

Collection: Thee Black Pride in JXN Oral History Project
Date: October 6, 2022
Narrator: Destiny Sears
Interviewer: Leigh Pennington
Audit Editor: Alissa Rae Funderburk

Summary Keywords: people, maya, mom, gay, sorority, question, Jackson, homecoming, girls, told, accept, week, knew, called, talk, life, relationship.

Index

"Homecoming Week". 3:07

Greek Life at Jackson State. 8:40

Growing up in Memphis, Tennessee. 14:31

My mom and I are the same person. 18:13

What's your dad like? 20:53

The moments where I questioned religion. 26:54

How did you reconcile the two parts of you? 30:26

How did you know you're bisexual? 39:42

Maya: The night of the party and the next day. 42:51

What's going on with you? 46:24

How my mom found out about my sexuality. 52:05

What's in the front seat of the car? 56:37

You find out you don't have a gay son. 1:05:17

My mom didn't want me to flaunt my relationship in front of my little sister. 1:08:36

People are not entitled to know what you do. 1:12:48

Family acceptance is having a deer horn put on your car. 1:21:37

It's cold in Chicago. 1:25:15

Being in a healthy relationship was a lot at first. 1:28:55

How my relationship has grown outside of college. 1:36:14

What it's like to be a part of the LGBT community at Jackson State. 1:39:31

How I became a part of the LGBTQ community in Jackson. 1:47:35

You cannot separate being Black and gay because it is one within you. 1:51:00

Safe spaces in the LGBTQ community. 1:54:33

How would your experience be different if you were of a different race? 2:02:12

What's your favorite thing about LGBTQ life in Jackson? 2:06:19

Be yourself first before you can expect anyone else to accept you. 2:12:26

Black Greek organizations and gay families. 2:15:54

Where did you find your gay family? How did you become a part of it? 2:18:16

I don't live to please other people's expectations. 2:23:38

Narrator Introduction and Interviewer Reflection

Destiny Sears is a powerhouse sweetheart. She is quick to laugh at a high, cheerful and clear register in between her affirming words. The first words that come to mind when thinking of Destiny are sass, gratitude, and confidence. Most people who project a high level of confidence can teeter into the world of cocky behavior, but not Destiny. Her confidence comes from a natural and unassuming place of pride in her character. Destiny takes almost no offense it seems to any phrase, judgment or otherwise that comes her way because of how sure she is of herself. In terms of her role as a narrator, the cliché 'open book' is an understatement.

Destiny was willing to explain whatever I did not understand or required more explanation for clarity. Our interview was enjoyable from the first moment to the last. Not once did I feel like I was stumbling over my own thoughts, nor did she present any information that might have been uncomfortable or difficult for me to follow-up on without adding her signature lightness and laughter to the topic. Destiny is a kind soul, through and through.

[00:03:07] Pennington: Hi! Hi, how are you?

[00:03:09] Sears: Let's see if my camera works. Yes! I'm using my work laptop.

[00:03:18] Pennington: Okay, well the audio quality sounds great which is the only thing I was concerned about. Well not concerned but you know every it's different every single time technically, like in—with remote interviews I can't really tell where you're sitting. You could be sitting in an all-wooden room for all I know and living—without living nightmare, but it would be thing to work around.

[00:03:38] Sears: Yes.

[00:03:40] Pennington: So how are you?

[00:03:42] Sears: I'm doing great. It's homecoming week, and it's the week of fall break. My fall break is this week.

[00:03:48] Pennington: Okay.

[00:03:49] Sears: So I'm really excited for that.

[00:03:52] Pennington: Okay, chill.

[00:03:53] Sears: I'm doing great. How about yourself?

[00:03:54] Pennington: I'm hanging in there. One day, one sleep deprived day at a time but you know, we're getting through it bit by bit. And what I've heard like homecoming week, it's different everywhere, though. What does that entail for Jackson State, though?

[00:04:09] Sears: How come a week literally is a full seven days. So our homecoming game is this upcoming Saturday? So homecoming we started yesterday for us?

[00:04:21] Pennington: Okay.

[00:04:22] Sears: So they throw parties every day of the week.

[00:04:27] Pennington: Good Lord?

[00:04:29] Sears: Exactly. Yeah. I think I only start going to parties. Thursday. But, so yeah, it's an event, the school hosting event every day during the week. There's music playing every day. Throughout this entire week outside on campus. There's music playing every day. So it's a lot I'm really excited. This is my first time coming as alumni.

[00:04:55] Pennington: Okay.

[00:04:56] Sears: So, ready to see what the other alumni see.

[00:05:01] Pennington: Are you kind of like elevated status now that you're an alumni or just sort of like?

[00:05:04] Sears: Just tiny bit.

[00:05:06] Pennington: Okay. All right.

[00:05:07] Sears: It's like okay, so now you're, so this actually is homecoming like, this is you coming back to your home college like, this is really a homecoming for you. Most times for us like when in undergrad, it's like, okay, it's all come a week. That mean, I still gotta go to class. But class might be canceled. So that might work out for us [laughter]. I plan on my outfits throughout the day, but as alumni, it's like, okay, so you get off work at six o'clock, so you probably won't do too much until it's over. And then when school is over, you can go outside. Yes. Structured now.

[00:05:40] Pennington: All right, fair enough. And it's like, it's like people turn out with like, the outfits like you're not wearing like, don't you dare put on the same pants.

[00:05:47] Sears: You cannot come outside with a T-shirt or leggings on. Everybody will look at you and be like, Oh my goodness. Did she not know it was homecoming week? She okay. Yes, if you come with his T shirts and leggings on they would probably looking to kind of crazy. This is like people spend their entire, like refund checks and stuff on outfits for this week.

[00:06:13] Pennington: Right? Okay wow.

[00:06:14] Sears: People save money for this week.

[00:06:16] Pennington: Wow. Which is like good on those folks. It's like priorities. You know what I mean? It's like, it's a big, it's a big week. It's like, give yourself a little bit of like, permission to like, go out and like you know, I have a

[00:06:28] Sears: Whatever.

[00:06:28] Pennington: Yeah, no, I feel ya, I have a hard living in New York. I have a hard time justifying like spending money on clothes. But then I just look like a tax accountant everywhere I go. [Laughter] That's just kind of like my run of the mill style. Right? And I'm like, This is how I look nice. But like, what these New York women are wearing and I'm like, I need to re up, I need to re up my closet. Bad.

[00:06:52] Sears: Yeah. Then that's how it is like for Homecoming. It's like okay, normally my favorite to go to, tights and a t-shirt. Everybody knows me knows that's just gonna come out tights and t-shirts and crocs. Cause crocs are my favorite shoes. I'm gonna have on crocs. And so this week, I have heels, dresses, skirts, shirts.

[00:07:10] Pennington: My god. Oh my god, it sounds like my Bar Mitzvah weekend wardrobe.

[00:07:15] Sears: It is complete difference. It's like okay, so you have three pairs of heels. You got orange, you have two pairs of silver you got blue. Okay, so yes, Homecoming is definitely a lot. It's a lot.

[00:07:15] Pennington: Wow. It's like college, plus fashion week, plus partying plus,

[00:07:35] Sears: Yes! And you must be dressed for the parties. Even like for some parties, they have like a dress code. Like you cannot wear slides you cannot wear you know, casual clothes like you must be dressed. So I had to literally go buy a formal dress for a party on Saturday.

[00:07:54] Pennington: That's kind of nice, though. That like the expectations are given.

[00:07:57] Sears: Yes. And everybody knows the expectations.

[00:07:59] Pennington: Okay, alrighty. Yeah, no, that's really nice. Because like, sometimes it's like, people invite me to stuff here. And I'm like, that could go either way. Like what's, what are we? You know, we are we? What is what? What is? What does a dungeon party entail? I've never been to one before.

[00:08:15] Sears: Yeah, I wouldn't know what to do, either [laughter].

[00:08:17] Pennington: I was like, Do I even want to go, is that even my kind of scene was like, in my head, but I'm like, I'll try anything once. I go and I'm like it. I leave, back to my bed.

Right?

[00:08:28] Sears: Yeah, one of my favorite things, especially during homecoming. Well, my favorite thing to say is just, surprise me.

[00:08:32] Pennington: Yeah.

[00:08:33] Sears: Surprise me. I don't know. You surprise me. We'll see. I just go with the flow. Yeah. Yeah. But that's attitude for homecoming week.

[00:08:40] Pennington: That sounds really, really cool. And just Jackson State have a big like Greek life?

[00:08:43] Sears: Yes, it is. And I'm actually a part of one of the D-Nine [Divine Nine: Black Greek Organizations] sororities. So I have to be outside I have to do the strolling and all of that. So that's, that's something entirely different. But this would be again, this would be my first time as alumni, alumni Greek, Homecoming because there's undergrad and being in the D-Nine and undergrad Homecoming is like the most stressful week ever. And undergrad and in a sorority, it is the most stressful because every day you have events that you must attend.

[00:09:24] Pennington: Okay. Mandatory?

[00:09:26] Sears: Mandatory. Yes.

[00:09:27] Pennington: I don't care if you're hungover from the night before get your ass there.
Okay,

[00:09:31] Sears: Yes, that's how it is like literally like okay, well, and that's why when I was talking to my Neo's, which are the people that come in the sorority after me, I'm like, I know you want to have fun Homecoming and I encourage you to have fun, but please know community service is still on Saturday at eight o'clock.

[00:09:48] Pennington: Right?

[00:09:48] Sears: You have to be there.

[00:09:49] Pennington: Right?

[00:09:51] Sears: And you must look like you care. So [laughter]

[00:09:54] Pennington: That's not only you're gonna show up, but you're gonna show up with the right attitude.

[00:09:57] Sears: Yes! And that's how it is. So yes, Greek life. If and Homecoming is a nightmare.

[00:10:02] Pennington: Okay, what sort of things do you all have to do for the community service portion of it?

[00:10:07] Sears: So we do recently actually, they brought baskets of school supplies and stuff for the teachers at my school that I work at. So they did that Thursday, I think. Thursday, they brought baskets. It's part of a one of our programs called Operation Big Book Bag. And it's just trying to help the schools in low-income areas, with school supplies, things like that, because not all students bring school supplies when they come to school. Sometimes it's just a student and a backpack. [Laughs] So, they gave school supplies to my school. What else? We did care packages for the homeless because downtown Jackson has a really high homeless population. So they gave care bags, they gave out like 200 care bags. What else? I'm not sure what the community service is for Saturday. But I do know it is our centennial year. Our sorority turns 100 on November 12, which is actually what my shirt says. So this homecoming and we will be in the homecoming parade. Which we must be there at five o'clock in the morning.

[00:11:17] Pennington: Geez.

[00:11:18] Sears: Yes. Saturday, we must be there at five o'clock in the morning for the Homecoming parade. Then after the parade, we have to set up for tailgate at the game. So it's like I said, it's a lot.

[00:11:33] Pennington: Yeah, a lot. God five in the morning. Does it start that early just so you can get all the rest of the activities in for the day?

[00:11:40] Sears: It's to make sure that everybody's actually there. So they do like a whole lineup at five o'clock, the entire parade, they just go through like, Okay, you're here. You're here. You're here. This org is here. This organization is here. They're here. So.

[00:11:54] Pennington: Wow.

[00:11:55] Sears: And the parade does answer like 12.

[00:11:58] Pennington: Okay, and then y'all go straight to setting up like tailgate?

[00:12:01] Sears: Straight to setting up because we're already late because the game probably starts at like three, and we are already late for setup, because the parking lot is already packed.

[00:12:09] Pennington: Oh my god. What is it like tailgating? I know. I've never done one.

[00:12:15] Sears: I actually prefer tailgating than going to the games. Because tailgate, you just walk right? You see people that you know, so you could speak to them, you get to eat with

them. Some of them have drinks, so you get to drink with them. You get its music playing, so you get to dance. It's like. It's like being at home. It's like a family function.

[00:12:36] Pennington: Right?

[00:12:37] Sears: And that is basically what tailgate gives you, it gives you family function.

[00:12:41] Pennington: That's awesome.

[00:12:42] Sears: But like, you don't even know these people. And everybody hey you just speak hey! Yes, it's like a family function. I mean, in family that you didn't know you had until then.

[00:12:53] Pennington: Wow. Oh, that's so nice. Damn. Okay. Well, I appreciate you taking the time out of your Sunday then to like, do this with me. Because you probably got

[00:13:03] Sears: My one of my neos is like, are you coming to brunch this morning? No, I'm not coming. I have something to do at two o'clock. I cannot come to brunch [laughter].

[00:13:12] Pennington: You could have showed up a little bit, but that would have been okay. Never mind. All right.

[00:13:16] Sears: The mimosas is that no, they have like fifteen dollars bottomless Mimosa, not going [laughter].

[00:13:24] Pennington: Devil's candy. It really, really is.

[00:13:26] Sears: They really trying to get me.

[00:13:27] Pennington: It's fine. You know, my mother told me a golden rule. She's like lay with come when it comes to drink. And when you feel good stop. Like that's, you know, but you don't sometimes, you don't.

[00:13:38] Sears: Okay, just one I could do one more. I could do one more. And then that one more turns to two more than okay. Time to go home [laughter].

[00:13:47] Pennington: It would have made for an interesting interview. But for the purposes of an official record, maybe would have left that out. [Laughs] So you are thinking. All right, well, if you're ready, you want to like go ahead and get it kicked off?

[00:14:00] Sears: Oh, yes. One second. Maya I can't do my favor and turn the fan on? Please. Thank you. Oh, that's gonna turn on a light. All right. Thank you. All right.

[00:14:14] Pennington: All righty. We're good to go. All right, number one. Could you please state your name for the record and what are your preferred pronouns?

[00:14:23] Sears: Alright, my name is Destiny Sears. D-E-S-T-I-N-Y. S-E-A-R-S. And my preferred pronouns are she and her.

[00:14:32] Pennington: She and her. Okay. And when and where were you born?

[00:14:37] Sears: I was born June 27, 2000, in Memphis, Tennessee.

[00:14:42] Pennington: Memphis, Tennessee. Could you paint me a little picture of like the neighborhood you grew up in? What life is like kinda?

[00:14:48] Sears: Okay, so, see Memphis? So the first house that I stayed in, we stayed in with my grandmother. It was on Vengeance Town and so it's a North Memphis, it's pretty friendly neighborhood at the time. Really nice. I actually enjoyed living there. Then we moved out and we moved into an apartment. And that neighborhood was definitely different [laughter]. That neighborhood was completely different from my grandmother's neighborhood. There was more crime in the neighborhood. It was a low-income neighborhood. Yes, it was definitely a low-income neighborhood. Very different. And then my mom ended up pregnant with my little sister. So we moved back in with my grandmother for a little minute. And it was pretty cool staying with her. But yeah, we stayed close to my elementary school. I went to Frazier Elementary. We stayed like maybe ten, five, ten minutes away from my school. And yeah, it was pretty much my neighborhood. I have small family. Yes, I have really small, on my mom's side I have a small family. I like to tell people it's like 13 of us now. So pretty small. I'm able to

count. Okay. One, two, three I'm able to count most of us. If I had three hands, so it'd be three. But yeah, it's pretty small family. So we grew up pretty tight. I'm really close to my mom and close my grandma and yeah.

