

a homeless man sitting in front of a Starbucks started chasing them, screaming that he was going to rape them. On another occasion a man started following them, getting right behind them and began describing very graphically what sexual acts he wanted to do to them. The worst incident may have been when they were riding on the subway, chatting about their day, when a man got on and came and stood over them and started simulating masturbating and grunting. The subway was crowded so there wasn't anywhere for them to move to. They were scared, but tried to ignore it and relieved when he got off at the next stop. Not once did anyone try to stop these people from harassing them or even ask them if they were all right when the incidents were over. Adding to Brittany's general sense of fear and anxiety were a couple of incidents of gay men being shot and the murder of a transsexual woman in New York City. These incidents combined with something happening back in Minnesota would push Brittany to come out sooner than she probably would have.

In May of 2013, there was a bill in the Minnesota Legislature legalizing gay marriage. Chris Swedzinski, the representative from Southwestern Minnesota, was interviewed by the local newspaper on the amendment. His response began Brittany's short journey to needing to share her sexual orientation with her grandparents and other family members. Brittany and Cindy had begun to talk about getting married someday. Brittany had been following the progress of the gay marriage amendment back home in Minnesota. The measure was going to pass, but Chris Swedzinski said he would be voting no because being gay was sinful and gay marriage was not part of the family values of his constituents. This hurt because he was a person of authority, an elected official, and he was saying she wasn't welcome in his district. She said "I didn't choose this," and "one of the reasons I think I ultimately needed to get out of there was the feeling that I would be burned at the stake," she said with nervous laughter. To deal with her feelings she wrote a letter explaining how hurtful and destructive his statements were not only to her but to L.G.B.T. individuals living in his district. She sent it to friends, including Rayne, who was interning at the Huffington Post. She hadn't intended for it to be published but he responded almost immediately asking if they could publish it in their on-line edition. With the vote coming up in the next day or two, they wanted to do so right away. He gave her a couple of hours to make a decision. She knew if she said yes that would mean coming out to everyone in a very public way. With her brother and I no longer living in Cottonwood it felt safer to open up about this. It also meant that she could no longer put off telling her father and grandparents if she didn't want them to find out from someone else.

Coming out to her dad and his family was one of the hardest parts of the journey for Brittany. When she had come out to me, her brother, and my side of the family she found mostly acceptance. She did find at least verbal acceptance from her father and her stepmother. The big question was how would her paternal grandparents react? They were conservative Christian farmers who had lived in southwestern Minnesota their whole lives. Brittany was their first grandchild and they put her on a "pedestal." In their world homosexuality was a sin. Her decision to allow the Huffington Post to publish her letter meant the phone call had to be made. Their reaction would be what she expected but not what she hoped for. The phone call to Grandma Anderson was "by far the scariest thing I've ever done," she said. Brittany had hoped they would be proud of her. She tried to explain that she was coming out in hopes of helping others and how when others shared their stories it helped her feel less alone. She had hoped the conversation would end on a semi-positive note but that would not be the case, instead, it ended with her grandmother expressing she was disappointed in Brittany. When Brittany hung up she wasn't sure if she would ever talk to her grandparents again. That night was also a big gala event and Brittany was the senior senator for Hunter College. There she was, sitting on a balcony on the Upper East Side overlooking Central Park, in a beautiful dress, crying her eyes out while friends held her. She thought to herself, "after everything I had accomplished for her to be disappointed. I hadn't killed anyone." Her grandmother called her a couple of weeks later to say