think portends a great four years," said Paul Dans, lawyer and former direc-

tor of Project 2025, the controversial presidential roadmap that Trump repeatedly denied involvement in.

The national- and global, as the Trump administration publicly comments on the war in Ukraine and the relationship between the U.S. and Israel-temperature seems to be rising.

“For many people, politics is a form of chronic stress that is getting harder and harder to deal with,” University of Toronto psychology professor Brett Ford said.

Though, like political tension, this form of anxiety is not entirely new.

In the 1950s, psychiatrist Orville Walters described that era as the “age of anxiety.”

Similar sentiments have been echoed in the 1920s, the 1930s and the 1940s.

In 1963, at the height of tensions between West Germany and West Berlin, President John F. Kennedy gave a commencement speech at American University. In it, he expressed his belief that America had “no more urgent task” than the “pursuit of peace.”

“Too many of us think (peace) is impossible. Too many think it unreal. But that is a dangerous, defeatist belief... Our problems are man-made--therefore, they can be solved by man,” Kennedy said. “Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal.”

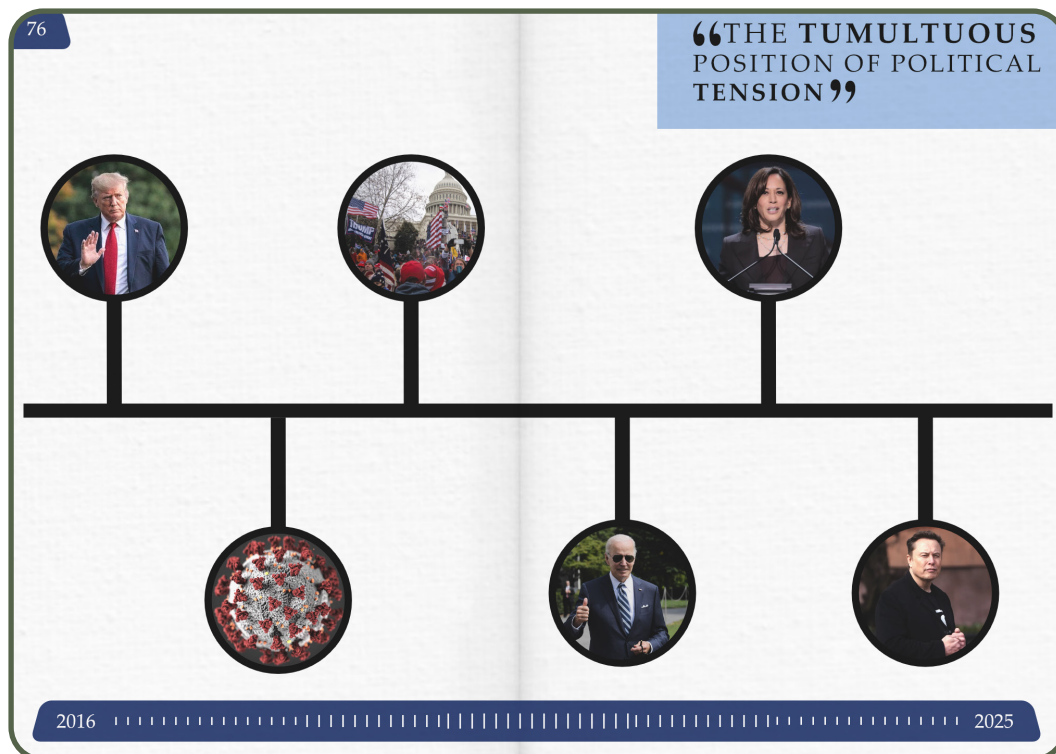


Photo illustration by Marc Stoufer III

I am an American citizen

By Rosalia Jimenez

I am an American citizen.

I was born on American soil to an American mother and a Mexican father. I have lived in the United States for all 19 years of my life.

I am an American citizen.

For my entire life, I never thought of the possibility that this glaring fact could be challenged. I always thought “I was born here, that’s that. I’m a citizen.” I never thought that one man could even think of changing that fact.

The U.S. Constitution states, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.” That makes me, and millions of others, a citizen, right? How can one man change that? Can one man change these rights? These rights were written over 200 years ago. Can he really change them? If he can, what does that mean for my family?

When President Donald Trump was inaugurated for a second time, my entire world shifted. Within the first eight days of his term, he signed executive order after executive order, each one potentially affecting the country. I never really paid attention to the presidency and politics. I always kept my head down and went with what was happening. Until now, at least. Now, I constantly check the news for new information about the things Trump is doing. Not because

I’m interested. I check because I need to know and...

I’m afraid.

I’m afraid of what will happen if this one man is able to get rid of the 14th Amendment. I’m afraid for the people around me who are affected by this. Since the document was signed, since ICE was spotted in Chicago and Detroit, and everything felt real, a series of “what-ifs” have been running through my head on the daily.

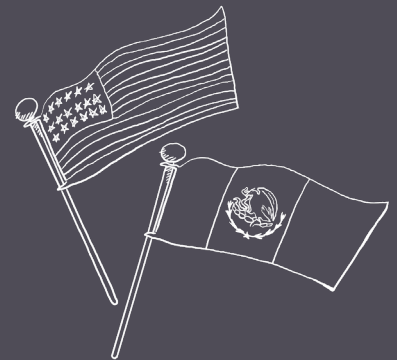
What if my father is stripped of his citizenship simply because he was not born here?

What if President Trump manages to nullify birth-right citizenship and my brothers and I are no longer citizens?

What if that happens and I get deported? Can that happen?

If my birthright citizenship, the citizenship I got from my mother being a citizen, got taken from me, what would happen then?

So many people shout from the rooftops to “send them back.” So many people want the country to be rid of everyone not considered



“American.” What does it mean to be an American? To be an American citizen? If the President is able to nullify the 14th Amendment, there is a chance that I will no longer be considered an American citizen. However, I have lived my entire life here. I went to school here, graduated high school here and started college here. I work here. Doesn’t that make me an American citizen?

So many people say we need to rid the country of immigrants and their families, “send them back” they say. If my birthright citizenship was taken, Where would I be sent “back” to? I was born in this country. I have never even been to Mexico. So would I be sent “back” or sent “away?”

People keep telling me “he won’t be able to nullify the amendment,” “everything will be okay”, “nothing will happen to you.” That may be true. Perhaps this one man will not be able to stop birthright citizenship. Perhaps he won’t be able to take away

my citizenship. Legally, I will probably be fine. Emotionally, I haven’t been fine since I heard of his plan.

This entire ordeal is not good. It is not good for anyone, legally or emotionally. Even if I am legally fine, I will not be able to spend another night without thinking about this. I will not be able to keep living my life thinking “They can’t take that away from me.” He tried. He still is trying. I won’t be able to live my life without knowing that it didn’t matter to Trump that I was born here or have an American mother. That I have never left the country, never seen the place my father is from. That I grew up in this country. To him, it didn’t matter that I worked in this country and graduated in this country. Now and forever, it won’t be “I am an American citizen.”

It will be “Am I an American citizen to those it actually matters to?”

Photo by Alexa Cheaney



Stop telling me you relate to me because your grandma died three years ago – what not to say to someone

By Vanessa Hewitt

You may be wondering if I'm being serious after you read that headline– and let me just say I am. I am dead serious.

My sister died less than a year ago so the very deep emotional wound is still fresh. And just as I'm reminded every time I attend a grief workshop or sit next to an “empath” for too long, my pain will never really go away.

I think it's about time someone tells the public the “do's and don'ts” of talking to grieving people. Maybe doing this will prevent you from chiming in when you really just shouldn't.

Grief like mine brings awkward situations and conversations, and I've come to the conclusion this might never stop happening. Meeting a new person always will eventually lead to me saying, “Oh, yeah no, she's dead.”



Illustration by Dana Kistler

I remember one of my first new-friend interactions following my sister's death, and it went a little something like this:



“Oh, I like your tattoo, what does it mean?”

“Um. It's matching with my sister.”

“Oh that's cute! So what made you decide on a frog?”

“I don't know”

“Why is the frog on the phone?”

“It's supposed to be like she's on the other line, except she can't really answer now. (haha)”

“What?”

“Oh, she's dead.”

I agree that was awkward. I'm no longer in contact with the person and to think– a beautiful friendship could have emerged had I not ruined it by talking about my dead sibling. That brings me to my first point.

1. DO NOT bring up your dead family members to grieving people (unless it's actually relatable).

When someone is talking about their dead loved one, let them talk about their dead loved one.

You don't have to bring up your dead grandparent or compare your dog's accidental hit-by-a-car death to my sister's hit-by-a-car death. Was your pet's death painful? Yes. Was your golden retriever going to be the maid of honor at your wedding? If you said yes, I take back everything I said. But I'm guessing you're sensing the difference between the two, right?

It is not helpful when someone begins to tell stories about their dead grandmother either. I stand by the fact that grandparent deaths are entirely different than losing someone in your immediate family. Your grandma lived a full life by 92, my sister was 28... do you see the difference yet?

That being said, if you have lost someone close to you like a parent or sibling, by all means, share your heartbreaking story. I'd love to hear it. Why? I know how uncomfortable it is to share with people who don't fully understand.

2. Stop shutting down jokes about death, and seriously DO NOT add your own.

Humor is one of the main ways I cope with this excruciating pain (as you may have guessed). That being said, my next point is: let your friend joke about death. Even if it makes you a little uncomfortable. Our whole lives are filled with

discomfort, you can deal with it for a minute or two.

Occasionally dropping a little joke about death or grief helps in a weird way. Does that mean you should chime in? Absolutely not.

Do not comment when you hear I'm wearing my sister's favorite pair of jeans by saying: "at least she can't ask for them back" because I will not laugh.

Just. Don't. Do. That.

If I say something about my sister not being able to steal back her (and my) favorite pair of jeans, laugh. Laugh or we are no longer friends.



3. DO NOT spontaneously share your memories or feelings about a person's deceased loved one.

Sometimes I love hearing those in my life talk about my sister. Hearing their memories sometimes helps, but sometimes it really doesn't. That is why you should never bring up a person's dead loved one unprompted.

There is nothing worse than having an awful day where I just can't stop replaying finding out about my sister's death in my head, to then be bombarded with someone's random trip down memory lane. Shut up.

4. DO NOT complain about minuscule things, when that person asks you to distract them.

That does sound a little confusing, let me break it down for you.

If I'm having an awful day and I ask you to distract me by just talking about anything that is not death or grief or my sister, maybe don't start with complaints about how detrimental the stain on your favorite sweatshirt is or how the flight you want to book to Bora Bora is full.

If there is one thing about people dealing with grief, it's that we have set aside minuscule things in our lives (or at least I have, I guess I can't speak for everyone). The main struggle in my life is, and might always be, my sister's death. So obsessing over small inconveniences is not even worth my energy. Dealing with your small inconveniences is really not worthy of my energy. Do you get it?

5. DO appreciate that person dealing with grief in your life.

Now to the only 'do' on the list.

Can you imagine the brainpower it takes to go about life after such a traumatic experience? Perhaps now after reading this, you have seen a glimpse of the inner workings of a brain rewiring

itself (it actually does that following a traumatic event like death).

This new rewired brain is hard to deal with, it's like living life on one of the hardest levels imaginable. So, that person you know who is going through something similar to me deserves tremendous appreciation.

Buy them a house. I'm just kidding. If you're Elon Musk, then it's crucial and actually required for you to buy this person a new house. And while you're at it, I also would appreciate a new house.

Seriously, random check-ins do more good than you think. Stopping by and giving this person a little treat or sharing a laugh can make all the difference. They deserve to feel appreciated, even if it's just simply saying thank you for existing.

This may have been a confusing column. Dare I say, complex. Some of the funniest people out there are those with serious emotional baggage. So, those dealing with grief might be the best people to talk to. To all of those fortunate to still have all your loved ones, I hope this inspired you to tell that person that lost someone they're doing great, even if you don't fully understand why.



Grand Rapids Trans Foundation continues to provide community resources despite trying times

Story and photos by Alexa Cheaney

The Grand Rapids Trans Foundation sits near the heart of Easttown, neighboring local restaurants and coffee shops alongside art galleries and crystal stores. The small office, residing in the backside of the Grand Rapids Pride Center, has become a pillar of support for residents of the city who identify as LGBTQ+.

Founded in December 2015, the GRTF is a non-profit that offers a multitude of resources for transgender and non-binary individuals. The oldest of these resources is the Trans Academic Scholarship.

“We have given out \$100,000 over the last 10 years to trans and non-binary students who are going to school in the area, including some (Grand Rapids Community College) students,”

Ximón Kittok, Executive Director of the GRTF, said.

The Trans Academic Scholarship is awarded to non-cis-gendered applicants in financial need. Applicants write a 500-word essay focused on their academic aspirations as well as some barriers they have faced as a trans student. In the most recent award cycle, three GRCC students received a total of \$6,000.

Other resources include providing those in need with name change support and assistance updating legal documentation, along with self-defense education. The GRTF also provides free gender-affirming clothing from the “gender junk closet.”

Transgender and non-binary people can take an unlimited amount of in-office items from the

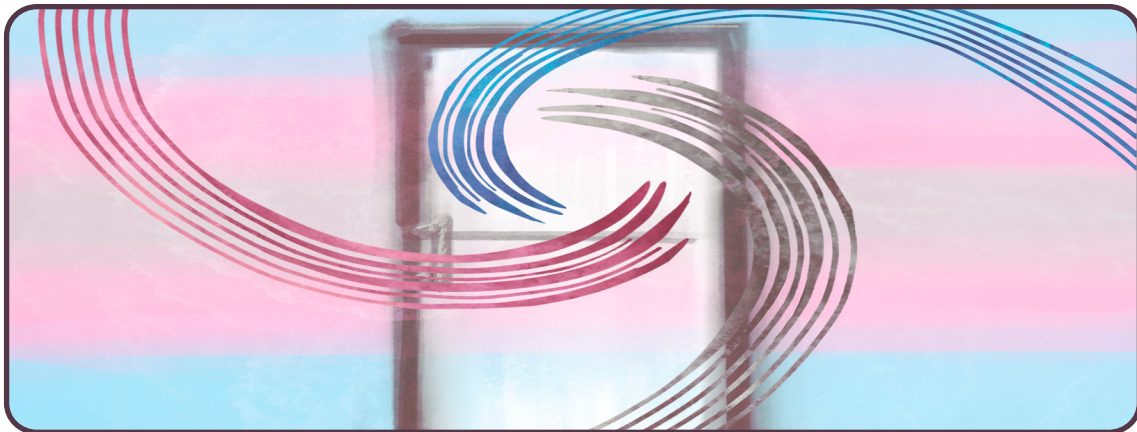


Illustration by Dana Kistler

closet, such as gently-used binders, bras, shape-wear and wigs. The GRTF also offers to pay for two brand-new items ordered online. People are able to order gender-affirming items such as new binders, packers and swimwear.