[00:16:20] Pennington: Wow. What is your grandma like?

[00:16:22] Sears: [Sigh] A Southern Baptist woman [laughter]. That is the perfect description of my grandma, a Southern Baptist woman. She's from Durant, Mississippi, then she moved to Memphis. She was married to my granddad. She loves church. She loves church. She. Loves. Church. We're there when she's there, almost every Sunday and growing up I was there because she would get up early in the morning and that's the reason I'm early bird now. My grandmother would get up early in the morning, she'll be gone the whole day I don't wanna stay at the house. So I would get up early in the morning every day so I could get in the car and go wherever she was going. And a lot of those times. We went to church. We went to church, we were at church. She went Sunday school. She went to Bible study she wants to service and she went to the after service. The after service after service, the visiting church. We went everywhere! She loves church! And that's where we were so perfect description for my grandmother is Southern Baptist woman.

[00:17:33] Pennington: Wow. And she was just, that was how she was kind of just raised like the church? From the ground up? Okay.

[00:17:39] Sears: Yes. She grew up in the church. A lot of her family members were pastors and preachers as well. So she grew up in the church. And so she made sure that we grew up in church and you know, as we get older, we kind of strayed away some, but Willy Mae? Willy Mae was at church. And Sunday, Willy Mae, yeah, that's her name was at church. Almost every Sunday. Seven o'clock came. She was up and out the door. Oh, her way to church. But yeah, that's pretty much my grandmother.

[00:18:13] Pennington: And what about your mom? What's she like?

[00:18:16] Sears: We're the same person. I mean, me and my mom are exactly the same person. To some point sometimes it's scary. Like, we're the same person and she's, now she's literally like my best friend. I tell her all the time. You know, you my best friend. So I call you every day when I get off work, I talk to my mom. I talked to her and she's three hours away in Memphis. I'm in Jackson. And she's in Memphis. And we talk every day, you would thought we was around each other every day. As it's like, I never left. So yeah, we talk every day on the phone. I call her, she calls me where I was on the phone we talk. But yeah, my mom is basically she's me. I don't even know how to describe it. She's just me. We look alike. Some of my friends said we sound alike. And so if I'm talking or she's talking, they'd be like, wait, what one said what? Destiny said [laughter] my mom said like, they get us mixed up. Like if we're talking, I said you sound alike we look like she's literally me. So. I am her as she would say cause she came first. So.

[00:19:37] Pennington: The blueprint the original, okay, credit where credit is due.

[00:19:40] Sears: Yeah, that's, she loves to say that. She's like I came first so really you copy me. And I'm like, no, you copy me but that's okay. But yeah, we joke alike we have the same humor, we're the same person. It's crazy but we really are.

[00:19:57] Pennington: Are you like close out of all your like siblings, how many siblings do you have? First of all?

[00:20:01] Sears: I have six sisters. Well, actually seven now because my mom is about to have a baby.

[00:20:06] Pennington: Oh, mazel tov!

[00:20:08] Sears: So I will have seven sisters and one brother. My mom has, well, four kids now, my Mom will have four kids in April. And then my Dad had the rest. I'm not sure how many he has.

[00:20:21] Pennington: Okay.

[00:20:22] Sears: I think six? I think six, me Michaela, Malia, [unheard name] Cadince, Devin. Yeah, my dad had six. And my mom has three. So.

[00:20:32] Pennington: Wow, okay, okay. I was like keeping them all in line there. Wow.

[00:20:38] Sears: Right. And I'm the second oldest on both sides.

[00:20:43] Pennington: Okay, second oldest.

[00:20:44] Sears: I'm the second oldest. Both of the oldest on both sides. Both of them are 24.

[00:20:49] Pennington: Okay.

[00:20:50] Sears: And then there's me who's 22? So.

[00:20:53] Pennington: All right. Very cool. Very cool. What's your what's your dad like?

[00:20:57] Sears: My dad. Ugh how to describe him. [Pause] And I know a lot of people probably wouldn't get this so I have to explain it, but he is a typical Memphis guy. Like he talks like he's from Memphis, he has the Memphis accent. All of the jokes that he make. They are Memphis jokes. I have no idea how to describe he's literally the typical Memphis guy. [Laughs] That's the I'm know how to explain it. But he's really fun. He's funny. He's really straight to the point.

[00:21:36] Pennington: Okay.

[00:21:37] Sears: I wouldn't say he's blunt, but he's definitely straight to the point. He's like, Okay, this is what it is. This is what it's not. Here we are. Yeah, what else about my dad? He's funny. He's pretty cool. Yeah. Yeah, I can definitely see why my mom fell for him. I can say that. I can definitely see that. But yeah.

[00:22:02] Pennington: Why do you say that? What do you mean?

[00:22:04] Sears: Because he's funny, he knows how to keep your attention. He knows how to keep you laughing and things of that such like, okay. I understand. I understand it. Okay. Make sense? But yeah. Yeah.

[00:22:19] Pennington: Okay, interesting, interesting. And like that dynamic. Like, you know, kind of as we get older, like figuring out who our parents were before they had us, you know? Yeah. Well, what's, what's, what's that face? Have you discovered some things recently that you're like, Mom!

[00:22:36] Sears: I'm trying to think. No, I think it was with my grandmother. I when I was discovering things, and I was like, Miss Southern Baptist woman. You said, you did what!? Repeat it because I didn't hear you correctly the first time my ears had to clean up. Can you say that again? So yeah, there'll be times where I'm like, I heard that [laughter]. Oh, like, for example, she has this guy friend who recently just passed. God rest his soul. So, but she was telling me how she met him. And when she met him and everything and so she had gave him a fake name. But at the time, if I'm not mistaken, she was still with my grandfather. And the fake

name she gave him is his sister's name. Is my grandfather's sister's name. I said huh! One plus one gave me 16 and I carried the one. [Laughs] Doesn't make sense. And I'm just like. I'm watching you. I'm watching. She's like, No, that was that was the old me [laughter]. Mokay. But yeah.

[00:23:53] Pennington: Eyebrow, eyebrow. Yeah. Sure. So she has a close affinity or like, you know, a closeness with religion or spirituality. You said you have moved away from it in the last couple years, not, you know, entirely, but just, you know, yeah, those things happen. What's your relationship to spirituality or religion like now?

[00:24:18] Sears: So I am Christian. But I would say I don't go to church as often and I honestly cannot remember my last time going to church. I'm not mistaken. Especially with me being here in Jackson. I haven't taken the time which I should have. But I haven't taken the time to actually visit any churches to see which ones I would like. I went to the church when I was in Memphis. I went to the church called Bellevue Baptist Church. It is literally one of the biggest churches in Memphis. Very hard to miss. They're very hard to miss. When you are driving on Interstate you see three big crosses in front of the church. Very hard to miss. And it's a really large church, but they split it up to the point where you still get that one on one time or like, you know, those small groups where you actually do get the ask those questions that you've been wondering, and things of that such so I really love going to that church when I was in Memphis, I adored that church, actually. I'm gonna take a visit when I go down there for Thanksgiving, but now that I've been here in Jackson, I have not visited any churches. But I still pray, still listen to gospel music or Christian music.

Still, I talk to the Lord a lot, especially after graduating college, it has become a really big thing. Like, I think the summer after graduation, my relationship with God grew really, really close. Like it grew majorly. Because that was a very trying time, after graduation. I don't think nobody prepares you for that summer or that semester after graduation is probably one of the hardest things in the world. Figuring out you know, where do I go from here? What do I do? I will love a job in my field. But then I have to figure out where am I going to stay? How am I gonna afford the rent if I haven't gotten a job yet? Well, I'm gonna have to get another job. So during those times, I will say my relationship with God grew tremendously. Even now being a teacher every day when I get up and I'm doing my morning routine, I have to stop like, Okay, let me pray really quickly. Right, I come in with a great attitude, my students come in with a great attitude and we have a great day because working with children, you have to believe in something [laughter]. Figure it out, you have to believe in something so that it works for you. That is something you're going to need. You're going to work with children. So yeah, I will say my relationship has tremendously grew since I've graduated school.

But there were moments where I question my religion. Especially with me being bisexual and having a girlfriend I'm like, okay, so in the book, but I don't know. It was a lot. It was a lot and there was like literally times I talked to my mom and be like God doesn't even pay attention to me, I'm gay. Like, I've actually said that to my mom, like, he don't care I'm gay! Like, she'd be like, no, that is not what that is Destiny. Do not say that. And I'm like, Well, I'm just saying like, if you actually thought about it, like, what if it's just going over his head, like, and he's just like, oh, well, because I'm gay. Because that's what other Christians have made it seem like once

you're gay, you are a, what did they call it? An abomination! I've literally been told that it was abomination by my grandmother, actually, we had a talk in a car, I had another family member to come out as gay. Well, he didn't even actually come out as gay. It just got out there that he was. And so when she found out which I have no idea how she found out, but when she found out and I think that was also around the same time, my mom found out about me. We were in the car, and she was stressed. I don't even think stressed is the right, she was so stressed, she was "ohhhh" [imitates sigh] "I just, oh," and I was like, what's wrong?! Why do you keep sighing?! What is your problem?! And she was just like, I just don't know, where did we go wrong? And I was like, where did you go wrong with what? And she was like, just, he's, he's gay. And I just don't know what happened? Why did, why us?

And I was like, well, I don't think that has anything to do with you. So I don't think you should take it personal as if he chose to love men because of you or something you've done that has absolutely nothing to do with you, lady! But, then she was talking about how it was an abomination. She was telling me, and I didn't know at that time, I wasn't sure if she knew about me. And that was her way of you know, trying to scare me. Also, because he came out of nowhere it was just a random conversation that we had in the car recently after my mom and a few more my family members have found out that I had a girlfriend so and we was having this conversation I was like, is she trying to tell me something like she knows but I don't care but okay. But yeah, that was the day she was telling me it was a abomination and everything and I was just like, well okay. [Laughter] It is what it is. I don't know what you would like for me to do but okay. So yeah, it's definitely has its trying moments being a Christian and being bisexual. So definitely have it's trying moments but I grew. And I ignored those thoughts, because I feel

like God loves me. He loves who I love. And he loves everybody, so I don't think he would, what am I trying to say? I don't think he would abandon me or, you know, forsake me and leave me where I am just because I chose to love a woman.

[00:30:26] Pennington: Right.

[00:30:27] Sears: So yes, it does have its trying moments, but yeah.

[00:30:31] Pennington: Yeah, you didn't always hold that view of yourself, though so how did you like, and sort of your conversations with God and in connection with him come to reconcile, like, these two portions? Like you're saying he loves everyone? You know, it took awhile to get to there? So how did you reconcile those two things?

[00:30:50] Sears: I will say, just seeing the things that he's allowed to happen in my life and seeing the growth in all of the other things that has happened to all of the blessings that he continues to give me. There is no way if there's someone I despise, and they are abomination to me, there is no way that I will be able to see I will still give them blessings or still help them and give them things and such. There's no way I would do that. So I knew just simply from him not abandoning me and me not being nothing, I guess, like, I knew that I wasn't see as an abomination to him. I wasn't seen as, oh, I wasn't abandoned by him. He still loves me. So it was me, recognizing that I was still loved, and I was still valued. And I was still being blessed. And there were still good things happening to me. Because at one point, I was like, yeah, my life is not about to go straight to hell. Like I felt that way, I was like I'm going straight to hell. So

it doesn't matter what I do, because I'm going there anyways, but then I'm like, no. But it just takes and I don't know, I don't know if it's him talking to me, or if it's just my thoughts, or what, but it just literally takes that moment to just sit down and just talk to the air. And then just get your answers. It sounds crazy. It sounds crazy, but it's just sitting there. And putting your thoughts out there. And then you just have that moment where you're like, no, I sound crazy. No. No, he didn't leave me because if he left me, I wouldn't have this. I wouldn't have that I wouldn't be here, I still wouldn't be breathing if he really left me and abandoned me. So it was one of those moments, I had to think of it to myself. So yeah.

[00:32:45] Pennington: That's good. Like, I'm also like, a woman of faith and just like, you take the bad with the good.

[00:32:50] Sears: Yeah.

[00:32:52] Pennington: You know, you put through certain things but that's, that's life, you know?

[00:32:56] Sears: And then, I was say, once I graduated, I told you that summer was really hard that summer after graduation was really hard trying to figure out where am I going to stay, how am I going to pay rent and things of that such and then just seeing him make a way. It was just like, wow, wow, okay. I've actually won a \$10,000 scholarship with Travis Scott and the Cactus Jack Foundation.

[00:33:22] Pennington: Shut up.

[00:33:23] Sears: Yes! Like, I had a \$10,000 scholarship. I was able I had, I didn't know where I was going to stay in a certain time. I ended up with a job that required me to stay on Tougaloo's campus for the whole month of June. Like and I'm so I'm staying here for free. And I'm still getting paid to tutor and pick and do things like that I'm able to work within my field technically, because I'm working with children. I'm tutoring, I was tutoring chemistry. So I was still able to work into my field, get more experience, get paid and have somewhere to stay. And I was being fed lunch, breakfast and dinner. I'm like, there's no way there's no way God just left me and I'm getting all these lessons like there's no way it's not possible! So [laughter].

[00:34:12] Pennington: Right, no gratitude. Yeah, doing a good job, being grateful. And being like, this is okay, this area is lacking. But look at what else is being done.

[00:34:20] Sears: Yes. Yeah. So it definitely was one of those moments where it's like, yeah, you're not here by yourself. You got this. You got this. See he's here. You got this. Keep going on. So yeah.

[00:34:34] Pennington: All righty. Well, now that we're on the subject, when did you first acknowledge your sexuality to yourself? Can you recall that moment?

[00:34:44] Sears: No. I have no idea where I just said I'm like, okay, I like girls. I don't think I've ever had that moment. [Laughs] I don't think I've ever had that moment where I was like I think

like girls no it was just like okay, I like girls. And I just kept on going like, it was never like, you like girls? Oh my goodness, it was like, okay, I like what I like and that was just that I never thought of as anything as big to me. Like it was just like, okay, you like girls but you like guys too. All right you like both of them! And that was that was it. So I will say the moment that I did realize where I'd like it was like, Okay, I like girls and guys, I was in high school. I was in high school, my freshman year of high school, actually. And I was questioned one day, I was questioned, I had this girl, her name was Devonche and we was always together, we was two peas in a pod. We went everywhere together, we did everything. The only time we wasn't together was when he was in class, because we didn't have the same schedule. And so one day, I was at lunch, and this guy came to me and was like, are you and Devonche dating? And I was just like, why? Why? Like, I didn't say no, I didn't say yes, it was just like, why? Like, why are you questioning me? And so at that moment, it was like, you like what you like, but you don't have to explain yourself to anybody. And so that was just that? And that was it. And I was like, OKAY, well [laughter]. And it was just, that was just the only money I've had where I just took and realized like, okay, you like girls, but you like what you like and you don't have to explain yourself to anybody so oh well. So yeah, that's what it was for me. It was never like a sit down and be like, I think you're gay. No, it's like, okay, you like what you like? And I just shrugged my shoulders and just kept going.

