

# **Let's Pretend This Never Happened Study Guide**

**Let's Pretend This Never Happened by Jenny Lawson**

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# Summary

Note: This study guide specifically refers to the March, 2013, Berkley Trade Paperback Edition of *Let's Pretend This Never Happened: A Mostly True Memoir* by Jenny Lawson.

*Let's Pretend This Never Happened: A Mostly True Memoir* is written by Jenny Lawson, a well-known blogger who writes under the name The Bloggess. Jenny grows up in West Texas with a patient, kind mother and a father whom Jenny lovingly describes as crazy. For example, her father once made a puppet out of a recently killed raccoon, an event which traumatized Jenny for years. Although Jenny later comes to attend high school with kids she has known all her life, she feels like a misfit and is very awkward in social situations. Jenny will only later come to be diagnosed with a severe anxiety disorder.

When Jenny attends college, she meets a young man named Victor at a bookstore. Victor is a few months older, wealthy, looks like Neil Patrick Harris, and is a Young Republican. He is the exact kind of guy that Jenny would never date. However, she makes an exception. She and Victor quickly fall in love with one another. Jenny is especially thrilled that Victor does not laud his wealth over anyone and does his best to fit in with her family. For example, Victor does not complain –though he does later admit to being terrified –when Jenny's father drops a live bobcat on his lap for laughs. Victor even goes so far as to make Jenny's father an Indian medicine bag featuring the actual face of a wolf, which her father ends up loving. Jenny is also thrilled that Victor accepts her own quirky humor and behavior, something which will only increase in coming years.

Victor and Jenny get engaged, get married, and move to Houston for Victor's job. They travel home to West Texas frequently. During each visit, Jenny is alarmed at how quickly the place is changing. Fields are being taken over by subdivisions, while Starbucks are popping up in small towns. Jenny realizes the place she once knew as home no longer exists. However, she also recognizes that home is wherever Victor is. Jenny and Victor decide to have children. Due to a blood clotting disorder, Jenny must take medicine in order to carry a baby to term. She ultimately gives birth to a healthy baby girl named Hailey. With both her and Victor now working from home, the family moves back to West Texas.

As Jenny is diagnosed with anxiety disorder and turns to the internet to blog, she begins to make friends online, including those like Laura whom she will actually hang out with in public. Jenny begins to make other blogger friends, whom she comes to appreciate and value because they are so non-judgmental of one another. At the same time, Jenny is diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. Sometimes, the arthritis keeps her bedridden for days. In situations like this, Jenny comes to appreciate even the small things, such as her daughter cuddling with her to keep her company while watching *Little House on the Prairie* reruns. Jenny also comes to appreciate her husband's patience and good humor, such as when he tells her not to buy any hand towels since she has just purchased new ones. He comes home with a giant metal rooster instead. As Jenny

concludes her book, she explains she is thrilled with her life and her family. She tells readers to embrace the absurdities of their lives and their own human nature as well.



# Untitled Introduction – Draw Me a Fucking Dog

## Summary

Untitled Introduction – Jenny Lawson explains this book is a love letter to her family about being human and how people are defined by their reactions to life's imperfect moments.

Introduction – Jenny Lawson writes that her book will contain things mostly accurate and mostly true so that she can avoid being sued. She explains that readers will frequently encounter rambling parenthetical phrases and that people need to learn how to take jokes. Also, some may find one thing in the entire book they are sensitive about, for which Jenny apologizes.

I Was a Three Year-Old Arsonist – Jenny is born in Austin, Texas. Her father is a soldier while her mother is a lunch lady and a homemaker. Jenny likes to wave at soldiers from the window as a child from her crib. When her parents move her crib, she shoves a broom into the furnace, lights it on fire, and runs around the apartment with it. After her father's enlistment ends and Jenny's mom becomes pregnant, the family returns to their hometown of Wall, Texas. Wall is known for being small and rural. Wall is also known for its cotton and its school yearbook that reads "Where's Wall?" Jenny explains Wall is famous for nothing.

My Childhood: David Copperfield Meets Guns and Ammo Magazine – Jenny relates eleven things that make her childhood different from the childhoods of most other people. These include standing beside a dead deer being gutted and cleaned by her father while playing tag with her younger sister. Her family did not always have running water. Her father would often raise the babies of animals he had killed, such as raccoons, one of which was kept as a pet named Rambo. Also, her father caught and raced armadillos. A string of duck thefts by homeless people led to Jenny's pet duck Daffodil being eaten. Her family would be invited over to a neighboring farm to swim in pig water. She had to devote an entire year of therapy to a ten-minute episode from childhood involving Stanley the Magic Squirrel.

Stanley the Magic Squirrel – Jenny's belief that her father is insane stems from running a full-time taxidermy business out of their house to his freezing to death a live rattlesnake in the freezer to bringing home a baby bobcat. Jenny is now eight; her sister, Lisa, is six. One night, their father wakes them up to show them a live squirrel in a Ritz cracker box. He explains it is a magic squirrel. When he asks the squirrel what two plus three is, the squirrel raises his paw five times. It is then that Jenny realizes her father has put his hand up inside a dead squirrel, and that there is blood all over his sleeve. Years later, her father attempts a similar trick on Lisa's daughter, Gabi, with a raccoon. Unfortunately, he leaves it under a bed and forgets about it. Gabi finds the raccoon and



runs around the house with it, waking her grandfather up from a nap. This causes him to scream. Jenny is thrilled for her revenge through Gabi.

