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It Takes Two

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it takes two
Heather and Bliss both grew up in a small, conservative town, where coming out to close friends and family was a life-altering moment. Now, they live happily (and openly) in Ankeny, Iowa as a confident lesbian couple - their personal stories of coming out merely an important memory.

By Jennifer Dryden

She dismisses temporary doubt, says she has never been attracted to guys and knows she never will be - she’s gay, period.

Heather and Bliss, both 19, started their freshmen year at Des Moines Area Community College in Ankeny this past fall. Growing up in a gossipy town of approximately 10,000 had them relieved to finally embrace a bigger city that lets them showcase their lifestyle freely. Heather and Bliss are lesbians, openly dating and completely OK with the way they are.

“In Ankeny... there are more people who are [gay], you know, and Des Moines for sure,” Heather said. “We can hold hands all the time, it doesn’t matter.

“It kind of just happens, we’ll be walking next to each other and she’ll just hold my hand. I don’t think about it anymore,” Heather said about her girlfriend Bliss. “To me it’s natural, but I have to remember that to other people, it might not be.”

While Heather and Bliss’ friends (in both Ankeny and back home) are supportive of their sexuality, the couple said they “don’t really act like a couple” when hanging out with friends.

“All the people that we’ve met are comfortable with it,” Bliss said. “But we’re not affectionate when they are around. I mean, it’s like we are hanging out with friends anyway... because we don’t want to make it awkward.”

Even though Bliss and Heather are now open about being a couple, they weren’t always that way. Bliss described coming out as “scary at first, but it’s so worth it in the end.” Heather said coming out with her sexuality was “a relief.”

Heather attended a private Catholic school and lived on the same farm her entire life raising turkeys and chickens among other animals. She grew up in a family who were always supportive—no matter what. And as Heather came to accept her sexuality in the early years of junior high, she began to realize she always knew she was gay.

Heather said it wasn’t something she had to decide—it was how she felt—it was accepting her sexuality that was a struggle. Growing up with her tight-knit family of three sisters and happily married parents gave her the traditional version of the all-American childhood. As a child, Heather had free rein to run and play with her cousins, pulled weeds in her grandparents’ bean fields and took many trips with her family.

“I always hung out with my boy cousins,” Heather said. “I’m not saying that’s why I’m gay, but I was always a tomboy and always loved wearing baggy clothes. I just always knew I wasn’t happy in girl clothes or, you know, when [my] mom made me do my hair. I always hated that. But when I could just be with one of the guys, I felt at home.”

Throughout junior high and high school, Heather focused her time and effort on lifting weights and athletics—participating in
volleyball, basketball, softball and track. Heather was labeled as a tough girl because of her participation (and success) in school sports.

“People were kind of afraid of me,” Heather said, laughing. “I don’t want to sound like a badass, [but] people knew I would get really pissed and not be afraid to yell at them.”

Heather said the closeness of her family made her feel that telling them about her sexuality first was the right thing to do, despite how hard it would be.

Since Heather was six-years-old, her oldest sister had been dating Jason (who is now her brother-in-law). Jason played an influential role in Heather coming out to her family and Heather said she believes it has something to do with an incident involving Jason when Heather was a child.

“The door to our basement dropped straight down. I was on my rollerblades and I thought the door was locked, so I pushed against it and I started falling down. Then the door pushed open, and Jason was sitting right there and turned around and caught me... “That was kind of always why I trusted him. I don’t know, he just caught me and I was so scared.”

Recollecting that event helped her decide who to go to when holding in her secret became too much to handle. The night of July 26, 2006, Heather approached Jason's house scared (once again, but this time not about falling down the stairs) knowing that night would be the night she'd have to look her parents in the eye and say, “I’m gay.”

Heather said she simply looked at Jason and came out.

“Jas, I think I’m gay.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Oh, OK. That’s fine.”

Complete acceptance from her brother-in-law was music to her ears. One person down, many more to go.

Heather said although Jason played a large part in her coming out, she owned most of her gutsy decision to an ex-girlfriend.

Heather’s ex lived in a nearby town and played sports, too. Their personalities clicked and they started talking freshman year of high school after a volleyball tournament. Her former girlfriend was also a closeted lesbian, but Heather hadn’t fully realized her own feelings.

Heather said she stopped talking to her for a while because she thought she “shouldn’t be feeling [the] way [she did].”

“The tournament [where we met] was in January, and I didn’t talk to her [again] until May or June,” Heather said. “I called her and she was really excited to hear from me. From then on we talked, constantly texted, called each other, you know, it was almost like we were inseparable. We were best friends.”

