REPORTING SRI MEDICHERLA, MELANIE PINCUS PHOTOS MELANIE PINCUS, SHANZEH UMERANI DESIGN BRYAN CHUNG

 avin Grimm was 16 when he sued his district's school board in Gloucester County, Virginia. Grimm is transgender, and
the objects to a policy that prevents him from using the boys' bathroom at his school.

On March 28, the Supreme Court will begin hearing arguments in *Gloucester County School Board v. GG*. They will decide whether Title IX's protection against discrimination "on the basis of sex" in public schools encompasses gender identity.

In the midst of this national debate, students at McLean who are transgender or whose identities fall outside of the gender binary continue with their high school lives.

"This isn't a burden to me. It's not a burden—it's who I am," said junior Carmen Beadie, who identifies as non-binary. "It's no more of a burden than the fact that I have blue eyes, to me, personally."

## Carmen

On Halloween their freshman year, Carmen Beadie gathered Wet n Wild eyeshadow pigments, a red Sharpie, a glue stick and baby powder to transform themself into a zombie version of Peter Pan.

"At the time, I really looked exactly like Peter Pan. I had the haircut and I had the stature," Carmen said. "I basically used the glue as fake skin, I used the Sharpie as blood and I used the eyeshadow as irritation and pigmentation."

This was Carmen's first experience with special effects makeup. Since then, they have worked on makeup in a number of theater productions at McLean, and they are currently doing makeup for *Mount Hideaway*, a TV show being developed for distribution on Amazon Prime.

"I'm interested in the cool fantasy conceptual stuff," Carmen said. "Like in *The Hunger Games...*when you look at everyone in the Capital, even though they're just extras and it's just one shot, each one has a different makeup design and it's all thought up by someone, and I want to be that someone someday."

Freshman year was a pivotal year for Carmen not only because they discovered their passion for makeup, but also because they determined their gender identity.

"I really noticed it when the gym teachers were like, 'Okay, line up boys and girls," Carmen said. "I had been researching this stuff because it didn't feel right...I was like, okay, if your biological sex doesn't determine your gender and neither do gender roles, then what does it mean? And I still don't really know. I just [think] that it's kind

JUST THIS MORNING, I LOOKED MYSELF IN THE MIRROR AND I WAS LIKE, GOD, I DON'T KNOW HOW I EVER THOUGHT I WAS A GIRL. CARMEN BEADIE of unnecessary and really limiting to label yourself as one or the other, so I just kind of go with neither. It fits best for me, I think."

Carmen identifies as non-binary—they do not consider themself to be either a boy or a girl.

"Just this morning, I looked myself in the mirror and I was like, god, I don't know how I ever thought I was a girl," Carmen said. "I didn't like having my long hair so I would always tie it back, and I didn't like looking like a girl so I would always wear oversized clothes... It led to a lot of insecurities and that was mostly stemmed from the fact that I didn't want to be a girl but I couldn't admit it."

Facing aisles full of gendered toys when they were younger, Carmen matched dinosaurs with doll houses and action figures with Polly Pockets.

"They market the pink princess toys to young girls and they market the cool action figures and dinosaur toys to young boys. That can be pretty limiting, I think, because when I was little I liked to play with both of those things," Carmen said.

As someone who has never felt comfortable being identified as a girl, Carmen said seeing representation on television when they were younger would have helped them.

"I was big on *Teen Titans*. If there was one of those who was maybe gender nonconforming...or something like that...if that was there when I was a kid, that would've helped," Carmen said.

As they got older, the internet helped them develop their identity.

"You can find great outlets online to read about it and talk about it and see other people that feel the same way you do when no one else does around you," Carmen said.

When they came out, Carmen faced mixed responses.

"Coming out was in some aspects very liberating but in others really horrible. It was great, like my friends were immediately very supportive, some of them didn't quite understand it at first and people still mess up on the pronouns, which is okay, but the hardest part was my parents and grandparents, I guess," Carmen said.

