

A vibrant watercolor illustration of a human head profile in silhouette, facing right. The interior of the head and the background are filled with swirling, organic shapes in a wide spectrum of colors including red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The overall style is expressive and artistic.

# I Hardly Knew Me

Following Love, Faith, and Skittles  
to a Transgender Awakening

**NIA CHIARAMONTE**  
LOVE IN THE FACE CO-FOUNDER

*I Hardly Knew Me* is a beautifully raw and profoundly human story of self-discovery, survival, and love. In a world that too often reduces trans lives to debate, this book is a testament to the power of authenticity, resilience, and the transformative grace of unconditional love. A must-read for anyone seeking to understand, affirm, or simply witness the courage it takes to truly know oneself.”

—Rev. Brandan Robertson, author of *Queer and Christian: Reclaiming the Bible, Our Faith, and Our Place at the Table*

“This beautifully written book is about moments. And most chapters are written ‘live’ in the moment. The moments of life for Nia are moments of discovering and awakening to her transgenerndness. Not only is Nia’s voice desperately needed in a time of transgender oppression, but her perspective rips apart our assumptions and expectations. And she points to love—true love! This book takes readers on a beautiful adventure in trans-gender-formation.”

—Thomas Jay Oord, author of *Open and Relational Theology*

“I was once told in life there is an invitation to go deep enough into your own story that others might find themselves there as well. In *I Hardly Knew Me*, Nia Chiaramonte boldly accepts the invitation gently bringing the reader deep into her world. Nia tells her story with boldness and compassion in a time when her very existence is being challenged by the empires of today. I walk away from this book with the courage to fully embrace and love who I truly am on my own journey of becoming, and for that I am deeply grateful. What a gift!”

—Joshua Patterson, host of the *(Re)thinking Faith* podcast

“Nia pulls you in with honesty and vulnerability that anyone can relate to, and the deeper she goes in, the more we connect and get to know her. *I Hardly Knew Me* is a profound book about Nia’s experience, not only as a trans person but also as a beautiful human being who is worthy of being loved.”

—Trey Pearson, musician

“. . . a candid and unflinching window into what it means to find oneself.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

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FOLLOWING LOVE, FAITH, AND SKITTLES  
TO A TRANSGENDER AWAKENING

NIA CHIARAMONTE



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Lake Drive Books  
6757 Cascade Road SE, #162  
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

info@lakedrivebooks.com  
lakedrivebooks.com  
@lakedrivebooks

*Publishing books that help you heal, grow, and discover.*

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This book includes personal stories. It reflects the author’s present recollections of experiences and information gathered over time. Some names and characteristics have been changed, some events have been compressed, and some dialogue has been recreated.

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# Introduction

This is the first time I've done this. No, not write a book. I "accidentally" wrote my first book, a children's book, *The Story of Nib*, a few years back. I'm talking about what I'm doing right now. This is the first time I've written in the middle of the night. I'm tired. I should be asleep. I have five kids, seven right now because my nieces are staying over, who will most likely choose this morning to get up at 3:30 a.m. and be awake for the day. The first one just woke up due to my typing. Fortunately, it was the oldest, who I convinced to go back to bed, but I still can't sleep. I need to get this out of me.

It's 3:30 a.m., and like many of the other moments in this book, this one is just here, begging to get out. Quite frankly, I'm not sure why it couldn't wait until morning, but it kept pounding away at my brain until, after an hour, I decided to get out of bed and let it out.

It's perfect really, because that's what this book is: a collection of moments. Just as I didn't set out to write my first book, I didn't set out to write this book either. What started as a single moment in time, weeping in my living room, needing to process my emotions, has come together to highlight an eight-year span of my life. This eight-year "moment" in my life has been a big one. I've undergone a transformation.

For those who have stuck with me, they'll recognize the person who they used to know as someone who has grown so much that I'm almost unrecognizable. Except that I'm the same. That's the thing about transition and growth. We take pieces of ourselves with us, both good and bad. Even if we try to burn away the bad things, the hard things, they leave

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scars on us. Many moments along the way make us who we are right now, in this present moment. And right now, in this present moment, I'm writing. You're reading.

