

MATT

not be gay anymore, or cut the poison out of me and all these awful things. It's my greatest blessing now. I just think it's like the best gift I was ever given. It's part of me and part of who I am.

The kid I was back in the day – clinging onto Madonna for dear life because everybody hated him – he would have no idea that my life would end up like this! I just wish I could tell him how much better things would get.

Charli



'People think if you're pansexual, you're in some sort of sex cult.'

Charli first came out as bisexual but now identifies as pansexual, which she says a lot of people don't understand. She is married but also in a polyamorous relationship.

So, I got engaged to a guy when I was 16, but it was around the same time that I realized I wasn't straight. I was working at a loss-adjusters and they had a nurse who would go out and assess people as part of their insurance claim. She was a Geordie nurse and she was a tall, dark, lovely, gorgeous woman. She was really warm and open and that was the first time I physically had a crush on a real woman. I'd had crushes on people off the telly, but she made it become very real. I quickly realized that this was the same sort of stuff that I would feel about a bloke. I was still in a relationship, so I just started discussing it with my fiancé. I asked him how he would feel if I did something about my feelings. We'd often have these kinds of talks and he'd get quite turned on by the idea, so that would lead to a bit of fun. And that was kind of all that would happen with it. I'm not

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even sure if he realizes, but he was effectively the first person I came out to as bisexual. I used him as a sounding board really, to bounce ideas off.

The first person I came out to properly was my mum. She was just like, 'Yeah, we know. Okay. Alright.' I don't really know how she knew. She then spoke to my auntie, who was living with us for a while, and apparently she knew as well! I thought, 'Okay, so it's just me completely oblivious and everybody else knew!' My mum told my dad, which saved that conversation, but he was fine. We're not the best of friends but we understand each other a lot more than we used to. I told my sisters and my brother and they were like, 'Yeah, whatever.' And that was it! I was then open and out.

After that, things kind of got a little bit muddier. That previous relationship ended. I started working at the university in 2001 and I can remember meeting the guy who is now my husband on the first day. He let the door swing in my face, which he still doesn't remember! We then would meet up for cigarette breaks or lunch and have chats. We became friends. At the time I was seeing this girl called Sharon, who was 28, tall and blonde and beautiful. And I'd talk to him about her. I was just starting to finally explore that side of my sexuality. When I first started a relationship with *him*, we weren't serious at all. We just said we'd been friends, and now we were friends who were dating. We were friends with benefits! But fairly early on I said I'd still like to explore the other side of my sexuality. I asked, 'Can I still do that? Would you be okay with that? Would that be an issue?' He thought about it and actually said, 'No, it's okay.' This was 17 years ago.

I also told him that if he wanted to explore that side of his sexuality, I'd be happy for him to do that. He hasn't though and he doesn't want to. He knows that sexuality is quite fluid, so

if things change and he wants to go that way, he can. I can't exactly say no, and I wouldn't! I would have no issue with him being with a man. A woman though...we would have to discuss it. Because that's what we do if something changes. Whether it's a job change or whatever, we would talk about it.

I'm so lucky. He's such a laid-back, chilled kind of guy. The interesting thing is that he only ever gets jealous of my friendships with men. He doesn't get jealous of me seeing other women. So, our polyamorous arrangement is that, yes, I'm married to him but I can have affairs with women. I've had a few affairs or shorter relationships, which have lasted a few months. We've maybe seen each other two or three times a month. It's not been an everyday thing. It tends to be with women who are in a similar situation – others who have the same sort of setup with their partner or husband. Long-term relationships with women would be different and I suspect that we'd have to talk about it. It's not happened.

I'm completely open about it with my husband, but if the woman that I'm seeing doesn't really want me to talk about what we do in the bedroom, then I won't say anything. But I would much rather be open and honest about all of it. We're open about it with our friends and families too. I know that some of my husband's mates don't like it and disagree with it. We've actually had discussions about it in the pub. I can completely understand it's not everybody's cup of tea. So, I've had to come out as being polyamorous as well. Being openly polyamorous makes sense – because if someone were to see me with a woman in some sort of steamy clinch or something, it could quite easily get back to my other half, and then that would put him in an awkward position. He'd have to go, 'It's okay – don't be offended for me!' So, I would much rather be open and prevent that awkward situation arising.

My mum always said to me that you can't judge anybody