



EAST MEETS WEST

**FROM CARS TO FOOD TO LOVE,
REGIONAL DIFFERENCES CREATE
GOOD LAUGHS AMONG STUDENTS**

— by Dottie Barnes

IT'S like a whole new world. Somewhere west of Lansing it happens. A different way a life begins. The differences between the Detroit and Grand Rapids areas are well known to most. The east is considered more liberal, progressive and Democratic, while the west is considered more conservative, religious and Republican.

For students at Grand Valley, the “east-west thing” sparks fun conversations and a variety of perceptions. Grand Valley has about 23,000 students; more than 5,100, or 22 percent, are from the Detroit, Ann Arbor and Flint metro areas. When east siders and west siders meet, students often share their perceptions about traffic, food, religion, boyfriends, music and beaches, to name a few.

CONEY ISLAND BABY

There are certain culinary differences between east and west. Perhaps nothing underscores the divide more than the Coney Island conundrum. When arriving in West Michigan, a query from east siders was, “Where’s the Coney Island?” The response is often, “*What’s a Coney Island?*”

For outstaters who need explanation, a Coney Island is a type of Greek restaurant popular around greater Motown. It’s named for its popular chili dog, but also home to loose hamburgers, gyros and Vernor’s ginger ale — a repast as cheap and delicious as it is unhealthy.

Brian Demers, a senior from Grosse Pointe Woods, said, “I was bummed there wasn’t a Coney Island in West Michigan, or a Buddy’s Pizza.”

Nicole Gauche, a senior from Clarkston, said: “Someone should open up a Coney Island. They would make a killing.”

Crystal Moss, a senior from Detroit, said: “There are about six Coney Islands within five minutes of my house in Detroit. The Coney Island that recently opened near campus is good, but not quite the same. I was expecting to find a White Castle, too.”



BABY, I NEED YOUR LOVIN’

Jessica Molenkamp, a senior from Grandville said, “I think people here tend to marry their first boyfriend or someone local.”

Moss said, “I’ve noticed that people from the west side tend to marry younger.”

WHOLLY HOLY

Religion was the most common difference cited by students.

Gauche said: "When my friends heard I was going to Grand Valley, they told me I was moving to the Bible Belt. My friends from the west side of the state have more of a foundation in religion. They go to church because they want to, not because they feel obligated."

Jenny Whalen, a sophomore from Clinton Township, said: "Everyone owns or carries a Bible here. Back home, the Bible is on a shelf or a table. Or, you're not sure where it is."

Jennifer Beukema, a sophomore from Zeeland, said: "One of the first things I ask a new friend is, 'What church do you go to?' It's a common question if you're from around here. I was also surprised to learn that some of my friends from the east side of the



state had never heard of the Christian Reformed Church. It's funny listening to them try to pronounce Dutch names."



KICK OUT THE JAMS, ETC.

Katie Beamish, a sophomore from Holland, said, "I find that students from the east side are more apt to listen to country music."

Gauche said, "People from West Michigan say 'Meijers' and people from the east side say 'Meijer.'"

Demers said: "The beach is like a way of life here. Going to the beach is a big deal on the east side. It takes a whole day of planning."

Jessica Doptis, a junior from Macomb, said: "There's more cement back home. It's greener in West Michigan."

Moss said: "It takes awhile to get to civilization on the west side. There are a lot of stores within walking distance in Detroit."

FREEWAY OF LOVE

Elizabeth Scerbak, a junior from Ypsilanti, said: "Back home, most people will speed through a yellow light; not here. Drivers are more relaxed here. They take their time."

Steve Bartz, a sophomore from Northville, said: "People drive faster on the east side of the state. We're also more apt to lay on the horn."

Heather DeWitt, a sophomore from Allendale, said: "People from the east side of the state seem to have a better sense of direction. They also use highway names and exits to refer to where they live. It's kind of weird."

Joe Leija, a junior from Mount Clemens, said: "We handle Michigan turnarounds differently. On the east side, we stay in the same lane through the turn. Drivers on the west side turn wherever they want."

Moss said, "The first difference I noticed was the lack of street lights and sidewalks."



EBONY AND IVORY

Kaley Novoselich, a junior from Muskegon, said, "East sides underestimate the lack of diversity in West Michigan. Grand Valley is becoming more diverse, but I think students from the east side expect to see more of a melting pot."

Scerbak said: "I assumed the area would be more diverse because of the size of West Michigan. I think people from the east side are more comfortable with diversity."

Editor's Note: Alumni, what do you remember? Share your memories with us at gvmagazine@gvsu.edu.

all photos by Amanda Pitts, except American Coney Island by Amy Cronkite, '96

Clockwise from top of page 23 are St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Grand Rapids; Saugatuck beach; traffic on I-96 near Detroit; (page 22, clockwise) downtown Grand Rapids; an American Coney Island restaurant on Lafayette Boulevard in Detroit; and the Detroit Riverfront Walk behind the Renaissance Center.