

WHEN HE WAS ANNA

A MOM'S JOURNEY INTO THE TRANSGENDER
WORLD

PATTI HORNSTRA



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*This book is dedicated to Tristan.
I'm so glad that God sent you. You filled the empty chair at the table.*

FOREWORD

Raising children is work. They are work from the time they are born until the time their parents leave the earth. It's ironic that we refer to them as a "bundle of joy" when they are born. There is certainly joy during the parenting journey, but that joy is mixed with so many other emotions as well. Our parents felt the same mix of emotions when they were raising us, but some of the issues our parents dealt with when we were growing up are so different than what parents deal with today. I think it started with Adam and Eve, and it has not stopped since.

It seems that society is becoming more complex—and more problematic. There are so many new social norms that are begging to be accepted. We have new terms, like "politically correct" or "PC," to add to our new vocabulary. Society encourages us to be "PC" in order to keep everyone on the same track. Being "PC" means reining in those people who may struggle to accept the new ways of thinking and speaking. Being "PC" means that we may have to adjust what we do/say/believe in order to fit in with today's society. But, it's not all bad. Some of these new norms are good and some are not.

Parents today face many more challenges than ever before.

When I was four years old, kids were making mud pies. Today a four-year-old is putting apps on their parents' phones. In elementary school, we worried about cooties. Today we worry about everything from peanut allergies to autism, and the list goes on. The world has changed.

When Patti told me that she wanted to write a book about Tristan and tell her story about this journey into the transgender world, I was honestly surprised. Patti is a very private person. She fixes problems (she was a handler long before Showtime's *Ray Donovan* came along). Like most mothers, she will go to battle for her kids and wants to help them navigate this world in a way that most mothers will understand. You don't poke the mama bear. Mothers are the ones who bring children into the world. Yes, dad might be the Lamaze coach, but that's nothing like giving birth—sorry, dudes.

This book is about a mother's journey when her sixteen-year-old daughter, the youngest of four, announced that she was transgender. This book does not celebrate that fact, nor does it condemn it. This book is about the love a parent has for their child. It's about a parent who wants to support their child but who also struggles in a rapidly changing world. This book is about the frustration of trying to navigate a system of medical doctors and therapists who take the path of least resistance rather than step back and dig deeper to really diagnose the issue. There are many good medical professionals and therapists out there but, just like every other profession, there are some who do more harm than good.

Patti wanted to write this book to let other parents know that they are not alone in their frustration as they struggle to accept what society tells us is now normal. It's okay to feel the hurt and anger that comes along with that frustration. It's okay to have questions. It's okay not to be politically correct in today's society.

This story is about a parent's love for a child.

Patti does a remarkable job of explaining this journey using raw, unapologetic emotions. This story is real, warts and all. I know because I was there the whole time. I'm Tristan's dad, the other part

of Team Eleven (that will make sense later). I know we are not the only ones out there who are living this story, the only message in a bottle wondering if anyone else is out there.

Patti asked me if I wanted to read the book as she was writing it, and I declined. She does a much better job of writing than I ever could, and I didn't want to interject something that would influence her explanation of how she felt, how we felt. I'm just the Lamaze coach.

Peace to all as you go through your own journey,

Curtis Hornstra

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Personally, I NEVER read the preface or the introduction to a book. Reading about the author's *inspiration*, their *motivation*, *blah blah blah*, always seemed just a little too touchy-feely for me. But it's funny what you figure out when you decide to dump your feelings onto a page in hopes that someone else will read about them (thank you for that). You learn that what comes before the story is likely *part* of the story, and you should *read* it if you want to *get* it. So please read it.

PREFACE

Hi, I'm Patti H., and I'm the mother of a transgender child.

Other than that, my life is now, and has always been, wonderful yet largely unremarkable. I've been married to the most amazing man since 1987, and we have four equally amazing children. God has blessed me with a wonderful life filled with love. If the God reference isn't "PC" and offends you, I'm sorry—but not really. If you read beyond this paragraph, then you'll see that my story is anything but politically correct.

