



Facing the Music: My Story

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Jennifer Knapp's meteoric rise in the Christian music industry ended abruptly when she walked away and came out publicly as a lesbian. This is her story: of coming to Christ, of building a career, of admitting who she is, and of how her faith remained strong through it all.

At the top of her career in the Christian music industry, Jennifer Knapp quit. A few years later, she publicly revealed she is gay. A media frenzy ensued, and many of her former fans were angry with what they saw as turning her back on God. But through it all, she held on to the truth that had guided her from the beginning.

In this memoir, she finally tells her story: of her troubled childhood, the love of music that pulled her through, her dramatic conversion to Christianity, her rise to stardom, her abrupt departure from Christian Contemporary Music, her years of trying to come to terms with her sexual orientation, and her return to music and Nashville in 2010, when she came out publicly for the first time. She also talks about the importance of her faith, and despite the many who claim she can no longer call herself a believer, she maintains that she is both gay and a Christian.

Now an advocate for LGBT issues in the church, Jennifer has witnessed heartbreaking struggles as churches wrestle with issues of homosexuality and faith. This engrossing, inspiring memoir will help people understand her story and to believe in their own stories, whatever they may be.

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From Reader Review Facing the Music: My Story for online ebook

Rebecca says

(3.5) If you were a Christian music fan between 1998 and 2002, chances are you know the name Jennifer Knapp. During her brief CCM career, she released three albums, most notably her gold-selling debut, *Kansas*, which had radio hits like “Undo Me” and “Romans” and won her two Dove awards. Her rock-chick persona and country-infused contralto set her apart from a sea of pop princesses, as did her deeper-than-average spiritual lyrics. I saw her play live twice, once at Kingsfest and then opening for Jars of Clay in Baltimore in the fall of 2001.

In 2002, though, Knapp basically disappeared off the radar, not to resurface until 2010, when she announced that she was making music again – and that she had been in a same-sex relationship for eight years. This memoir fills in the missing time, gives Knapp’s background in music and faith, and brings readers up to date on what she’s doing now.

The section on her early life is the least interesting, and not particularly well written. The book really takes off with her conversion and early career. Most important to know is that her parents divorced when she was two and she and her twin sister went to live with their father and stepmother on a Kansas farm until high school. Given the choice, her sister moved in with their mother, but Jennifer stayed behind, though she didn’t get along with her stepmother at all, to continue music lessons. Her love of music was evident from an early age: she started with the recorder, then piano and trumpet (for which she earned a college scholarship). She didn’t pick up a guitar until college.

Knapp escaped her unhappy family situation by partying hard through high school and college, binge drinking multiple times a week and sleeping around with random guys. At age 18 she had to face the fact that she was an alcoholic and needed help if she didn’t want to wind up dead. Ami, a friend from her dorm room corridor, kept praying for her and led her to Christ. In her new life of attending FCA and leading worship, Knapp felt a little creeped out that people knew about her personal life and had been praying for her to turn away from destructive behaviors. It was her first taste of the culture of surveillance and judgment that would follow her through her years of music ministry. Was Christianity about membership in some clique or actual life change?

It is this kind of juxtaposition that I find both oddly fascinating and maddening at the same time. Christianity can so eloquently remind me that we are all worthy of being loved. The Bible does well to illuminate and honor the selflessness and forgiveness required to keep love in motion, yet, at times, seems to suggest that God’s love is reserved for only a chosen few.

Knapp was never comfortable being a poster child for Christianity. She was alarmed at the kind of scare tactics she saw being used at Christian youth camps, and saddened that she could only toe the party line and not offer a true message of love and acceptance – for instance, to a girl who came up for an autograph and said Knapp’s music had saved her from a life of homosexuality. Knapp quickly learned that her every decision would be held up for scrutiny: she was criticized for playing Lilith Fair, and swiftly corrected when she listed the Indigo Girls as one of her inspirations; these liberal, secular influences were simply unacceptable.

