

to sleep on the floor." There wasn't one incident telling her she was different, but rather a gradual increase in discomfort as she moved from junior high to high school.

At barely 18, Brittany headed off to college in New York City but that didn't mean she suddenly could put a name to her feelings. During her freshman year, many of her new friends were gay men. There was this saying "gay by May" to convey the process of coming out for many of the gay men at college. They would come to college identifying as straight but would gradually identify as bi-sexual and finally by the end of the year openly gay. According to these "experts" bi-sexuality wasn't real, but a step before admitting to being gay. This added to her confusion about her attraction to both men and women.

The first time someone opens up about their sexuality, it usually isn't a full blown coming out. In Brittany's case, during the fall of her sophomore year, she shared with a straight friend at college that she thought she had a crush on a co-worker named Belinda. She chose Kate, who was part of the circle of friends that included gay men, but that didn't remove the anxiety or confusion. For Brittany, it was the "first time I expressed out loud, um, that, that it was a possibility. I wouldn't say that it was me coming out necessarily but it was like testing the waters, for sure." At this point, she hadn't identified herself as either a lesbian or bi-sexual and it would be about two more years before she would make that leap.

The decision to come out isn't the end of the journey to self-acceptance but merely a big step forward, and for Brittany, it would be a gradual process over several years. She had become friends with Aaron, who was gay and like a big brother to her. She was in an on-again-off-again relationship with a woman and struggling with uncertainty and fear. As Brittany said, "I wasn't identifying as anything." but just trying to figure out what it meant to be bi-sexual because her images of what it meant to be bi-sexual were from awful reality shows and she kept thinking "that's not me." Telling Aaron was the first time she had said to another person that she was bi-sexual and as she said with a hesitant laugh, "saying the words, like, I'm bi-sexual, it was so hard but was such a relief." The door was now open to having an actual open relationship with a woman, at least in New York City.

Brittany's first serious relationship with a woman would be the push for her to tell me that she was bi-sexual. We are close and she said it felt weird to keep that part of her life from me. Brittany told me when she was back home for a friend's wedding. We were in the car and while I don't remember her exact words, it took me a few seconds to comprehend what she had just said. For her it was a "big step in my identity shifting", but for me it was heartbreaking. All I could think was if only I had known when she was a teenager I could have been there for her. When she was confused and struggling I could have put my arms around her, told her I loved her, and that she was perfect just as she was. As her mother, I still get emotional thinking about how confused and scared she must have been and that she had faced that alone.

First loves are always intense and exciting and Brittany's was no different. While there had been a couple of other relationships with men and women this was the first one that was serious. Brittany met Cindy during training for residence hall staff. Describing it, Brittany said, "I fell madly in love, um, and it was just, it was great. It was really great. I mean it was like a hard relationship, but it was really exciting to fall for someone and have it feel, just like, that natural." While Brittany had come out to me and had introduced Cindy to me via Skype, Cindy was adamant that she couldn't tell her family because of their extreme homophobia. She would be disowned and lose her financial support. This left Brittany feeling like Cindy was "ashamed" of her. The strain would play a major part in their break up.

When you're living in the melting pot of New York City you would expect there to be less open harassment and hostility towards members of the L.G.B.T. community, but Brittany and Cindy discovered this to be far from true. One day they were walking down the street holding hands and