“A big part of the way that we operate is we know that statistically, because of discrimination... the trans community is lower income, struggles with housing (and) employment, things like that,” Kittok said. “So all of our services and all of our items are free.”

Kittok shared that the GRTF also provides a free transportation program, allowing for unlimited bus rides through a monthly renewal service, as well as Uber rides to select appointments. A resource guide has been compiled for those looking for gender-affirming doctors, barbers, tattoo artists and more.

Providing the community with resources has always been at the heart of the Trans Foundations’ mission, as Kittok said the center was originally founded out of necessity.



“The foundation of this organization originally came about because myself and some of my friends saw that there (were) gaps in care that were not being addressed (in) other places and that the trans community deserved more support, especially in the broader LGBTQ spaces,” they said. “A lot of those were still very heavily focused on LGB folks and not so much on trans folks.”

Since the opening of the Trans Foundation, the organization has received “pretty large community support” according to Kittok, who will be celebrating their tenth year as the executive director this December. They shared that some local businesses have been strong allies, initially putting up trans pride flags during Trans Week of Visibility and then leaving them up year-round.

The majority of Americans are in support of transgender people having the same rights as their cis-gendered counterparts. However, on his first day in office, newly re-elected President Donald Trump signed an executive order stating that only two genders would be legally recognized in the United States, giving way to an onslaught of anti-trans legislation.

“(The) trans community is a very small community percentage-wise and has been scapegoated by the current administration for a lot of things,” Kittok said. “Lots of misinformation and lies (are) out there about the community.”

Since the election, there has been a notable change in the atmosphere at the Trans Foundation. According to Kittok, a lot of clients have



been coming in with a heightened sense of anxiety and fear. In times of uncertainty, the Trans Foundation steps in and helps to mitigate worry by shining light on exactly what is known as opposed to what is not.

A frequent concern of the community due to legislative attacks is that people who are transitioning will no longer be able to update their names or other legal documents. In the state of Michigan, however, Kittok explained that there are some protections.

“Those processes to update name and gender marker(s), including “X” gender marker in Michigan, have not changed, and we don’t foresee them changing in at least the next couple of years,” Kittok said.

GRTF will continue to provide the trans and non-binary community with name-change resources, along with a safe space for the community. The foundation hosts “T time” socials which helps create community for those identifying under the trans umbrella together.

Community, as Kittok puts it, has always been a strength for the LGBTQ+ community at large.

“Historically things have not been great for the queer and trans community and we really found our strength, our joy, our stability, resources, mutual aid, in community,” they said.

An important part of the ongoing fight for trans rights comes from those who do not identify as trans. Kittok says being a good ally comes from everyday actions, such as using someone’s preferred name and pronouns as well as being supportive and offering a listening ear. They also encourage allies to be vocal with their support of the community.

Along with leaning into community, Kittok encourages anyone who may feel fearful to lean into their identity.

“There are people out there that love you just the way you are. And I would encourage people to not dim (their) shine, even though it might be tempting to hide,” Kittok said. “Obviously, gauge your own circumstances how you will and stay safe. But our community has been loud and joyful and proud for a long time. And I think that is what should be motivating us more than fear right now.”

How people who put on a smile can be the most sad

By Justin Stulpe

For as long as I can remember, I've been the type of person who goes with the flow and puts on a smile, giving off the appearance that everything is fine. People, including my friends and family, have always assumed I'm happy and doing well—just the same old Justin. I've always looked for the positive in any situation and genuinely aimed to stay upbeat and smiling through everything.



But this smile doesn't always reflect what's happening inside. For much of my life, I've been able to maintain that cheerful exterior, even when things weren't as great as they seemed.

It's easy for others to believe I'm doing just fine because I've made it look effortless.

I haven't always been this person. Recently, I've

started to feel less and less like the upbeat, go-with-the-flow individual I was always seen as. It has become increasingly difficult to put on a smile when I'm anything but happy. The pressure to remain the "rock-solid" person I've always shown others is wearing thin, and I'm finding it harder to maintain the image that everything is still okay, just as I've been "supposed to" be.

Many people have experienced what I'm going through at some point in their lives: masking their true feelings behind a smile that suggests everything is fine, while concealing emotional pain and vulnerability inside. For various reasons, people choose not to reveal their struggles to the world.

The outward appearance—whether through facial expressions or other subtle actions—does not always reflect what's truly happening inside. I aim to show that even those who seem the most stable and happy may be hiding something deeper.

With each passing day, it has become more normalized to openly discuss mental health struggles, and the stigma surrounding these conversations has lessened significantly. This shift is an incredible step forward, allowing people to admit when they are not okay.

With that in mind, I want to share some of the struggles I've faced to illustrate how putting on a smile became a coping mechanism—one that, over time, left me feeling less happy and fulfilled. I've struggled with my mental health, but I've also learned how to address it, rather than allowing it to control me, and I want to show the highs and—



Photo by Vanessa Hewitt

lows of doing this.

As mentioned previously, for most of my life, I've been the type of person who goes with the flow, always appearing put together to those around me, whether it be family, friends, classmates, or coworkers. This gave the impression that I was doing well at all times. Because of this, no one ever asked if I was okay mentally. After all, I was known as the happy, go-lucky guy who was always smiling and having a good time.

What I didn't realize at the time was that this way of lying to myself and those around me was the leading cause of my growing unhappiness. By faking a smile during moments I wasn't truly happy, I convinced myself that I wasn't sad or depressed, because I was showing the world I was "having a good time." At the same time, it reinforced the idea that no one

needed to ask how I was really doing, since they always saw a smile, making it easier for me to hide my true feelings.

When I was pretending everything was okay and sticking to the "same old Justin" persona, I was terrified of showing vulnerability to my friends, family, or anyone in my life. I didn't want to burden them with my struggles, especially after never

giving any indication I was sad. I feared they might feel sorry for me or see my mental health challenges as a reflection of their failure to make me happy.

I was especially afraid to tell my friends and family, who had always been kind, loving and supportive, that I was borderline depressed and struggling to find joy in life. I worried that they might push me away, thinking that even their love and care weren't enough to help me feel happy and that I mattered. In my mind, I feared they would start to care less about me. But in reality, I

needed them more than ever.

For nearly two years, from ages 19 to 21, I maintained the cycle of faking happiness in front of my loved ones while never addressing the internal pain I was silently enduring. I went through the motions of life, feeling increasingly disconnected from anything that brought me joy or motivation. After several weeks of feeling severely depressed and empty, I reached a breaking point and decided to confront my situation through professional counseling.

Opening up about the internal struggles that had been eating away at my happiness and sense of purpose was one of the hardest decisions I've made as an adult. I was terrified of how others would perceive me—especially those who had always known me as the easy-going, put-together person that I had always shown them, no matter the situation. I feared they might be shocked to learn that beneath the smile, I was struggling just to get through each day.

I realized that continuing to hide my struggles behind a smile was not only unhealthy but unsustainable if I wanted to be happy again. I needed to find a way to express myself and show people when I was struggling so they could offer support. So, I decided to begin a journey of learning how to be honest about when I wasn't okay.

The main way I've worked on this is through counseling—something I never thought I would consider just a few years ago. Taking that first step was a significant challenge for me. Admitting I needed help and learning how to cope with my mental health struggles didn't come easily. But I knew it was necessary if I was ever going to confront the negative emotions that had been clouding my mind for so long.

After attending counseling for an extended peri-

od, I can honestly say it's made a huge difference in my life. It's helped me become more comfortable with myself and more open about the hardships I've faced. It's also made it easier to share my pain with those close to me—something I never thought I could do before. Going to counseling was one of the best decisions I've made on my path to better understanding and expressing my true feelings as well as finding much more everyday happiness again after the inner guiltiness of detailing my deepest emotions did not affect me anymore. Without attending counseling, I truly don't know where I would be today.

After sharing a bit of my story and my battle with mental health, I hope everyone understands that it's okay to not be okay. Seeking help to deal with and address your emotions is not something to be ashamed of, but something that should be encouraged. I hope that this pushes those who are feeling similarly to how I did to seek out help, it can aid you to feel better far sooner than I did.

My goal is for anyone struggling internally to address it sooner rather than letting it build up, as I did, even with how difficult it can be to do so. I know how it feels to put on a fake smile to avoid confronting your feelings, thinking you can deflect them indefinitely. But the earlier you face those emotions, the easier it will be to heal.

Always remember that there are people who love and care about you, and they want to see you happy. Allow them to help you, just as my loved ones helped me find happiness again.

GET HELP: If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency or need immediate help outside of office hours, please call 911, campus safety at (616) 234-4911, or go to the nearest emergency room. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available by phone, text, or chat 24 hours a day.

The transition from high school to college

By Lamar Reeves

After graduating from high school, many students jumpstart to a new direction of who they want to be. Those who go to college can have a hard time stepping into higher education.

Grand Rapids Community College students explained how college is different. Sara Brock, 20, of Owosso, explained her first year of college was difficult because of the different pace. “It was definitely fast paced because both of my parents are counselors at a high school and my parents will help me pay for college if I go right after high school,” Brock said. Brock didn’t know how to deal with heavy loads of homework from each class in the first half of her first semester.

As a student at GRCC, many have experienced difficulty leaving the high school mindset in the past. The first semester taught a lot of college students to be prepared for upcoming deadlines, such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Athiei Kuot, 19, of Forest Hills, said college preparation and grant applications were very hard to understand. “It was actually really hard,

I think, ignoring everybody else’s warnings to start things early, but if there’s one thing I can emphasize much earlier than I had is FAFSA and scholarships,” Kuot said. “If I knew what position I had in the fall semester dealing with FAFSA and not knowing my schedule and support team. I would’ve done that way before during high school.” Kuot added, “Once you do get a firm grip of your support team, resources and your classes of what you need at this school experience.”

Once going to college, students have to learn how to take accountability, be responsible, and utilize time management to balance their schedules. Kuot said that students need to be proactive in college to manage their time wisely.

It’s difficult for some college students not to see their high school friends anymore. Aven Flippin, a 21, of Kentwood, explained how he realized that life starts after high school, when he saw the majority of his friends get their high school diplomas and go to different colleges or trade schools.

“I realize I still have the same type of thinking that I had in high school, which impacted me greatly to the point that I failed classes and knowing that I have to retake them,” Flippin said.

He said he realized he has to control his actions with academic priorities, commitment and choosing friends wisely who love to see improvement.

One thing that college teaches students is to utilize provided resources. Some students improved after one semester by going to the tutoring labs and scheduling an appointment with their success coach, counselors and academic advisors, who gave students valuable lessons.



Photo by Vanessa Hewitt

Player Profile: Marshaun Flakes and his journey to becoming a school record holder

By Jack Walker

Marshaun Flakes is a 20-year-old freshman at Grand Rapids Community College and the leading scorer for the postseason-bound men's basketball team. Flakes has had himself a phenomenal first season at GRCC, including a record-setting night in January, where Flakes scored an unbelievable 53 points, a performance that will forever be etched in GRCC men's basketball history. Flakes, who has been a key focal point for the Raiders all season, is a big part of the reason why the team was able to reach the postseason once again.

Flakes' basketball journey began at age 10 at a Boys & Girls Club in Grand Rapids, where he was born and raised. Many people were introduced to basketball or began playing the sport through a relative or other influence, Flakes however got himself into basketball by playing at a local park to pass the time. The game came easy to Flakes, who was able to score his first 50-point game in middle school. With the success Flakes was having at a young age, he continued his basketball journey into high school at East Kentwood.

"Going to East Kentwood the atmosphere was crazy," Flakes said. "It was fun."

At East Kentwood, Flakes had a lot of success including his all-time favorite basketball memory, which was getting into the district championship his freshman year on varsity. East Kentwood is

a big school with an enrollment that tends to average around 2,000 students, so for Flakes to be able to get into the district championship as a freshman is a big deal. The success at East Kentwood continued for Flakes, who led them to yet another district championship, this time in his senior season, where he averaged over 18 points per game.

With a successful high school tenure, it was time for Flakes to continue his career past high school and take it up another notch. College coaches began to take notice of Flakes and he began to receive offers, one being from GRCC head coach Joe Fox.

"I first met [Fox] at a Rockford game when we beat Rockford High School in 2023," Flakes said. But GRCC was not the only school on his radar, "I had an offer from Saginaw Valley and a couple of other schools."

Despite the offers from GRCC and Saginaw Valley, Flakes opted to sign with Jackson College after his senior season. However, after one year at the school, Flakes decided he would be transferring before using any eligibility, which is where GRCC and Fox came in.

"Marshaun played at a really large school, East Kentwood, and played for a really good coach in Mike Thomas, he was an all-state player," Fox said. "We were aware early on, and tried to get in on him early, but he initially signed with Jackson

College. He approached us first after transferring, and there was definitely some mutual interest.”

What made Flakes have a change of heart?

“I really came here to hoop in my hometown,” Flakes said.

Flakes made his presence known early in the season, scoring 18 points in just 17 minutes in the Raiders’ season opener against College of Lake County. Flakes followed up his 18-point performance with a 24-point performance the very next afternoon against College of DuPage while seeing his minutes increase from 17 to 33.

Flakes continued to put up solid performances, but the scoring numbers began to fall early in December, when he was only averaging a little over six points per game and 12 minutes per game between Dec. 1–6.