[00:36:47] Pennington: Was that that probably wasn't the last time you had to like somebody confronting you with the like, so what's going on with you? And you like, none of your business sort of deal? No, Willy Mae.

[00:36:56] Sears: Yes. But I would say that was the first and last time in high school where I was questioned like that. When I got to college, when I got to college, I was asked a lot! And I'm like, are the girls talking about me? Is that what it is? Am I the topic of y'all conversation? I know, I'm cute and all but I am the topic of y'all conversation, and that's why everybody keeps asking me this question. It came to me so often. And then freshman move in day. I walked in my room. My roommate was already moved in, my roommate was so small I thought she was my roommate's little sister. I didn't know she was my extra roommate. And I tell her this all the time. Like, I'm like, you know, when I first seen you, I didn't think you, I thought you was the little sister. I didn't think you was the big sister because you're so small. So but when I walked in, there was a rainbow flag on the wall that I'm talking about the minute you walk through the door, and that's the first thing you look at that rainbow flag and my grandmother almost had a heart attack. Willy Mae was losing it! Oh, my goodness Willy Mae was losing it! She was like, well, you need to be careful, because. I said I need to be careful because of what? I'm just saying. And you're just saying what? Tell me, what are you saying? Girls we trying girls too. Okay. I was like all right. And, and that is a problem because???

And so, at that moment, I don't know if they, I don't think they picked up on it. But it was like, okay, because I didn't like it. Like, she's a person too. And if she want to hang her flag, I'm gonna let her hang her flag up. Why do you feel like because she has a flag she's going to try me? Why do you think she's going to try me? But—and she never did, that was my best friend and my freshman year of college we was together two peas in a pod. We was going everywhere together. But that was my roommate. Even to this day we still talk to this day. We have a whole group chat. We just texting and talking. She actually text me today like I seen

you, I think I've seen you in a mall today. But, yeah, that first thing you're seeing when I walk with some of the door. Freshman year college moving day, the very first thing I seen was the flag on the wall. And I didn't think much about it. And then that entire year I was asked so often do you like girls? Do you like girls? Do you like girls, do you like girls? And if you like girls, and I'm like, Well, I told you I didn't like girls. Oh, so you do?

[00:36:58] Pennington: Wait, was this question coming from more like?

[00:39:50] Sears: Everyone! It was coming from my suitemates because it was four of us to one bathroom. So it was two rooms. Yes. So it was me and my roommate we had one room. And then there's a door. It connects us to the bathroom. And then there's another door across from that door. And that's our suitemates room. And so, my suitemates had already known each other. Bree and okay, Aubrey and Bree, were best friends before they came to college. And so they were both from Chicago. And then we had another sweet mate, her name was Vash. And so all of us were just chit chatting and talking everything. And so the question came again, like, do you like girls? And I was like, Yes, I like girls and boys. [Acts out a big exclamation] Oh, well, how'd you know? How'd you know? And I'd be like, I don't know. It's just, you never answered the question. So it made me and I'm like, Oh, well, yeah, I don't feel the reason to have to explain myself to anyone. So that's why I never answered the questions. But yes, I am bisexual. And so once they knew it was everywhere, everybody knew.

[00:40:58] Pennington: News travels fast.

[00:40:59] Sears: Yeah very fast, especially the girls, the girls they "Oh, Destiny like girls. Oh, Destiny." Oh y'all, leave me alone [laughter]. Leave me alone. I am talking to someone right now. Please leave me alone. Um, I didn't really, really date a girl for real, for real, like a serious relationship until my sophomore year of college, and we're still together now.

[00:41:27] Pennington: Okay, very cute. How'd y'all meet?

[00:41:31] Sears: So. I was walking. So we have this thing called the plaza, the plaza cuts through the entire campus. And I was on my way to my friend's room. It was her birthday, and we was getting ready to go to her birthday dinner. So I was walking down the plaza, going to her room, and I heard my name being called on the side. So she's calling me so I look and I see, my roommate, I see one of her friends. So she calls me she's like, Destiny come here. I'm like, okay, so I walk over there. She's like, Hey, you look so cute. And I'm like, thank you. And so my now girlfriend her name is Maya. Maya was standing there. And so she spoke to and I'm like, hey, whatever. So my roommates friend, her name is Dashe. So we just her Che. So Che's like, I got a question. I'm like what? She's like do you play with girls?

[00:42:19] Pennington: What a way to phrase it.

[00:42:20] Sears: And so it took me a moment because it took me aback because of the way she phrased it. And then I was like, well, yeah, sometimes. Why and so Maya's like, well, if that's the case, go ahead, put your number in my phone. Okay, because you're cute so I'm gonna do it. But this was awkward. Just want y'all to know, but my numbers 901. [Laughs] And

so I gave her my number, and I went about my day. She texts me we text that night, and then I stopped responding. I just, I just, just stop responding, so we didn't talk as much. And so that same weekend, maybe the next week, I see her at a party. She had walked up to a party. And I already looked at my friend, I was like, Oh, that's my girl talk to while I was texting. And she's finna come speak to me and I ain't even been responding back to that text messages. So let me speak first so I could be nice. And so I was like, hey. And she looked me dead in my face and said, Do I know you?

[00:43:29] Pennington: Oh, oh. Oh, yeah. Color me intrigued here.

[00:43:38] Sears: And so I said, never mind. And I walked away. And we're back to where I was. And so she kept walking. She's my friend. She kept walking. And so maybe a minute or two later, my phone buzzed. And I looked at it and she was like, I didn't know that was you come here? No, no, I won't. I will not come back there where you are? No, because I tried to speak to you. And I was trying to be nice. And you just asked me right in my face if you knew me. No, I'm not gonna be back there. You just played me. And I don't like that. So I like no, I'm not going back there. And so she was like, I didn't know that was you? And I just didn't respond. And so I continued on with the party where my friends were and so she ended up walking up there to where I was, and spoke to me. And I looked at her. And she was trying to tell him like she I came down and whispered in my ear cuz she's like, six feet. I'm only five [feet], five [inches]. So she had whispering ears. Like I didn't know that was like, I didn't know that was you? And I was like, because you really just asked me if you knew me that was so rude of you. And she was like, I really didn't know. And I'm like, yeah, so then we ended up

talking while I was there, and we ended up having a great time. And so we ended up leaving out and she was trying to get me to come with her. Now ma'am, no, ma'am! First of all, you didn't know who I was before. No ma'am. I'm not going with you, I don't know where you're going, but I'm not going with you. And so the whole time while all this has happening and my friends are in the car behind me. And so they're like Destiny come out. I have literally a friend standing out of the sunroof telling me to come get in the car so we can leave. And so I was like, I gotta go. I obviously my friends are waiting on me. Like, I have to go. And she's like, Okay, well, I'm gonna text you. Okay, cool. So, I ended up leaving. I don't even think we text that night. I think we texted the next day. And she was telling me how sick she was from all of the drinking that she did the night before and everything. And I was like, oh will that sucks for you. Well.

[00:45:44] Pennington: [Laughs] I'm not swayed, like.

[00:45:48] Sears: Because I was still upset because you really asked me if you knew me. And you asked me for my number. Yeah, so we ended up talking and texting a little more. And so she told me she was about to get in the shower. So I text her. And she didn't text back. So I called her and she and I heard shower running and everything. She was like, hello. And I was like, you said you're gonna call me when you get a shower. Right? She was like, huh, I say you said you're gonna call me when you get a shower. Right? And she's like, Oh, I guess I was like, Okay, great. And so since then, we started talking, we talked every day. And then the next week, I ended up sick. And she ended up coming over and bringing me soup and stuff. And then we were locked in. [Laughter] Oh sinus infection.

[00:46:35] Pennington: I literally, I've had that happen on a date before I would like I have no excuse for myself.

[Destiny steps away for a minute to help her roommates]

[00:47:28] Sears: Because when you flip it on the wrong side, it doesn't charge; it has to be on the side of the line. I don't know why it's like all right, there we go. There we go. I've had a sinus infection since teaching. So the month of September. I've been sick since like, first week of September. Sinus infection, chill. A lot of germs.

[00:47:52] Pennington: Yeah, you're telling me. My grandmother works in a preschool and like constantly like wiping their snot on you, no care in the world.

[00:48:01] Sears: They always want to give hooks like you have a booger you get to shoot first and then sanitize the you come give me a hug but um.

[00:48:10] Pennington: You're saying you were sick? Actually. You're on this traveling sickness. You were sick and Maya brought you stuff to make you feel better.

[00:48:16] Sears: She brought me soup and some medicine and stuff and so ever since then. And she ended up spending the night that night. I fell asleep while she was there. And she ended up spending the night and then ever since then we've been stuck together like glue.

Hmm like you see me you see Maya you see Maya you see me? That's how it's been ever since then. Um, yeah.

[00:48:42] Pennington: Nice. Well, who was the first person like are you what kind of if I can ask this if it's alright, kind of relationship do you guys have are you monogamous? Are you I mean, open? Everybody has?

[00:48:51] Sears: Yes, we're a monogamous relationship. So it's just as two.

[00:48:55] Pennington: All right. And who was the first person that said? What's going on here? What are we doing?

[00:49:06] Sears: I don't know.

[00:49:08] Pennington: Y'all never have the conversation?

[00:49:10] Sears: No. Never had the conversation. And then after we were so that was in September, September, October, November, December, January, February. So in February, she officially asked me to be her girlfriend. Okay. In February of that year. She officially so five months into talking or you know, there was some gray space. We don't know what we were doing [laughter]. But that February she officially asked me to be her girlfriend, but we always celebrate our anniversary in September because that's when we met each other. And then

because we also don't know what day it was in February. We just celebrated our anniversary September 18, which is also my friend's birthday.

[00:49:55] Pennington: Oh, that's so nice. You're gonna do like a together celebration sort of thing. Now has she met your family?

[00:50:02] Sears: Yes, my family loves Maya! If I come home and my is not with me the first thing they ask me is where's Maya. Maya is not like I tell my mom all the time Maya is not your daughter. I am. So I don't know why you're looking for her. Because I'm who's supposed to be coming, not Maya. But yes, Maya met my family. She met my mom. Was it November then November while we was talking? Yes. She met my mom in that November. So, September, October, November. So within two months of us talking. Give you the story how they met actually. Every year, my mentor, she has a drunk game night. Every year before Thanksgiving break, she has a drunk game night, every year! Every year, she has not missed a year. She is from New Orleans. And she will literally come up here just so she can do her annual game night. That's how serious it is. And so we had our game night and I told my mom that I wasn't going to participate in the game night. I was lying. But we all lie sometimes. She knew I was lying. I knew I was lying. We both knew I was lying. So was I technically lying if you knew I was lying? So the night came. And boy, we had a time [laughter]. We had a time. And so I actually ended up with alcohol poisoning. Because that was really great idea, right? But ended up with alcohol poisoning. So my mom came the next morning to come get me for Thanksgiving break. And when she came it was me and Maya in the room. And then it was my mentor. My roommate had already left. And then my mentor her roommate, because we were suitemates

me my mentor were suitemates, so her roommate had already left too. So it was just us two. And they might get there. And so we've gotten a car, my mom met Maya and everything, but she didn't know she was. So we got in the car. And this is how my mom found out about Maya, everything. Got in the car, we went to the gas station. And so my aunt went to go get the gas. And my cousin was in a car as well. And my cousin's got a car I was in my mom's in the driver's seat. And so my mom's like, I got a question, I'm like sure. So who was the other person that was in the room? I was like, oh, that's Maya. You know, I'm thinking absolutely nothing. But I planned on telling her on the way back home, but I was gonna wait so we got on the road because I didn't know how this was gonna go. So I was gonna wait till we got on the road to tell her. And so I was like this Maya, and she's like, okay, so who's Maya and I was just like, a girl. This girl, Maya [laughter]. So she's like, okay, okay. So who friend is she? She just mine, my friend. My mom was like, okay, she's like, okay, okay. So, are you telling me what you're telling me and I was like. And So we just looked at each other for a moment. And I was like, yeah. And she was like, okay, okay. I need a cigarette. A cigarette!? You don't smoke cigarettes. What are you talking about? It was like girl, okay, not too much. She was like woo I need a cigarette. And I busted out laughing. I thought it was funny. She was like, and she just kept saying, okay, okay. She was trying to put it together. Like she's putting it together. And she's okay. Okay. And I'm like, Yeah, sit in the back seat quiet [laughter]. And so she's like, so when was you gonna tell me and I was like, actually, when we got on the highway. I was on the interstate. I was gonna say something. And I was gonna try to initiate the conversation in a way. But you asked me before we're at the gas station. We didn't get on the road yet. Like it happened too quickly. And she was like, okay. And then she got the car to pump the gas. And then she rolled down, she opened the doors. Like I knew it was something! And I was like,

what are you talking about? She's like, you was not calling me every day like you normally do. You was missing days. You wasn't calling me so I knew he was occupied with something because you wasn't talking to me as much. I didn't put that much thought into it. I didn't realize how occupied I really was. So I never put that much thought into it. And I was like, she might be right.

[00:54:57] Pennington: Yeah. Have you and her ever had like a conversation about your sexuality before Maya?

[00:55:04] Sears: No.

[00:55:04] Pennington: No, that was the first time you kind of were that it was like?

[00:55:08] Sears: Yeah, it was like okay, so let's talk about this. Yeah. So that was our first and then later on that night, we sat down and had a conversation too. She was like, okay, so how'd this happen? When did you know? Why you ain't tell me? I thought we told each other everything, you keeping secrets. I was like, oh, you're so dramatic. But no she was like you really kept secrets. That was every excuse, like you kept the secret. Um, but yeah, so then my cousin was like, and I'm like, yeah, and so I actually at the time, I was on birth control pills. And I was like, I forgot my pills. And she was like, you don't need em! All right. Here's the jokes. Here we go [laughter].

[00:55:57] Pennington: It was like, Yeah, okay.

[00:55:58] Sears: It's that quick, the jokes kicked in immediately. Um, so she didn't tell my aunt at first. And so we had drove back to the school. And I had called Maya, because she was still in my room. And I had called up like, Hey, can you bring my birth control pills down for me, please? She's like, yeah, so she comes out to the car. And now my mama roll down the window when she got to the car and was like, and my her and my aunt kept exchanging looks. And so mom was like, well, hey, Maya, I'm Destiny's mom, if I really knew who you were, I would have introduced myself a little more. But it's nice to meet you. And Maya's like, it's nice to meet you as well. She gave me my pills. And she walked way. So my mom and my aunt was still exchanging what's in the front seat. And then my auntie goes, ohhh. [Laughs] So now she's caught on too. And so she's like, well, why you got pills then? Birth control is for everything it can be used for anything. Why is that the first thing I'll think of? So I was just like, okay, so then we talked about it. And then talked about how we met. How long we had been talking, basically the dynamics of our relationship, and they use this term just, who's the male who's the female?

[00:57:26] Pennington: Oh, god. Okay. Yes.

