

PROLOGUE

I hadn't journaled for almost four years. At the age of twenty-seven, I had a secret. A secret so powerful, it silenced not only my voice, but my pen as well. A secret I was afraid to admit, even to myself. Overwhelmed with shame and full of guilt, I was powerless to put it on paper. I was terrified that by writing it down, it would become too real for my soul to bear. I wasn't ready to be that real.

For four years, I struggled with my sexuality. It was a suffocating journey that deprived me of words most of the time. Admitting a romantic attraction toward people of the same gender was unthinkable for any Christian, but even more so for a Christian with *my* background: my father is an executive at Focus on the Family. He's worked there almost all my life. With that company name as the trademark of our family, I didn't think I could ever let my secret out. Yet it followed me daily, begging for my attention. So I took my secret to the only place that I knew it would be safe: counseling. Granting myself the permission I desperately needed to process my feelings and fears that lurked in the darkness, I slowly came to grips with the reality that I am gay.

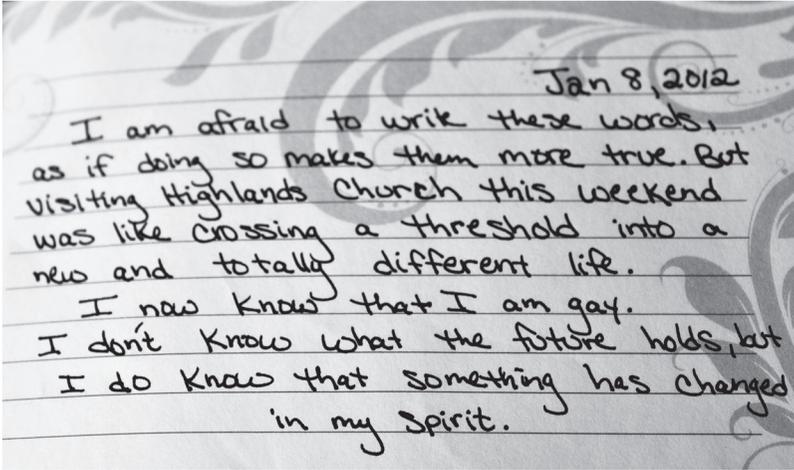
That realization caused me to feel disjointed, like I didn't fit in anywhere. It was as if half of me belonged in one world, and half of me in another. Both worlds coexisted in my heart yet refused to cohabitate in real life. I stood at a crossroads. I refused to lie or be a hypocrite, but I knew that if my secret were found out in church, I would no longer be allowed to serve in ministry. Torn and conflicted, I engaged in a mental war day and night—a war I couldn't escape, because it raged inside of me. This internal war was so brutal, it produced external scars; self-injury was the only way I knew to survive. Eventually, I began to wonder if the struggle was worth it. I wondered if it would be better to be dead.

In a final attempt to free my soul, I searched the internet to see if churches that were both biblically sound *and* accepting of the LGBTQ community even existed. It was the only option I could think of that might save me. Looking outside my hometown of Colorado Springs, I found a nondenominational church in Denver. Upon reading their ethos, I was immediately inspired by their transparency and intrigued by their model for living. Reaching out to the pastor, I quickly received a heartfelt invitation to visit.

January 8, 2012, was the day I attended Highlands Church for the very first time. I found and met people like me that day, and for the first time in four years, I felt a little less isolated, and a little more hopeful. It seemed my journey might not have to end after all.

Up to that point, I'd been afraid to write the words, as if doing so gave them permission, validity, and life. But the day I visited Highlands Church was a turning point for me, like

crossing a threshold into a new and totally different reality. That day, I finally penned the words that I'd hidden inside for so long, "I am gay."



I passed the point of no return. I could feel it. Something changed in my spirit. The story that unfolded in the months and years to follow is the story you'll read in this book. Whether you're a parent, a pastor, a friend, or an LGBTQ person searching for answers on your own journey through faith and sexuality, my desire is that through my story, you'll not only find your story, but you'll also find the courage and the hope you need to live it out.

The point in writing this book is not to berate Focus on the Family, nor is it meant to denigrate my parents. Rather, my goal is to give a voice to LGBTQ people who are living this same story in different families and churches all around the world. I pray that my story will shine light on the damage that beliefs like those of Focus on the Family inflict on real people.

And I hope that through my story, we can learn to love a little more like Jesus did—and does—love us.

As you read about the journey I took to refocus my family, may you find light, courage, and strength to continue on your own path as well.

***Trigger Warning:** Self-injury is discussed in detail in short segments of chapters 5, 6, and 9. If this could be potentially triggering for you, please keep yourself safe and skip the paragraphs marked with an *.

Note: All names in this book have been used with permission or changed for the sake of privacy.