Then, on Dec. 7 against North Central Michigan College in Petoskey, just 21 mere hours after their tipoff against Washtenaw Community College in Grand Rapids, Flakes exploded for 32 points on 13–22 from the field. Since that point in the season, Flakes has only finished below 10 points twice in 19 games, both of which were nine-point performances. Instead of choosing to prop himself up on his recent scoring outbursts, Flakes instead credits his teammates as what’s helped him out.

“My teammates just keep finding me and trusting me to shoot, that’s really it,” Flakes said.

Comfort can sometimes be the name of the game sometimes in order to start scoring more, but



Photo courtesy of GRCC PR

Flakes insists it's not a comfort thing, "I'm always comfortable, but it can be hard to score."

Flakes' favorite NBA player to watch is Paul George, more specifically his stint with the Indiana Pacers. But the player Flakes tries to model his game after is former four-time NBA All-Star and three-time All-NBA player Penny Hardaway. Hardaway debuted for the Orlando Magic in 1993, 11 years before Flakes was born, however, the influence remains strong. What stands out to Flakes the most about Hardaway is, "how easy the game looked for him."

Flakes channeled his inner Hardaway on Jan. 15 because the game certainly looked easy for him then. On that cold Wednesday night in mid-January, Flakes set a school record, erupting for 53 points on 17-28 from the field, 9-13 from 3-point range and 10-12 from the free-throw line against Lake Michigan College. Flakes could feel something brewing that night, even before it looked like 50 points was a realistic goal.

"I told my teammates that night that I was gonna get it," Flakes said in reference to his 53-point performance.



Watching from the sidelines was his head coach, Fox, in awe of the performance he had witnessed.

"I've been at the JUCO level for 12 years and D-III for a couple of years, I had someone

score 55 and that was incredible, but it was in a game that was not competitive. What was most impressive was all of those 53 mattered. We were in a back-and-forth and he stayed engaged the entire time," Fox said.

Directly after the 53-point game, Flakes said in a post-game interview with The Collegiate: "My teammates were just telling me to keep going." Choosing to give credit to his teammates instead of soaking up the spotlight speaks to the type of teammate Flakes is.

"He's been an outspoken leader, when he's not in the game he's extremely engaged and up calling out defensive assignments. To stay engaged for 40 minutes is important," Fox said about his star freshman.

Flakes' leadership has played a pivotal role in the Raiders' success this season. Last year, GRCC finished the season with a 14-15 record, missing the postseason as well as losing their top-six leading scorers. Incoming players were expected to step up this season and Flakes was among them.

"We were expecting a lot from Marshaun," said Fox. "He was a great player in high school, he was an All-State player, but he's exceeded our expectations for sure. He's just been consistently very good for us."

Since Jan. 15, Flakes has averaged 22.8 points per game for the Raiders, and has seen his season points per game skyrocket from 14.3 to 18.1. But it's not just the offensive side where Flakes excels, he's been a premium defender for the

Raiders this season too, averaging 1.1 blocks per game and 2.6 steals per game this season. Flakes has 11 games where he recorded a minimum of two blocks and three separate games where he recorded at least seven steals. Flakes played in all 29 games this season for the Raiders and managed to play the most minutes on the team, eclipsing 800 total minutes on the season.

One key part of an athlete's life is a routine, something they do every game day, and Flakes has a routine, though he likes to keep it simple. He gets some rest and makes sure to eat before games. Flakes is a "big smoothie guy."

Off the court, Flakes' hobbies don't get too complicated either, as he said his schedule is the following: "hoop, go to school and work." He does happen to be a fan of rapper Lil Baby, who he listens to before games. Flakes also likes to play video games including Warzone and NCAA College Football 25.

Something coaches and teammates may not know about Flakes is that there is a world where he never had himself a 53-point game and a school record at GRCC, and the reason for that is there was another sport involved before he chose basketball.

"I played soccer in elementary school. I just played it because I went to that type of environment, all my friends played it," he said. Flakes had a good laugh reminiscing about his soccer days, but is certainly happy with his choice to stick with basketball.

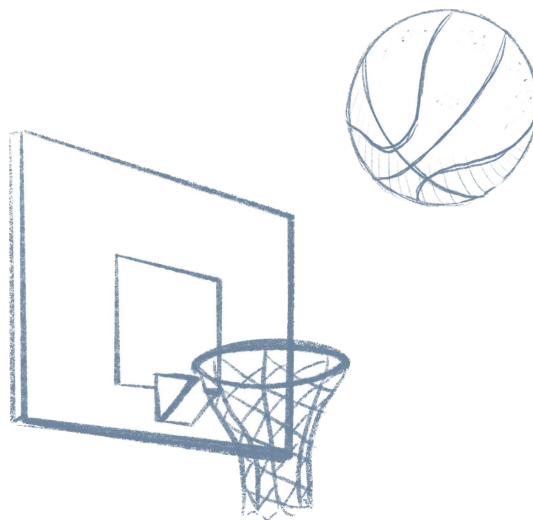
With Flakes' first college season almost in the books, he's had time to reflect on how his first

year has gone. "Individually I would say pretty good, but as a team it could've been better, it can always be better."

Flakes and the Raiders will have a chance to make the season even better with a chance to partake in the postseason. With an 18-11 record this season the Raiders qualified for postseason play and will have a chance to make a name for themselves this coming March.

Through ups and downs, Flakes has never really set himself any goals for basketball, he says he just chooses to live by a quote that he says was passed on to him from other former basketball players.

"Use the game, don't let the game use you."



There is good to be had, after all

By Ava West

People fall apart all the time. Friend groups fall apart all the time. I don't know why I assumed mine would be different. I don't know why I assumed I would be different. Senior year of high school, many things changed for me, and much of it was not my doing.

My best friend and I had been in the same friend group since eighth grade. I met her that year when I switched schools after a hard time at my previous school in seventh grade. It was like a coming of age story how fast we became best friends.

On the very first day of school, I was so nervous, I went right to class and found a seat by myself. Her, ever the extrovert, walked up to me and said "Is this seat taken?"

I said, "No." She sat down next to me, and things went from there. I sat with her and her friends at lunch. And almost every class I was in, she was too, and we sat together. We told each other everything, and no one had ever made me feel that comfortable, that fast.

The friend group she introduced me to were all people she knew since kindergarten. And they were all so kind, all let me join right away.

So for the next five years, those were my people. My best friend and I did grow apart during different phases, but we always came back together.

Senior year though, things changed in our friend

Photo by Vanessa Hewitt



group. My friend confided in me, and another one of our friends, something very personal. Somehow, the story that should have only ever been hers to tell, was out. People talked, people overheard, people listened, not really ever thinking about how it might affect her.

And the friend group that we had been so comfortable in, turned hostile. My best friend and I were isolated. It was disorienting for me, yes, but I can't imagine how much more so for her. It wasn't that they just cut us out, it was that they intentionally did things to make us feel bad.

So where school had once been a safe space, it was now a battlefield. With only a couple months left of senior year, I didn't know if I would be able to get through the year. What was supposed to be filled with fun and celebration, was filled with confusion, hurt and anger.

Thankfully, my family was very supportive. They were all there for me, constantly doing little things to make me feel better.

I cried one day getting in the car after school, when my dad picked me up. We went home and he made me a cup of tea, and trying to relate to me, he said “What’s that one Taylor Swift song, ‘All you are is mean?’” I laughed with tears in my eyes.

Home was always a safe space for me, but during high school I did turn toward my friends more. But senior year, that clearly wasn’t an option anymore, so I settled back into home.

However, on my senior prom night, as I was getting ready (my best friend and I had barely decided to go), my mom fell and hit her head. We thought it was just a concussion, although she was in a lot of pain, so my dad decided to call an ambulance. After I was done getting ready, I went into the ambulance so my mom could see me.

We had picked out my dress together, a big pink one. My mom wanted me to have a magical prom if the rest of my senior year couldn’t be good. She said I looked so pretty, and I said I loved her.

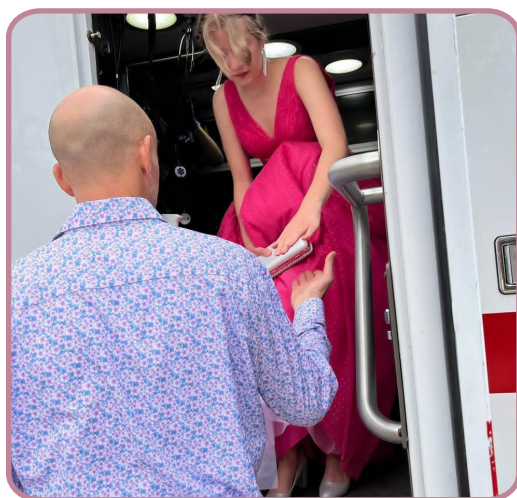


Photo courtesy of Ava West

She seemed pretty alright so I still went to take pictures with my best friend. We went to the Grand Rapids Public Museum and my sister was our personal hype woman and photographer. We had a lot of fun, posing with random things after a stressful year. After that, we went to the Downtown Market, where our prom was being held. My sister dropped us off, and my best friend and I went looking for food.

We were there for probably an hour, when I saw my sister and my brother walking towards us. At first I thought they were just crashing my prom, maybe there to tease me. So I smiled, but when I realized how sad they looked, my face immediately dropped.

My sister said, “Mom is having an emergency surgery, we’ve got to go to the hospital.”

It sounds cliché to say this, but it felt like time stopped. I looked over at my friend, her face had dropped.

I said, “I have to go,” she nodded and hugged me.

I had left my purse upstairs so I took my shoes off to run, my brother held them for me. I remember thinking, this is a very main character moment, and immediately feeling guilty for that.

My brother and sister took me home to change and grab some things to pass time at the hospital. We sat in the family area, and one by one, people started showing up. My aunts and uncles, my parents’ friends, my sister from out of town. The more people that came, the more real it got. I didn’t cry much in the car, I think I was still in shock. But once people started showing up, I couldn’t stop crying.

We talked about our favorite things about my mom in the waiting area, one of my parents’ friends joked that she was really good at reeling her finger up to flip people off. My aunt talked of

her empathy, I can't remember what I said, probably not much.

Finally, the doctor came out and told us that she was okay. She would obviously need lots of recovery time, but so far she was looking good. He told us she had fractured her skull and had a brain bleed. That if the ambulance didn't come when it did, she may have died. He even called her break a "wicked fracture" which is now a joke in my family.

We were told that immediate family could come and see her, but only for a few minutes, she would need a lot of rest. We went up to her room, and it was all dark, there was my mom barely awake in the hospital bed. They had shaved half her head, she had just been growing her hair out. There were staples all the way up her scalp. She looked very small, lying there.

We all told her we loved her. We talked about the skull fracture, and she started crying, they must have told her before but she didn't remember. Then the nurse told us it was time to go. It felt wrong leaving her there, all by herself, in pain, in the dark.

The next few days I spent most of my time at the hospital. It was my senior skip day, two days after her accident, so I spent the entire day there. My best friend texted me every day to see how I was, even if there weren't any good updates. I was so tired and mentally drained. My school was no longer safe, and my home was now on edge, full of reminders of my mom and her accident.

I felt very numb going to school and going back

to the hospital and back to school, etc. My mom made great progress very quickly though, and was soon discharged. She was terrified to be driven home, any movement hurt her head. But she made it, and with lots of help, got inside.

Going to school felt odd, with all my ex-friends having heard what happened, but still none of them saying anything. My best friend was very kind and helpful, though.

The next few weeks, my sister, my dad and I took care of my mom. My sister took most of the work, but I helped where I could. Reading to her, spending time with her, making her food, whatever I could do when I was not in school.

As my school year finished out, there was the question of whether or not my mom would come to my graduation. It was a lot of work for her and for us to get her places, she now used a walker, and walked slower. But she was pretty set on attending, and I, of course, wanted her there.

I wouldn't have made it to graduation day without her.

My best friend and I had last names right next to each other, so we thankfully got to sit next to each other through the ceremony. When graduation was done, I felt a huge sense of relief. There were so many people I never wanted to see again, and finally the option would be up to me. I was college

bound, and ready for a fresh start.

Summer passed quickly, my mom kept on improving, we were all so proud. I spent a lot of time with my best friend, going to concerts, walking my dog, watching movies, it didn't really matter what it was. Then the school year came around. I

"My best friend texted me every day to see how I was, even if there weren't any good updates."

thought I had time to process everything, but as I started at Grand Rapids Community College, I felt lingering bad feelings.

I was on edge all the time, looking for anyone from my high school and texting my mom to make sure she was all right. I felt irrational and paranoid, but no matter how I tried to comfort myself, my mind still told me I wasn't fully safe. Even when I was sleeping, I couldn't escape everything. I constantly had nightmares about my old friends and the night my mom fell. I got through the first semester, just barely. And, during winter break I had a check-up with my doctor.

The nurse gave me the depression and anxiety questionnaire, and I filled it out. I guess I finally let everything catch up to me. When my doctor saw my answers we had a long discussion, and we decided it was best for me to go to the emergency room and be evaluated further.

I spent most of the break going to different appointments, trying different techniques, getting evaluated and anything else that might help. Toward the end of break, I had an appointment with a psychologist, and after answering her questions, I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. A lot of guilt came with this diagnosis, I felt stupid for reacting this severely to two things that didn't even directly happen to me.

But over time, and with actual talking, processing and crying over things, I began to get better slowly. There wasn't a quick fix for what was happening in my brain, but taking each day, and looking forward, helped.

I didn't have control of what happened to the people around me, or myself. But I could control how I handled the fallout. So, I wrote lots and lots of lists. To do lists, things I wanted to do in the future, lists of my favorite things, anything and everything to understand myself better. I hadn't

spent a lot of time with myself, I avoided my own company for a long time, just focused on caring for the people around me. But, I had clearly reached my limit.

I got to know myself. I went places alone. I tried different hobbies. I went back to things that I liked when I was younger. And, it was when I was getting to know myself, that I began to appreciate the people around me more.

"I didn't have control of what happened to the people around me, or myself. But I could control how I handled the fallout."

My best friend, who had been through so much, checked in on me constantly. My mom, who had to start a lot of things over, in some ways, wanted to support me through my changes. My family stuck by my side through it all.

I had lost a lot of my community, but the important people in my life stayed. Quality will always outweigh quantity. Taking things day by day is not easy, but eventually it can lead to a way out. It led me to a way out of my own head and the places that haunted me, to the path toward my future.



