

In Community

-Camden

It's September 1st, 2021. I walk up the steps of the Grymes Memorial School bus and the driver, Mrs. Linda greets me and directs me to my slightly cramped seat in the back. I sit down as the bus pulls out of the Louisa Car Wash parking lot. As we are driving down the beautiful backroads of Louisa County I begin to wonder about my future. *"What will this year be like?"* Will the classes be hard? Will the students like me? Will the *teachers* even like me?

All of these questions fly about my head as we enter the parking lot of Gordonsville Baptist Church. A few kids get on, but most of them look to be younger than me. We finally arrive at Grymes and Mrs. Sacre bids me *"Good Morning"* for the first time. It's uncomfortably warm and rainy. I worry God is sending me a sign that this isn't going to be a great day. I brace myself as Mrs. Keating directs me to the Seventh Grade classroom. It's a long walk down the sidewalk to the end of the building. I take a deep breath, realizing that when I walk through that door my whole life will change. For better, or, worse.

Hello. My name is Camden Harper. And I've come a long way since that first day in seventh grade. To answer the three questions I had on that bus 609 days ago; one, the classwork is challenging, but you are still managing to get pretty good grades. Two, everyone welcomed you with open arms and you have made relationships that have both entertained and challenged you. And three, the teachers have been the best you have had in the entirety of your educational career. They have guided you through the tough topics and go the extra mile when it comes to engaging all students, including you, in the subjects you're studying.

Flashback to 2017, and another new community. I walked into the Louisa Arts Center for the first time, to audition for a part in *"The Best Christmas Pageant Ever."* I am so glad I mustered up the courage to walk through those doors. First because this was my introductory opportunity to be on stage in a major production. The work I put into my role as Elmer Hopkins involved countless hours of memorizing lines and working with others to develop my part. I'm thankful for the theatrical tricks and skills I've learned from the Louisa Arts Center as it greatly helps me in the Grymes Theatre program.

Secondly because the Arts Center has given me what no other community had; the feeling of acceptance. When you are interacting with the same people every day for months on end, you begin to grow relationships you never could have imagined were possible. The theater community accepts all differences and makes everyone feel welcome, no matter who they are. Because the end goal is always that the show must go on! And no matter what, you must stick together with your fellow cast members to

make that goal happen. I will always be grateful for the Louisa Arts Center. Because the skills I learned there contribute not only to the way I prepare for theatrical productions, but also to the way I live my everyday life.

Throughout my life, I have been supported by a third amazing community. Mineral Baptist Church, my church since I was four years old, has been there to introduce me to experiences I am truly blessed to have had. They have embraced my love of music by giving me the opportunity to sing songs for the congregation and be part of the Church's praise team and choir specials. This music has not only provided me joy but also helped me to grow my faith in God through the inspiring and meaningful messages of the songs. The Youth program has also helped me step outside of my comfort zone.

Last year, I went on my first Youth Mission trip. Which was one of the most fun weeks of my life, I met so many interesting people from all over the United States during that trip. The food at James Madison University was delicious, and we got to play fun games in downtime. Then we served the community by playing fun games like *Duck Duck Goose* and *Hide and Seek* in a park. Mineral Baptist Church has not only provided me with some of the best moments of my life, but has helped me *through* some of the most challenging trials of my life. When my mother, Tara, died in a car accident in 2018, the incredible people at my church were always there for me. They have never let me down, no matter the circumstance. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you, Mineral Baptist Church, for being one of my communities.

It is now a bittersweet moment as I prepare to leave this community. Grymes Memorial School has been part of my life for the past two years, and during that short time, I've learned things I couldn't have imagined learning at any other school. Everyday I've grown as a student.

Early on, I developed better organization tactics. FOLDERS ARE KEY! I also learned how to better collaborate with my classmates in an effective way while also growing good relationships with them. I'll never forget the many moments we've shared together. I've also gotten advice and support from the best teachers in all subjects. I've learned to carefully critique my writing, speak Spanish, not just be a good scientist, but a great one. I've struggled; yet persisted in math, and learned US History in an in-depth way. My teachers are the centerpiece of my time at Grymes.

Thank you Louisa Arts Center. Thank you Mineral Baptist Church. And thank you, from the bottom of my heart, Grymes Memorial School. You have all helped me become the person I am today.