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Nina Here Nor There: My Journey Beyond Gender

By Nick Krieger



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Honor Book for the 2012 Stonewall Book Awards in non-fiction

The next-generation *Stone Butch Blues*--a contemporary memoir of gender awakening and a classic tale of first love and self-discovery.

Ambitious, sporty, feminine “capital-L lesbians” had been Nina Krieger’s type, for friends that is. She hadn’t dated in seven years, a period of non-stop traveling—searching for what, or avoiding what, she didn’t know. When she lands in San Francisco’s Castro neighborhood, her roommates introduce her to a whole new world, full of people who identify as queer, who modify their bodies and blur the line between woman and man, who defy everything Nina thought she knew about gender and identity. Despite herself, Nina is drawn to the people she once considered freaks, and before long, she is forging a path that is neither man nor woman, here nor there. This candid and humorous memoir of gender awakening brings readers into the world of the next generation of transgender warriors and tells a classic tale of first love and self-discovery.

Discussion Guide for Book Clubs, Classrooms, and Group Discussions

What did you know about transgender people before reading this book? How has your perspective changed?

Did reading this book make you think about your own body, gender, and identity? In what ways?

How do you feel about the way Nina treats her parents? How about the way they treat her? How would you react if your child was transgender?

What role does Ramona play in Nina’s journey?

How do you envision gender—a binary, spectrum, galaxy...?

What are some of the benefits to our culture of gender? Some of the downfalls? How does the binary (man/woman) system help you? Hurt you?

How do you relate to Nina’s experience? In what ways is her story universal? Specific?

In what parts of your life do you feel you are “privileged”? Have your privileges changed over time? Has this impacted your worldview?

How is this book similar to other memoirs about gender? How is it unique?

How does the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder and its classification as a mental illness affect trans people?

What do you see as the main challenges for trans people in our society? Are these covered in the book, or are these from other sources and experiences?

What did you learn through The Boys? How are their gender expressions and decisions similar? Different?

Where do lesbian and transmasculine (trans people on the male side of the spectrum like The Boys) communities overlap? Where is there friction?

What defines “women’s spaces” and in what cases, instances, or places should transmasculine people be included? Excluded?

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Editorial Review

Review

“...[B]eautifully written... Accessible and full of humor, there’s no question that in the growing canon of first person transgender narratives, this is already a classic.”—*Curve Magazine*

“I found Nick Kreiger’s memoir to be non-threatening and honest. It was candid and answered many questions I didn’t even know to ask.”—*Transforming Love*

“Nick’s story is refreshing because he doesn’t abide by the ‘heterosexual man trapped in a woman’s body’ narrative that we’re so used to hearing in the news. It’s more nuanced and... feels so much more real and personal.”—*Queering the Campus*

“As Kreiger explores the gender spectrum, we do too. At the same time he’s seeing the blurred lines of woman and not-woman, we see it as well. The journey is a good one, shared... The book is a captivating fresh take on the fluidity of gender to which many LGBTs will relate.”—*Washington Blade*

“*Nina Here Nor There* (and how clever a title is that?) is... a very well-written, important book... *Nina Here Nor There* works on several levels—as a guide for people who want to transition; as a conversation-starter for those interested in gender issues; as a heartfelt memoir; and as a fun, fly-on-the-wall look at San Francisco’s diverse LGBT scene.”—*GO Magazine*

“Nick Krieger’s *Nina Here Nor There: My Journey Beyond Gender* is a passionate and honest memoir. Krieger recounts his personal search for identity and gender with humor and emotional honesty, making this one of the year’s most moving books.”—*Largehearted Boy*

“His experience as a travel writer brings cultural details into sharp focus, and weighs individual meanings... a well written travel guide to Nick’s corner of the world.”—*OUTview Online*

“The memoir is a journey that grabs your heart and stretches your brain into new ways of thinking.”—*The Windy City Times*

“A new and welcome voice in transgender memoir.”—Kate Bornstein, author of *Gender Outlaw*

“A personal, insightful, and nuanced discussion of the life experiences and tough decisions that inform transgender identities. The language is precise, the thinking is complex, and the self-questioning is funny and honest. This is a profound and moving book, and its existence makes me happy.”—Stephen Beachy, author of *Distortion*

“It’s a rare memoir that can tell a story that seems brand new, but *Nina Here Nor There* does it. This one-of-a-kind narrator undertakes a quest that is unmistakably timely. But in its yearning for awareness and connection, this book feels timeless.”—K. M. Soehnlein, author of *Robin and Ruby*

“With inimitable charm . . . *Nina Here Nor There* depicts the trans experience in a way that anyone can identify with, and everyone will enjoy.”—Thea Hillman, author of *Intersex (For Lack of a Better Word)*