[00:57:30] Sears: And so I was telling them, like, Maya's masculine presenting, but she's still a female. Like, she's still, that's still a woman! And I'm just me, like, it's me. I'm me, I've been me before. I've always been me, I'm just me and they like, okay. All right. And so, then we me and my mom had got home later on that night. And so she's like, okay, so it was just us at the house. And she's like, Okay, so let's talk about it. And like, what is there to talk about, I thought

we talked about getting a car, right, but, so she was like, she's like, I still love you. And I was like, well, I wasn't expecting that to change honestly. But I'm glad she felt the need to tell me [laughter] that you still love me. And she was like, but it is something I have to get used to. And she was letting me know that as parents, she was like, they set up this, like, they have this whole setup in their mind on how their children life will go. And so when their children, me, makes different decisions, and if it doesn't fit what they have in a mind, it takes them a while to get used to it.

[00:58:43] Pennington: Yeah.

[00:58:45] Sears: And I was like, okay, that's understandable. Like, I get that. But she was like, and then she was like, I don't know, I'm Christian. You know how all that goes. And she was like, but God not gonna ask me about you when I get up there. He gonna ask me about me. So whatever you choose to do that's you but I still love you. And I'm gonna continue to love you. Regardless of what happens. I still love you. That's why you my dog! [Laughter] But then I told you that same weekend is around that time my grandma found out I don't know who told her. But it got to her and she was in the car. So why us!?, What'd we do wrong? And I was like what are you talking about? She's just delusional, Christ. Lil Willy Mae, she's just Willy Mae. And so, and that same weekend we was going to church. And she was like, I think the pastor gonna talk about what she call a gay. I think the pastor's gonna talk about gay and that's stuff so you can go sit with the kids if you want to. I said I'm fine where I'm at. I'm fine in there. I understand. You know, I was like, it doesn't bother me like I understand. I'm cool. You're sure I'm just making sure I was like, Yeah, I'm fine. All right.

[01:00:10] Pennington: Okay.

[01:00:11] Sears: She wanted me to like yeah, I'll go sit with the kids? No, I'm not offended because I know, I knew how everyone felt and how Christians felt about this before it became a main part of my life. Like I knew what it came with. So I don't, it doesn't offend me. It's just like, okay, grow up. [Laughs] Just grow up, because the world is not going to always be the way that you expect it to be. So grow up and accept those that do come to you, period.

[01:00:40] Pennington: Right.

[01:00:41] Sears: And so that's how I was. But yeah, that's when I found out about Maya, and so Maya started come around a little bit more. As in like, last year, she spent Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Year's with us. All in Memphis. She's spent summer holidays with us. And it was when she actually came and stay because she actually stay. My mom was like, anybody stay at our house, especially if she thinks that they like her daughters. They cannot stay at her house. But she allowed Maya to stay in my room, but I had to sleep in the bed with my mom while Maya was there. I had to sleep in the bed with my mom, so she knew we wasn't doing anything. Which we wasn't but she had me sleep in the bed with her.

[01:01:18] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:01:19] Sears: And so, when we was getting ready to leave, she was like, All right, well I'll see y'all later, Maya you coming back for the holidays? [Laughs] And so it was like, okay, she was you know, trying her hardest to show that she accepted Maya, she accepted me and she accepted us for what we were so. Um, but yeah, that's how my family found out. Well, my mom. And yeah, my mom's side. My dad's side technically did not find out until this past year, as in graduation.

[01:01:50] Pennington: Why?

[01:01:57] Sears: Yeah, a very long time. So my dad and my stepmom and my stepsisters. My I would say my stepsister knew my stepsister knew. Um, she found out I think I posted me and Maya's pictures on Twitter one day. And so on my birthday I think I was turning twenty. Twenty, yeah, I think I was turning twenty. She called me. Was telling me she loved me. And she turned around, told me I was going to hell [laughter]. Yeah, so she turned out and basically told me I was going to hell. She told me I was a lukewarm Christian. And yeah, it was a lot. And then she was reading scriptures to me on the phone, all of this on my birthday after she told me happy birthday and she loved me. She went on. And she was like, I just want all of my families to go to heaven. But if you continue, you won't.

[01:02:49] Pennington: What did you say in response to that? You're just like, I mean, like, that's?

[01:02:53] Sears: Okay [laughter]. Okay, well, all right. Okay. Well, okay, I love you, have a great day.

[01:03:04] Pennington: Wow.

[01:03:04] Sears: But it was just like, so I went to my mom, because I'm like, this girl just called me and told me I was going to hell. And my mom was like, who? Cuz I'm gonna call them right, mom, no you can't. No. No. No. No Tanisha no.

[01:03:19] Pennington: Tanisha put the phone down.

[01:03:21] Sears: Tanisha put the phone. She thought I was telling her basically what she was saying to me. And when my sister said to me and everything, she was like, no. And she was like, she was telling me she was like, people like to take the Bible and they only read part of the Scripture. And they don't read the whole thing. And they just use the pieces that they want to manipulate people. And she's like, and that's what she tried to do. Luckily, you just told her okay, you kept on going. And she was like, and if it hurts your feelings, you can tell me because I'll still call and I was like, no, Mama, you don't need to call. I'm okay. I'm fine. She's like, okay. But my mom she was up-set. Oh, my, she was like, I don't think I'm gonna call her mama and I'm like Mama, leave it alone. Leave it alone. She was so upset that my sister had called and said that to me. Like, she was livid. And I was just like, it's fine. It's just like, okay, well, I know who to you know, be around who to kick it with because it's like, what in the world? And then my sister also asked me, she was like, Why didn't you call? She was like, why don't

you tell me why you didn't tell me that she was gay? And I was like, did you think we were close enough for me to even tell you anything? Like we don't even talk that often. Like what made you think I would just text you like, Hey, girl, I'm gay! Woo rainbows and sparkles! Like no, I'm not gonna call and tell you that. I said you found out on Twitter just like everybody else did, like. So that was that and she was telling me how, when she was in high school, she actually was talking to a girl at her job. And so she said that my dad and her mom, which is my stepmom, made her quit her job and sent her to Christian counseling.

[01:05:10] Pennington: Whoa no way?

[01:05:12] Sears: And so I'm like, Okay, well, I already see how you all coming.

[01:05:17] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:05:18] Sears: So you find out, you find out, you don't, you don't, and I've gone about my business like, I'm not gonna go out of my way to let you all know. And y'all made y'all child quit her job, and then sent her to Christian counseling.

[01:05:34] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:05:35] Sears: So I'm not going to go out of my way to tell you all, if you find out, you find out if no, no. But if you don't, oh, well. That's what it was for me because that was extreme to

me. I felt like that was extreme just for her talking and texting and liking one of her female coworkers, you made her quit her job and sent her to Christian counseling.

[01:05:58] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:05:59] Sears: That was extreme to me. So I made like, it wasn't a priority of mine to tell them. And I got to a point where one day I have posted because I'm also a part of that organization called spectrum at JSU. And so I was part of an organization. I was the parliamentarian for two years. Maybe three? Yeah, three years, actually. So I was parliamentarian for—No, two years. Two years, I was parliamentarian. And so we had our Pride Week. So I posted it on my Instagram, you know, proud week celebrate with us. And so my dad's screenshot first of all, one, I didn't know he had Instagram. Two, I didn't know he followed me. And so he screenshotted it and sent it to my mom. It was like, so Destiny gay now. My mom was like, did she tell you that. And he's like, Well, I'm not stupid. This says spectrum. That's like me hanging out with all of a whole bunch of gay dudes and then me not being gay. He was like, that doesn't make sense. And I'm just like, what if she just supports all people, and she's not biased, she just support all people. And he was like, I'm not dumb. But he never said anything to me about this. Only I find out because my mom showed me. I'm also nosy. So I was going through my mom's phone. She doesn't know well she does. She does know now. But I just, I don't know, I'm just a nosy person. And so, when I seen that I was just like, I didn't like his reaction. And so my mom asked him like, so what if she is gay? And he was like than I just got a gay daughter. And my mom was like, what is there a problem with that? And so, she was like, is there a problem with that? And it sounds like the word homophobic was brought

up. And so in the messages if I'm not mis-ta-ken, I'm pretty sure he said he was homophobic in the messages.

And so I was like, okay, still not a priority of mine to tell ya. Find out. Find out if you know, you know, if you don't, you don't, still wasn't a priority of mine. And so that was the same year that my sister called me and tell me I was going to hell. So that was that same year. And so graduation came up this year. 20. So that was 2020. This is now 2022. And so graduation came up. And I told them I sent the message. The week of graduation, I let them know, hey, I have a girlfriend, her name is Maya. She will be a graduation, she will be at the dinner, she will be around. Because my mom one of my mom's biggest things was she didn't want me to flaunt it in front of my little sister. Because you know, little kids are impressionable. And so I was like, okay, that's fine. So we don't show much, you know, a lot of PDA in front of my little sister, when she's with us. But my little sister love Maya, she thinks my as my best friend, Chrissette, it loves Maya. She's like one of her favorite people. Like if I come home, and it's just me, she's gonna ask me, where's Maya like?

[01:09:12] Pennington: Yeah, right.

[01:09:13] Sears: So I don't funny in front of Chrissette, I just, you know, just me and Maya, she thinks we're best friends. And so she said that she was gonna take my and Maya is now her best friend. She's not my best friend anymore [laughter]. And so I let them know Maya will be there. But Chrissette also will be there. So it won't be any, you know, a lot of PDA or anything, but I just wanted to let you know who she was, and why she was there. So I didn't

have to introduce her in front of everyone else. Especially if, you know, my younger siblings are there because I know. I don't know, you know how y'all will feel about me saying oh, this is my girlfriend in front of everybody, including the children, you know? And so my dad never said anything until later he called me say you think I'm just now finding out, I've been new, I've been new! And I was like, I already knew that you knew. He was like, how you know that I know? Like, my mom told me. I wasn't supposed to have said that, but [laughter]. Tell me like, I knew that you knew. But his wife didn't know. My stepmom didn't know. And so she was like, well, thank you for letting us know. Um, and we definitely don't want the kids to know. And I was like, that's fine. And, she was like, but if she's like, if we don't need to bring them, we won't, we'll leave them at home. And I was like, no, I would love for them to come, I would love for them to be there. But if it is a problem with Maya, your being there, then leave them at home because Maya is going to be there.

[01:10:50] Pennington: Right.

[01:10:51] Sears: And so the kids did come. We all you know, I already said there wouldn't be you know, much PDA or anything. So it was pretty peaceful event. Um, but yeah, that's when my stepmom found out and that's when I officially told my dad, but he already knew. He already knew. So um now with Maya it's taken, it's taken them a little minute to you know, except the fact. We actually talked about it recently, maybe a couple of weeks ago. Um, we talked about, you know, me and Maya, and it was like, well, your mom damn knew for three years. And I was like, my dad knew too. But I was like, my Dad knew too. It was just you, Stepmom. You were on person that didn't know [laughter] like your child, like their children

knew. Because my sister called and told me I was going to hell. So she knew she knew. It was just you. They everybody kept it from you. So I was like, you know, yikes. But, I saw she will be like, she texts me, we got off the phone. And she's like, tell Maya I say hey, and I was like, okay, I will and so later on I texted because I had told Maya, and Maya said, you know, hey, Becca, so Maya say hey. So she hearted the message and everything so it's taken them a minute to you know, accept the fact they've never actually like sat down and talked with me and Maya or just sat down and talk to Maya or anything. My mom and them they adore Maya they love Maya. They be like Maya can you, Maya is Maya coming, like when we plan trips, we plan for Maya to come on the trips as well, like we already know she's coming of like she's a part of the family there. On mom's side definitely is part of the family. So yeah. But yeah, it took my dad and my dad and did not find out until 2022, about Maya me and Maya being together. But yeah, my family on my mom's side knew all about her.

[01:12:48] Pennington: Right? Oh, I mean, people are not entitled information. Even about.

[01:12:52] Sears: Yeah, and that was another thing. I always tell my mom, like if they ask than cool, but if you don't ask why does it go around. Hey, so I'm gay! I'm not going around just telling people that because it's not your business, what I do or who I'm with like that, right? Doesn't matter. So.

[01:13:10] Pennington: What about your grandmother and Maya? How do they get along?

[01:13:16] Sears: Alright, so [laughter].

[01:13:18] Pennington: Okay. All right. All right, I opened up a can of worms there. Okay.

[01:13:22] Sears: When Maya first started coming around, it was hard for Willy Mae, Willy Mae had a hard time. Um, we actually got into it. Last December. We, me and her had an argument, because she kept telling me who's talking about my graduation trip. And so it was in question if my aunt was bringing her husband but I was like, I really wanted it to be a girl's trip. You know and for her not to bring her husband and so my grandma was like, well, it's not a girls trip because Maya's coming. [Pause] And so me and Maya we've been through this, we've heard this before. So this is nothing that I haven't encountered before. And I was like, because we call my grandma mama. So I'm like my mama. Maya is a girl. So it is still a girl trip. [Laughs] If she comes along with this. "Well, I don't see her as a girl."

[01:14:18] Pennington: Wow.

[01:14:20] Sears: Well, I'm telling you, right here right now on the record. She is a girl. So if she was to come on the trip, she was still it'd still be considered a girl's trip. Because my is a girl. "She doesn't dress like a girl." I said neither does Kiara which is my sister I was like Kiara doesn't dress like a girly girl any thing either. Does that mean she's a guy too? Is she a man too? Because she doesn't dress like a girl? You know, I'm asking questions because I need you to make it make sense. I need what you said to me to make sense. And so let's make it make sense. Let's do the addition subtraction and the whole equation. Let's do it. And so she was like, "well, we don't see as a girl," and I was like, who is we? "Well, I don't." Well she is

and so she can try to argue with me about the fact that if Maya was a girl or not. And so I'm not going to argue it's like she still has a period just like the rest of us. Um, so I don't understand what is it that you don't understand. And I told her I was like, if dressing like a boy is going to stop your period, you are not a girl anymore. I'm going to go ahead and buy me some jeans, some hoodies, tennis shoes, but I cut my hair off. Because if I can skip the time of the month, I'll do whatever it takes.

[01:15:38] Pennington: Fuck yeah, oh, sorry, can't say fuck on the official record.

[01:15:41] Sears: I'll do whatever it takes. So let's, let's let's figure it out what I need to get help me. So I can understand it. And so she was really upset. She was angry, like, she was angry. She was upset. And so I'm just like, she's really upset. I walk out the room because I'm trying to educate you, and I'm trying to help you. But you refuse to accept what I'm saying? Yeah. Why would I keep going? So walk out the room. Out of the room and kept going and so she's kept talking about and everything she was up-set, she was like, you can't be mad, because you chose that lifestyle. And you expect everybody else to understand I need to be educated. You chose that lifestyle. I didn't tell you to choose that lifestyle. And I was like, but I'm trying to educate you now and tell you now that Maya is not a boy. She is a girl but you refuse to accept it. [Imitates her grandmother's voice] "Well, maybe I'm just homophobic." I said, Well, if that's the case, then I'll leave because I can choose what I want to be around and I don't want to be around that. She's upset. "Well, I can never talk to me again." Okay. It does again, I don't I don't argue with you. Okay. So that's it, okay. And as she was walked by me, she was like, I'm not about to let the devil get me mad. So now I'm the devil! Wow I got a lot of faces. So I'm just

like, wow, so I literally call my mom, I'm like a gram, mama said I was the devil. And that I chose this lifestyle. And I can't be mad at other people, because they don't want to understand my lifestyle that she needs to be educated. But when I tried to educate her, she didn't want to hear. So my moms like, destiny. I love you. And I don't care what anybody else say. And I'm like, Well, I'm just telling you what she said. And told her I don't want to be around and she told me I don't ever have to speak to her again. She was like, I'm on the way to come get you out. Alright. Okay. And so she can't look at me. And so we talked about situation. And so later on my we dropped my sister off at work. And so my aunt called, my mom's like, hey, have you talked to mama. She's like, Yeah, she's really upset. And my mom's like, and I was like, why she'll said she started it. She said, she knows she was in the wrong. She literally called me and said, I messed it up with Destiny.