You're sure to see God come up again, and you'll hopefully read things that make you say, "I can't believe she said that." That's the point here—raw truth, no bullshit. I'm going to tell it like it is, from my perspective, like it or not, agree with it or not—it's the truth. You can applaud me, you can call me nasty names, and whatever emotion creeps up as you read my story is okay with me. My feelings are mine without apology.

I am not a therapist nor am I a specialist on anything to do with gender (gender dysphoria, gender fluidity, or transgeneriness, if that's even a word). This is not a self-help book, nor is it intended to be. Lord knows, I have a hard-enough time helping myself. What

I'm writing is simply a chronology, a timeline of my journey as the mom of a transgender child (yes, teen, but she/he will ALWAYS be my child). I don't even know what to call myself, not that I'm looking for a label. But, let's face it, I'm not a transgender mom. That seems to connote that I'm a mom who's transgender. So, I'm just a mom of a transgender child. But, I'm the mom of three non-transgender children, too. I love each of my kids as much as the others. I love them for their uniqueness, for their kindness, and for their talents. I could burst with pride at what great people all *four* have grown to be, despite the seven million mistakes I made along the way. But, Christopher, Mallory, and Andrew—none of you have presented me with a life-situation where I needed to write a book to work through it. That distinction belongs to Number Four, the one I named Anna Marie who now goes by Tristan Blaine. I don't think that events or situations in your life define you (so there you go, I don't even need a label), but they certainly help to shape you.

First things first, then. Please go back and read the line above the last paragraph, the part that says, "I'm the mom of a transgender *child*". I say "child," because frankly, deep down inside, I still don't get it. The emotional struggle remains. Do I have a transgender daughter or a transgender son? My child was born a girl and announced at age sixteen that she was a boy (much more to come in the following chapters). So, which is it—transgender daughter or transgender son? I know there's a right and wrong here, but that part still confuses the hell out of me, even after two years. (For the record, according to the terminology, I technically have a transgender son, a female at birth who identifies as a male).

So here it is, my selfish rant about the trauma of trying to parent a transgender child, or really a transgender teenager. *Trying* is the operative word here. As you'll soon find out, I have no idea what I'm doing. Mistakes? Oh honey, I've made more than my share. I'm a mess on so many transgender parenting levels. And so, I've decided to give myself a pass, just for this one time. I'm going to unapologetically spill it all. Remember, this whole thing is about my feelings, my struggles, my heartache. No bullshit. If you've been through

something similar you might think, “Finally, someone said what I’ve wanted to say.” Or maybe you’ll just think I’m a cold-hearted nut, or a total loser, or just an awful mom. Whatever you think is just fine with me. Your feelings and opinions are yours without apology, too.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

~ Maya Angelou

In the early days of our journey, Tristan suggested that I find a therapist to help me work through the confusion and complicated mix of emotions that had suddenly become my world. While I appreciated the suggestion, traditional therapy just wasn't my thing. I was certain that I could work through all of this on my own. After two years divine intervention pointed me in the right direction. God let me know that I needed to write this book—it was my therapy. My lifelong dream of writing a book finally came through, but certainly not in a way I had ever imagined. Sharing my personal struggles and failures was never part of the plan, but here I am doing just that. I'm so thankful that He knew what I needed when I didn't. And I'm especially thankful for the people He's chosen to bring into my life.