If you found yourself here, maybe because someone gave you this book, or maybe because you're going through your own transformation, or maybe because we know each other, it doesn't matter. You're here now. And really, that's all we have. This present moment.

If you've read other memoirs about transgender people (spoiler alert: I'm transgender), or other memoirs period, you'll recognize most memoirs as a collection of moments in time. I hope though that this one is unique, in that it documents my transformation in real time. I have changed from someone who was so inside myself that I could barely look people in the eye, and definitely couldn't order pizza over the phone for the first twenty-five years of my life for fear of sounding stupid, to someone who is moving toward being fully alive in this present moment, unfettered by what others think, writing about my life for all to judge. Even at 4:00 a.m.

For me, the past eight years of my transformation have been made up of present moments. They've been both exceedingly freeing and excruciatingly painful at almost the same time. Many of the moments I've captured here are happening in real time for me, just like this one. Okay, all moments happen in real time, I get it, but these stories were written as I experienced the emotion of the moment. My hope is that you feel them. All the joy, pain, loss, dysphoria, freedom, abandonment, hope, love, grief, and euphoria. I hope you can feel each moment as I did. And no, I don't want you to get super depressed by reading this book, but I do hope you can experience what it's like for a transgender person to come into their own in the world. I hope you can feel the finding of self and the waking up to new life that we all desire.

When I first came out to my family, one of my closest family members said to me, "The only thing people will think about you in the future

is that you're transgender." And while I told him he was wrong and that I am more than this one piece of me, part of what he said was right. People judge. And people judge the first thing they can judge about you. For me, it's typically that I'm transgender. They usually don't get to know me well enough to judge me on other parts of my life, or maybe just well enough to drop their judgment of me altogether. For those that do drop their judgment, they may get to see all of me.

I used to be so hidden that even I couldn't see who I was. I was so repressed in my body and I merged my external personality with anyone I met, because it was easier than exploring within and because I hated conflict (where are my Enneagram 9s?)<sup>1</sup>.

Now, those that see me will see a confident person, (mostly) at home in their body. Someone who loves life, to the point of getting up at 4:25 a.m. to write about it.

And for those who continue reading this book, I hope you too will be able to drop the judgment you have. About me. About transgender people. About yourself. And be here now.

Many of the moments here are heavy and thick with emotion, and you might think some of the moments included here are too minor, too uninfluential on the overarching narrative of life to be included in a memoir. But for me, those are the moments that are apropos of everything. They are the moments that made me who I am, right now, at 4:30 a.m. (still no kids are awake, thank God).

These are the moments that shape all of us if we let them. They shaped me. They are the moments where we can get to know ourselves. Before I started this journey, I hardly knew me. I was unexplored. So much so that,

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1 The Enneagram of Personality is a personality theory that classifies people into nine types based on how they relate to the world, based on motivation, not just behavior. For more information check out the Enneagram Institute online at [www.enneagraminstitute.com](http://www.enneagraminstitute.com). I also recommend Suzanne Stabile and Ian Morgan Cron's book, *The Road Back to You*, as a starter.

now, eight years later, many of the things I believed/thought/loved when I started writing have changed to the point that they are unrecognizable. There are some major themes that have gotten me through, and you'll recognize a lot of self-encouragement. Some of what you read here was written by someone who, looking back, felt like a different person. You may find these inconsistencies in belief or the way I have written down these stories from moment to moment jarring, but I urge you to see them as growth. Live transformation happening right in front of you.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the political context present during the publishing of this book. A time where trans people are under fire from a political faction influenced by conservative evangelical voters, creating legislation that is literally killing people. Much has been written about this, but I hope to give insight into what daily life is like for a trans person, so people can stop believing the myths and stories made up to perpetuate a narrative about us, and instead listen to what we are saying. Things will get better if we choose to listen.

Thank you for going on this journey with me. As we know, it's not about the destination, it's about the journey. But also, we're here now. A momentary destination. For me, 4:45 a.m. on a Monday morning, hoping I can get another hour of sleep before work. For you, wherever you are, hoping to relax with a good, illuminating (and hopefully at times funny) book.