[01:18:12] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:18:12] Sears: And that's the problem. But I was like, but I wouldn't I she didn't mess it up. Yes, she hurt my feelings. But she didn't mess it up. That's still my home girl. Like, that's my grandma. I still love her. You didn't mess it up. You just we need some time.

[01:18:12] Pennington: Okay.

[01:18:12] Sears: And I was like, What else she say? [Laughs] And so she was like, she didn't tell me what all was said. But she told me she messed it up. And she said, she messed up big. And I was like, the thing is, it's just the fact that yes, I understand that you were raised in

different times. And you were raised a different way. You was raised in the church, all of that, so I understand you the fact that you don't understand me. But it is the simple fact that I'm trying to help you. And you have this will refusal to listen.

[01:19:17] Pennington: Right.

[01:19:17] Sears: I text her. I tell her I love her. So we'll talk about it later. But it's just we can't talk about it right now. Emotions are still high. We're still upset about it. And let's let's just wait till later, and we'll talk about it. And so she texted back like Okay, I'm sorry, I'm not homophobic. [Laughs] I'm like, I know. I know you not I know. It's okay. And so, we talked maybe it was weeks later is when we actually sat and had the conversation about it. It was weeks later, but we did talk about it. And it's crazy because we talked about as I was literally in the car with Maya. I was in the car with Maya and I called my grandma and we talked about it was just like, I get what you were saying, I understand that there's a lot to accept. I understand that sometimes the way people present themselves confuses others. I understand that! But when someone is trying to explain and educate you, you must be open to listen, and not listen to respond, but listen, to comprehend, and to receive what I'm saying to you. And she was like, Okay, I'm understand, I love everyone. She's like, I wouldn't even be a good Christian if I didn't love everyone. And I was like, exactly see, mhmm! Yup, that's right! Exactly. She was like, So I completely understand. She apologized. I apologized to her if I hurt her feelings at any point. And so ever since then, I'm on the phone, "where Maya at?" At this point, y'all just call Maya phone if y'all gon' ask about her when you call me. And she's like, I love y'all! Y'all be safe! And

she says, y'all now she don't say just I love you. She cuz she knows Maya's around. So she say, I love y'all. What are y'all doing today? You know, she talks to both of us.

[01:21:19] Pennington: Right?

[01:21:20] Sears: And so she actually, we went to Memphis a couple of weeks ago, and we stayed at her house. And so the very first night, she made Maya sleep on the couch, and I slept in the room.

[01:21:33] Pennington: Okay.

[01:21:33] Sears: And then the next day, she was like, y'all could sleep in the room together. It's fine. And I was like you gon let us sleep in the room together?!

[01:21:43] Pennington: Progress Willy Mae!

[01:21:44] Sears: Yes! So we have been really moving again. She's getting used to Maya being around because Maya is always around. And so yeah, it took a minute, though. Yeah, it took her a minute, it took for us to have a little blow up. But we got it back. And we are where we are now. So yeah.

[01:22:04] Pennington: Right. Yeah. And it's good y'all like had it out, you know?

[01:22:08] Sears: Yes!

[01:22:08] Pennington: Like, cared enough. The relationships were important enough to have the hard talks. Yeah.

[01:22:14] Sears: And so, other person and my uncle, my mom's brother. I didn't know how he was going to accept it either. I don't know why I just was didn't know how he was going to accept it. And so, one day we was in Memphis. And so he was like, "Hey, I'm gonna put a deer horn on your car." So let me tell you what it is. Yes. So a deer horn. It's like when you're driving on like the interstate and stuff. And those dark streets, it's dark. And deers normally cross the street and cross the road and stuff in that area, especially going from Memphis to Jackson. And so the horn when you have it on your car with the way it's shaped or something, the way the wind hits, it makes a noise that the deers can hear.

[01:22:58] Pennington: Oh, wow. Okay.

[01:22:59] Sears: And so it keeps them from jumping out in front of the car. And so he was I want to put a deer horn on your car. So he put one on Maya car. And when we was gone, I was like, I hope you know, you've been initiated into the family now. Like, you're initiated in like, you are one of us [laughter]. Because everybody in my family has one.

[01:23:19] Pennington: Right.

[01:23:19] Sears: And so he put one on her car. And I'm like, You got a initiated in [laughter]!

[01:23:27] Pennington: Cause you got a deer horn!

[01:23:29] Sears: You been initiated in, you have a deer horn! And that's so southern [laughter].

[01:23:35] Pennington: No, but like, it's that it's a very southern thing to be like, let me adjust something for you to make your life safer. For you. Yeah, it's a very southern thing.

[01:23:45] Sears: But, so he put a deer horn on her car. So I'm like, Okay, so he's accepting you, too. Like, you're a part of the family now. Like, because Okay, who how did you know we needed a deer horn? Where did you? I didn't know where he got them from I just know, he said it works for him and he wanted all of us to have one. And so now we have one. But, yeah, my family has accepted her. That's on my mom's side. She's, she's one of us now. Like I tell her all the time, like, you're a part of family. This we was planning, Christmas trips, Christmas and Thanksgiving trips trying to figure out what we're going to do. And so my mom was trying to go up into the mountains for Christmas, and we get a cabin and everything. And I was like, okay Maya we are going to the mountains. She was like well I actually planned on going home. You're not coming, you're not coming with me! My family looking for you! Right? [Laughs] And sometimes, I be forgetting like, Maya has her own family. Yeah. She has family too. So why let her go with our family, but I did want her there [laughter]. So now we're trying to figure out what

our plans are for the upcoming holidays and who's gonna where and what we're going to do and if we're going to spend them together so.

[01:25:00] Pennington: Nice. And do you spend a lot of time with her family as well?

[01:25:04] Sears: I have not. Her family ,most of her family's in Chicago. And so what we have are longer breaks, which is like Thanksgiving and Christmas break. It's cold in Chicago.

[01:25:06] Pennington: Okay. Yeah.

[01:25:17] Sears: I hate the cold. I hate the cold. I hate the cold. It can get 60 degrees here. And it's literally one sec. Actually. It is 79 degrees outside. I have on a hoodie [laughter]. A hoodie. I'm like, it's gonna get chilly. I need to put a hoodie on. The low was supposed to be, today it's 55. I'm not going outside past seven o'clock, because it's gonna be cold outside. I can't do anything below 60. I hate it. I do not like to go outside when it's cold. And so because she's from Chicago. And when we have our break, it's cold. It's freezing up there.

[01:25:40] Pennington: Yeahhhh. Right.

[01:26:02] Sears: I'm not going up there. [voice raises in cadence] And so I think I'm gonna have to bite the bullet because she wants to go to Chicago for New Years. And so I didn't want to bite the bullet this year and actually go up there and meet the rest of her family. I've met her

mom, me her and her brother talk almost everyday like me, my mom talk. She has a twin brother.

[01:26:21] Pennington: Oh, cute.

[01:26:22] Sears: So her brother. He's in Baton Rouge. And so he calls and FaceTime. And we talk to him. We give him girly advice and things of that such like, so me her and her brother, I would say we're pretty close. Her mom, you know, we chitchat a little bit when she calls and everything. But not as much cause me and my mom talk everyday all day. [Laughs] So it's not the same as our relationship is with my parents. Well, my mom and that side of the family and everything. It's not as close. But I am hoping that it does get there especially when we come up there. And it's cold in in January.

[01:27:01] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:27:02] Sears: I'm gonna go, it's gonna be freezing. I'm gonna need a coat and like two pairs of socks and two of pairs of pants and two pairs of everything, but I'm gonna go I'm gonna suck it up and go just so I can meet them. And so we can have the same relationship with I can have the same relationship where her family that she has with mine, so I'm gonna bite the bullet so that that can work out for us.

[01:27:22] Pennington: Right. Because if you're creating like a kind of a future together, whatever that may look like, it's like you both got got people to involve in that sort of scenario.

[01:27:29] Sears: Yup, but I would say she has a cousin that they live in Memphis, on the outskirts of Memphis. We sat down, we talked for hours. Me and her cousin and she's older. She yeah, she's older. But we sat down and we just chit chatted up and that she called what she called she like, tell Destiny I say hi! Or we're both in sororities. And so we make sure when our Founders Day, come up with stuff, we let each other know, you know, Happy Founders Day, and things of that such. So, that is someone in her family who I believe I have left a great impression on so [laughter].

[01:28:07] Pennington: Nice, all use one advocate, one advocate.

[01:28:10] Sears: That's it! That's all I need! [Laughter]

[01:28:13] Pennington: Her over there. She likes me right there go talk to her.

[01:28:15] Sears: Hey I'm like if I know when I go to her family functions, I know I can talk to her! [Laughter]

[01:28:20] Pennington: No, that's so it is important. Like it really is important to have those like family touchstones so to speak.

[01:28:26] Sears: Yes. So that's one of the people I'm like, Okay, I know if I go there. And yeah, it was very weird for me. I know, I have one person to speak to. And I can chit chat with her at

any moment. So yeah. That is one person in her family that I have gotten close to. And I chit chat with So yeah.

[01:28:44] Pennington: That's cute. Okay. It's like it's, that's lovely. It's like y'all had like trials and tribulations, but still like, one of the better. It's like the.

[01:28:52] Sears: It's working out, right. Yeah we are getting it to work. It was a lot at the beginning. There was a lot it was a lot, it was new, especially for me. Just being in a healthy relationship was a lot and it was new to me. So I self destruct, self sabotage and all of that. That was me at first so it was really rocky for us. And me, I'm more outspoken and I always tell people because a lot of people go based off our relationships, okay, they like Maya is the masculine one and Destiny is the feminine one. But if you actually sit down and talk to us, you will see I have the most masculine energy in the relationship and she has them. She's so feminine. Maya is so feminine. She is more feminine than me.

[01:28:52] Pennington: How so? Like when you say feminine does that mean for you?

[01:29:52] Sears: When it comes to anything? Actually said, and also tell her I was like Maya, I hate to say, but you are more messy you're messier than me you know all the tea you see everything you bring everything back to me [laughter]. Like but Maya is very feminine when it just comes to simple thing as in how she carry herself. She dressed masculine, but Maya is gonna make sure her nails are, she makes sure her nails are together, she makes sure totally, she's going to make sure she does she do her hair, she's going to cut it, she's planning to go to

barber school. So I actually got her barber kit for our three year anniversary, like a clippers trimmers and all of that. And so, she's gonna make sure she cut her hair. She's gonna make sure people who do-rag on at nighttime, so her hair is laying down, me I go to bed however I go to bed. [She makes me laugh with this comment, perhaps cause I too go to bed however I got to bed] I just know I'm getting a shower, and I'm gonna smell good. But if I go to bed and I put my hair up, that's. Look, I don't have a whole long day. And every day is a long day to me. So therefore, [laughter] I go to bed like, you know, I'm more of a carefree I don't care it is what it is, when it comes to like presentation, I would go out and I would throw on tights and this t shirt I told you this. Maya's gonna iron [her Memphis accent makes the word 'iron' sound like 'earn'] her jeans, she's going to iron her shirt, she's going to make sure everything's together.

[01:31:10] Pennington: Oh bless her.

[01:31:10] Sears: I don't care, I will go out there and my T-shirt will be wrinkled, it's okay. Because it's hot outside, it's gonna it's gonna straighten out at some point. I don't know when but it is. So I don't care. She's very feminine is very feminine, the way she talks the way she carries herself, she's very feminine. People would think I am the more masculine I have the most masculine energy according to them. According to other people, she's also I would say she's also more submissive than I am. Maya just be like, okay, it is what it is, you know, she loves me, Maya let's me do whatever I want. I'm very spoiled, I can say that. But I, you know, I make a lot of the decisions. And in a hetero relationship, the guy makes most of the decision for the relationship, most of the finances and things of that such, that's what the guy does. That is the masculine role. Well in our relationship, it's me! And if you were to look at our

relationship, you wouldn't tell that I would be the person to make those decisions, but I am! So that's why I say I have the, what in the hetero relationship, the masculine energy, that's me. And then she will be considered the feminine energy, and that will be her. So yeah.

[01:32:26] Pennington: And it's interesting, like, yeah, you're hearing you describe it, it's like, you know, you figuring it's like you only figure this stuff out, the longer you sit in it, you know?

[01:32:34] Sears: Yes!

[01:32:34] Pennington: And sort of like, it's like comparing it to the, to the, to the masculine or feminine roles you have seen before in your life, the different combinations of energies people can have, and how that can be totally.

[01:32:44] Sears: Yes. So like, when I was dating guys, and like, in my relationship, I would try to like, No, we're doing this this at this time. And then I want this, this this, and then the guy be like, No, ma'am. No, I make those decisions. And I'm like, me, I'm gonna do it, and so a lot of my some of my relationships actually clash because I had that energy, where it's like, I want to make the decisions. You can't you don't always have to make the decisions, why can I make those decisions? And so I've had relationships to clash because of that. And so with Maya, it's like, okay, I'm able to make those decisions. And there are moments where she's like, No, we're gonna do this. And I'm like, Okay, I let her make the decision. So it's like, it works for us. It works for us.

[01:33:36] Pennington: You compliment. You complement each other well.

[01:33:39] Sears: Yes! She's the quiet laid back, she'll be in the corner, and I'm the one that's out there on the floor dancing and I'm like, Hey, loud and everything. There was this post I sent and it was like every loud and drunk girlfriend needs a quiet boyfriend who's going to support her shenanigans. All right, so Maya is going to support the shenanigans and Maya does not drink. Maya don't like to drink. But me. I'm gonna have a drink [laughter]. I'm gonna have a drink. She knows I'm gonna have a drink. Well, we go out she be like, Okay, so what do you ordering? Well, I seen this Margarita right here, and she be like, I already knew that you want the mango strawberry don't you? You already know! You know, that's what I want. So, yeah, we know each other, like back our hands.

[01:34:27] Pennington: That's beautiful. It's a beautiful.

[01:34:29] Sears: The back the front, the fingertips we know.

[01:34:32] Pennington: Cuticles, nail beds, all of it. All of it

[01:34:34] Sears: All of it, everything and it's a lot. It was a lot. At the beginning. It was a lot. Being in a healthy relationship was something completely new to me. And so it caused a lot of rift between us because I was like you're doing dadada, she'd like, No, I was and she will be able to show me and prove me wrong. And I'd be like, Okay, I'm the problem. And that's why I was telling you I was giving some undergrad students some relationship advice. And I was like,

sometimes you actually do have to stop and realize like and look and examine yourself to make sure you're not being the problem. Because we've been together three years. And at the end of two years, I had to sit and realize, okay, Destiny. You're the problem [laughter]. You're the problem. And once I was able to fix and correct those issues, we've been great. We're like, okay, so when are we getting married? That was, like, literally, I think, and asked that yesterday. I was like, When are we gonna get married? She was like, I don't know, but we are. Okay!