From playing youth services and coffee houses, Knapp’s career went into high gear when she signed with Gotee Records (founded by DC Talk and solo singer Toby McKeehan). Celebrity events like GMA week made her head spin: “What was I doing here? I was definitely not in Kansas anymore.” Burnt out and

exhausted by 2001, she said she needed a break but no one seemed to be listening. She returned to alcohol on tour, which paves the way for the best anecdote of the whole book. Knapp had brought along a young blonde singer named Katy Hudson to show her the ropes and serve as a mentor. Returning to the bus with a hangover didn't exactly make her a role model. Some years later Knapp got the shock of her life when she turned on the TV and saw her protégée, renamed Katy Perry, singing about kissing a girl and liking it.

"It doesn't take long to figure out that in the Christian subculture, the biggest criticism to throw at someone is to question their integrity as a believer," Knapp remarks. And disproportional woe to those who 'sin' sexually! Scandals over Michael English (who had an affair) and Amy Grant (who got a divorce) were cautionary tales, yet Knapp was completely unprepared for the cloud of suspicion that surrounded her growing relationship with stage manager Karen. Nothing in the memoir foreshadowed this; there was no childhood attraction to girls. Instead, it's that fascinating phenomenon of someone previously straight falling in love with a member of the same sex (it would be interesting to know Knapp's twin sister's orientation). **"I had been celibate for ten years but, if God was sending me anyone, it was a woman."**

Things had come to a crisis point; "there was no difference between my faith, my music, or my profession. They were all inexorably fused together. Freeing myself from one meant freeing myself from all of it." Knapp broke contract with Gotee, gave up her shares in an artist management business she had co-founded, and got away from Nashville. She and Karen bought a camper van and took road trips through America and Europe, then moved to Karen's native Australia. Karen made her take her guitars, but Knapp flogged all her memorabilia; she swore she was done with Christian music forever.

I loved the Australia section of the book. Knapp may not have been that successful compared to a mainstream artist, but she was still able to live off her royalties for years. She and Karen explored the country thoroughly: having bush adventures, learning the lingo and the culture. Knapp eventually took citizenship, but remained leery about giving out her last name. Ashamed of her connection with Christianity, she never told anyone about her musical background. My other favorite moment from the memoir is when she was recognized by a plastic surgeon who was going to remove some pre-cancerous moles. For the first time she understood what an honor it had been to use her gift to play some small part in other people's stories of faith.

Picking up a guitar again and starting a home studio in Australia were the prelude to moving back to Nashville and carefully orchestrating her public coming-out (via gay media, Christian media and mainstream media) in 2010. That year she released a new album, *Letting Go*; her latest is *Set Me Free* (2014) – neither of which I've heard, but I understand she's distanced herself from Christian music and is playing general folk-rock. She has also started Inside Out Faith for reaching out to LGBT Christians.

What struck me while reading this book is that Knapp never felt ashamed of her identity or like she had to change herself to be accepted by God; it was only other Christians who wouldn't accept her, like the bitter fan who made a point of mailing back all her albums. I don't think you need to be a Jennifer Knapp fan to welcome this as a strong contribution to the debate over Christian responses to homosexuality. This isn't a book of theology but of lived experience, something that should never be overlooked.

Really, it's all about story. To be oneself requires a vulnerability that needs love, compassion, forgiveness, and empathy to protect. We know that every single person who dares to come out of the closet does so at great risk. We share the truth about ourselves because we want to be known. We want to be known because we long to love and be loved. How is this anything other than the universal cry of the human heart?

Derrick Harris says

I really enjoyed her story. I can feel the pain she went through as she relives it in these pages. She has a great story about overcoming struggles. The faith she must have to have endured so much but remain faithful to her deep faith is remarkable. She was shamed and ridiculed for being herself by people who were supposed to share the same love she has. I can only imagine how difficult it was to see those people turn their backs, based entirely on her sexual preference. Good story.

Dana Stinson says

I knew of the name Jennifer Knapp from my days of listening to Contemporary Christian Music (CCM). I knew of her music because hers was the type of Christian music I avoided.

Through my Tedious Music Prick persona I put up walls and limits to what Christian music I liked. Yeah. I'm an asshole.

Fast forward what seems to be a lifetime later, I find myself on the outside of the church after coming out and walking away. Through a podcast about Post-Evangelicalism I stumbled across an interview with Jennifer Knapp, only to discover she too had come out and all the dealings which transpired before and after. I learned she published an autobiography, which I put on my wishlist.