Together in the fullness of our humanity we can make the world a better place. Reflecting ourselves back to one another. Because ultimately that's what love does. It shows us who we are. And while we may not know each other, in the end I want you to feel loved. I want you to know you deserve to be happy. I want you to feel what I have felt so that you can have more empathy for those around you and also more empathy for yourself. Because we are the hardest on ourselves. And until we can love ourselves for who we are, we can't fully be here now.

Thanks again for joining me on this journey. At this destination. Thanks for being in the both/and of life with me. I hope to meet you

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someday and hear all about what you were doing when you read about the day I was up at 4:50 a.m. Still no kids awake. Thank goodness.

Peace and Love,  
Nia

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# Hope

I sit down to write this with my spouse weeping in the other room. I had to abandon her though, in her time of need, because I needed to get this out of my body. I needed to express my faith in God, my need to search for hope in the midst of the pain created by well-intentioned people and a religious machine.

It took me twenty minutes to write that.

My emotions are swirling at such a breakneck pace these days. I thought I was getting healthy when I learned to cry in therapy over a year ago. Now I don't know. It seems like things would have been a lot better if I had continued to live life unaffected. Unaffected by people and unaffected by religion. My faith was strong. But once I found a God who loved me, everything changed. I'm not talking about finding a God who loved me in spite of who I am, but a God who loved me because of who I am. The moment I realized that God loved me, I couldn't go back. I had to move forward. For me that meant confronting what had been there all along. I was transgender and I knew it, even though I hadn't let myself see it for fear of damnation.

I no longer have that fear of damnation in a life to come. No, I'm focused on the now, and the now is crushing me to death.

Religion . . .

People . . .

Shit.

Crushing the breath of life out of me.

I have to write this for the sake of hope. I have to start something that needs to be finished. If I can come back to this, continuing to move forward, it means hope is real. It means something has changed. Maybe something in me, maybe something in others, maybe both. But ultimately it means all of this wasn't for nothing. It means there is hope in the world.

The thing is, I know there is hope. At least I think there is. I'm actually an optimist. I had a marquee sign in my office for the longest time that had a quote from Anne Frank that read, "Despite everything, I believe that people are really good at heart."

People are good. I believe in my core that we are this way because that is how we were created. In the image of a God who loves. But damn, people are really trying to prove that statement wrong right now. I want to focus on all the good things in my life. The relationships that are flourishing, my five kids who are thriving, my marriage which has never been stronger . . . but I can't. I'm buried alive.

I am broken sitting on the couch, early in the morning, and my wife lies weeping in the other room. Not because of anything we've done to each other but because of forces outside of our marriage and ourselves. A world that doesn't want trans people to exist and a narrow religious system not made for everyone. I hope this story is one that continues to move forward. I want to be self-sacrificing and say I hope this is the case for other trans people who follow behind me, but I truly hope that is the case for me. I hope that is the case for my marriage and my kids.

Because life without hope is . . . hopeless.

There it is, that dry wit that has been buried finally shows signs of life.

I used to not be able to feel my body. Through years of shutting down my emotions I thought everything was fine. Sure, I'd get the occasional back spasm, but I was strong. I was resilient. Nothing got me down. That was then.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, nineteenth century Russian novelist once said: “To live without hope is to cease to live.” I feel that getting closer. But sitting down to write this means there is a little hope left in me, even though I can’t really see it. I feel it . . . somewhere.

# *About the Author*

Nia Chiamonte, with her wife Katie J. Chiamonte, is the co-founder of Love in the Face ([loveintheface.com](http://loveintheface.com)) and co-author of *Embracing Queer Family: Learning to Live Authentically in Our Families and Communities*. Nia and Katie work to support other transgender and LGBTQIA+ individuals and their families on their journeys of self-discovery. She and Katie were featured in the Hulu documentary *We Live Here*. Nia is a nonprofit professional, and she and Katie reside near Baltimore, Maryland with their five children.

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