[01:35:44] Pennington: Okay, so that conversation has like been had like, we are each other's it?

[01:35:49] Sears: Yes! We're like, I'm like, okay, so when are we getting married? She was like, I don't know. But we are. Okay. Great, as long as you know, because I know. So I'm just making sure we're on the same page. And we both know, like, this, this is it. ok great. But yes, we have had that conversation.

[01:36:04] Pennington: But it's been no more than, like, we acknowledge this is happening eventually. Or like, you know, she's like, in two years, if I don't see your ring, I'm gone.

[01:36:11] Sears: No it's like, we know what's going to happen eventually. We haven't put a date on it, because we want to get where we are stable. Because Maya is still in school, she graduates this year. And then she wants to go to barber school, barber school after this. I've already graduated in May. I'm teaching now. This is my first real world in the adult year in the

adult world. But so I'm like, okay, and then it took for me seeing our relationship outside of college because I was in college. I'm like, okay, so this is a college relationship. Once we graduate, once I graduated, it's gonna be over. And it wasn't like we have stuck beside each other this whole time. And I feel like we've grown even closer, outside of college, then we went on when he was in college. And it's crazy, because we was, we basically lived together in college, and now we don't live together, she has her own house. And I live in apartment in North Jackson, she stays closer to the school. And even though we are in separate houses, our relationship has grown tremendously.

[01:37:19] Pennington: Why would you say that? Like it was? What was it? The little bit of distance, you're able to miss each other more, you just think like, as you're sort of becoming your own people outside of a college identity?

[01:37:28] Sears: Yeah, we're becoming our own people, especially me, I'm becoming my own person outside of college. Because I said she's still in school. And so because I'm becoming my own person outside of college, it's like, okay, all right. So college is fun, you definitely have college problems, but a lot of those problems don't matter, once you actually get into the real world. And so like realizing that it's like, oh, this doesn't even matter, like, [laughter] so like, the little things that I will be upset about, which I said the little things because they were very little, very little, it's like, it doesn't even matter now, it doesn't matter. So stop letting these small things and those college issues, block your relationship, or you now have an effect on your relationship. So yeah, it's definitely growing outside of college in a relationship, it has tremendously helped.

[01:38:27] Pennington: That's awesome. And as like you are growing into your, you're becoming your own sort of people like your version of yourselves kind of how is your because this is something that kind of want to get into. Sort of tapping into like, Black LGBTQ life in Jackson, like, like sophomore year, this is the first time, you've had a girlfriend, you know, it's sort of like you were allowed to when you got to college, and in Jackson, sort of develop and finally kind of discover, you know, a part of yourself. So, you know, what was that experience, sort of like getting into the community in college? And then how is your experience changed once you guys like once you're out of college?

[01:39:14] Sears: Okay, so in college, it was like, Oh, she like girrrlls! [says this in a mocking almost childish tone] And like, the community was so small. So like, everybody knew everybody. You couldn't do anything without the other person finding out you it was there yeah. Though, the proof everything was there. It was so small. And so although it was so small one, it took a long time for people to accept the fact that I actually was a part of the community because, one, I just according to him, I just don't look it. I don't know what it is. It was like, they just didn't believe it. And so and I've also had like guys that I've talked to on campus, and so when I'm talking to Maya when I started talking to Maya and so one of the first things we started doing, like interacting with each other on Twitter, everyone's like, so you go for real? Like you like girls for real for real? They like, you've always liked girls like this whole time. I'm like, yeah, [impersonating another person] Really? Like, people didn't believe it. Like no one believed the gay community didn't believe it, the heterosexual community didn't believe it, nobody believed us. So I was just there. And it was like, Okay, so where do I go? Where do I fit

in? Because no one believed, it was just like, I can talk about guys, but I could talk about girls too.

[01:40:42] Pennington: Right.

[01:40:43] Sears: And so it was, I felt the most acceptance within my roommate, Aubrey, I felt the most acceptance from her because she was like, you know, she was able to talk to me, I could talk to her about guys if I needed to, talk to her about girls if I needed to, like, I was able to have that safe space.

[01:41:03] Pennington: Right.

[01:41:03] Sears: And so that's where I became more into who I was because that safe space was there. 310 and 312, that's the suite numbers. That was a safe space for us. So we was able to have those conversations and sit down and talk about whatever we needed to because we understood all of us understood. So I would think I would say that was one of the biggest things with coming into the community and doing it in college, though, that safe space that I had within those three people was important. Because I had friends outside of those three people. And they didn't know, like I told them, but they just didn't accept it. So it was like it never happened. It was never there. And so I was able to have those conversations and stuff with those three people. So they helped a lot, having that same space. And then, once people actually seen me Maya together, it was like.

[01:42:05] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:42:06] Sears: Destinyyyyyy. [Laughs] You for real, like, everybody took me for real than like, they was like, okay, and so even so I had more people to come to me, one of my mentees that I had, she actually was an education major, so that's how she became my mentee and I became her mentor, was because we had the same age, but she even came to me and was like, I seen that you had a girlfriend. She was like, Are you a lesbian? Or are you bisexual, how is it? And I was like, I'm bisexual. She was like, Okay, so my problem is, I think I am too. But I don't know how to tell my mom. So how did you do it?

[01:42:46] Pennington: Okay.

[01:42:47] Sears: And so I realized—I can help people.

[01:42:52] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:42:52] Sears: That's why I love helping people. Like, I'm really big in helping people. So I'm like, I can help people, like people literally want to know, like, how to max your swing. And like, if they need support, I can be that safe space for them.

[01:43:05] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:43:11] Sears: Okay, and so, I became a safe space for other people. And so, that was a really big thing for me, you know, letting people know, like, you know, you can, we can talk about whatever you need to talk about, I'm here for that. I'm here for that. Like, if you need to talk about it, you can. Um, And so even so my life is still kind of the same. I was interacting with more LGBTQ people. I did notice that I was interacting with well, they were interacting with me more, because I always spoke to everyone everything, but they actually spoke to me now. Like, they was like, Okay, great you one of us. Like I became one of them. And they finally seen that I was one of them.

[01:43:55] Pennington: Okay.

[01:43:56] Sears: So that was really good. And but then I would say, with the heterosexual community. I don't I don't want to say they didn't like me or anything, but I will say it was like, oh, we can't talk about them issues because you like girls? Well, actually miss ma'am, [laughter] I'm bisexual. So I most definitely can relate to what you're saying. And I understand what you're saying. And I have some advice because I've experienced that already. So, so that was a thing. In Jackson. I did not get into the LGBTQ community in Jackson until I started with Thee Black Pride and Jackson.

[01:44:44] Pennington: Okay. All right. That was like your segue into the world?

[01:44:48] Sears: It was like, yeah, a big push like.

[01:44:51] Pennington: Wow.

[01:44:52] Sears: Because I've always heard that we've had gay clubs, but I've never had anybody to go with.

[01:44:58] Pennington: Okay.

[01:44:59] Sears: I've always heard of Pride? But who's gonna go with me? Because don't nobody really speak about it. And so, when I actually started the project, I started to learn more. And I'm like, Wait, that's here that—we have a Pride?! Because I've never been to Pride before. I had never been to pride until I started Thee Black Pride in Jackson. And I went to Pride for the very first time.

[01:45:27] Pennington: Wow, who took you?

[01:45:30] Sears: Maya. [Laughs] Maya, she dropped me off. But I told her, I was working on my project while I was there. And so I was finding narrators there.

[01:45:41] Pennington: Wow.

[01:45:42] Sears: And so that was my very first and I also was a part of Spectrum and Spectrum went there for community service. They was there to where community service were Mississippi Votes. And so it was like, both of my worlds like clashed into one. And it was like,

Okay, I'm here, like, I'm here like, this is it, this is it. And so when I got there, I was like, wow, okay. So you're telling me? All of y'all stay here, Jackson, and I've never seen you before? So where you hanging out? Where do you go? Like, I was asking the questions, because I'm like, I'm new to this.

[01:46:21] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:46:23] Sears: So I'm like you know, which, what does this mean? What does that mean? And so even like, with the project, that was my first time the project helped me go to pride for the first time. And I went again this year.

[01:46:36] Pennington: Wow.

[01:46:37] Sears: And I didn't even go because of the project. I went, because I wanted to go because I enjoyed myself, when I did go for my project.

[01:46:44] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:46:45] Sears: And so I was able to go again this year. And I'm like, wow, okay, pride. It was literally maybe two weeks ago. Okay, so it was two weeks ago, and I went and I took my, my sister with me, too. It was me, my little sister, and Maya, and we went to pride. And we watched the shows, they had a comedian out that we watched that we went into the museum, because it was at the Civil Rights Museum, here in Mississippi. So we went there, and it was

really nice. And I'm like, Okay, so the project really helped me actually indulge into the LGBTQ community here in Jackson. Because before then I wasn't sure if I would be accepted into it, because I did not present myself as you know, I was just typical. Me. [Laughs] So people wouldn't even know if I was a part of the community unless you actually asked me, or you see me with Maya.

[01:47:44] Pennington: Okay. Right.

[01:47:45] Sears: So, that's when I started to learn about all of the clubs and all of the lingo. Like I've known some of it, but I like my vocabulary, everything else grew when I started the project.

[01:48:00] Pennington: Okay.

[01:48:01] Sears: And that's when I was able to become a part in the project and become a part of the LGBTQ community here in Jackson. And so once I started to project, I started meeting new people, I started getting their experiences. And I'm like, and it's like, you see these things, but you never really think of how much they affect the person until you talk to them. And so a lot of the things that some of my narrators were telling me, I'm like, wow, okay, I noticed, but I didn't peep that much. I didn't think that much into it. So, the project is actually when I got my experience of the LGBTQ here in Jackson.

[01:48:42] Pennington: That's crazy. What sort of new pieces of information did narrator's give you? Yeah, we're just like, wow, I had no idea.

[01:48:51] Sears: I always knew how hard it was to be Black and gay, in the south. I understand. But then when they described it to me as basically a job. I was like, a job?! [laughter] But they was like, it's literally basically a job like, and then people expect you especially with, with the guys in my, my gay males, it's like people expect you to be this whole person and people come to you by Hey, girl, and you just be like, Why are you just gonna say hey to me? And I was like, I never thought about that. Because a lot of people when they see gay guys, they get to being overly what I'm trying to say. They have like a little more attitude when they speak to them. They become overly feminine when they speak to them. They try to make it a point to you know, show that they support but you're only making it weird.

[01:49:53] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:49:54] Sears: I never noticed that until my narrator pointed it out to me. And I was like wow, okay, because I didn't notice, even I do it. But I did not notice it until it was pointed out to me.

[01:50:13] Pennington: Wow.

[01:50:14] Sears: And I'm like, wow. Okay. And then they was telling me how one of my narrators told me how he literally had rocks thrown at him. And when he was telling me, he was laughing, I realized something that we use is we laugh when we're uncomfortable.

[01:50:34] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:50:35] Sears: We laugh to ease the pain, because I'm pretty sure that was traumatic because you were able to give me exactly what you were doing at that moment. And what they said to you and what they did. It traumatized you. And I was like, Okay, so, trauma response for us. We laugh. About everything. We think everything's funny, but it's trauma.

[01:51:00] Pennington: Right?

[01:51:01] Sears: Okay. And then the fact that they threw rocks, that was something I'm like, Okay, I've always heard you know, you got to Mississippi, they're gonna throw rocks at you, because you're Black. You know, that's just how it goes. And it was always the white people are gonna throw rocks at you because you're Black. But there are Black people throwing rocks at the Black gay males? Because they're gay.

[01:51:20] Pennington: Right?

[01:51:22] Sears: How's that work? Like, it's crazy. So it was a lot, it was so much to take in. Because it's like, wow, it really is a different world than what other people see. It is a completely different world. Like, when they was explaining to me that it's a job and that you cannot separate, how some people try to separate being Black and being gay, you cannot

separate being Black and gay, because it is one within itself. That is who you are as a person. You cannot separate that.

[01:51:54] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:51:55] Sears: And I was like, that's true. People try to separate it all the time. Like, I'm just Black. No, you're Black and you're gay. And that is a totally different community than just being Black. Because when you are Black and gay, the Black people do not like you either. So it's not like it's just oh, white people just don't like me. No, you actually have a better chance with the white people than you do with the Black people when you are gay.

[01:52:22] Pennington: Wow. Okay.

[01:52:24] Sears: You have a better chance with white people. When you are gay and Black than you do with just Black people. That is a lot to take in [laughter]!

[01:52:36] Pennington: Yeah, that is a lot. Did take you a lot a long time to kind of come to terms with that concept?

[01:52:41] Sears: Yes! It took me a very long time. And it was something like I had. And then you know, I always do my notes, actually, my interviews. And so when I was doing my notes, I was like, wow. That's crazy, like, and I'm like, they opened, they opened my eyes to so much that I did not realize. And it was like, it was always there. But they just.

[01:53:09] Pennington: Right.

[01:53:10] Sears: It was their reality every day. So they was able to talk about it. It's always there, but it's not talked about.

[01:53:17] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:53:18] Sears: And so, it was a lot to come to terms with. But it was real. And that was the reality. So when I started the project, and when I was working on the project, that's when I was actually indulged into the LGBTQ community. And they actually like, one, accepting me, two, they were able to give me what their experience was because I didn't have that experience, because I could pass as heterosexual like, I'm bisexual. So people would never think when they see me that I'm a lesbian, that I'm bisexual that I have a girlfriend, that I date women, they will never see me. So I did not have that experience because I did not pass as a person that would.

[01:54:02] Pennington: Right.

[01:54:03] Sears: But because these are feminine gay, gay males, they see they get the full, the full experience of actually being gay—and Black. And not being accepted by either culture. And I've been accepted either, either culture as in Black people. And then you know, they just being Black. Sometimes it's hard to be accepted by white people just because of the a fact that

you're Black. And so they got that full experience of them being their only safe space. And so to learn about those safe spaces, Metro, which is one of the gay clubs, there was another, Wanderlust, to learn about those safe spaces. It's like wow, I really would love to experience that to see what it's like to see you and your full form without being harassed or looked at crazy or anything, like I want to experience and I see I'm not gotten that chance yet but when I do I'm so excited.

[01:55:09] Pennington: Wait, so you haven't gone?

[01:55:11] Sears: No, I had not been yet!

[01:55:12] Pennington: Why is it sort of like you have to have some be take you with them? Or is it?

[01:55:16] Sears: Yes, don't want to go by myself. I don't like going places by myself. [Laughs] It's like. This is Jackson, it's not that safe here [laughter].

[01:55:26] Pennington: Okay, all right.

[01:55:28] Sears: It's like, yes, I would love to go, but I don't want to go by myself. And then secondly, it's like, what is the best time to go, like I have to get and be able to plan because I'm telling you when they go, they're gonna make sure that I don't their best fits. And that takes a

lot. That says a lot for me, because I like to rest on the weekends. And so when you expecting me to put on some heels and to do my hair, it's just a lot you ask for a lot [laughter].