Carmen considers senior Emily Swett to be one of their best friends. Swett said Carmen has helped her learn about gender.

"Carmen has made me more aware of a lot of gender issues in a way that I was not at all before and has taught me to be more understanding of people with the same identity or other identities," Swett said.

Carmen's mother, Rachel Wright, said she struggled at first to reconcile her child's identity with her beliefs about women's empowerment.

"As someone who has worked very hard to prove that women can succeed in male-dominated environments and traditionally male careers, it was upsetting at first. It felt like a rejection of the gender I worked so hard to redefine, like Carmen was asserting that to be female was somehow 'less than,'" Wright said. "But I know it was never about me, and I suppose in some ways that my rejection of gender roles in my own life might have made it easier for Carmen. That makes me more proud than anything."

San Francisco State University's Family Acceptance Project analyzes the effect of family rejection on LGBT youth. In 2009, they found that highly rejected young people are more than six times as likely to report high levels of depression.



IN THE BLACK BOX — Carmen did makeup designs for TheatreMcLean's production of The Children's Hour. "This takes place in the 30s, which means period makeup, which is fun," Carmen said.

"As a parent, the most important thing to me was that [Carmen] be happy, and everyone needs to find their own definition of happy," Wright said. "So I'd say that you have to trust that your child is not doing this to rebel or to irritate you or anything else—they're just looking for their own happy."

For Carmen, becoming comfortable with their gender is only part of their happiness.

"A lot of people see me and they think, 'Oh, that's the trans kid,' or, 'That's the non-binary one," Carmen said. "There are other qualities that people...have about them."

In addition to their passion for makeup, Carmen can label every country in the world on a map. They play ukulele and enjoy baking and acting.

"I just kind of like learning about whatever piques my interest," Carmen said. "Like there was a one-month period when I was really into the ukulele... There was a while when I baked a lot, there was a while where I knitted a lot."

Wright sees Carmen as someone who is empathetic and unafraid.

"They have a remarkable ability to put themselves in someone else's shoes, with empathy," Wright said. "And more than anything, I find Carmen to be incredibly courageous. They will stand up to someone they feel is being unkind or unfair, and they're not hindered by a fear of saying or doing the 'wrong thing."

Carmen hopes to pursue a career doing makeup for film. They don't see gender as a defining factor or a limitation.

"If you find a pronoun that fits you, go for it. If you find a label that fits you, go for it. But it's not that important. I don't say that to be rude or anything, but what helped me is the thought that this doesn't really matter in the long run," Carmen said. "It doesn't affect my talent and it doesn't affect the things I can do as a person. It's just an arbitrary factor when it comes down to it. Gender is just another way to separate yourself from others."



## Rowan

Senior Rowan Wooldridge came out as transgender to his family and friends the summer before his junior year, but he came out at school only this fall, switching to male pronouns and asking to go by a different name than was on the roster.

"I just kind of casually told my teachers [this] year, and then slowly slipped things in," Rowan said. "But a lot of people are really confused, especially people who knew me, because I've been in this school system since I was in kindergarten."

Rowan says this past year was a time of learning about himself, and cites the internet, his friends and PFLAG, a national advocacy and education organization for the LGBTQ+ community, as resources that helped him learn about gender identity.

"Watching [YouTube] videos helped me, just hearing someone describe everything. I've talked to someone in a PFLAG group before and [explained] what non-binary was and someone else in the room was like, 'Wait, can you say that again, I think that's me,'" Rowan said. "So going to these things is not corrupting you, it's not making you gay or trans, it's helping you understand your feelings."

However, taking time for himself meant that Rowan had to sacrifice some aspects of his life before the transition.

"I [used to play] really competitive softball but then I couldn't play anymore because I didn't identify as a girl," Rowan said. "When I quit I couldn't really tell anyone why because I didn't feel comfortable telling them...but it wasn't something that I stopped just because of my transition. I just needed to take a few months and not have to do something every single day so I could figure myself out first."

