

the personal stories



Christina (Chris) Terrell is a senior at Colby College who will be graduating this spring with a degree in American Studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Originally from Gary, Indiana, Chris came to Waterville, Maine a student and will be leaving with more than just a B.A.; she will be leaving a community activist, an advocate and member of the LGBT community.

Although Chris is 22 years old, she only came out to her parents two years ago.

"I came out to my mother on a Sunday. I think I called her after church. And, she, ya know, was normal, 'Hi, how are you?' and I said 'Mom there's something really important I need to tell you.' And at that point I was not even comfortable with saying, 'I'm gay,' and I said, 'Mom, I'm dating a woman.' And she said, 'What!?' I said, 'I'm dating a woman,' and she just sort of paused and she said, 'Well, what about guys?' and I said, 'I'm not interested in guys,' and she said, 'Well...sometimes parents have to ac...sometimes parents disagree with things- er, sometimes parents don't like things that their children do but they have to love them anyway.' And then she said, 'I have to go; the dog just peed on the floor, and hung up the phone.

And, part of that, the beginning is very nice, that she still loves me. The hard part is, at the time we didn't have a dog."

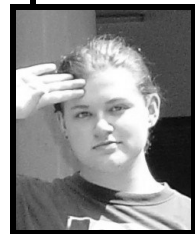
It is through sharing her story that Chris hopes to reach other young people in an effort to raise awareness and prevent other young people from feeling the way she felt the first time she realized, at nine years old that she might be gay.

"The first time that I ever thought about suicide I was nine and it was after having a friend sleep over and wanting to kiss her and I just remember writing in my diary at the time, 'I think I'm gay, everyone's gonna hate me, I wanna die.'"

Chris is very aware of the emotional and mental toll that homophobia over a lifetime can have on a young person. "Not being able to fully live my, to fully express my sexual identity makes me suicidal because, it gets really difficult to change who I am with each place that I go and I don't wanna do that anymore. I want society to accept me, I want my family and my church to accept me."

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Unlike many LGBT youth, Samantha (Sam) Shandorf had a generally positive experience when she told her parents that she was bisexual. Since then, Sam's parents, Emily and John, have made a concerted effort to support Sam in a world that can be a harsh place for LGBT people.

Emily, Sam's mother, talks about how she worked to create a safe space for Sam. "I purposely tried to make sure to let the kids know early and often that whoever they are was okay." Sam is going to struggle, she says, trying "to juggle living in a heterosexual homophobic society and having different feelings."

"As long as she's happy and being authentic, I'm happy."

Sam is careful to point out that what made her more comfortable with her sexuality was the consistent support from her parents: "I guess what my mom was saying [is that] being different and being honest about who you are is okay, and that we could always come and talk to them about something."

Through Sam's participation in the film, she hopes to help parents, educators and peers understand the importance accepting and communicating with LGBTQ youth. But, she says often that's not enough. Community members need to be proactive in creating safe spaces.

"They think that the things that they say won't affect anyone else because they're just words. And it's like that quote, 'sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me.' The truth is—they do."

"By being silent when you hear negative comments or you see things on TV, it means that you're okay with it happening. People think that they are being neutral but the truth is they aren't. Ignoring it won't make a difference. The only way that you can change it is if you actually say something about it and too many people don't."

Sam will start at the University of Maine this fall in International Affairs. She lives in Kennebunk, ME.

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