[01:55:55] Pennington: I know.

[01:55:56] Sears: We're a lot. So, but I'm Homecoming week would be the perfect time to go.

[01:56:02] Pennington: You got the wardrobe man, you've already you've made preparations for the plans before you set them.

[01:56:07] Sears: Right? That will be the perfect time to go. But yes, I am thrilled to experience them in their full form and in a safe space. Because they they that was their safe space. Wanderlust, Metro that those are their safe spaces.

[01:56:26] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:56:27] Sears: And so I have not experienced them yet. But I would love to.

[01:56:32] Pennington: That's good. That's like, you know, you had like a structured sort of in to ask those questions. You know, because it wasn't that sort of like narrator interviewer like relationship where maybe some question you wouldn't have asked just casually at the Pride event?

[01:56:50] Sears: Yes. I was able to ask them. Yes, yes. And so they gave me a lot. They told me their experiences telling me how all the things were. And then I was also able to compare my experience to theirs. And it's just not the same.

[01:57:07] Pennington: Yeah.

[01:57:08] Sears: It is not, it is not the same. Having a bisexual daughter and a gay son. Those experiences as the child is not the same. It's not the same.

[01:57:20] Pennington: Well, how does that make you feel about your place where you sit in the community overall?

[01:57:25] Sears: I don't want to say I have a privilege. But it is a privilege to not have those experiences to have people that actually, you know, are able to overlook the fact that you know, your sexual they're able to overlook your sexuality. It is a privilege because when people cannot overlook your sexuality, that's all they see of you.

[01:57:48] Pennington: Right. I'm probably okay, I'm gonna ask a question now. And you tell me if it's ignorant or what the fuck ever,

[01:57:55] Sears: Okay!

[01:57:55] Pennington: You think sometimes it's harder for like, just going off what you said. Let's say you say I have a bisexual daughter, a Black gay son, you know what I mean? It's harder for the families to accept a gay son rather than a gay daughter.

[01:58:14] Sears: Definitely.

[01:58:15] Pennington: And why do you think that is?

[01:58:21] Sears: I will say because they always feel that the if you have a gay daughter or bisexual daughter or lesbian daughter, whatever, they always feel that there is a chance that you will be with a man. They always say that hope. That hope! I'm telling you my mom's still got it! She still has that hope is still there! It's there in my mom it's there in my grandma is there in my family that hope is still there.

[01:58:47] Pennington: Wow. Okay.

[01:58:48] Sears: That hope is still there.

[01:58:50] Pennington: Right?

[01:58:51] Sears: But in the Black community when a guy comes out as gay, that is what he will forever be known as. My past if me and Maya was to breakup today and I was to get

married next week to a guy, that entire past of Maya will be completely erased and they will act as if it never happened.

[01:59:08] Pennington: Wow.

[01:59:10] Sears: If my cousin one of my cousin's that came out is gay if he was to break up with his boyfriend and get married to a woman right now, he will be questioning for the rest of his life.

[01:59:22] Pennington: What a way to put it.

[01:59:24] Sears: He will be questioned the rest of his life

[01:59:31] Pennington: My mind. Give me a minute. [Destiny chuckles

[01:59:34] Sears: I'm telling you that hope is still there. But once a guy says he like a guy it's that hope is gone completely. They see nothing else but that. And that's it. They see nothing else. There's nothing else. And so again, like I said, me and Maya was to break up today and I married a guy tomorrow, Maya would have never existed.

[02:00:01] Pennington: Does that kind of—does that hurt you sometimes that that would be?

[02:00:05] Sears: No!

[02:00:07] Pennington: Okay.

[02:00:08] Sears: Because I just [laughter] leave it alone. Let it go, you know, if you don't, that's fine that's on you. Because I know they'll still accept the fact that if me and Maya was to get married tomorrow, they will still accept Maya and they will still because I love Maya. And they know that Maya loves me and she treats me well. So they will get over it.

[02:00:25] Pennington: Yeah.

[02:00:27] Sears: And that hope would die but that hope is not going to die until me and Maya is actually married. It's not going to die until then. And then maybe like, Oh, she serious.

[02:00:37] Pennington: Wow, wow, wow.

[02:00:39] Sears: But if, because, for some reason, in the Black community, I also feel that when women are gay, or when women are dating other women, it's a phase. They never take it serious, it's never taken seriously. Unless I am literally dressed masculine. It is never taken serious if I cannot be normal, feminine Destiny and be gay. They will never take it serious. But if I decide to cut all my hair and start wearing baggy clothes, things, then it'd be like, oh. But that hope still is going to be there. Even if I decide to dress masculine, that hope will still be there. For a guy, if he was to decide, he can still be very masculine, work out very buff

everything the whole nine yards. The best looking man you can think of, he can look exactly like him. But the minute that he tells you that he is gay. That is are you going to see of him.

[02:01:35] Pennington: Right.

[02:01:35] Sears: No matter what he looks like that is all you're going to see with him. All right, that's all they are going to see. Even if he decides to marry a woman and decide that he does not like men anymore. Everybody's is still going to see him as a gay man.

[02:01:53] Pennington: Wow.

[02:01:55] Sears: Yeah, [laughter] that's life!

[02:01:58] Pennington: No, but what, uh, yeah, what a thought to sit with and like what you're saying it's like, in some form, it's, you know, because I've gone through it with my own family members. It's very true. But and yeah, until, like hashing it out. That's crazy. Yeah, so speaking of that, you know, as there's a big difference between having like a white gay experience and Jackson and a Black gay experience in Jackson. You know, how do you feel your experience would be different, you know, different if you are of a different race? You know, what I mean?

[02:02:31] Sears: If I was a white bisexual woman? I've never thought about this before.

[laughter]

[02:02:38] Pennington: Weird question? It's a weird question.

[02:02:39] Sears: Yeah it's like, Okay. Different skin [laughter]. Longer hair. Okay, okay.

[Laughs] I don't think, one, I don't think it would ever even come into question if I was gay. I don't think it would ever come into question, one. And, two, I think I would be accepted immediately. Like, I don't think there would be any points where people are like, You sure?! I don't see it, you know how suddenly people would question me all the time and they didn't believe it until they see me with Maya, I think if I was a white woman, they would just accept it. And then they will go on with their lives. Like I don't think it will be a double back any question of I think it would be accepted immediately. And then it would just that'll be it.

[02:03:29] Pennington: Why do you think that is? Like just it's a done deal?

[02:03:32] Sears: Because something I've noticed that the LGBTQ community where Black members are complaining about the things that are you know, people are like, Are you sure things so we're complaining about the problems that happened within the community and outside of the community and how the heterosexual people perceive us. It's just like, Girl anyways, it's look over. It's overlooked. When a white woman, a white woman tears, and I say this so much, and I've heard other people say it, the white woman tears hold so much more weight than a Black woman tears or Black men tears, regardless of my sexuality, it holds more weight. And so I would not question her. Because I don't need those tears because it's going to cause a problem. And then everyone's going to look, and then I'm the problem. I'm considered homophobic and things that says because I questioned her. What she says goes, yeah, in

that's it. So it will be much easier because once I say, okay, and everybody go about their business, because they are not going to question it because that will cause a problem. But if they were to question me, and I was to raise hell about it, I'm an angry Black woman.

[02:04:56] Pennington: Yeah. Yeah.

[02:04:59] Sears: So it will be easier because it will be accepted quickly and then there will be no issues now they're probably talk behind my back but no one would actually come to me and say those things as a Black woman they're gonna tell you so are you sure you gay? Like they just come up to, you sure? You positive so you just you haven't been with a man? I'm, listen I've seen a masculine woman, a masculine presenting woman around guys and the guys like you sure, you you you don't like dudes like you sure? You positive? You ain't having had sex with a guy so you don't know. You're gonna have sex with a girl before you leave, you before you graduate like they, yes, I've seen this happen. Maya has even told me her experiences and things of that such happening to her!

[02:05:45] Pennington: Wow.

[02:05:46] Sears: They're going to question it. But I'm telling you, if one of the soccer ball players were to come to them, tell them that they were gay. That will be it. And they will leave her alone. Anything, they will leave it alone. So that's what my experience will be like if I was a white woman. It will be accepted and I'll go on about my day.

[02:06:11] Pennington: Right, you're right. Yeah, cuz it's often.

[02:06:13] Sears: And that what I think it will be like.

[02:06:14] Pennington: Like, dare to question us? We're gonna make your life a living hell, you're gonna regret it. Yeah, I know what you mean.

[02:06:18] Sears: Yes!

[02:06:19] Pennington: Yeah. It's right now that's the situation we found ourselves in. But that's very, very interesting. So off, again veering off in a different direction. Now. What's your, your absolute favorite thing about LGBTQ life in Jackson, some sort of like a cultural thing, an event or even maybe it's just, it's a person?

[02:06:42] Sears: Ah, okay. So I have—I call him my uncle. He was actually one of my narrators in *Thee Black Pride*, Joshua. Joshua Knight.

[02:06:51] Pennington: Okay.

[02:06:52] Sears: He is one of my favorite people. He is my safe space. He is everything because, one thing about Josh, Joshua is going to be Joshua. Josh is going to be Josh. He is. And I love that so much about him because no matter what happens or what he went through, or what he's going through, he is going to be him. He's going to put on that—oooo! He loves

pink and pink my favorite color too, he's going to put on that pink fit with his Chanel, his Chanel lebrooch, and he's going to go on about his day. He does not care. He doesn't care. And I love that so much. And he told me and these I believe these his exact words, in the gay community, you're going to either be ate alive or you gonna eat them up? What you doing? Yeah, well, y'all not gonna eat me alive! So [laughter] I love that so much about him. We also have this other student that went to Jackson State. JeMarius I love JeMarius, I love him. I love him. I love him so, so much. Because he is one of those other people. He is going to say what needs to be said. And he wants and he like, even in his interview, we did a mock interview, me and him, we did a mock interview so I could prepare. And so because I wasn't sure what type of answers I was gonna give, what type I didn't, I wasn't, I didn't know. I'm like, look, I'm just here. So we're gonna try to see what I get here, okay? And so the things that he was telling me like he was being authentic just given me exactly what I asked. And it went, it was one of my shortest interviews, but we hit every point that needed to be hit. And I appreciate it. And it's crazy, cause it was only a mock interview.

[02:08:52] Pennington: Right.

[02:08:53] Sears: And so it helped me, one, it helped me prepare for what I was about to hear from other people, because I'm pretty sure it was y'all experience was similar. So I'm like, okay, and so, he definitely said what needed to be said. And he always says what needs to be said. And, yeah, I just love how they're them. And I feel like they pave the way at Jackson State, for people to be themselves. And I love that. I love that so so, so, so much. I love it so much. I feel

like they literally paved the way for a lot of our new students at Jackson State. They help them become comfortable with being them.

[02:09:40] Pennington: Good.

[02:09:41] Sears: And so they've become those who people have become my favorite part of being in the LGBTQ community because I love how they set up that expectation for people and they set up, you not gonna come here and talk crazy to them. You're not! You're not! The whole school is going to get on your head. You say one thing wrong to either one of them.

[02:10:04] Pennington: Right.

[02:10:05] Sears: Those are—excuse my language—those are the head bitches in charge. You're not going to come in here and talk crazy to them.

[02:10:12] Pennington: Yeah.

[02:10:14] Sears: And then the crazy thing is everybody's going to come to their defense, but they're gonna eat you up before anybody else does. They're going to talk crazy to you, and get you together before anybody else even does they're gonna handle that before we even get to you. And I love that I love that so much. That was two of my favorite, favorite, favorite, favorite, favorite, favorite people.

[02:10:36] Pennington: Strong leaders pillars, you know?

[02:10:39] Sears: And I don't even think they realize it. That's another thing. I don't think they realize how much they have an effect on the LGBTQ community at Jackson State. I don't think they realize their effect. They might. They might just have like, you know, a slight little hint of how much they're that effect they have on, but they have a grand effect. Right, major and they don't even know it. I don't truly don't believe they know how much they contribute to the LGBTQ community at Jackson State. Do you think they did they don't see it as like a, something they need to be even rewarded for? It's just No, they just see it as them being themselves. They're just being that's it. That is just them being them?

[02:11:27] Pennington: Right.

[02:11:28] Sears: So I don't even think they will see themselves, you know, needed to be rewarded for it. Because that's just them being them.

[02:11:34] Pennington: Yeah. Right. accepting your I mean, that's the way it works. Like you're saying paving the way it's sort of like, yeah, people were there before you to answer the questions that you have, you know, to be there a pillar otherwise, you know, it's like, how how do you have a touchdown on this portion of your identity if you can't touch on it with anybody else who shares parts of that experience?

[02:11:56] Sears: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, they definitely two my favorite things, they are also to me, but that made me comfortable. Like, okay, this way I am. I mean, it is what it is. And if I want to fight about it, we can like [laughter] yeah, they made me that comfortable. Like be you be you be you! I'm gonna be me.

[02:12:18] Pennington: That's awesome. Yeah, they're leaving like a legacy. They're leaving. They

[02:12:22] Sears: They are but they don't know it. They don't know it.

[02:12:26] Pennington: That's good, though. The people who were like often find themselves in leadership positions that do a good job. It's because they weren't looking to lead in the first place.

[02:12:34] Sears: Yeah, that's true.

[02:12:36] Pennington: Right? Yeah. So speaking of like, your legacy by volunteering for this project, it's like you're in the driver's seat. And still in the driver's seat narrator is what I consider to actually be the main driver. So you're in the driver's seat now. [Destiny chuckles] Okay, so what do you hope to give back to the community by working now as a narrator with Thee Black Pride in Jackson, what do you want your listeners and viewers of this interview, both inside and outside the community to take away from the work?

[02:13:07] Sears: Be yourself? I know it sounds so cliché. And it is. But truly honestly I say be yourself and you have to, especially for those that are struggling and they don't know yet you have to accept yourself first before you can expect anyone else to accept you. So if you do not have that self love and you know who you are and you love yourself, if you don't have that the world's gonna eat you up. And in the words of Uncle Josh, he said [Destiny chuckles] you either will be a up or you're going to do the eating! So! You need to love yourself first. Definitely love yourself first, accept yourself first. Because for me, it wasn't an accepting myself like I already knew I'm okay, this who I am. And I went out on my day like it wasn't, but for some people it takes okay, this is me. This is what I like its probably outside of your ordinary your parents are probably Christian or, or any other religions. So you are terrified. But before you can expect somebody else to accept you, you must accept your first yourself first. Because when they come to you and they have those jokes, and they have those side comments, it's going to hurt you a lot more, when you don't know who you are, then when you actually do know who you are you and you like girl anyways.

[02:14:39] Pennington: Yeah.

[02:14:39] Sears: So that's what I really want people to take away from this accept yourself first. Before you can expect others to accept you.

[02:14:50] Pennington: Right. You can't. You can't control nobody else's behavior except your own.

[02:14:56] Sears: That's it. That's it. That's all. [Sigh] I tell my students that so much cause they love to snitch on other people, what did you do? Right? Accountability. I know it's a lot to teach second graders about accountability. But please, accountability.