Thank you

Curtis Lee—you're the love of my life, my number one

Christopher, Mallory, Andrew, and Tristan—you've grown into extraordinary adults, and I could not be more proud of each of you

Tristan's Grandparents: Darrell, Maxine, Michael—you've shown nothing but grace and acceptance throughout this journey of ours

Those Very Few Friends With Whom I've Shared This—your support has meant more to me than you could possibly know

Kim, KWE Publishing—your guidance has been invaluable

INTRODUCTION

My mom used to tell a story about going to see a palm reader (I am not joking) when I was a toddler. Madame Sophia—I'm calling her that because I have no idea what her name was, and because that sounds like a cool name for a palm reader—told my mom a lot of stuff, some about her and some about me. The part about me: I'd marry a man whose name began with an "H," I'd have a long, happy marriage, she thought I'd have three kids (she said that part was fuzzy for her), and I would write books. That was about fifty years ago (I feel so old), and it looks like Madame S. was pretty much spot on.

The three kids thing was unclear for her, but it was pretty unclear for me, too. My husband was one of four kids (two boys, two girls, all in less than five years). I was an only child. Like a classic only child, I wanted the opposite of what I had. I wanted a BIG family. To an only, four kids is definitely big. So, I wanted four. The first two came pretty easily; we decided to have a baby, and nine months later, viola! We were on a roll, and I wanted number three right on the heels of number two. But number three took a little longer—a shocking two and a half years for Andrew to get here. By that time, I was twenty-nine and tired—three kids in four

and a half years is no small adventure. Do the mom math: two hands + three little kids = a lot to handle. So, Curt and I decided that three would have to be it. And so, we were a family of five. A family of five at a six top kitchen table. And that was the problem for me. I looked at that empty chair and wondered who was supposed to be sitting in it.

CHAPTER 1

THE NUMBERS

I am your Creator. You were in my care even before you were born.

~ Isaiah 44:2a (CEV)

December 1999 was a great end to a great year. Andrew (number three, my Christmas-time baby) turned five, which meant all day pre-school. Kindergarten was looming on the horizon; diaper bags and car seats were long gone. In 1999 you didn't have to keep kids in car seats until they started middle school, which I'm pretty sure is the law in at least forty-eight states as of now. I was thirty-four, Curt was thirty-nine, life was good! We lived in an upscale suburban neighborhood in a big house with some awesome neighbors. Y2K was on everyone's mind, so we decided it was time to *party like it's 1999* (if you don't get that reference then I have no words).

How does a neighborhood of thirty somethings party like it's 1999? You have parties. December 18 was a fancy progressive dinner, and it was a blast; by the dessert course, we had people falling out

of their chairs. I was among those who kept their seat. And the grand finale? On New Year's Eve 1999, we joined two hundred of our closest friends (black tie, private invitation only) in my neighbor's backyard two doors down from our house. We tented their backyard, hired a DJ, a caterer, waitstaff, a bartender, you get the picture.

On to January 2000. I felt crappy, achy, couldn't sleep, just yuck. For weeks. My boobs hurt, my back hurt, and even after already having three kids it never occurred to me that I might be pregnant. Birth control pills always work, right? (Side note: We're Catholic, and that's relevant since here come the church references. Don't worry, I'm religious but not a religious fanatic, and this isn't an attempt to convert you or to convince you that I'm a perfect Catholic—which I'm not. Look, I just admitted that I took birth control pills).

On Saturday, January 29 (Y2K), we went to 5:30 Mass. Being Catholic is awesome because you can go to church on Saturday night if there's something big you needed to deal with on Sunday like a "Big Football Game" or a snowstorm, both of which were coming up the next day. I saw my doctor at Mass, and since she was a dear friend as well as a church buddy, we went into the ladies' room to try and figure out why I felt so awful. She suggested a pregnancy test (wait until Sunday morning for best results, she said), and I thought she'd lost her mind. Remember, I'd already had three kids—what kind of idiot has three kids and doesn't know she's pregnant again? That would be me. Since I wasn't sleeping (at all, for weeks) I decided that 2:00 am was a good time to take that pregnancy test. You've figured out the rest. Since it was 2:00 am and I couldn't call my doctor/friend, I decided to wake up Curt and share the shock. And that's what it was, shock. Not bad, just shock. You see, I'd had a private talk with God, ongoing for months, and had told him that I still saw that empty chair at the table, and I wondered if it wasn't time to fill that seat. I had no idea He was going to answer.