‘It’s a different feeling altogether’: Why physical media is making a comeback

Story and photo by Marc Stoufer III

It’s a fall day in 2006. You invite your friends over, pop too much microwave popcorn and hit play on your box set of “The Office.”

Except, it’s not 2006. It’s 2025. And you don’t own a box set of “The Office,” you watch it on Netflix. At least, you did, until Netflix removed it in 2021.

This is the state of movie night for a growing number of people, as the distributors of popular media go full-tilt into the world of digital media, leaving viewers in an increasingly unbalanced scene.

How did we get here?

Perhaps more importantly, what do we do now?

The death of the DVD

Instantly watch as many movies as you want! For only \$7.99 a month.

That was Netflix’s selling point when they launched their streaming service in 2007. Rather than ordering a movie from a website, waiting for an envelope with a DVD to arrive at your house and then making sure to watch it in time to return it by the due date, you could just find the movie you wanted, click on it and watch. Even better, their library of around 1,000 movies and shows at launch meant you could watch, well, as many movies as you want.

An article about the launch at the time said the streaming service might have reversed Netflix’s “impending death”– but it also likely led to the death of the otherwise reigning way to watch

movies, the DVD.

When the DVD was introduced in 1996, it quickly overtook the VHS as the de facto media format due to its better image quality and lack of rewinding. By 2005, the format would reach its peak of \$16.3 billion nationwide, making up roughly 64% of the U.S. home video market. Its dominance wouldn’t last long, however, and a downturn began as early as one year later, in 2006. The rush to buy as many DVDs as possible at the beginning of the craze meant many people had a library large enough to make buying even more discs unnecessary. More significantly, though, was the Great Recession in December of 2007.

As the recession spread across the country, the cost of buying anything went up. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average cost of a dozen eggs rose from \$1.63 in August to over \$2 in December– an increase of almost 23 percent. With price fluctuations like these affecting nearly every kind of purchase, spending \$20 on a DVD of “Transformers” felt less economically viable. So, it’s likely that Netflix isn’t solely responsible for the end of the DVD, they just followed the trends that were already taking place.

But, as more companies followed those trends and shifted their focus to video-on-demand, fewer produced DVDs, meaning that consumers shifted their money toward video-on-demand, meaning more companies shifted their focus to video-on-demand...

By 2009, the market had mostly recovered. But public opinion had shifted to view video on demand as the future of home media– in the words of IT professor Michael Smith, “once they go dig–

ital, they don't go back to DVD." The tides were turning once again.

The rise of Streaming

While Netflix's 1,000-title-deep library seemed revolutionary at the time, the next decade was about to change what the term "streaming service" even meant. Seeing the control Netflix had of the home video market, every major media company decided to push back by launching their own streaming services. Disney+, Apple TV+, HBO Max, Peacock and Paramount+ all launched between 2019 and 2021. The streaming wars had begun.

As 2021 rolled onward, every service prepared for battle. Disney+ was developing 50 new streaming-only series. Netflix would produce so many originals that it would take up nearly half of their library. HBO Max would receive all 17 Warner Bros. feature films made in the upcoming year at the same time as theaters would.

Warner Bros. CEO David Zaslav would later say the company's strategy was "to spend money with abandon while making a fraction in return, all in the service of growing sub numbers." In these trenches, success was mandated, regardless of what it took to get there.

Alas, it took massive amounts of debt.

Are you still watching?

By 2019, more people in the US paid for a streaming service than for cable television– and the average American paid for four of them. Despite this, most services announced price hikes. According to J.D. Power, the average cost of being subscribed to the major streaming services rose from \$38 to \$75 between 2020 and 2024, nearly doubling in just four years.

This isn't (exclusively) because these corporations want to squeeze their customers for every penny.



It's because running a streaming service has never been profitable.

Most services launched with a 'too-good-to-be-true' offer for new users– just giving it to them. Having HBO Now (a way to watch HBO shows) would give you HBO Max, a year of AppleTV+ came free with the purchase of any Apple product and certain Verizon plans would come with six months of free Disney+. This business model was never sustainable, and Warner Bros. CEO David Zaslav later called it "deeply flawed."

Many services also completely removed content from their libraries. Sometimes, to license to another service, but often without going anywhere else– especially significant for streaming-exclusive titles.

Why would studios want less content on their flagship products? Largely, because having content on the platform costs the studios money.

To compensate people that work on streaming shows, creatives get paid a flat fee every year that their show is on a service. So, removing it removes an expense. The battlefield of the streaming wars is led by the pocketbook – and if the pocketbook doesn't want a show in the trenches, it doesn't stay there.

Alright... Now what?

The revolution promised during the explosion of streaming services never came to pass.

Except... It kind of did.

By 2023, streaming services were responsible for 86% of the home entertainment market – price hikes and content removals and all. The DVD, for its part, is in no shape to fight back, only making up 10% of the market. As tech hubs like Best Buy further pull back on DVD sales – both in store and on their website, the tides don't seem to be changing.

Alissa Nutting, writer of a show removed from Max in 2022, described her feeling after discovering her work's fate: "I remember feeling like, OK, like, nothing's safe." This is what experts in the industry call "streaming anxiety" – the fear that, for the first time since the early 1900s, any project could become lost media. These wouldn't be lost due to nitrate film catching on fire, though. They would just disappear.

The solution, for many people, is to hold onto physical media anyway, despite its decline – something Houston Matters producer Garrett Bohlmann described as "a state of decline and renaissance at the same time."

In a guest essay with the Internet Archive, BBC News and VICE writer JD Shadel mused that "if you don't save it, even if it seems like it's everywhere momentarily, it will just as quickly disappear."

So, people save it

"I think (physical media is) really important to keep us kinda grounded," said 18-year-old Grand Rapids Community College art major Micah Hernandez.

For GRCC student Isaac Thom, physical media helps him connect to the media on a deeper level.

"I definitely think there's a different kind of respect," said Thom. "I feel like when I put on a record with my friends, it's more something that we're listening to. But, when I plug in my aux and Bluetooth, it's more in the background."

For others, it's about connecting with each other. The Collegiate reported last year on GRCC brothers Kevin and David Lyons, and their 50,000 record-strong collection.

"It was always the two of us, it was something we did together, and there was something magical about that," David told The Collegiate.

Twenty-five-year old general major Cas Eavey trades physical games with friends as a way to connect and try new games.

"I just lent my friend my copy of Super Mario 3D World for the Switch, and in return, I got Link's Awakening, which is a game I don't own. I get to play the game, and then give it back. And now, I have a new experience. You just can't do that with ... digital media," said Eavey.

The reasons people engage with physical media all boil down to the same thing – choice. People want, and have always wanted, to create the experience that means the most to them, that they can take agency in. Whether it's the grooves of a record, the tactile feel of buttons on a controller, or the seven incorrect password attempts of Disney+, the future of media is – in the words of JD Shadel – "what we make it."



Five students reflect on three words – Change, Consistency, Community

By Vanessa Hewitt

According to the Chinese Zodiac, the year 2025 symbolizes change and resilience. This year is expected to be a turning point in everyday society, which can be felt through numerous executive orders in the U.S., various natural disasters and the rise of artificial intelligence.

The Collegiate surveyed five students at Grand Rapids Community College to understand what change means to them, how they stay grounded through the depths of change and where they find community.

Eighteen-year-old Rockford native PJ Middleton believes that change is inevitable.

“I think change for the most part is good because it’s a part of life. Everything’s bound to change at some point,” she said.

Middleton explained that as she’s grown up, she has learned to be a more positive person. She credits this change to her friend group, who has helped her become a “healthier” version of herself.



“I wasn’t the nicest person, I guess, growing up I had a lot going on, so I kind of pushed that on to other people,” she said.

Middleton shared that she regrets “Not being as attentive to friendships” during her high school years and “not being the best friend that (she) could be.”

Those friends are what Middleton finds consistency through, more specifically, her “best friend.” She talks about how this person stood by her side through “experimental” phases and has stuck with her for the better part of seven years.

“She keeps me level-headed through changing. She’s a person I can rely on if I need someone to talk to, or need advice or assistance or anything like that,” she said.

Along with that, Middleton finds community at her workplace.

“It’s a private business, so everyone’s really close because we don’t have many people on staff,” she said. “So, it’s kind of like a family as corny as that is to say. My workplace is my family,”

Similarly, River Palasek, an 18-year-old mortuary science major from Grand Rapids, finds consistency through people in her life, more specifically her mom and her boyfriend of four years. She said, “They’re just two very supportive people and they have my back.”

She explained the secret for maintaining a healthy, consistent relationship at a young age as using effective communication.

Palasek also believes that intentional pacing is an important part of success.

“(I regret) not taking things slower cause I feel like I’ve always been on top of things to try and get ahead, try to do all this stuff, and I feel like I miss out on a lot because of all that,” she said. “(I’m) just always looking towards the future instead of (being in) the present.”

As she has learned to live in the present, Palasek has also learned the importance of prioritizing herself.

“I feel like I spent so much time focusing on other people and tending to their needs over mine, but I feel like lately I’ve been trying to focus on putting more thought on myself, and I feel like that has changed who I am as a person.”

Overall, Palasek thinks, “Change is good, everything’s always changing and you kind of have to go with it and accept that change.”

For 22-year-old Megan Rogers, of Rockford, change has the potential to be good, but it can also show up negatively and be unavoidable.

“We believe that bad things happen to good people because it brings out our awareness...bad things happen to us because it’s for our growth. It’s for our character development,” Rogers said.

Rogers opened up about her worries surrounding finances and said she misses having a job and feeling independent. Through these worries, it is faith that keeps Rogers grounded.

“I can have this deep peace knowing that I’m going to come through on the other side for good...There’s a way through it. I don’t know how it’s gonna happen,” she said.

Rogers grew up Catholic and began practicing Pentecostal Christianity in adulthood. She said a close friend introduced her to the religion, and since then, she hasn’t looked back.

“I say I have (changed) for the better since becoming a Christian,” she said.

Similarly, Evan Sabin, 20, a computer science major, believes he has changed “for the better” as well.

“Yeah, I feel like I definitely progressed from back then,” he said, referring to his high school self. “I feel like nowadays I’m trying, I’m trying to (put) more effort into.... (becoming) more successful and overall a better person than what I was a year ago.”

Sabin has applied this mindset to pursuing his goal of getting a “good, successful job that pays well.” Additionally, Sabin brings up how change is a “double-edge sword” and one can choose to push through hard changes when they arise.

“We believe that bad things happen to good people because it brings out our awareness... bad things happen to us because it’s for our growth. It’s for our character development”

“Some people, depending on their mindset, can choose to improve themselves, make better routines, be able to make themselves be able to work in schedules to where it makes their mind, I guess, in a better place than what it was before,” he said.

Sabin said it is his family that keeps him grounded as well as the community he found at GRCC with fellow classmates.

"I ended up becoming ingrained in some of the friend groups here...And growing strong with those people, and they end up supporting me, and I end up supporting them," he said.

While Sabin did say he appreciates his new friends, he tends to find himself missing his friends from middle school that he is no longer in contact with.

On the other hand, Cassipoeia Longway, a communications major from Iowa, talked about the good that came from losing friends she no longer speaks to.

"I'm a lot more assertive, I've learned to speak my mind. I'm very blunt now," she said.

Longway explained her past with GRCC, saying she first went to the college back in 2018, and ended up dropping out due to COVID-19 in 2020. Now, Longway has come back determined to obtain her associ-

ate's degree.

As for finding community at GRCC, she said, "It's hard to make friends here, personally."

Longway said her family and her cat, Napkin, help her stay centered through change. And as for change itself, she said, "I think (change) is good to get us moving forward, it can also move us back, but primarily you need to go through the bad to make yourself better."

Editor-in-Chief Alexa Cheaney and Collegiate Reporters Rosalia Jimenez, Shy'Ana Thomas and Mackenzie Davis contributed to this article.



Photo by Vanessa Hewitt

Anti-villain

By Grace Howard

Anti-villain: a character who has good intentions but uses questionable methods to achieve them.

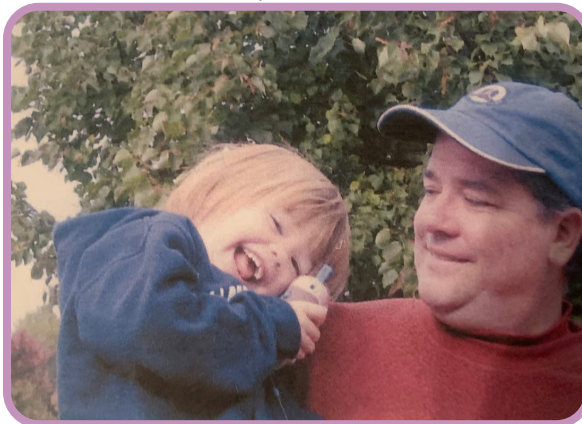
When you hear the word anti-villain, most people think of Thanos from Avengers or Killmonger from Black Panther, but I think of my dad. My dad was the best person I knew. He was my best friend and favorite person, but that was only when he was sober. Sober dad was my real dad. He was the dad that listened to my 20-minute stories, played hour-long Uno tournaments, rode our bikes to the park every night after dinner and was the most loving, caring person I had ever met. On the other hand, when he was drinking, I didn't even recognize the person I loved the most, he was a villain in my mind.

Growing up, I was stereotyped as having the "perfect family." Three kids, two parents and a yellow lab who never fought and all loved each other. People see us as belonging to a country club, having a nice house and going on vacations yearly. Behind that, the part people didn't see was a dad missing the swim meets because he was too busy "golfing." I hated being in the nice house because no matter how big it was, you could always hear the fighting, and behind all the vacations, it was only my mom, siblings and I because, in reality, it

was actually a vacation away from my dad. Behind the facade of a perfect family with two parents who love each other was actually two parents who loved each other.

Having a parent with an addiction is never easy. I had to always be on. As a 10-year-old, I knew if my dad was "nice" dad or "mean" dad just by knowing where he was in the house. I could walk into my house and immediately know if I needed to be on edge or if I could relax. My favorite time of the day was always the morning. My dad would wake me up every morning for school, make my lunch and breakfast, and then drive me up to my bus stop. I always knew he would be sober in the mornings.