[02:15:09] Pennington: Kids are smart. They're smarter than they act like they really are

[02:15:14] Sears: Yeah. Like that. Yeah, I think that is something. I would like to tell everybody. So, yeah.

[02:15:21] Pennington: That's great. That's awesome. Those are all the questions I have on most of that, like by proxy, you kind of like, answered already, as we were just like chit chatting away. Yeah, that was really great. You're a wonderful narrator. Thank you. Very, because some people, they don't talk, like I said, it's like trying to draw blood from a lizard. So.

[02:15:48] Sears: Yeah, I'm trying to think there's anything else I want to put on the record.

[02:15:51] Pennington: Yeah, yeah, of course.

[02:15:53] Sears: There was something I thought of, but then it disappears. So now I gotta go back to it. Mmm hmm. Oh, okay. I'm getting closer to it. Okay, not being Black and Greek. I'm, I mean Black, gay Greek. Oh, I did miss something. You was asking about the things that I've learned throughout my experience with Thee Black Pride. Now, I've always heard of the gay Greek organizations.

[02:16:31] Pennington: Okay.

[02:16:34] Sears: But I did not know how big it was. And I also did not know how big the gay families were. It was something new for me. I never when I say never would have thought. And so I'm in a sorority, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated. And one of my prophites, which is somebody that was in a sorority before me. She was telling me about when I was actually looking for narrators because I knew she was big in the gay community in Jackson when she stayed here. And so she was like, oh, my pops. And I'm like, okay, your dad. And she's like, Oh, no, I mean, like [laughter]. So they're gay families. She was like, yeah. And so they create those spaces so that it's a safe space for you. So you would have like this, mom, dad, sister, brothers. They have like gay children. And I was like, hh, my goodness!

[02:17:34] Pennington: Yeah. Wow.

[02:17:37] Sears: And they have like, different names and stuff like that. And I was like.

[02:17:41] Pennington: So the houses like?

[02:17:42] Sears: Yes!

[02:17:44] Pennington: It's a thing down south. Wow. Because I'm familiar with it in New York. I'm not familiar with the houses of the south, though.

[02:17:49] Sears: Yes!!!! And never knew. I never knew. And so I've heard her say it before. And so when she gave me her number, I was like, oh, my goodness, like, and I can't wait to learn more. And I actually see her this week. So I can't wait for ask her questions, because I have so many questions because I need to know.

[02:18:17] Pennington: What are you curious about? What are you want to ask her?

[02:18:19] Sears: Where did you find your family? Your gay family? Where? How? How y'all be like? Yep, we're gonna make family. I'm your kid. You're my dad. Like, how did you do that? How did you? How? How? How did that happen?

[02:18:35] Pennington: Yeah, there's no flyer, there's no website? Where do I go?

[02:18:38] Sears: Because where do I need to go? How do I become a part? Like? Like, how did that happen? So, that's another big thing that I have questions about. It was something else. Oh. Mmhmm. Goodness grace, and it was just on my mind, but I forgot it. Well I'll speak on being gay in Greek, and being in my sorority and being gay, one of the big. [Pause] That's what it was. So when my dad first found out about me being gay, from the Instagram post or whatever, when he was making his assumptions and everything. The first thing he said was it's because of her sorority. No!! Yes, so there's a whole stigma around sorority life. And and it's not with all people but I know in some some places there's a stigma with sorority lives and like, you have to be gay to be in certain sororities or you sorority lives when you're going into your

sorority make you do things that are, one, it's considered hazing and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated is a non hazing organization. Two, it's inappropriate!

[02:20:08] Pennington: Right.

[02:20:08] Sears: And like do inappropriate things to get into your sorority or into your fraternity, and like sexual things. And I'm like, and that was the first thing he thought of. And I was like, oh my goodness! One, what type of person do you think I am? [Laughs] What type of person do you think I am to think that I will even allow anything of that such to happen to me and then, two, for it to affect me to the point where I decided that I'm gay all of a sudden? What?! But yes, there is a stigma around sororities and them having people do inappropriate things. And that's how people become gay when they're in their sororities.

[02:20:58] Pennington: And this is a widely held perception?

[02:21:00] Sears: And I don't think it is. But that was something that was brought up to me. And so another thing that was brought up to me was a stigma that is with my sorority, specifically, like within the D9, and the Divine9 sororities that my sorority Sigma Gamma Rho, and that the other sororities Zeta Phi Beta were considered the gay sororities. And I was like, what?!

[02:21:35] Pennington: Why? What do you mean? Like, just what?

[02:21:37] Sears: So, they got to this perception, and people got to this because a lot of us, some of our members are masculine presenting.

[02:21:48] Pennington: Okay.

[02:21:48] Sears: And people fail to realize they're still women.

[02:21:53] Pennington: Okay.

[02:21:54] Sears: And because we accept everyone for who they are, you assume, oh, this is the gay or this is where the gay people go. And that's not true. Because there are gay people in the other orgs as well.

[02:22:10] Pennington: Right.

[02:22:11] Sears: Not just those two, but that is something that came to me a lot when I was newly Greek.

[02:22:21] Pennington: Okay.

[02:22:22] Sears: And a lot of people asked me because they knew I had a girlfriend and everything. And people asked me like, if that influenced my choice. In the sorority that I chose. And I would have never thought I would have been exact, I would have never thought that that

would have been a question. But it was. And I was like, wow, okay [laughter]. Because even my mom asked me, my mom ask me she was like, is that the gay sorority? And I was like, no. I was like, there isn't a gay sorority in the Divine9. Like, we don't have a sorority that's okay all the gays y'all go over here, like no! We don't do that but it was a question. It definitely was a question. I've been asked that question more than once. So that is something that I was like, wow. Okay.

[02:23:16] Pennington: What, what is it? I mean, it's just shocking, kind of shocking. But what did it feel like to what does it just generally feel like to absorb everybody's expectations of how you should look or the affiliations you should have and what it just like sounds incredibly confounding.

[02:23:38] Sears: Yeah, it's very exhausting. And I have to remind people that I'm me, just because I'm me, and that's who I chose to be. So, the expectations you have of me you are setting yourself up for disappointment because I'm not living to your expectations.

[02:23:55] Pennington: Right.

[02:23:55] Sears: I don't live life to live up to anyone's expectations, except for God. But [laughter] I failed some of those too, according to my grandmother, but still [laughter]. But still, it's like, I don't live to please other people. I don't live for other people's expectations. And so it takes people a minute to understand like, okay, y'all know, this, you just got to do whatever Destiny want. Right? Like, okay, as long as we all know, like, I let them know, I be like okay, I'm

still gonna do it this way. But like, I have to let people know I don't live for other people expectations. I live for me.

[02:24:35] Pennington: Yeah.

[02:24:36] Sears: And so you can set these expectations up for me as long as you want. I honestly don't care do what you please. But. I live for me and I do what makes me happy.

[02:24:47] Pennington: Yeah. And like it's hard for people to take away.

[02:24:52] Sears: I know, it can be hard. It can be hard when it's coming from every direction. And that's something I told my mom, because I was like, I, I love my mom Mom approves what I do. And I love getting confirmation from my mom. I thought I was like, once you tell me once you tell me I'm not wrong I know I'm not wrong. So now I'm set and, you can tell me, once my mama gave me to go ahead, I'm not wrong. But I've also have to learn that it's your life that you are living. So normally your mom could tell you, it's not, she don't like it, don't do it. But if that's what makes you happy, then you need to just do that. And that is something that I've been learning with this journey with Maya. Because I know my mama it the point like she said she had that expectation for me.

[02:25:49] Pennington: Yeah.

[02:25:50] Sears: The good old are getting married to a man have children. First of all, I don't like kids enough to have them at home. Only when, you know, I can teach them and all but you can't come home with me. So [laughter], but yeah, and so she was like, and I felt like, I'm like, okay, so basically, what you're telling me is I disappointed you like, I didn't live up to your expectations? And she had to I'm like, no, that's not it.

[02:26:13] Pennington: Right.

[02:26:14] Sears: It's just, I have to change the way that I look at things. So you're not the problem. It's me.

[02:26:22] Pennington: Yeah.

[02:26:24] Sears: And I think everybody needs to actually again, take that step back and look at yourself. Because everybody has these expectations. When you see a man that's buff, nice looking, you like oh my goodness, Zack Morris Chestnut?! Like when you see that and then he's gay, you need to just accept that. Not have an issue with it. Because a lot of people have issues with nice looking men, men that women find attractive, they have an issue with them being gay. That was your expectation! He doesn't have to live up to your expectations?

[02:27:01] Pennington: Right? What you're feeling is disappointment. Identify that correct. You're feeling is like, shit.

[02:27:11] Sears: Like so I think that's thing. People need to stop expecting other people to live up to expectations.

[02:27:18] Pennington: Right.

[02:27:20] Sears: I'll do whatever makes me happy. It makes me happy. If it don't make me happy I don't wanna do it no more [laughter]. And my mom she told me, she called me she called me she said I was oh, what did she say? I had commitment issues. My mama told me I had commitment issues, because the minute I'm doing something, and it no longer makes me happy. I don't want it no more. And so she calls me have a commitment issues. I call it me trying to be happy. And finding my happiness. So if it doesn't make me happy, I don't want to do that no more.

[02:27:54] Pennington: Yeah, I mean, it's very commendable, because a lot of people have a hard time walking away from situations. Yeah.

[02:28:02] Sears: Imma leave. I've learned my lessons. Imma leave imma gonna go. And so yeah, people have to really stop internalizing other people's expectations of them.

[02:28:16] Pennington: Yeah.

[02:28:17] Sears: They have to because the more you internalize other people's expectations, you find that you are no longer living for you. And so once that person is no longer in your life,

you don't know what to do with yourself. Because you no longer have their expectations to live to.

[02:28:33] Pennington: Yeah.

[02:28:34] Sears: So now you're just in there like—so what I do now? Well, I normally go and I do ballet, but I don't even like ballet. And they not gonna be there to be at the reception. So what do I do? You spend your whole time living for that person. And now that person is gone, and you don't know what to do with yourself. So people have to stop living for other people. Because it's hard. It's hard. It's very hard. But you have to learn to stop doing it. Right.

[02:29:01] Pennington: And that's a lesson you say you pass on to your you try to pass on to your students as well. Like you said.

[02:29:05] Sears: Yes. Well, I want—no. They always like a lot of people, like a lot of my students. And kids, like I said, kids are very impressionable. But they want to do what the other kids are doing, or you act out because the other kids find it funny. But the other kids are getting their work done.

[02:29:26] Pennington: Yeah.

[02:29:28] Sears: Is your work done? [Laughs] And then when you tell me no, it's like, okay, so they're gonna pass and so you're so busy trying to live up to their expectations of being funny.

They're gonna pass to the third grade and you're still going to be a second grade, because you decided you want to go and do any of, you wasn't going to do any of your work.

[02:29:46] Pennington: Yeah.

[02:29:48] Sears: Trying to live up to expectations. Nope [laughter].

[02:29:52] Pennington: I mean, it's wild that it's like we can start doing that at such a young age.

[02:29:57] Sears: Yesss. Literally! Elementary school when you you have that child that's always trying to be funny or to be the class clown. You're doing that because you're trying to live up to the class expectations of you being funny, especially like if something happened in the past looks at you and wait for you to react. When you start living up to the expectation. A lot people live up to their parents expectations, it's hard parents have to realize your kids are going to do other things that doesn't involve you or is not within the little vision you made for them. They're going to do other stuff. The only thing you can do is support them.

[02:30:31] Pennington: No for sure. And that's with every parent.

[02:30:34] Sears: Everything. Yes!

[02:30:36] Pennington: Every parent. You have a solid idea about how your kid is going to go about their life, what they're going to do even how they're going to look. And,

[02:30:43] Sears: Yes, and then they don't look like that you set yourself up for disappointment. So now you're upset and you're disappointed. But you still have to love that child.

[02:30:52] Pennington: Yeah.

[02:30:54] Sears: But yeah, I think that's pretty much everything I want to put on the record.

[02:30:57] Pennington: Okay. I mean, if anything else comes up, we can do a part two.

[02:31:00] Sears: And if it does, I'll write it down. So I can remember [laughter].

[02:31:04] Pennington: Okay, yeah, write it down, email, whatever. And we can totally do like a little bit of part two, like I'm gonna, I'm gonna listen back over the whole interview, which is a whopping two and a half hours. So it's like,

[02:31:18] Sears: Whooo, you have a long [laughter].

[02:31:19] Pennington: I got a lot to listen to man, but like, yeah, the transcribing process is gonna be very interesting. But yes, yeah, if you want to do a part two, I'm down to do a part two, I'm just going to need like, digestion time with the material, you know, which is also like

good, because you've given me a lot more perspective to ask, to continue to add to like, the questions list. You know, yeah. So my god, this is so I thank you, man.

[02:31:47] Sears: No problem!

[02:31:47] Pennington: This was just so freaking lovely. And like, just highly. I knew being involved with this project and the work was going to be like eye opening. I just didn't like know how, you know?

[02:32:02] Sears: Yeah. Same! And I also if you need help with narrators, I'll try to find some as well. Because the one that I did speak up Jamareous [Thompson], I really feel like he needs to be a part because our interview, the interview I did with him was off record. It was a practice interview, but it definitely would add, it would add 1,000%, it would add so much more to this project. And I truly believe that he should be a part of it.

[02:32:38] Pennington: Well, if he, if you want to send me I mean, if you talk to him. And he's like, yeah, I could fucks with that, that's kind of cool. Just like shoot me an email, and I'll send him like an official invitation to be a part of the work because that would be really, really cool. Really, really cool. Because he sounds like a character I'd love to talk.

[02:32:56] Sears: Oh definitely! De-finitely! When I say a character that's, like main character!

[02:33:05] Pennington: My favorite kinds of narrators. I don't even have to ask the questions. I just sit and be talked to which is like.

[02:33:12] Sears: Yes. Me! [Laughter]

[02:33:16] Pennington: But that's good. Like I said, rather have that then the opposite where you just like.

[02:33:21] Sears: Pulling teeth trying to get them to talk.

[02:33:22] Pennington: Oh and questioning your ability, abilities as an oral historian. Yeah.

[02:33:26] Sears: Yes! That happened to me one of my interviews I was like [changes her voice to a whispers tone] I don't like this one.

[02:33:32] Pennington: I know it's like we're you're gonna bomb like I spent years like bombing interviews to like learn how to not bomb and I still bomb so like, still frickin happens man.

Alrighty.

[02:33:45] Sears: All right. Thank you so so much.

[02:33:47] Pennington: Thank you. Really thank you so much. Yep, if there needs to be a part two, we'll be in touch about that. And any info or advice or general life questions that you want to send my way feel free.

[02:34:01] Sears: Gotcha. Thank you so much!

[02:34:04] Pennington: All right. And homecoming week! Oh my god!

[02:34:08] Sears: I have a drink in the kitchen. I'm bout to go get it and I've started homecoming week. I'm about to file these papers and then homecoming week starts.

[02:34:17] Pennington: I'm gonna go in the kitchen and match your drink with a glass of wine of my own. So that's what's gonna happen. Alrighty. Take care.

[02:34:27] Sears: You too.