In 9 days I finished her book and through these nine days I have grown to admire and respect a person who, due to selfish reasons paid no attention to.

Jennifer, thank you. Thank you for your authenticity. If anything I gained from this book is that it's not always easy being true to oneself. It's a process of many failures, fears and frustrations. Thank you for the honesty in your music. (Yes, I've started listening. It's growing on me.)

From one brass player to another. Empty the spit valve of life and play on.

Ashleymac says

I wasn't able to put this down. Growing up as the youngest daughter of an Evangelical pastor, this book is such a reflection of my journey and the journey of so many others.

From escaping in her music to cope to hesitating when claiming to be a Christian to the struggle of trying to reconcile her faith with her sexuality, Jennifer paints an honest picture of what life brings.

I highly recommend this book.

Bailey says

This book was absolutely incredible and touched me in ways I may never be able to fully describe. I expected it to be mostly about Jennifer's story of coming out in a very public realm, with a largely critical, religious audience. It was so much more than that. I read this during a time when my life was (is?) falling apart, and where I feel very insecure as a writer, not feeling capable or talented or that I will be missed by readers. Much of Knapp's story is about feeling valued, worthy. By people and by God. She never once, that I noticed, wished herself to be of another sexual orientation in order to make her life easier, but she struggled long before that was even a main issue in her life with feeling like she still had something to offer and whether she felt good about that. God, finding your voice and then using it is SO hard when things aren't just perfectly lined up for you to speak (or sing) with ease. Jennifer Knapp gets this on a level so deep that makes it obvious, in retrospect, given the extremely layered talent of her music. Jennifer fought to be happy, to still believe in a God who loves her and us, to be loved by a partner, to be loved by her fans, and, praise the good Lord above, to sing once more. When I read of the time that Knapp wept during her set after eight years off the stage, after sharing a huge secret with the whole world, I wept too. I'm glad she's out. Out here with us.

Spencer says

Loved this memoir. She really captured a lot of the same feelings I have about Christian culture. I really liked where she ended up in her thought process at the end of the book, where she has to be herself, sexuality and faith alike. She cannot divorce herself from her faith even after the pain other Christians have inflicted on her because she is gay, yet she also cannot deny the romantic feelings she has for other women.

"The entire world could, would, can, and will forever offer its opinions about how to be the best version of yourself that they imagine you should be. Yet none of us will ever be able to live any life other than our own. There comes a point where the only real thing, the only choice we really have, is the choice to be responsible for the journey that is our own. I gave up on my journey once, and I can't imagine doing it again." - Jennifer Knapp, page 288-289

Danielle says

In this memoir Jennifer Knapp shares about her very difficult childhood and how music kept her going through it. The music couldn't however save her from the destructive pattern she started in high school and continued into college becoming a severe alcoholic as a teenager. What did save her was counseling and developing a relationship with Christ. Through her music and her new Christian friends Jennifer found herself propelled into a career in Christian Contemporary music where she quickly found herself atop the charts and engulfed in the consuming machine that is the Christian Contemporary Music industry. Eventually Jennifer wound up realizing that she had fallen in love with another woman and it was becoming increasingly clear to others who did not approve. Completely burnt out by constant touring and pressure to record more music and realizing she could no longer lie about her feelings Jennifer announced that she was quitting and disappeared for many years until she felt a call to return to Nashville in 2010.

I really enjoyed reading this book, but it made me sad. Jennifer found the love of Jesus and it saved her life and then a bunch of so-called Christians showed her everything but the love of Christ and almost ruined her faith. Luckily she felt God's love more than their hate, but many people don't.

Violinknitter says

I devoured this book in a week's time. Knapp's passion for music, her introspection, and her unease in the shiny world of American evangelical sub-culture all resonated with me.

If I like a book at all, I tend to love it without reason right after I shut the covers. It's only later that I may be more critical. Knapp's voice is honest & vulnerable, and her story is heart-wrenching. My only reason for not giving the book five stars is that I felt at times her prose drifted a bit into cliché. I've read several very well-written memoirs this year, and Knapp's narrative prose isn't quite as strong (in my opinion) as her incredible poetic gift. (I've loved Knapp's lyrics since KANSAS.)