All photos courtesy of Grace Howard



My dad went to rehab six times, and every time he went I knew the coming few months would be my favorite. He would come back as the dad I have always known, sober 24 hours a day, and being his funny, amazing cook and fun self. In the back of my mind, I always knew it would end at some point. I knew I could come home from school one random day, and I would just be able to feel it as soon as I walked in the door.

In 2019, my parents got a divorce. My mom and I moved out of my childhood home and into a new house with just the two of us. After they got divorced, I never really saw my dad. Neither of

us had a license, and I just didn't want to be with someone I didn't even recognize. I would still text him all the time about my silly little stories or our hometown sports teams, he was still always my best friend.

He ended up moving into a condo in 2021, and I got my license, so I would try to see him every couple of weeks. He would cook my favorite meals, and we would watch the cooking channel or a sports game all night. Even if he was drunk, I would still hang out with him because I knew he needed it.

On May 24, 2021, I got a call from one of my best friends who lived in the condo next to my dad's, and she told me our dogs were out. I drove over there and put the dogs back in the house. Two minutes later, they got out again, so I went into my dad's house and saw him passed out on the couch. I got mad, so I took the dogs and went home. A day went by, and no one heard from him. He didn't text me about the dogs, but I figured he was too scared to tell me he lost them.

On May 26, two days after I took the dogs, I was taking my normal after-school nap when my mom



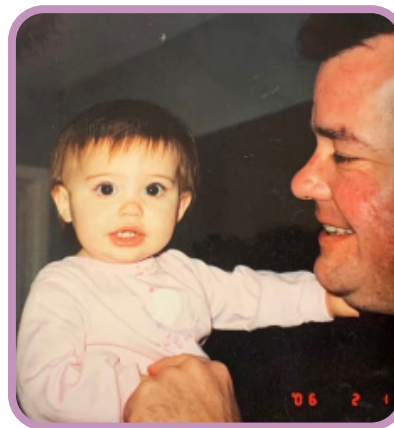
came into my room, turned my light on and woke me up. She didn't have to say a single thing; I just knew he was gone. My mom told me that her friend had gone to check on my dad, and when she got

there, she found him in the same position I saw him in, passed away. I didn't know what to do. I told my mom that I needed to be alone, and she did just that. I called my best friend to tell her, and she immediately drove to my house and just sat in silence with me. Five minutes of silence

later, I got up, walked outside without putting my shoes on, and walked a lap around my neighborhood barefoot. I called the people I wanted to call, and within a few minutes, all of my friends were over at my house. That's all I needed: distraction.

I lost my best friend. That is all I could think about. The denial hit immediately. I didn't cry for five days. I called his phone, and I talked about him like he was still alive. I went crazy. I don't think I slept more than five hours across those five

days. I went to school and appeared to live my life normally, if you can imagine. My friends were very worried about me, but in my mind, it was my only choice. I knew the second I accepted it that I was going to lose myself in the process.



It ended up happening, I finally accepted that he was gone. I didn't go as crazy as I thought, but don't get me wrong, I wasn't myself either. I closed myself off, slept at all hours of the day and hated school.

"I knew the second I accepted it that I was going to lose myself in the process."

I was distracted for three months before it got to this point. It was summer, so I wasn't home most of the time. I spent all day, every day with my friends, which is exactly what I wanted and what I still believe I needed.

Once I finally settled into accepting it, it was like he died all over again. I relived the day in my mind over and over, still keeping up a fake face to my friends because I didn't want anyone to know I was still up-set. I figured it had been four months, and they would tell me to get over it, so I didn't let anyone know I was struggling other than my best friend Stacie, but even still, there were times I didn't want to bother her or anyone with my grief.



I still texted his phone when I wanted to tell him something. One day, someone texted back. They had given away his number. I felt like the world had just crashed down on top of me. I couldn't call him anymore to hear his voicemail, just to hear his voice. It felt like I had finally lost him. His phone number, my last form of communication to him, was given to a girl in the city next to us who just so happens to share the same name as my sister, Emily.

After you lose someone that close in your life, everything reminds you of them. I can't look at a slushy without thinking of all our bike rides to 7/11. I can't look at eggs without thinking about

my favorite thing he would make me for breakfast, fried eggs. This happens to me every day with so many other random things. Growing up, I was attached to his hip, so everything reminds me of him. There is always a memory or story to go with it.

I have never gotten to a part of grief that other people have, not wanting to talk about him. I know people who refuse to talk about a loved one who passed away, but for me, I bring him up as much as I can. I never want to make him out to be a villain because he wasn't. He was only a villain when he drank, and when he drank, he wasn't my dad. So I talk about my dad as much as I can, not the other person he became, because that's not who he is.

After losing my dad, I have learned that people won't understand unless it has happened to them. People expect you to bounce back after a few months, when, in reality, grief is never something that goes away. I am stuck with it for the rest of my life.

My dad will be my best friend in every universe and the ones after that. Everyone that I meet will know exactly who he was – an amazing person with a disease he couldn't get rid of, because that is exactly who my dad is. My own personal superhero.



Be better: My experience at a military academy

By Kaylee Alvarez

The last thing I ever wanted to do was go to a military academy. The word “military” alone was a huge “no” to me. In January 2023, when I was 16, I felt as if I had absolutely nothing going for me. I only went to school to sleep in classes and see the very small friend group that I had.

I woke up on a Wednesday morning, complaining to my mom about not wanting to go to school, like an average teenager, and she surprised me by nonchalantly agreeing, saying we had to go somewhere anyway. I was much too tired to care where it was that we were going, so when I hopped in the car, closed my eyes and awoke to the sight of a giant military tank parked in front of me. You could say I was a bit surprised when the place she took me to was an open house for the Michigan Youth Challenge Academy (MYCA) out in Battle Creek, Michigan. I sat down and watched a video introducing the academy not really understanding why my mom had brought me here since we never discussed about me attending a place like this. While watching the video and listening to Cadets who had been in the program already, something that stood out to me was that I’d be there among other girls from the ages 15 ½ to 19 years old. That didn’t sound as terrifying and eased me a bit to know I wouldn’t be alone if I enrolled. It was a good thing that this was only

an open house.

Yet, before I knew it, the day was Jan. 15 and I was holding a large paper Meijer bag full of clothes, waiting in line to be moved into the MYCA for the next five months. I don’t remember much of what I was feeling, but I do remember how cold it was. We were all the way out in Battle Creek and it was just starting to snow outside, and, man, did it snow. When it was my turn, they signed me in and took my photo. My mom and I didn’t have the best relationship at the time, so our goodbyes were short. I walked the long, gloomy halls carrying this absolutely massive bag, going through the process of checking to see if I had COVID-19, medical issues, or any physical problems and getting all our clothes and hygiene into a rucksack. That was when I was quickly introduced to the cadres dressed in their army uniforms. Cadres are our guides and leaders into a better life, and we were instructed to follow everything they said and do it quickly. I did not understand this at first, so when a short female cadre with blonde hair began yelling in my face to hurry up, I panicked and began shoving my stuff in my rucksack, speed-walking to the next hallway. Turning the next hallway, I looked up and was introduced to a cadre that changed my life. He led the group of girls and me to a bus where we were moved over to Fort Custer where the

Acclimation Phase would be held for the first two weeks.

We went through several processes of getting introduced to places we'd eat, sleep, work on Drill and Ceremony and go to class. By that time, night had fallen and we were separated into two groups, top deck and low deck. I was put in top deck. I will admit at this time, I finally noticed the situation I was in and got a bit emotional, but thankfully everyone just avoided me at the time as we set our things down by our bunk beds and got ready for bed. As the light's turned off I could hear a couple silent cries from the other girls and part of me relaxed a bit knowing I wasn't the only one nervous about this huge change in our lives.

He then began to tell us a story and to this day I still remember how that was the exact moment everything changed. He shared a story about when he was serving and met a boy around 18 years old who he became acquainted with, and that boy shared a poem with him. In honor of his memory, he recited the poem and continued to repeat it every night for the next five months. I took that saying to heart and used it to push myself through the acclimation phase:

"Be better. Be better than yesterday and the day before. Every day you wake up and you try and be better. You will achieve something in this world, in your lifetime. Big or small. Be proud of your achievements, but be better."

The following two weeks can be summed up as lots of crying, eating fast meals, physical activity, runaway kids, candidates fighting cadres, top

deck vs. bottom deck, short showers and cold weather. After the two weeks came to an end, we marched over to our new home for the next five months. The one thing I personally was not looking forward to was sharing a room with over 50 girls. I had a valid reason to be nervous as well. Imagine a bunch of girls in bunk beds at 5:14 a.m. trying to get on a line in thirty seconds to do their daily pushups and planks.

Mornings consisted of a 5:30 a.m. wake-up, physical training, either working on your hygiene or making your rack to perfection for checks at the end of the week, making your hair into a bun that wasn't sloppy, getting your uniform on and getting in our formation called the four-cadet-front every morning. As the weeks rolled by, it felt like I was losing track of time trying to take this opportunity to better myself and not have the cadres see me as some weak, crybaby that was too emotional to get anything done. That's when leadership was introduced and I became a squad leader, even though I was happy being someone who followed silently. Taking on a leadership role was frightening, especially since we were balancing school on top of all the training, drill and ceremony.

That was also when we all started to notice just how important mail call was. Mail call was when we would receive letters from loved ones whom we've written to, and it was truly the one piece of peace in all the chaos. I even found myself leaping up from my spot and running toward my letters. It helped me realize just how much I cherished the people in my life and how their words alone could get me through tough weeks.

Before anyone even blinked, three months had already passed, and I was starting to feel stronger, not just physically, but mentally as well. After I realized I could use MYCA to get better, I took the challenge. I was eventually selected to be an adviser. Advisers went out and told the next cycle why they should attend MYCA. We were also given the chance to participate in sports. Many of the cadets enjoyed this because it was something other than drill and ceremony or cleaning given to us by the cadre, and, frankly, I could agree with the excitement. We were also given the gift of a parent visitation. My mom and I had been in a very tough spot when I had left almost four months prior, so the moment we saw each other and I ran into her arms, I was finally able to see how much my mother truly cared for me after not believing she did for so long.

As the long-awaited five months started coming to an end, I was given more opportunities for leadership roles. I didn't particularly enjoy the idea of being in another leadership position after being placed as platoon sergeant. That alone was way beyond my comfort, so when I was put in the spot of executive officer, or X.O., I wasn't exactly thrilled. In fact I was terrified. The X.O. was the second in command of the entire company, meaning not just my platoon but all three of the platoons.

I ran the company alongside two of the male cadets from the second and third platoons, which was difficult since I was the only female. Through the whole process of being an X.O. and eventually becoming a permanent Platoon Leader, I realized change is infinite and that no matter how

terrifying it may be to be put in an uncomfortable spot, it is truly the only thing that helps us grow and become stronger.

The transformation within myself was visible and vibrant on the day of graduation. My hair had grown out, dark circles lined my eyes, my dress blues were nicely ironed and a smile of triumph marked my face as I was handed my diploma onstage and shaking the hands of all the people who had turned my life around. I am to this day asked if I would go back and do it again? I would say no. Not because it was difficult, but because I know what I need to do now. The cadre and administrators gave me a helping hand to success. I must do the rest on my own and continue to be better every day.



Photo illustration by Dana Kistler

How do GRCC students find community when politics are more personal than ever?

By Mackenzie Davis

With the 2024 election season coming to a close in January and numerous changes happening around the country, people now, more than ever, are forced to adjust to a life where identity is discussed in politics, friendships are ending due to differentiating beliefs and an overall declining ability to find community. Students at Grand Rapids Community College have experienced firsthand the tolls of an increasingly political country, but some seem to think these are changes for the better.

Freshman JaVeon Johnson, of Grand Rapids, acknowledges the changing political world and its impacts on making relationships.

"I am an African American male and if a person dehumanized me in a way, I would separate myself from them because they could not understand where I come from. If they took the effort to learn and are ideologically different from me on other points, then I am perfectly fine," Johnson said. "As time went on, we became more of a political country...I think we are becoming more of a conscious country. It is one part negative and one part positive because we are becoming more conscious of people's identities and people's values and there is more of a conversation of who a person is. Unless you know who they are, whether it's sexuality, race, gender,

it's become a part of politics. Who you are is now political."

Student Karalynn Davis made a similar point on having friends with different beliefs.

"More recently, during the election, I voted for Kamala Harris," Karalynn said. "A lot of my friends back home voted for Trump ...I'm not cutting them off because of their political beliefs, I genuinely don't understand how some people's priorities lie. I don't cut people off because of their politics, I cut people off if they value money over human lives."

In January of 2025, the National Opinion Research Center for the University of Chicago posted research on the topic of differentiating political views and if, as a whole, Americans are really as segregated as it seems. The general consensus of this study seemed to be that there are generally five ways of political thinking for the American people and an overall common view of "...a deep and growing distrust of the government, the media, and their fellow citizens." Tom Rosenstiel, Senior Fellow, Public Affairs & Media Research, wrote.

Mother of GRCC student, Deb Spoors, who drives her child to class twice a week, has a different view on the growing distrust of peers.

"I think we have chosen sides, and I think that it's really unfortunate that that has happened because it tends to isolate people from each other. I think it is different then it was 50 years ago, everybody struggled but they struggled more together and now people point fingers and they look at political identity more as picking sides," Spoors said. "... so making decisions based on one political view really robs people of getting to know the full spectrum of people they are talking to. It's only one small piece of their identity and there is much more to be gained from knowing people who don't agree with you. I think one thing that has changed is people are now willing to hurt each other because they don't believe the same way. That's a scary thing."

As the country falls into this polarizing era separating friends and connections, how do students continue to keep their mental health in check and the constant information online at bay?

"We are surrounded by information all the time. Our generation is more used to blocking out the information and just choosing to remain ignorant because I feel like there is such an oversaturation of information out there and you don't really have to look for it anymore," Karalynn said. "I feel like we get burnt out really easily and our generation as a whole really struggles with mental issues."

In an article released by the New York Post in 2023 titled 'Antisocial behavior': Why Generation Z struggles to make and keep friendships, reporter Shona Hendley wrote about a study done by an associate sociology professor at Dartmouth College, Janice McCabe.