“A beautifully rendered and personal account that feels like a fresh addition to trans literature.”—*Publishers*

Weekly

“[A] humorous, moving, and engagingly authentic journey.”—Whitney Scott, *Booklist*

“Reading *Nina Here Nor There* is like taking a tour through San Francisco’s transmale culture by the most charming guide you could hope for...an important contribution to the body of literature about contemporary queer culture and lives. *Nina Here Nor There* is a book queers across the gender and sexuality spectrum should read. An insightful, accessible, and witty page-turner, *Nina Here Nor There* is the transgender narrative we’ve been waiting for.”—*Lambda Literary*

“In our media context, where only one kind of narrative about transition seems to be allowed, this alternate personal story can feel pretty revolutionary...He writes incredibly perceptively about issues like gender and class, approaching them through storytelling and subtle personal exploration instead of explaining through standard social justice language...*Nina Here Nor There* offers an honest, personal take on many aspects of identity...”—*Feministing*

"[*Nina Here Nor There* is] an edifying, passionate memoir ...the uninitiated and the curious will find these pages brimming with an enlightening, first-person experience that is both intriguing and educating...What emerges is a powerful and moving portrait of one man's quest for happiness in finding the truest sense of himself. Krieger has produced an intimate memoir about how vital physical changes can beautify every aspect of life, inside and out.”—*The Bay Area Reporter*

“In a twist on the traditional transgender narrative, Nick identifies as neither male nor female and invites readers to view gender not as a binary or a spectrum but as an infinitely beautiful ‘kaleidoscope.’ Narrated with verve, charm, and humor, Krieger’s memoir doesn’t hold back on self-examination and emotional honesty, and will likely upend some of your preconceptions.”—*Bust Magazine*

About the Author

A native of New York, **Nick Krieger** realized at the age of twenty-one that he’d been born on the wrong coast, a malady he corrected by transitioning to San Francisco. His writing has earned several travel-writing awards and has been published in multiple travel guides.

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One Ta-Ta tatas

On a Saturday afternoon in May, tucked into a friend’s backyard near my house in San Francisco’s Castro neighborhood, only a few blocks from the supersize rainbow flag, the memorial triangle of pink stones, and the landmark marquee of the Castro Theatre, women surrounded me. They were my older, established, financially secure, coupled-off, home-buying, capital-L Lesbian—as in women-loving-women—friends. With money, influence, and good looks, they weren’t quite mainstream, but part of the emerging gaystream, those targeted by the *New York Times*, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and marketers of the pantsuit. I called them my A-gays.

Our host, Stephanie, appeared at the top of the stairs, sporting a J. Crew sweater, gold necklace, and designer jeans that hid a small tattoo by her hip. “Helloooo, ladies!” she shouted, before descending into the yard. Her girlfriend, Beth, followed close behind, sporting a collared shirt, silver thumb ring, and cheap khakis that hid a small tattoo by her ankle.

After a lifetime in the women’s athletic scene, I was accustomed to the understated casual wear, parties reminiscent of halftime huddles, and a definition of “ladies” that implied ass kicking rather than good

manners. My connection to everyone in the backyard crew stemmed from soccer, a sport I'd stopped playing a couple years before, tired of competition and commitments that required me to run around at specific times.

I came to this postgame gathering to see Zippy, a tiny and witty monkey-like thing who'd recently moved to LA for a film career and was back in town for a visit. She and I were younger than the others, less accomplished, A-gays in training—although we weren't really on course to pass the entrance exam. We sat across from each other on folding camping chairs, rickety on the yard's uneven slabs of stone. Pockets of flowerbeds and banks of shrubbery sprouted around us, the dirt still wet from the morning rain.

"Well, isn't this my lucky day," Stephanie said, placing one hand on my shoulder and the other on Zippy's. "A special day indeed when you kids come out to join us."

Zippy sprang out of her seat, shooting her tricolor pompadour-mullet to the sky. "Well, wouldn't you know, it's my lucky day too, be-otch."

The two of them hugged before Stephanie opened her arms toward me. "Always a pleasure."

Had Stephanie not meant every word, her exaggerated pleasantries would've been embarrassing. I felt myself blush all the same from her kindness.

"How's your writing?" she asked.

"Yeah, how is your writing?" Beth seconded. "And when do I get to see what you've been working on?" She winked, just as she did at the office when she caught me with one of my essays open on my computer.

Beth had contracted me to do web writing at the bank where she worked and considered my employment "supporting the arts," as did a handful of other A-gays I'd worked odd jobs for over the past three years. They couldn't get enough of the mass e-mails and blog posts I sent from my trips—backpacking in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia, bicycling from Canada to Mexico—and, much to my appreciation, always helped my traveling-writer lifestyle by employing me and buying me drinks whenever I was back in San Francisco.