Around Christmas of Heather’s sophomore year in high school, she came out to her (now) ex-girlfriend.

“I like you.”

Heather said tears starting pouring out of her crush’s eyes. She questioned if her confession had made her crush mad. But she wasn’t.

“No, I like you too,” the ex replied.

From then, the two experienced ups and downs about their feelings towards each other. Despite the rollercoaster ride, Heather said figuring out her sexuality with her ex made her comfortable enough to finally come out to her parents. This girl was the push she was waiting for.

July 26, 2006, was a busy day in the life of Heather’s family—her dad was at work, her mom and sister out of town. Heather told a white lie get permission from her parents to leave the house. Little did they know, she
had plans to drive to the town where her then-girlfriend lived.

With her mom’s approval to go to another friend’s house, Heather drove off in the opposite direction to another town. July 26 was the day Heather and her then-girlfriend planned how to officially be together.

“We spent the whole day talking, figuring everything out,” Heather said.

Heather’s mom caught her in her lie and demanded she come home immediately. Heather made a quick side trip to tell Jason her news first. Afterward, her sister took her hand, and they headed home.

Once Heather and her sister were seated on the couch facing their parents, her mom and dad started questioning her sudden change in attitude, including lying. Heather interrupted, “It’s because I’m gay.”

Silence.

After a few silent moments, her dad said he suspected it, but her mom didn’t say a word.

“Mom had a panic attack and… she was crying and shaking,” Heather said, her own hands shaking as she relived the memory.

Heather made a decision to pack a bag and spend the night at Jason’s house. She hugged her mom goodbye and left. After everyone had a chance to let the news soak in, Heather said her mom wanted to discuss the matter, but Heather said she didn’t want to talk about it because she didn’t want to make her mom cry. Now, Heather said her mom fully accepts her and current girlfriend, Bliss.

Heather said she thinks being gay is a matter influenced by both nature and nurture.

“I think you’re born being able to feel this way, [but] I think nurture makes it what it is,” she said.

Bliss, on the other hand, said she believes there is no way that the matter of homosexuality is related to a person’s upbringing.

“I think it’s nature. I don’t think it’s nurture at all,” Bliss said. “I have talked to gay people who say ‘if I could change it I would,’ but you can’t change the way you feel. It’s just automatically there. I’m attracted to girls instead of boys. There was never a point in my life where I would have changed that. I was born [the way I am].”

Opening up to her family made it easier for Heather to tell her friends. Most said they already assumed she was lesbian, but never wanted to say anything.

“Everything just seemed so perfect,” Heather said. “Coming out, I was physically hurting—like physically ached—[but] when I came out everything was different. Like, I hurt my mom, and I hated that and that was the hardest time in my life, but I started crying and it was like tears of joy. I was so happy.”

Heather came out to her good friends all at once in the school bathroom and allowed them to out her to anybody else at school, trusting they would tell the story correctly. Her guy classmates and Heather had a daily ritual—checking out girls.

“With the guys at my school, we used to check out girls together. I mean that was our thing after I came out,” she said. “All of them were just awesome about it.”

She said some of the girl classmates thought she liked them, but after some reassurance of no attraction, Heather said they calmed down and accepted it.

Thanks to an ex-girlfriend, who doesn’t play much of a role in her current life, Heather came out, a 19-year old lesbian woman who’s happy walking the streets holding hands with Bliss, her girlfriend of nearly two years.

Bliss

Bliss grew up attending a public high school. Her family was compiled of two older brothers, and when Bliss was six, her parents split with her mom getting main custody of the children. Despite all the time with her mom, Bliss said she’s a daddy’s girl.
She described her childhood as “kind of rough,” citing the divorce, but said she still had a good childhood. She remembers camping, taking fishing trips and hauling livestock with her dad. Bliss also said being around boys made her feel more comfortable.

“Being around my dad and brothers a lot, we’d always check out girls together and I’d always be like ‘hey she’s cute,’ stuff like that,” she said.

When Bliss finally outed herself, it wasn’t to her family. Instead, she confided in her friends. It came a little too fast for her, she said. Heather influenced her decision to come out and stop being a “closet case.”

“I wasn’t comfortable with it yet when I came out,” she said. “[We were at a party] one night and we were just sitting on the couch and we were holding hands. [A friend] looked at us weird, and then Heather just kind of said it.”