"The study, which was conducted via a series of interviews over several years to track friendships of college students, found that the pandemic had negatively affected the ability of the participants to both sustain friendships and make new ones," Hendley wrote.



Photo illustration by Alexa Cheaney

Johnson shared his thoughts on the importance of community in today's world.

"I think we definitely need places where we can talk and have places where we can go beyond home, school and work and we need to basically get out more. But obviously most people are introverted, even I," Johnson said.

When asked how he thought students could find community, Johnson replied, "I would say try to find a space, probably? It's really hard cause I don't have many friends that I really go out with, so I don't really know. I would just say find a place and then people will come? But beyond that I don't really know."

Spoors shared her opinions on the younger generation's ability to find community.

"I think coming out of the pandemic with so many kids having to do school online we stole from them a very important segment of their life where socialization would have been the primary thing they were thinking about but they couldn't do it at that critical development place in their life," Spoors said. "And I think they are now coming to a place where they don't have friends as much and don't really understand how to make a community around them."

For students at GRCC who can relate to this lack of community, Karalynn feels that there are ways students can engage and find their people.

"I think that community is found where you look for it. I think that I say this always, there are resources and there is a community," Karalynn

said. "If you go out and look for it, you will find people."

Sondra Davis, support professional for GRCCs Success Center, shares her advice on finding a place at the college.

"I would say go to student events... especially if you can join up with one where there are like-minded students. Get involved with things on campus. Just look for all the things on Raider Connect, and there's going to be other students also looking for connections. Be open to talking to other students," she said. "There's so many ways to get involved and meet other students and socialize and practice socializing. Get a job on campus, student employees are able to talk to students as they come in and you can build some confidence there too."

Evodie Djunga, current president of the Black Africana Student Union and former president of the Campus Activities Board, agrees that community is found by the effort students put in to find it.

"Here on campus, there is a lot going on. If you don't communicate with people, you will find nothing. You have to go out there and find out what campus has to offer you," Djunga said. "It is hard to reach out to people and people don't make it easy these days because they are too busy on their phones and with their lives. So, it's a lot. I joined the Campus Activities Board, I became the president there and that's how I found a community."

‘We’re not going back:’ Thousands gather in downtown Grand Rapids for International Women’s Day march

By Vanessa Hewitt and Alexa Cheaney

On March 8, over 2,000 West Michigan residents gathered in Rosa Parks Circle for the International Women’s Day, “Unite and Resist” march. This peaceful protest consisted of speakers, a performance from the Grand Rapids Women’s Choir and a march starting on Michigan Street and ending on Ottawa Ave.

Local restaurateur Jenna Arcidiancono opened up the rally with a speech, saying, “As I look out to all of you, I’m reminded of the resilience, strength, passion and all of the things that define us as women.”

Also known as “Chef Jenna,” Arcidiancono owns Amore Trattoria Italiana, a local Italian restaurant located off Alpine Avenue. She shared with those in attendance that prior to owning her own business, she faced trouble getting hired because of her gender.

“No one in Grand Rapids would hire me as a chef, even with 20 years of experience because I am a woman,” Arcidiancono shared, to which the crowd responded with booing. “... Remember it is our unique experiences that equip us to lead with empathy... and creativity, and persevere with unwavering determination.”

As a woman in leadership, speaker and State Representative Kristian Grant, (D–Grand Rapids),

shared that during her campaign she was met with a similar resistance. When Grant and her team would knock on doors to gather support, they would be met with hushed support, such as “I’m going to vote for her, but please don’t come back. I don’t want my neighbors to see you guys... I don’t want to start any trouble.”

However, standing in front of her constituency on Saturday afternoon, Grant encouraged rally attendees to start some trouble.

“We won’t have a next time to stand up if we don’t stand up today,” she said. “And so we have to be the women and the people who support the women who are willing to stand up.”

Among those lending their support was Democrats at Grand Rapids Community College President Collin Helak, who rallied in support of cis-gendered women and transgender women.



Photo by Vanessa Hewitt

“Women’s rights are very important in society, but also the current administration’s attacks on gender nonconforming people, especially working class gender nonconforming people, trans people (and) especially trans women (are) perpetuating misogynistic and frankly horrific stereotypes,” Helak said.

Twenty-two-year-old Madan native Katrina Shafer-Dyer echoed the same message.

“I feel like a lot of things are really being threatened, not just for cis women but for all women. Trans women can’t even be women right now in the administration, even though they are,” she said. “That seems like the most basic right is to be able to be a woman.”

Izzy Hathway, 17, came to show support while dressed in Chappell Roan merchandise. She brought attention to the shirt she was wearing that read “Femininomenon”.

“I think this is a Femininomenon or the definition of a Femininomenon,” Hathway said. She also shared why she thinks it’s important for events like the Unite and Resist march to exist.

“I think everyone needs to form together and fight for what’s right, and this is what’s right. I think seeing all of this, it shows how far we’re going to make it and that this administration is not going to take us down.”

The actions of two-time President Donald Trump and legislation introduced under his administration were hot-button topics for those gathered in Rosa Parks Circle.

The “SAVE Act,” which was reintroduced to Congress on Jan. 3, and has many speculating that it may be harder for married women to vote, motivated 68-year-old Beth Miller, joined by her husband Micheal, 67, to attend the march in protest.

“Being a married woman I’m going to have to change my name back to my maiden name, which I hated. I’ll kind of feel like I lost my identity, I’ve been a Miller for 44 years. That’s my reason, and he’s supporting,” she said, gesturing to her husband beside her.

Micheal, who was there to support his wife, also took great interest in the event individually. He mentioned being at past protests for similar things and questioned the progressiveness of American society.

“I mean, we’ve been here before, why are we here again?” Micheal said.

Kym Combs, 56, brought attention to women’s suffrage and said her great-grandmother voted in the first election that gave women the right to vote.

“When my great-grandmother was in labor with my grandmother, she made her husband stop at the polls because it was the first time ever in this country that a woman could vote,” Combs said. “My great-grandmother had more rights than we do today.”

Seventeen-year-old Jolie Guevara was alongside her boyfriend, Sam Schult, 19. Guevara said her main reason for attending the event was

Photo by Vanessa Hewitt



to support the cause. “I’m here to support everybody, you know, I’m a young woman myself,” she said. “It’s important that we’re all just supporting each other, especially with what’s going on in the world.”

As for Schult, it was the women in his life that motivated him to attend the event.

“I love my mom, I love my girlfriend. I appreciate women,” he said.

For event organizer Lauren Coman, the turnout was “incredible and “overwhelming.” She has been marching for women’s rights since before Trump’s first term in 2016, but the “Unite and Resist” march was her first time organizing something of this scale.

Lynne Ike is also a long-time protestor. She mentioned marching in Washington D.C. to protest during Trump’s first presidential term and expressed contentment for the replicated energy in downtown Grand Rapids.

“It was just so good to be around people that had like-minded concerns and so (today) we just got

a bunch of friends together and, this is great,” Ike said.

Gage Lee Bender, 22, of Marin, is typically right-leaning. However, he doesn’t feel as if the current Republican party represents his beliefs. According to Bender, the shift began halfway through Trump’s first term.

“Ultimately, what conservatives and Republicans believe in most is ‘live and let live’ you know, do what you want to do and we don’t care. We just want to do what we want to do,” he said. “That’s not what the current administration is doing.”

State Representative Grant said she thought the turnout of the march was “amazing”, and vocalized the importance of showing up, especially when the administration is putting human rights in “jeopardy.”

“We’re just a few weeks into this year, and into this presidential term and we’re already seeing just how bad it can get... This is not a time for us to give up. The people of America and the people of Michigan still have power and we can use every bit of it if we want to see change,” she said. “We need these same turnouts in all the spaces where our rights are in jeopardy and where our rights are being taken away. We need the same kind of turnout and we need the same kind of passion behind that work. Today is a really great start, it’s March, but we’re going to need this in August, we’re going to need this in December and for the next four plus years.”

Collegiate reporters Grace Howard and Kaylee Alvarez contributed to this report.

Compassion in the face of grief

By Bethany Davis

A particular silence follows loss where unspoken grief lingers for a long time. At the start of this year, my hometown experienced that silence twice, only days apart. Two former classmates of mine were gone far too soon. They were so loved, each in their own way, and their absence weighs heavy in every single heart they touched.

One of the things that struck me the most wasn't just the grief, but the way it spread. Friends reaching out who I hadn't heard from in months. Posts saturated social media with memories, condolences and reminders to check in on each other. Conversations that were once surface-level suddenly felt deeper and more intentional. It made me realize that grief has a way of reminding us how interconnected we all truly are.

In a small, conservative town where people kept to themselves, I was seeing people show up for others in ways I had never seen before in all my years living there. It was in the simple texts like, "I'm here if you need anything." It was in the way people from all circles, no matter how different, showed up in mourning together. The grief had brought an unexpected but deep sense of community.

However, this ripple effect of grief and loss extends beyond my hometown. Across Michigan and at Grand Rapids Community College, conversations about mental health and suicide prevention are crucial. GRCC offers counseling services for students struggling by providing a space to talk and find resources. Going beyond institutional support, having each other is just as important. Saying hi to an old friend, reminding someone that they are valued, or just being present can save a life.

Mental health has become a larger conversation in everyday life and around the world in recent years. What once used to be a taboo topic is now one of the most important conversations to have. More often than not, life's challenges are under the surface, and we don't know the weight other people carry. Extending kindness and compassion has never been more of a necessity, and one great place to start is locally, even here on campus.

Photo by Vanessa Hewitt



As reported by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention in 2022, Michigan lost 1,503 people to suicide alone. This is the highest report for the state since 2018. More than just numbers, these are real lives lost. It's a meaningful reminder, whether we know it or not, that the fleeting moments that seem insignificant at first are so much more profound than we realize.

The ripple effect of loss is undeniable, but so is the domino effect of support.

If you or someone you know is struggling, reach out. GRCC's Center for Counseling and Well-Being offers support on campus, or you can dial 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. You are not alone.

Well, why would I check the news?

Art by Dana Kistler

Text by Alexa Cheaney



How I cope with things I can't control

By Faith Ball

"This is the worst day ever," is a familiar sentence in my life. The first time I can recall saying this, I was 3 years old. I had taken a razor and shaved my arm as I had seen my mom do the day before, except I had neglected to use soap and water. Instead of perfectly smooth, hair-free skin, I had a perfectly smooth, skin-free forearm.

"Uh oh, Mommy, uh oh," I yelped as tears streamed down my face.

I had never felt pain like this before. My mom bandaged me up and hugged me while I cried. Despite feeling upset, I quickly got over it like most kids do. I was too distracted by my brand-new band-aid to care about the scrape that lay underneath it.

When I was 10 years old, I dropped a pot of boiling water on myself. I had first and second-degree burns down my stomach, hip and upper thigh. The day after, my mom dressed me in one of her nightgowns and let me sleep in my parents' bed with them. She surprised me with a Squishmallow frog and a boatload of Reese's peanut butter cups, and I realized that things weren't so bad after all.

As I've gotten older, the frequency of the sentence 'This is the worst day ever' has only increased. Now, at 19 years old, I know that there is much greater pain than the physical.

This year, my 74-year-old father got COVID-19, and he was hospitalized because of kidney failure. I remember contemplating what my life would be like without my dad, the man who adopted me and raised me as his own. My dad has protected me throughout my life. He would bedazzle my bike with flashing lights so cars wouldn't hit me. He installed a mirror on the handlebar so I could see behind me. He bought me gloves and knee pads to avoid scrapes. Despite hating him for it as a kid, I felt truly grateful I had someone in my life who loved me enough to protect me.

A week after my dad's hospitalization, my former best friend died. When we stopped being friends, I lost a huge support system. My friend supported me when I came out to my parents. They were my prom date and the platonic love of my life. I thought the world had stopped for me when they died, but I was wrong. I looked around and noticed that I had stopped for the world. I quit going to class most days and got very behind on my schoolwork. I rotted in my bed and stayed up late, having nightmares about their death.

I have battled with feelings of guilt and selfishness for what has happened to those around me. With the help of therapy, I have come to a comfortable place with myself. I have prolific anxiety about the future and what terrible things could happen next, but I have found ways to cope with the things I can't control.

For me, this can be done by merely appreciating what I do have. My dad left the hospital after a few days. He has lost some vision in his right eye but is continuing to recover with the help of my mom and me. I have a new baby niece. She is a miracle baby since my sister didn't know if it was possible to give birth with cerebral palsy.

I have found a new appreciation for life because not living mine will never bring my friend back. I have begun reading motivational books and attending the gym more frequently.

I have confided in my parents, and we are closer now than ever. I found a new love for writing and recovered an old passion for ice skating, as it took my mind off things. I even hold a new appreciation for school.

I realized college isn't just about getting a degree or the job I can acquire with said degree, but about the people I meet and the knowledge I obtain. My anatomy class helped me discover a passion for the medical field. A passion I never thought I would have as I never wanted to follow in my parents' footsteps. Relying on friends and hearing about their problems has taken me out of the constant feeling that I'm the only person struggling.

I know that every day is an opportunity for something terrible to happen, but it is also an opportunity to have a better day than the one before.



Photo by Vanessa Hewitt

‘Do not go gentle into that good night:’ Transgender peers at GRCC speak up and speak out

By Juliette Bolle-Leon

Editor’s note: The Collegiate has granted anonymity to some sources in this article due to the sensitive nature of these interviews. Interviewees who asked for anonymity have chosen to go by pseudonyms. Their names are marked with an asterisk the first time they appear in the story.*

Transgender rights nationwide have been put in the spotlight, but that doesn’t stop those at Grand Rapids Community College from sharing their stories of finding community, recovering and enduring.

Throughout the nation, transgender rights are at stake. In March, Texas began discussing a bill

labeling transgender identity a felony. Despite a transgender woman being one of the first to fight against police brutality and homophobic protests against the people at Stonewall, the Stonewall National Park Service website removed the ‘T’ in ‘LGBT,’ the acronym covering transgender people in the LGBTQ+ umbrella. The Trump administration has removed the ‘X’ indicator for passports, meaning intersex and non-conforming transgender people are left to identify with a sex that does not align with their identity.