Still, a very good book and well worth a read!

Dionne says

Early on, I became accustomed to how people in the church can have a tendency to complain about others by judging someone's likeness to Christ by their own perceptions of what a Christian should or shouldn't look like, do, or not do.--Facing the Music

--I was sent a free, advanced copy of Facing the Music from Howard Books for me to read and review on my blog. I loved it.

--Three years ago I wouldn't have chosen to pick this book up, let alone read it. Yet, since my divorce, a whole new world has been opened up to me. I have discovered that the world isn't even close to as narrow as I used to think it was.

--In reflecting on the past 20 years, I cringe when I look at how much I judged others, and at how judgmental many Christians and churches can be.

--Recently, I disagreed with another Christian blogger who had a very uncompassionate view of interacting with a gay person. He too also just went through a divorce. I was shocked that his divorce hadn't softened his heart towards others.

--All that said, I found Jennifer's book to be very therapeutic. I have always loved people who are genuine and real, and Jennifer is just that.

--She shares about her childhood, and how she grew up. She talks about her struggles with addictions while trying to cope with her life at college. She talks about how she became a believer, and how she ended up becoming a successful singer in the Christian Contemporary realm.

--Jennifer then talks about how she wanted out of the Christian music scene and her realization that she was gay.

--I could relate to a lot of what she says in dealing with a very judgmental Christian realm. Below are some excerpts on how she concludes her book:

Really, it's all about story. To be oneself requires a vulnerability that needs love, compassion, forgiveness, and empathy to protect.

I must write. I must sing. I must love. I must have faith. All these things insert themselves into being who I am.

Yet none of us will ever be able to live any life other than our own. There comes a point where the only real thing, the only choice we really have, is the choice to be responsible for the journey that is our own.

Dichotomy Girl says

This was interesting. And spiritually I could relate to her journey. Being raised fairly secularly, in the upheaval of a broken home, having siblings, but not always living in the same house, being made to feel as though one had no worth; and then having a legitimate, life-changing faith encounter, only to have it hijacked and manipulated by fundamentalism. And trying my best to measure up to their idea of what a Christian was, before eventually growing disillusioned with all of it.

But there was one main thing that kept me from loving this book: it felt less like an intimate memoir allowing the reader to share in the author's life experiences and more of a reluctant recitation of her journey. ON example of this was her refusal to name her family, even her twin sister, who she simply referred to as "my sister". Nor did she name any childhood friends or significant relationships. Did she have any? Did she date in high school? She slept around in college, but that is mentioned in passing. Even her relationship with Karen seemed to come from left field, and the author shared very little about what it was like for her. (It would be difficult for ANYONE to process a sudden attraction to a woman, let alone a well-known christian singer).

Ms. Knapp seems to be a very private person, and I believe that it was probably difficult for her to share even this much of herself with strangers, unfortunately for me, who has a thousand reasons to relate to her journey, I finished the book feeling like I didn't know much more than I learned in the newspaper article when came out several years ago.

Tiffany says

Back in the late 90s, I fell in love with Jennifer Knapp's music. I was always a struggling Christian at best because of my near-constant doubts and questions about faith. I identified with Jennifer's music because it was so unlike the bubbly Christian music that was popular at that time. I saw her in concert once and she blew my mind. Jennifer's music expressed sincerity about the faith experience, but never shied away from the weaknesses that made Christians, ultimately, only human.

Somewhere in the 2000s, I was pulling away from Christianity and stopped paying such close attention to the Christian music scene. Peripherally, I was aware that Jennifer was on an extended hiatus from music, but my Internet searches only turned up the rumor mill. I figured maybe she'd gotten burned out and needed a temporary break, or maybe she was working on some stuff in her personal life.

A few years later, I had fully moved on from Christianity and any religion in favor of a comfortable agnosticism. Despite this, I've always held a special place in my heart and memories for Jennifer's music. One evening, I was flipping through tv channels and stopped on CNN's Larry King Live. I thought, 'Hey-- that's Jennifer Knapp!' Imagine my excitement in seeing her on tv when I hadn't heard her songs in many years, even though I still have all her CDs. When I read the headline onscreen that said Jennifer had come

out as gay, I was thrilled, to be honest.