During this time, Rowan has turned to his friends for support.

"I've found [the] most community among my friends who are also LGBTQ+," Rowan said. "Even though I don't have a lot of other trans guy friends, just having people who understand how hard it is to come out and have everyone think you're just a complete outsider is just really helpful."

While his transition has been a time to learn about himself, Rowan recognizes that it is a learning experience for people around him as well.

"A lot of people are kind of just like, 'Okay, you changed your name, but why? And you don't look the same, but why?" Rowan said.

Rowan also fosters an understanding of his identity. Principal Ellen Reilly, who has met with Rowan about making accommodations for his identity, said Rowan has been helpful in helping her learn more about gender.

"[I want students to] educate me on what it means, and I think Rowan is excellent at that," Principal Ellen Reilly said. "He just gives you a great understanding... He's educated me."

Expectedly, it wasn't easy for Rowan from the beginning.

"My parents did take a little while to understand but I guess I understand their confusion," Rowan said.

Rowan's father, Paul Wooldridge, said that there were some initial challenges, and some that have persisted.



"You have to adjust rapidly to many abrupt changes, from using a new name and new pronoun references to making time for research [and] educating yourself to get up to speed on a whole new set of unfamiliar, complex concepts," Paul Wooldridge said. "Everyday work-life balance is stretched to the max. It is a struggle to empathize directly with what your kid is going through because you have no direct experience to draw from. It can leave you feeling helpless at times about what to do to help and support them."

Now, Rowan says his parents' support is something he is grateful for and has relied on during his journey.

"My dad's side of the family has been supportive, because my dad made this Powerpoint," Rowan said. "He sent it to me the other day and I was almost crying—it was really sweet. He kind of explained everything to people... It was really cute."

Beyond fostering an understanding in his immediate community, Rowan says he finds reward in being a part of a bigger movement.

"I like to spend my time trying to help other people," Rowan said. "I go to a lot of PFLAG meetings. I went to the Women's March and protests and stuff—I just like to advocate for people."

Rowan even gave an interview for *Gloucester County v. GG*. When he received an email from his local PFLAG group about interviewing, he hoped to use his experience to facilitate communication and understanding.

"Everyone has a bathroom story," Rowan said.

Rowan's bathroom story in particular reveals some of the struggles gender nonconforming individuals can face in school. Although Rowan's experiences have generally been positive because of McLean's accommodations and accepting nature, he initially didn't have ready access to a gender neutral bathroom at McLean.

"I would either have to choose between going into the wrong bathroom or I would just not drink water so that I didn't have to go to the bathroom the entire school day," Rowan said. "That's not good, because a lot of trans guys who do this—it's not an uncommon thing—get urinary tract infections just because they can't go to the bathroom for like seven hours. It's hard to explain the fact that it hurts me more to go into the girl's bathroom than it would to just not go to the bathroom the entire day."

Rowan hopes that his experiences can help other young people struggling with their gender identities.

"I just found myself being really interested in being able to pass on what I've learned because I've had such a hard time transitioning and it's really good just to pass [on] my information," Rowan said.

The constants in Rowan's life, like his family and friends, ensure that any struggles he still faces are bearable.

"[Rowan's] interests are the same as many kids his age—he tolerates school, loves animals, likes TV shows, movies and memes, and likes to hang out with his close friends," Paul Wooldridge said. "He even might like his parents more than many kids. I admire his work ethic—he is one of the hardest working people I know. He is also very caring and loyal."

Rowan's desire to foster understanding in his community is based on the idea that his gender does not define his identity.

"I mean, when you think about it, it's not that strange. It's just a person doing something to make [them] more comfortable with themselves," Rowan said. "And I feel like anyone who doesn't agree with me is basically saying, 'I don't want you to actually like yourself and be who you are,' when that's all I'm trying to do."



**REMINISCING** — Rowan holds a picture of himself at age 4 (right) with longtime friend senior Sam Peters. "All of my close friends are obviously really accepting," Rowan said.