At the time of publication, the ACLU had tracked 569 anti-LGBTQ bills being discussed in the United States Congress, with five in Michigan targeting either healthcare or transgender

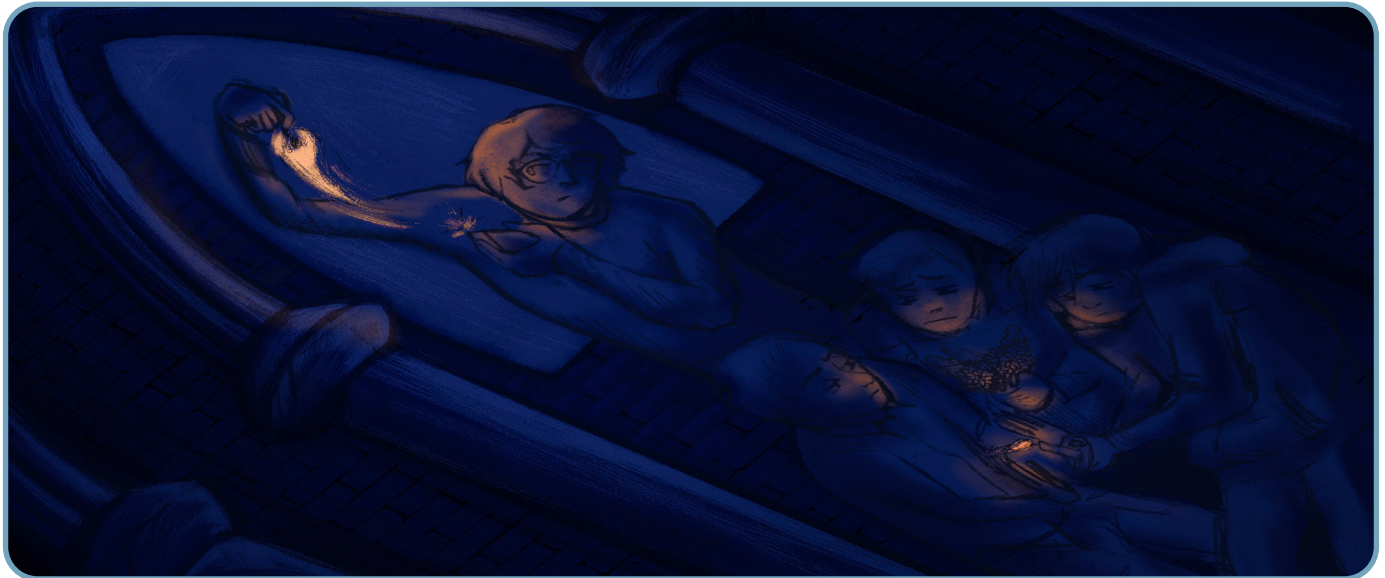


Illustration by Dana Kistler

students in schools. These laws have caused up to a 72% increase in suicide attempts among transgender and nonbinary youth, according to The Trevor Project.

Anonymity

Despite the attempt at erasure in America, transgender students and faculty at GRCC don't want to stay silent. In an attempt to elicit compassion and understanding, six transgender peers at GRCC, all with differing experiences, agreed to share their stories. Two students among the six peers chose anonymity. One student, who chose to be under the alias “*Spring,” discussed why telling the stories of transgender people is so important.

“The moment we meet a person, we tell personal anecdotes to try and connect, because we are nothing but stories as humans.”

Spring, 19, is a transgender psychology major at GRCC who feels her transgender identity pigeonholes her, meaning it would ultimately become the defining label people saw of her. However, she has conflicting opinions about ‘stealth,’ or hiding her transgender identity from most people she knows.

“Being openly transgender forces you into becoming a martyr, no matter what. We are terrified of everything, and we have to go to bed each night knowing that there are people ... that aren't willing to understand or love us ... because their hate and confusion is more valuable to them than our lives,” she said.

Spring has been a victim of hate crimes in her life, even being followed home by high school peers. Her identity has created opportunities for the intolerant to attack her or attempt to assault her. Hate crimes are motivated by bias against race, color, religion, national origin, sexuality, gender, gender identity, or disability.

“I'm tired of being ‘the trans girl.’ I know that I'll never retire that name because that is a part of my identity, but maybe for now, I'll be taking a break from it,” she said. “... Although I wish I didn't have to shun a part of myself, alas.”

She isn't alone in this feeling, either. Another anonymous student, one who preferred to go by “*Solstice,” explains why he chose to be anonymous.

“It's mostly an issue of personal safety, and also just not feeling ‘there’ yet. ... I don't want (being trans) to be my defining factor. I want it to be something like, ‘oh, I'm trans,’ but I'm also a guy. That shouldn't matter to anyone.”

Solstice, 19, is a writing major at GRCC. He is a Hispanic transgender man currently in the process of finding resources for hormone replacement therapy.

Social transitioning

Socially transitioning is a large, initial hurdle to cross as a transgender person. Every transgender person has a different story on their transitioning journey. Before going through any form of medical intervention, many transgender people are forced to have years of therapy.

Some, like Spring, had to earn their femininity.

“I love my mom, I love her. ... My mother, like every Hispanic woman that I know, made womanhood a challenge,” she said. “I think that having to prove myself a woman – just like my sister did – having to learn how to walk in heels, having to learn how to do makeup, how to manage my hair... I was raised in toxic femininity... I’m very grateful for the experiences that I learned, because I learned femininity in the most objective way possible.”

Others, like Solstice, had to take steps before coming out to their family, discussing it with teachers and friends first. Eventually, he found other closeted family members that created community for him and thanked him for his confidence.

“The first step I took was just going to school and actually coming out to my teachers, because I thought they would be a little more open to it. ... After a few years, I finally built up the confidence to have a conversation with my mom about it. Of course, it was scary, and she did not approve at first, but I found out there were a lot of people in my family like me who were just scared to come out.”

Solstice discovered his older uncle was gay. All his uncle needed, despite decades of pain and insecurity, was another person to do it first.

“He was not open to being gay at first because we all grew up very Christian. And then, by the time he realized, he was in his 40s,” he said. “... He thought it would be better to stay silent about it

than to come out and have ... the risk of being excluded from the family.” Solstice, despite not being religious, goes to his family’s church with them frequently.

“I believe there is a double standard that, just because someone does not believe the same things that you do, you can’t support them. And so I’m mostly there for my family.”

Solstice was lucky to find community within his family. But many, like Sasha Lišková, cannot speak to their families at all. Some people refuse to understand. Many, like her parents, did not want to even discuss gender identity in their households.

Others had to take steps before coming out to their family, discussing it with teachers and friends first. Eventually, he found other closeted family members that created community for him and thanked him for his confidence.

“I came out April 30. May the second, I got a phone call from my biological mother. She said ‘don’t come home.’ I was in school at the time, ... I was very well nearly homeless.”

Lišková, 27, is a professional tutor for physics and statistics at GRCC and has been on hormone replacement therapy since 2019. She nearly suffered the fate of homelessness, which approximately 40% of transgender people experience.

“I was very lucky to be housed that summer.

Very, very, very lucky. I'm very lucky to be sitting here," Lišková said. "The causes and conditions that led to (my near-homelessness) happening are, I think, outside of our scope. Let's just say that I don't speak to my family anymore, at all, and leave it at that."

Familial love is incredibly important and having that inclusivity has made all the difference for Jax to feel welcomed and loved, even before starting hormone replacement therapy.

Some people are luckier than others, though. Ella and Jax Johnson, siblings at GRCC, had an already progressive family. Ella, 19, is the Vice President of the Democrats at GRCC and identifies as nonbinary, meaning they do not conform with either gender.

"I was actually home-schooled. ... My parents were very liberal, very, you know, 'girls can do whatever they want! They can climb trees, they can get dirty,'" they said. "... We moved to Michigan when I was about 8 or 9. ... We mostly frequented very liberal and accepting areas so, again, not a lot of gender roles enforced there, so I just kind of grew up not really caring."

Ella came out as nonbinary before their brother, Jax, a 17-year-old pursuing a career as a public librarian, came out as a transgender man. Their

bond as siblings has created safety with one another. Because they came out first and their parents knew being openly transgender made their children happier, Jax was welcomed with open arms.

"They asked more questions to Ella when they came out, and so Ella was kind of their testing grounds. And then they were like, oh, this is normal and fine, and my child is happier now! So thanks, Ella, for that," Jax laughed.

The proximity of these two siblings has helped each other understand what it means to be inclusive. Familial love is incredibly important and having that inclusivity has made all the difference for Jax to feel welcomed and loved, even before starting hormone replacement therapy.

Inclusivity

But how can GRCC make transgender people feel more included? Jax believes normalizing it is more important than emphasizing it.

"I'm taking human anatomy and physiology right now, and we got to the endocrine system, and my professor, Lee Kleinart, ... she talked about a young transgender person who was taking hormone replacement therapy," Jax said. "And, I don't know, little things like that, just mentioning transness in this neutral or positive light, like this is just something about the world."

Transgender people, students or otherwise, are all around the world. It's estimated that over 1.6 million people in the United States alone identify as transgender in some way, with over

100,000 transgender children living in one of the 24 states which hold a ban on gender-affirming hormone therapy. By providing inclusive and open mindsets, communities are able to create stronger bonds within themselves and provide the care transgender people need to feel validated. This validation also comes with pride and being vocal about one's gender identity.

As mentioned prior, two chose anonymity in times of crisis. However, the other four interviewed about their own identities have chosen to be publicized under their own names. They were asked why, amidst everything, they chose pride.

Ella responded, "If you're, you know, not 'passing,' I do think kind of putting your name out there, especially in a public newspaper that everyone can read, everyone can look at, it might put a target on your head ... I have a very strong support network ... I think I'm coming from a very strong position and I'd like to be able to advocate for both myself and other members of my community."

Passing refers to a transgender person being perceived and treated as the gender they identify with, leading to less discrimination and lowered risk of hate crimes.

"Can't unring that bell. And I don't know if I would want to if I could," Lišková said.

"I'd rather be out and proud than anonymous," said Eli Schuitema, a 19-year-old psychology major at GRCC.

Jax replied, "I think part of it is, I want people to

know, like, even if they don't feel safe enough now, there are futures for them where they do feel safe enough..."

Some situations, especially with transgender people under attack politically, create tension, though.

"There's been a couple of touchy situations where people who have political shirts make me a little nervous or whatever, but I use the male bathrooms. I haven't faced anything negative so far, and I hope it stays that way," Schuitema shared.

In order for transgender people to feel safe, they must have a voice. For those who chose to publicize, leading with their voices and embracing their transgender identities allows others to feel more secure in their own positions. Standing out is a natural part of being transgender, but being proud of it is a learned trait.

Hormone replacement therapy: the facts

Hormone replacement therapy, or HRT, is, for a large portion of transgender people, the end goal. Hormone replacement therapy is a form of medical treatment for transgender people that involves taking gender-affirming hormones. Transgender men, often labeled FtM for 'female-to-male,' take testosterone to help alleviate and possibly remove their gender dysphoria altogether. Transgender women, who are labeled 'MtF' for 'male-to-female,' take estrogen and androgen blockers to reduce testosterone levels, and other female hormones to mitigate the effects of their gender dysphoria.

According to the National Library of Medicine, hormone replacement therapy lessens suicide rates and other disorders caused by gender dysphoria. Those who start hormone replacement therapy earlier typically have better mental health than transgender people who take it later in life. All participants of gender-affirming hormone replacement therapy are kept under supervision in case of maladaptive physical traits and to observe hormone levels. All of this is done via medical labs with strict adherence to medical guidelines to maintain the safety of the person.

Hormone replacement therapy: the stories

An end goal for many transgender people is to be placed on hormone replacement therapy. Of the six interviewed, four are on hormone replacement therapy. Only one of the six is not seeking hormone replacement therapy.

Schuitema is a psychology major who hopes to work in counseling. He was the president of his Gay-Straight Alliance in high school.

“I didn’t actually get on hormones until about eight months ago. So it’s a relatively new thing, but it’s been amazing so far,” Schuitema said.

Schuitema has seen a drastic increase in quality of life since starting testosterone. He has felt more confident, more respected and much happier since.

“I think there was a huge shift in self-confidence. I felt like I could be more of myself, especially once my voice dropped,” he said. “... I felt like I was actually, finally, on the path to being who I wanted

to be rather than just waiting and waiting...”

He was at a low point in his life prior to starting HRT. Though by starting testosterone, he could finally see the results of years of therapy and consultations. Jax shared the same sentiments.

“As I started to notice changes in my voice, I was like, hell yeah!” Jax said. “One cool thing was that I didn’t really hear it. ... Because in my brain, my voice was always lower and more how I imagined it. And so it wasn’t that I was hearing my voice in my own head differently, but when I heard it back, it sounded more like how I think I should sound. So that was really cool.”

Common criticisms of testosterone in HRT is that, by starting the hormone, transgender men will become more aggressive or have less patience with people, both actions that are typically associated with higher levels of testosterone. Jax believes he’s done the opposite since beginning his hormone journey. He feels that transitioning has helped him achieve greater peace, thus helping him feel calmer.

“I was worried that I’d be more aggressive or more snippy or have less of a patience. I haven’t really noticed that ... After socially and physically transitioning... I’ve been calmer, I’ve been more social, I’ve felt less anxiety,” Jax said.

Transgender women tend to see changes at a slower pace when starting HRT. Although testosterone will deepen the voice, neither estradiol nor antiandrogens can lighten or change a person’s voice. Testosterone is found within all people – males and females alike. This shared

hormone creates muscle mass and bone density in all humans. Transgender women competing in the Olympics are required to have less testosterone than is considered healthy for their body, the same amount as menopausal women. Despite this, transgender women nationwide are being banned from playing sports altogether.

Lišková is a competitor in many triathlons. These attacks on transgender rights in sports have affected her mentally and personally.

"I compete in triathlons and so, naturally, this makes me the person that a lot of people are talking about when they say – and I put this in as many quotes as possible – 'protect women's sports,'" Lišková said.

According to the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport and many other sources, trans women, at best, compete fairly with cisgender women, or people born female.