I knocked around a few pebbles with the toe of my hiking boot. "At the rate I'm going, I'll have some quality writing in a few years," I said.

"And I got first dibs," Zippy jumped in.

"Well, I'll be waiting patiently." Beth offered me an encouraging smile before turning to Zippy. "For your next film project as well."

Zippy motioned me back down to our seats and scooted hers closer. "So, what *are* you working on?" she whispered.

Ever since Zippy had read one of my early travelogues, forwarded by a mutual friend, she'd been my biggest fan. When I returned from that trip, she found my number and called me six times in one day, begging to hang out, a near stalking that might've scared me had I not been laughing so hard from her messages. We ended up chatting for hours about our book and film influences and passions, barely stopping to breathe. For a few weeks, early in our friendship, I thought I might be in love with her, until the moment she flipped upside down on her couch, inhaled a whip-it balloon, and I knew she was too out of control to date. Zippy

was a best pal, the only one I'd ever showered with, which had happened once when we were unable to pause an exciting conversation.

Of all the things I'd missed about Zippy since she moved, it was our artistic talks, creative speed as we called it, that I missed the most. I told her about the essay collection I was developing out of an unfinished one-woman show she and I had collaborated on about my futile quest to find a girlfriend, now going on nearly seven years.

"Who's your latest crush, or should I say character?" Zippy gibed, nudging my foot with hers as if we were both in on the joke that my life only existed to serve my writing. "Let me guess, unrequited?"

"Yeah. She's straight." I avoided Zippy's eyes, knowing they would be both chiding and compassionate, as I described the flighty girl in my graduate writing program. "She confessed to having a crush on me. Then for the next three months, whenever we went to a bar after class, she made sure she was never left alone with me."

"Classic." Zippy slapped her leg a few times. A half-dozen zippers fluttered on her baggy pants. They looked like something Michael Jackson would've designed for MC Hammer, but on Zippy they seemed cool. Everything did.

From my jeans, I pulled out a glass bowl and weed from a medical dispensary. I'd claimed "anxiety" to receive my cannabis card, although "New York City Jew" would've been equally accurate. I packed the bowl and waited for Zippy to take the first hit.

"It gets worse," I said. I lit the last patch of green and inhaled deeply. "I finally got her alone and made a move. She said she wasn't ready." I blew out my frustration in a huge cloud of smoke. "The following week, she asked me to walk her home *and* invited me up. We ended up messing around in her bed. I stayed over, but no sex. She said she wanted to, but pulled 'time of the month.' I still don't believe her." I tapped the pipe against my hand. The ashy residue stuck. "We met up a few days later at a literary event. She brought some guy. He groped her the whole time."

"Why do you do this to yourself?" Zippy asked.

"Dude, this guy was such a loser. She could do so much better."

"Like you?"

"Yes, like me."

"But she's not a lesbian."

I banged the pipe on the stone at my feet, nearly cracking it. In the hammock across the yard, two women lay entwined, swinging gently. Next to them, Beth was curled into Stephanie's lap. "I prefer straight girls," I said.

"You do see the problem, right? They don't like the hooah."

I grabbed my Milwaukee's Best, one of the many leftover cans from the soccer field, out of the chair's cup holder. The beer tasted like piss, but I chugged the rest, the same move I made when anyone implied they

might want to get near my hooah. Leaning back into my chair, I could see through the protective cover of the trees. My eyes followed the white trail of clouds off into the distance. "I could really use a trip," I said.

"It hasn't even been a year. Aren't you just getting settled?" Zippy said. "How are your new digs, anyway?"

I thought of the parties at my house, my roommates' friends with tattoo sleeves and septum piercings, boyish and manly dykes flaunting all that had been ingrained in me as disreputable. "It's an education." Picturing the chest scars of the few folks who often went topless on my back deck, I added, "And then some."

I pulled a flier out of my jeans pocket, one of the many left lying around my kitchen. I unfolded it to reveal a grayscale guillotine, designed not with one hole for a head, but two holes. For breasts.

"Whoa," Zippy said.

I felt relieved to see her large blue eyes expand as she stared at the words *Ta-Ta Tatas* on the top of the flier. My roommates talked about their friend Greg's top-surgery fund-raiser as if it was a common occurrence, like raising money for the AIDS ride as some of the A-gays did annually. I glanced at the flier again, at the guillotine. It was both sacrilegious and curious.

"I think I saw this on MySpace. You wanna go? There'll be hot girls there." Zippy sang the last word like an enticing advertising jingle.

I anxiously patted my jeans for the pipe. "Do you even know Greg?"

"Not well. Just from flag football. I found out about her— I mean his—transition from our teammates." I'd forgotten Zippy had played flag football with Greg and many of the others who hung around my new house. With a history of outsider experiences only a few people knew about, Zippy was deeply empathetic...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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