First, you have to understand--when I was doing the Jesus thing as a teenager, homosexuality was one of those deal breaker issues as far as religious doctrine. Evangelicals had drilled it into my head that being gay was a sin--but God could cure you of it. Christians could not be gay, end of conversation. When I left Christianity, I was relieved to leave that kind of bigotry behind. And honestly, when I had been a Christian, I never really understood precisely why being gay was supposed to be such a huge sin in the first place.

So, back to present day. I follow Jennifer on Twitter, so I was aware that she still identifies as being a Christian, although certainly no longer the Evangelical kind. When I read that she was releasing a memoir, I was so excited to finally get to hear her story.

The book is a brave reflection on what it means to be a person of faith when the established religious community rejects you. In Jennifer's case, the world of contemporary Christian music (CCM) basically ostracized her after she came out. It's always been so interesting to me how some of the most hypocritical, un-Christlike people are the very people who claim to be the most devout of Christ followers.

The book is also a raw look at Jennifer's tumultuous family life, which involved parents who divorced when Jennifer and her twin sister were very young, as well as an emotionally abusive stepmother. Although Jennifer had basically been a good kid growing up, her troubles at home ultimately came to a head and she pretty much let loose after that. She is very open about having had a severe drinking problem in college. When she became a Christian as somewhat an act of desperation, she realized that it saved her life.

Jennifer had always been musical in school, but after becoming a Christian, those around her prompted her to use her musical talents in service to God. The portion of the book where she talks about her first record deal and her entrance into CCM is fascinating. For a Christian industry, it sounds pretty cutthroat. It is, after all, a business. It's also a business where even the hint of impropriety is to be avoided at all times. Jennifer mentions some infamous names in CCM, ones I recognized immediately because of the scandal surrounding those singers' personal failings in a harsh public light. Given how the industry treated those people, imagine Jennifer's terror at the idea of anyone finding out that she is gay.

Her hiatus from music was the result of severe burnout from constant touring and promotion. After this, she went off the grid--and took that time to discover being with the person she had fallen in love with, someone who happens to be a woman.

Years later when Jennifer decided it was time to come back to music, she knew she wanted to distance herself from the Christian music industry and just make good music. Of course, her fans and the industry itself expected that she was returning to make CCM again. She set the record straight when she officially came out in 2010. It's not surprising at all to me that many people turned their backs on her--from fans to people she considered friends and mentors. Christianity and I have always had a contentious relationship for this very reason. They teach you to love, except when certain people are 'living in sin' because of a perceived 'lifestyle choice.' It just never made sense to me. But I was glad to learn that some people stuck with Jennifer after she came out--even some people in the Christian music industry. It gives me some hope, if only a spark of it.

What Jennifer has done is incredibly brave. I don't know that she would characterize herself as such, but that's how I see it. To live truthfully, honestly, in spite of your harshest detractors--that's the hardest thing you can do, but it's also the thing that will make you free. I really admire her for being honest, continuing to live a version of faith that works for her, and now working as an advocate for LGBT people of faith. She has always been an inspiration to me in the past. Now she's one for a new and even greater reason.

Cameron Van Sant says

Back in the early 2000s, my parents bought a DVD of Contemporary Christian music (CCM) videos, and it's Jennifer Knapp I remember the best. It was just her and her guitar and the red box-like music video set. I just remember feeling a shudder up my spine at *Undo Me*'s soul-baring lyrics, and the intensity of her gaze. I watched it over and over, and I felt like I was learning this woman's secrets.

Facing the Music reminded me a lot of that video--Jennifer Knapp is back to tell you about her personal experience, and it's resonant, and important. She uses her story to start a conversation about faith, identity, honesty, and purpose.

I expected (hoped) this to be one part coming out story, and one part shit-talking exposé on the CCM industry. I think the reason I approached the book this way was because this was my own journey (leaving Christianity and eventually coming out as transgender and pansexual.) However, like the classy person she is, Knapp understands that humans and faith are complex. She makes pains not to make judgments, even on those who judge her. However, she also makes pains to highlight the problematic and stifling aspects in evangelical Christian culture.