Lišková, like many transgender women, had to work to regain their physical strength. According to the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport and many other sources, trans women, at best, compete fairly with cisgender women, or people born female. There is no dominance or disadvantage against cisgender women. However, politicians have moved to create more than 80

separate bills reducing transgender rights on the issue.

Speak up and speak out: Fighting for rights

Many are frozen in fear by their removal of rights. However, even if one cannot look at the news every day, action is seen as necessary.

"I follow a lot of creators online who have formed ... protests, not just in Grand Rapids, but in other states, and it sort of renews a hope that there are people who are fighting and that you could be part of that," Solstice said.

All interviewed advocate at the local level, some only signing petitions and contacting representatives, others more. Lišková believes her voice can be heard more in Grand Rapids than federally and fears she does not have control over federal policy. Spring, however, holds little trust in the government altogether.

"Political transparency anywhere in the nation is terrible," Spring said. "It is absolutely terrible. I think the best thing we can do is, at the end of the day, be there for one another. Because if I can't be the person making the changes, I can certainly help people feel less alone."

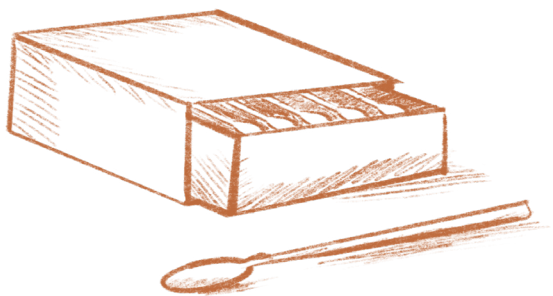
Connecting with one's community can do more than change political behavior. The Grand Rapids Pride Center and the Grand Rapids Trans Foundation, for instance, help support people in their transition journey. They help provide counseling, offer free gender-affirming clothing and assist in legal name changes. Both organizations are non-profit. The Grand Rapids

Pride Center is the longest-running LGBTQ+ resource center in Michigan, starting in 1988.

“For the children that feel unseen, I love you.”

The resources provided by these organizations and public displays of transgender pride help provide warmth during trying times, especially for transgender and queer youth. Amidst chaos, people afraid of their futures must be reminded why people fight for them and why to fight for themselves.

“Humanity, if nothing else, is made to endure and to love despite. For the children that feel unseen, I love you, and love does triumph in those restless nights,” shared Spring, in hopes of comforting the children that are upset with the state of the world. “I love you, and do not go gentle into that good night.”



Lišková chooses to fight for all transgender youth out there. “The adults in your life may not listen, may not understand, may do worse than not understanding, ... but you’re not alone,” she commented. “You don’t, despite what anybody says, do this on a lark. You are real, and I see all

of you, and I hold all of you in my heart, and I am... fighting for you.”

“There have always been people like you. You are loved, you are understood,” Ella said. Ella also shared that, especially as a child, seeing transgender media made them feel comforted and helped them understand the complexity of a differing gender identity.

The vast majority of transgender individuals report feeling isolated at one point or another during their transition. Jax shared advice for those who feel alone in their queer identity.

“If you don’t have them already, find people who will support you. ... Queer and trans people are far more common, I think, than people realize,” he said. “... When you feel like you’re a part of something bigger, it’s kind of a self-reinforcing feeling... and so reaching out to a community beyond queer-centered spaces, I think, is really helpful, too.”

“Just because there is a big ... storm of people who want to suppress or feel the need to beat others down, it looks bad, but there are a lot more people who are willing to accept you and willing to love you,” shared Solstice. He also noted that finding friends and loved ones which accept him is what made him more confident in expressing his identity.

“Look for the euphoria instead of the dysphoria. ... Just searching for those things that bring you joy and bring you peace rather than the things that you don’t like about yourself,” Schuitema said.

Conclusion: A magic button

Throughout the history of transgender people, several interrogatives have helped people understand themselves more intimately. As all interviews finished, the interviewees were asked a final question:

If there was a magic button that could skip transitioning and give you everything transitioning could give, would you press it? Would you have pressed it prior to transitioning?

Only one person answered yes.

“The climb to the top, I think, makes the struggle worth it. That’s my answer,” said Lišková.

Jax believes being transgender just emphasizes a natural part of life: finding one’s identity and how personality changes through time.

“I don’t think I would. I think being trans is really cool... It’s really human to me, like, figuring out who you want to be and making your life what you want your life to be is just, it feels really innate to me.”

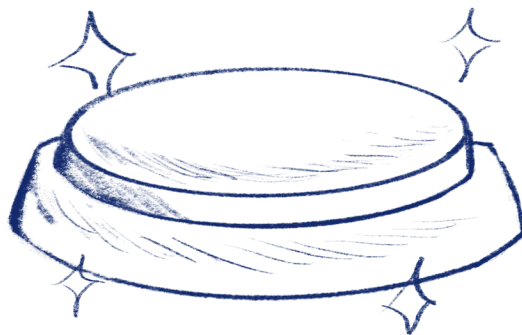
Now, Spring wouldn’t press the button. She is too appreciative of her identity and believes her journey has made her the person she is now. If she were asked prior to transitioning, though, it would have been a different story altogether.

“The moment that I came out to my friends and my family, if I were offered a button to skip everything...I would have pressed that button without reading any of the fine print.”

The only person who would press the button is Solstice, who has been searching for testosterone treatment for months and is still looking for the resources he needs. When asked why, he shared he has felt dysphoric for too long.

“I would definitely press it, 100 percent. Just because it’s hard to find the resources to be able to transition now and I have felt like this for so long. I’ve felt this since I was a child.... I wanted to be able to love myself a little bit more, but I wasn’t able to before I ... socially transitioned. If I could gift myself that, I feel like I would be able to love myself more and honor who I was as a child.”

Transgender people have existed throughout history. Despite several attempts at erasure, people still fight to maintain the human rights transgender people deserve. By accepting the differences in people’s identities, solidarity can be established. By speaking out against discrimination, youth are emboldened knowing they have people who understand. And by standing out and displaying pride, unity and strength can be created.



Where do GRCC students go to socailize?

By Jared Tobaison

In a world centered around technology and social media, relationships are being formed more via phone apps like Snapchat or Instagram, and less in person. While many have shifted from meeting people at those traditional hangouts out in public, not all have.

Evan Krummel, 21, of Grand Rapids, has a friend group that they've been hanging out with since 10th grade. Being an introvert, they don't go out to and hang out with their friend group often in the city, but what they do instead is partake in a weekly tradition.

"We have a friend who sets up a weekly tradition called game morning," Krummel said. "Every Sunday morning we do board games and breakfast. It's a really good way for us to stay connected."

Krummel's friend group is able to stay connected just by finding a little bit of time to be together once a week. Which sometimes, is all they need.

Though on the off chance they do go out into the city, their friend group enjoys ice skating at Rosa Parks Circle.

With it being winter in Michigan, it gets very cold out and some people don't want to spend their days or evenings outside in the Grand Rapids area. People would rather be inside whether it's in

the comfort of their homes where they chill and text or call their friends, or they'll go out to do something indoors where it's nice and warm.

V Heath, 20, of Grand Rapids, enjoys going out with his friends but not much by himself. When he is with his friends they usually do "boy stuff, like hangout in the mall, and just horse around."

Simple things like going to the mall with friends is a good way to be social, meet people and connect with other people.

With people communicating more via social media and text, Heath prefers the in-person conversations, explaining, "I feel better talking to them in person rather than text, cause there's no emotion when you're texting and you can't read them," Heath said.

When it comes to socializing and the ability to just meet new people and have conversations with them, there's a difference between introverts and extroverts. Introverts tend to stay with their groups and not put themselves out there, while extroverts have almost no problem being out in public making friends and socializing with random people.

Cody Andersiak, 19, of Kentwood, usually goes out a few times a week with friends. Usually, he is playing Pokemon Go or playing on random playgrounds in Grand Rapids. He's an extrovert and it

showed when he mentioned that he “quite often” talked to people and made friends when he is out in Grand Rapids.

Andersiak had a couple of suggestions of places to go to just be in a social environment either by yourself or with a group. “For group things we normally do Peppino’s,” he said. “If you’re looking for a good solo spot for breakfast I recommend Brooklyn Bodega, they’re pretty good.”

With technology becoming more ingrained in students’ everyday lives, some people need to push

themselves to explore Grand Rapids and experience fun places where they can meet new people, like the mall or just walking around downtown Grand Rapids playing Pokemon Go. There are also plenty of coffee shops around the city like The Bitter End or Midnight Express Cafe that have great atmospheres and provide opportunities to meet new people and just get out and be social.

Simple things like going to the mall with friends is a good way to be social, meet people and connect with other people.



Illustration by Dana Kistler

My story is just getting started

By Marie-Ange Betz

On January 12, 2010, at 4:53 p.m., the largest earthquake of that time struck Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Every major news channel—CNN, Fox News, CBS and others—covered the disaster, sharing updates for adoptive families and tracking when we would land in America. About a week and a half later, I finally left Haiti and boarded a U.S. Army cargo plane. On that very plane was a journalist from Time Magazine. He photographed five children, including me, seated in the aircraft, waiting to meet our adoptive families in America. Below the picture, the caption read, “There are few children more valuable than the youth of Haiti...”

My name is Marie-Ange Betz. I was born and raised in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where I lived in an orphanage. As many know, orphanages are not always the cleanest environments, but for children, it’s still a home. I entered the system when I was just 1 year old. My birth mother experienced complications after my birth and left me in the care of my father, brother and sister.

My father, a street salesman in Haiti, struggled to care for a newborn along with two other children. As a result, he made the difficult decision to place my siblings with my grandparents, who were already familiar with raising children. I remember my adoptive mom sharing how heart-wrenching it was for my dad. She said, “I’ve never seen a grown man cry so hard, giving up his own child like your dad did.”

After the process of entering the orphanage, I remained there until I was 4 ½ years old. Sadly, my father was never able to see me again due to Haitian child protection laws. These laws focus on addressing issues such as family separation and child abandonment. Many children are placed in care institutions, not because they are orphans, but due to poverty. Most still have living family members. Organizations like UNICEF work alongside the Haitian government to address these challenges, encouraging family-based care instead of institutional care to keep families together.

By late 2009, I was adopted by a wonderful woman who is now my mother, Susan Betz. Before I arrived in Florida, my mom visited me one last time. Originally, I was expected to arrive in America by the third week of January. However, since the earthquake, my mom and many other families lost contact with the



orphanage's organization during this time, leaving the adoptive parents unable to confirm their children's whereabouts or well-being.

On the plane, I have a couple of friends that I still know and talk to till this day, Lourdie, Celina and Gracie. Lourdie and I still hang out here and there, but Celina, Gracie and I haven't seen each other in a really long time, only because they live in Florida, unlike Lourdie, who lives here in Grand Rapids.

Photo courtesy of Marie-Ange Betz



(left to right: Lourdie Clark and Marie-Ange Betz)

As a fun little joke with one of my Haitian friends, we were playing around with Facebook and then decided to look up anyone with the same last name as mine. My middle name is "Aubin," which is the last name in Haiti. We saw so many people with that last name, so we went in order, and the first person we clicked on was my brother. His

background profile picture was of me as a little girl in a yellow polka dot dress. At first, I was super scared that an adult man had my picture as their profile picture. I then showed my mum and asked if this was really one of my family members. She didn't want me talking to a grown man, so she decided to get one of her guy friends to talk to him to make sure he was legit. Later that day, we found out that he was my brother and that I had a sister.

I wish I could tell you the feeling I was going through, but remember, I was only 4. The only thing I really remember about this historical journey of my life was the smell after the earthquake. Every time I smell burnt rubber, it's like a flashback to Haiti, as I don't really like the smell. It reminds me that I'm in a better place now and will never have to deal with something like that.

Many people might ignore the Time article, thinking, "It's just a magazine," but to me, it represents so much more. It captured the reality of Haiti's struggles and told the true story of what we were facing. The article highlighted how we were simply trying to reunite with our families during the chaos. While sharing this story was important and helped show the devastation in my homeland, it also reminds me of all that we lost—and how we're still working to rebuild. Despite everything, I'm grateful that I was able to find my way to the right home and start a new life with my adoptive family.

GRCC's 11th President Charles Lepper resigns

By The Collegiate Staff

On March 14, the Board of Trustees at Grand Rapids Community College announced via email that President Charles Lepper had been placed on paid administrative leave. No reason for his leave was provided in the initial announcement. A week before the announcement was sent out, Lepper was announced as a finalist for the president role at Madison Area Technical College, a two-year college in Madison, Wisconsin.

Eldin Causevic, 19, said, "It kind of just seems like he's finding a way out and leaving the college."

After the announcement of his leave, The Collegiate surveyed several students. Not one person could name who the president was, and some thought that was a problem.

Saydy Bravo, 22, brought up involvement, saying, "I feel like if you're the president, you should get to know everyone and be involved with the school and try to help most students in some way."

President of the Campus Activities Board Brayden Smith shared his experience with Lepper.

"He never really engaged with CAB or took an interest in what we do. Early on, he would attend Involvement Day each semester, and I once went to see him at lunch with Lepper," he stated in an email. "But every time I spoke with him, it felt like he was meeting me for the first time—which didn't feel great, especially considering the major events we organize for campus."

At GRCC, Vice President of Finance and Administration Lisa Freiburger took over as acting president, while Lepper was unreachable to The Collegiate and went on to do his finalist interview at MATC.

In his interview, Lepper addressed his leave from GRCC while talking about his employment with the college in the past tense.

During his March 27 interview, when asked what excites him most about the possibility of being president of MATC, Lepper took a six-second pause before saying, "There are so many great things that are going on at this institution, it's hard to say this is the one thing that excites me," Lepper said. "But it feels very comfortable to me, in a way it's kind of like a home."

Questions regarding the future of the college were addressed through two listening sessions hosted by the Executive Leadership Team as the winter semester came to an end. Common concerns included distrust in the college's leadership, as well as how various executive orders may impact education on campus.

Some answers were provided at a special meeting called by the Board of Trustees on April 14, where the board unanimously accepted Lepper's resignation and approved his separation agreement.

Even at the special meeting, no rationale for the separation was provided.