At the time, Bliss had been dating a guy from school and made sure he was the second person to know. They decided to part ways so Bliss could be with Heather. She said being in high school and openly gay was one of the hardest times to go through.

“High school was a bitch. [Classmates] were so mean to me, the whole school was,” she said. “They would spread rumors and do stuff to my car and I got a lot of discrimination for it my senior year. I lost friends in school for it, like the people I would talk to and they would always talk behind my back, but I always had my true friends so I knew they would stick up for me.”

With all the wrath Bliss encountered at school because of her sexuality, she said her emotions occasionally got the best of her.

“They’d write ‘dyke’ and stuff like that in the dirt on my car and spit on it and put notes on it,” she said. “I broke down quite a bit, but I mean, I was my true self so that’s like the natural high – that’s the highest feeling you can have so I came over it.”

Her friends, she said, had no idea and were upset, not because of being a lesbian, but for not being truthful all along. It took a little bit for them to get used to it.

“I was boy-watching with them, and they had to get used to the fact that I was girl-watching,” Bliss said.

A month later, her mom approached her because she had heard the news from someone else. Bliss said that upset her.

“It was the fact of me wanting to do it myself rather than other people telling her,” she said. “She was really great about it. She didn’t mind at all. She ended up telling my dad and grandparents because I was too scared to and they all took it OK, too.”

Bliss and Heather met one night while driving around in different cars with different friends. One mutual friend had introduced them while stopping at a Texaco station. Gossiping in the station’s bathroom for awhile, Bliss came out of the stall and started to wash her hands, but forgot to roll up her long sleeves. Bliss asked a friend to do so, but she had wet hands too. Heather reached in and their eyes met for an instant.

“When I first saw her, it was a love at first sight thing. I instantly knew I was going to like her. I thought she was so beautiful and she was really funny. I wanted her to like me,” Bliss said about Heather.

Heather said that reaching over to help roll up Bliss’ sleeves, “felt different.”

“I felt something when I saw her, I knew I liked her because I’ve seen her before,” Heather said. “But I pulled her sleeve up for her, and she kind of looked back at me and kept washing her hands. And I knew she liked me.”

Their mutual friend received a text from Bliss after each car drove away—Heather and the mutual friend in one car, Bliss and her friends in another—that that said she was crushing on Heather.

“I freakin’ knew it!” was all Heather could say.

Bliss was skeptical about how she
should be feeling about Heather, which led to months of hanging out then avoiding calls. Once Bliss came out to everyone, both Heather and Bliss listened to their hearts and became a couple on June 14, 2007. They have been together ever since.

“I was going to wait until after high school [to date] so I didn’t have any drama,” Bliss said. “But then I met Heather in February of ’07 and my feelings for her were stronger than [my feelings of] wanting to keep it a secret. I went back and forth with her a lot because I was scared, like was really scared about coming out and what everyone would think.”

Although coming out was too fast for Bliss, she wouldn’t change a thing, an open 19-year-old lesbian woman walking the streets next to the other woman she loves.

“Like the butch-type,” Bliss said. “I don’t see myself dating a girly-girl. I’m more like the opposites attract type of person because I don’t like being with someone who is exactly like me. I like a surprise and like having to make myself accept something else.”

Heather said she doesn’t really have a type, but Bliss fits her perfectly.

“As long as we click right away; as long as they care about family and are family-oriented, and if they had a problem with kids, I would never let them into my family. When I think about Bliss, she likes kids; she was a family-oriented person. I don’t really have a type; it just has to feel right... I love Bliss, she’s right for me and she’s right for my family.”

As it is with any relationship, Bliss and Heather have arguments and jealousy issues, but overall they said their relationship is holding strong.

“The big complications will turn over into little complications over time,” Bliss said. “Other than that we have a really good relationship and we love each other and I think it’s going to last. Our good points outweigh the bad points by a lot.”

**Marriage equality in Iowa**

On April 3, Heather and Bliss’ Facebook statues reflected their feelings of the unanimous vote to legalize gay marriage in the state of Iowa.

“Bliss was just ruled gay marriage ok!!!! We can now get married!!!!!!!”

“Heather is glad there’s finally equal rights.” [sic]

Heather said that morning, she was simply “excited” and that Bliss started crying—tears of joy, of course.

“That was the only obstacle for us...,” Bliss said. “My God... this feels so amazing.”

**Advice**

Bliss: “It’s scary at first [to come out], but it’s so worth it in the end because you get to be yourself. And nothing is better than that day you can be yourself.”

Heather: “It’s a relief. I’d just say find someone you can trust and just take a chance.”