I reserve a full five stars because I feel Knapp wrote the book more because she had important things to say than an artful way to tell them. Not that her prose is bad, but this is her first book, and there are places where the words seem amateurish, or trying a bit too hard.

That said, her story is fascinating. I consumed the book in three days, and enjoyed it utterly. I wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone who has experience with evangelical Christian culture, is LGBT, or is interested in a more complicated and liberal faith.

Henk-Jan van der Klis says

Reading the story of Jennifer Knapp gives the reader an inside out view on the harm fellow Christians do towards LGBT people. Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) is positioned as parallel universe to regular, secular music. Its clean cut subculture stresses purity and perfect role models, a standard difficult to reach or maintain without going through the motions or falling out of human grace. It was what Jennifer Knapp after a difficult youth, a remarkable musical upbringing and discovery of her muse and a sudden rise as Christian rock chick caused her to call it her quits in 2002 after successful albums and an intensive tour schedule. Once off the radar there were gossips about forced withdrawal, a sinful life as single possible cause.

In *Facing the Music* Knapp tells her is her story of finding Jesus in the midst of a wild youth of navigating school heavily influenced of alcohol and promiscuity. Her years of celibacy and devotion to sing Jesus songs, getting signed by TobyMac's Gotee Records, the condemnation of her appearance at the Lilith Fair concerts, her discovery of being gay and avoidance of having to disclose her sexual orientation to her roadie, even to close friends and mentors. She found herself babysitting (both professionally as practically) to the then 17 years old Katy Hudson, pushed to the Christian music scene by her parents. Knapp quit CCM and promised never to play and sing anymore. Jennifer's travels through the US and Europe led her ultimately to Australia, where she and her partner Karen settled, still trying not to be recognized as that Jennifer Knapp. Step by step she learned to accept herself and to value her talents. Inspired by both a local pastor and the 2008 hit *I Kissed a Girl* by Katy Perry (yes, the same Katy Hudson, who took another stage name and sent quite a different message than during her CCM years nearly a decade before as teenager), she took a bold step and started writing music again. IN 2009, she returned to Nashville again in preparation of what would become the *Letting Go* album. A public coming out to both Christian and secular press was planned. The resulting storm of reactions was no surprise, but did harm Knapp's well-being again. Years of absence and

silence, reluctance to ever visit a church again and yet a faith that was so strong, that Knapp was convinced that she couldn't relinquish that part of her personality just as being lesbian. Despite the theologically sound arguments, traditions and convictions, she maintains she is both gay and a Christian. A human being looking for love and to give love away. Knapp's journey's for which she is responsible is not over. She gave up once, but can't imagine doing it again. Her latest album Set Me Free testifies to that. An inspiring memoir that made me feel ashamed and yet again willing to choose to love my neighbor.

Wontfor says

Her music was a defining part of my teenage years, and she put together lyrics that still speak to me so many years later. In my sheltered bubble of acceptable music at the time she was inspirational -- I loved the honesty, and the raw texture of her expressiveness. I can say that in hindsight now.

Writing lyrics so rarely translates to writing long form, but she shines here. You can tell even without her descriptions of her encounters with books at a young age that she's well read. She applies her skills here, and the stories are not simply honest and thoughtfully composed, but well told in the end. Sorry, I'm going into craft here before I even go into what makes this shine for me.

Her songs are already so very loaded with all of the baggage of my teenage years, and the meanings I put to her songs before. Going back, now I appreciate them even more for a completely different take -- her own intent and where she came from when she wrote them. At one point when reading, I had to drift away from reading for a moment and slightly tear up singing Martyrs and Thieves to myself after reading about her experiences with her father and stepmother. Later, her own description of where she was coming from there only solidified that moment.

Yes. I loved this book.

I am so happy that she can be honest and happy after all of these years. I'm so overjoyed that she's found a place for herself that gives her some comfort. I am also going to be selfish, and hope that she continues to write. :D

Nicole Guthrie says

I could not put this book down. I have always loved Jennifer Knapp and her music. This book is just as poignant as her lyrics. There were times during this read that I was sobbing uncontrollably because I could understand her pain. I also reveled in the parts where life was good and all the joy and peace she experienced. Her story resonates with me so deeply and has made this the best memoir I have read.