Back to the "Big Football Game"/snowstorm. "Big Football

Game #34” (I can’t put the real name in the book without paying royalties) started at 6:25 pm Eastern Time, and the snow had been coming down for hours. I couldn’t have cared less, because I was sixteen hours into my “what in the hell just happened” zone. The Tennessee Titans played the Los Angeles Rams, the latter of which happened to be my husband’s favorite team. So here we are, all 5.2 of us, ready to watch Dad’s favorite team. And then the power went out. And then the panic set in. My panic. I really have no idea where Curt was emotionally at this point, all I remember is that he REALLY wanted to see that football game. As much as he loves jumping in the car, risking life and limb in a snowstorm *just because he can*, Curt knew that he’d better stay put. No sports bar “Big Football Game” for him. He got out the sleeping bags, turned on the gas fireplace, and camped out in the family room with three kids. While they camped, all snug as bugs, I worked on night number forty-two of sleeplessness, which sadly has grown to a total of 7,296 sleepless nights as of this writing. I have my own math system, you know, and if you take nine months of pregnancy without sleep, add 19.25 years of parenting this child without sleep, then the sum is 7,296 sleepless nights. The silver lining in all this sleeplessness was that it gave me more time to panic! I could now panic all day AND all night.

That night, I was in full panic mode about one thing only—Andrew would NEVER get to Disney World. We’d taken Christopher and Mallory to Disney World a few years back, but Andrew stayed behind since he was barely one and a half (he stayed with Grandma and Grandpa, in case you were wondering). My plan had been to take him to Disney when he was five or six, which gave me over a year to plan it and get it done. All I could think of that night was that I was pregnant, Andrew had just turned five, Christopher and Mallory had already been to Disney World, and now Andrew would never, ever in his whole life see Mickey. I then did the most rational thing I could think of. I got a paper, pen, and a flashlight (no power, and it was dark) and called the Disney reservation number. I could not have found a more expensive way to book that

trip if I'd tried, but we went to Disney World for Mother's Day 2000.

Snow melts, "The Big Football Game" ends (the Rams won), February rolls in, and life goes back to normal. Sort of. Time to figure out the details. I assumed I was a couple of weeks pregnant by the first of February. We're in mid-February now, and I'm thinking this will be an October baby. Two OBGYN visits and one ultrasound later, my doctor says the funniest thing to me: "It looks like your EDC (that's what the doc called your due date back in the olden days, your *estimated date of confinement*) is September 10." He then pauses to look at the conception calendar/wheel. "That would make your date of conception December 18. Anything memorable about that day?" I laughed until I almost peed my pants. Don't get it? Go back a few paragraphs and you will.

My October baby was really a September baby; I was about eight weeks pregnant before I even had a clue.

TABLE FOR SIX

Having four kids grants you instant access to the exclusive club known as “Wow, That’s a Lot of Kids!” I couldn’t wait. I already had more kids than I had hands, so what was one more? The empty seat at the table would be filled, and all would be right with the world. This baby may have been a surprise, but boy was she wanted—and celebrated! This child, number four, was everybody’s baby. My neighbor buddies (most with babies neither in the house nor on the horizon) couldn’t wait for our little bundle of joy to arrive. My other three kids were thrilled, particularly Andrew who saw the new baby as the end to his days as the youngest child in the family (plus this was his ticket to Disney World). And Curt? Well, he had told me (many times) after Andrew was born that if we ever had another child, we were selling the big suburban house and moving to a farm. He grew up as one of four, and he apparently thought that only farmers and crazy people had more than three kids. As fate would have it, the suburbs won out and I was able to stay in suburbia. Curt never bought us that farm, but he did buy me a fancy new mini-van two days after Anna was born. He needed to make sure his princess (the baby, not me) had safe transportation.