Don't Tell Your Parents – On weekends, Jenny and Lisa often go to visit her father's Czechoslovakian parents, Grandlibby and Grampa. Grandlibby is cheerful, while Grampa is gruff though kindhearted. Jenny and Lisa's cousin, Michelle, often visits as well. Nothing is off-limits to Jenny and Lisa, from television to brownies. While out looking through trash one day, Jenny and Lisa find a Playboy. Grandlibby does not take the magazine away, but she attempts to lure the girls away with other activities and by calling the magazine rubbish. Jenny and Lisa are too intrigued, however, until hail begins to fall from the sky. Grandlibby blames the hail on Hell, causing Jenny and Lisa to abandon the magazine. As an adult, Jenny agrees that Grandlibby was correct.

Jenkins, You Motherfucker – Jenny has what her mother describes as a nervous stomach. Years later, Jenny learns she had a severe untreated anxiety disorder. Jenny always feels as if she is doomed and something bad will happen to her. One night, Jenny and Lisa are brought outside by their father to look in his pickup truck. They are wary about this, but they are surprised to discover a dozen turkeys in the truck. The turkeys become named pets and love Jenny's father, but they chase Jenny and Lisa around the yard. Jenny and Lisa believe the turkeys, led by Jenkins the turkey, want to eat them. One day, Jenkins and two other turkeys follow Jenny to school. The turkeys traumatize the school, forcing Jenny's dad to come grab them and clean up after them. Not long after, the turkeys are turned into food.

If You Need an Arm Condom, It Might Be Time to Reevaluate Some of Your Life Choices (Alternate Title: High School is Life's Way of Giving You a Record Low to Judge the Rest of Your Life By) – Jenny explains she dressed like a Goth in high school to keep the other kids away since she is so shy. Her editor says the chapter is not long enough and must be fleshed out. Jenny then goes back in time. Jenny's high school is so rural that the classes are about boll weevil eradication, animal husbandry, and cotton judging among other things. Jenny hates high school, and says only psychopaths, cheerleaders, or combinations of both love high school. Jenny dresses darkly as an attempt to reinvent herself, but her classmates already know her, having gone through the entire school system with her. Lisa, however, has no problem fitting in and getting along with the other kids. Jenny comes to work as an office aide. Seeming a bit shiftless, she is invited by the ag teacher to help out with an animal husbandry class at the local stockyard. She agrees to do it because of the attractive guys in the class. She realizes she has made a huge mistake when she is encouraged to artificially inseminate a cow. Jenny's arm gets stuck in the cow's vagina, and she must slowly withdraw it to avoid having the cow sit on her.

Draw Me a Fucking Dog – When Jenny is eighteen, she tries acid after hearing about her friend Jim's experiences. He has been using it since he was fifteen. Jim relates taking hits while waiting for friends to show up and drawing a stick figure who told him to draw a dog. Jim's mother sends him to rehab the next day. Jenny and a small group of friends who have never tried acid before get together to do so. Jenny, who has tried marijuana before but did not feel a high from it, wonders how acid will affect her. Jenny



takes a hit and learns shortly after that the acid is laced with strychnine –rat poison –to get the acid to bond with the paper. Jenny begins throwing up and does so for the next four hours. Jenny concludes by explaining that drugs are a bad idea.

## Analysis

It is clear from the beginning of Jenny Lawson's memoir that her greatest childhood influence on her quirky sense of humor is her father, whom she lovingly describes as crazy. One of the running themes of Jenny's memoir is the assertion that not many people have a father like hers, and that her father is especially unique. Jenny presents her father as a loving man prone to strange and even bizarre activities. Some of the tamer things her father has done –ranging from the taxidermy to raising the babies of animals he has recently killed to racing armadillos –pale in contrast to the utterly (and comically) outrageous, such as turning a raccoon corpse into a puppet that he used to awaken his daughters one night.

Jenny understands that her father's eccentricities are one of the many absurdities of life. Jenny explains early on that people are defined by how they handle life's absurdities, from the strange and humorous to the difficult. Being chased by turkeys and unwittingly agreeing to artificially inseminate a cow rank among some of the humorous and strange, while Jenny's anxiety disorder –something which will only later be diagnosed – help Jenny to become the person she is when she writes her memoir (a famous blogger with an unusual and quirky sense of humor). Jenny attempts to handle her anxiety by redefining herself in high school, but given the small town situation in which she finds herself, such reinventing does little other than changing her wardrobe and makeup.

Jenny's attempts to reinvent herself are a failure, she recognizes, but they also begin to teach her an important lesson. Jenny will explain, as her memoir unfolds, that the very human moments of peoples' lives –their failures and their mistakes –help to make people who they are. They allow growth and strength to be drawn from the past. They also help make people appreciative of what good things they do have in the present. Jenny's growing appreciation for the good things she has in life, rather than those things she has lost or considers to be losses (such as her attempt at redefining herself in high school or her attempt to do drugs) will become an important theme that grows stronger as the years go by.

All of Jenny's experiences –even the bad ones (such as Stanley the Magic Squirrel and her attempts to reinvent herself) and the stupid ones (such as trying drugs, which she admits is a very bad idea) nevertheless make Jenny who she is today. She has come to appreciate the flaws in her life, but uses them as a point of learning and as an example for readers. Obviously some things (such as drugs) readers should never try, while other things (having a crazy father or anxiety) should be embraced and celebrated rather than brushed aside, ignored, or suppressed. These are things that Jenny very much appreciates, because regardless as to what she has lost (such as a year in therapy due to Stanley the Magic Squirrel), she has gained important life experience, and appreciation for her life.



## Vocabulary

sadistic, rambling parentheticals, journalistic, subtle, nonjudgmental, capitulated, taxidermy, bastions, stoic, nonplussed, conspiratorially, luridly, authoritatively, reverently, baffled, narcissistic, eradication, husbandry, rebellious, bemused, bewildered, epiphany





# And That's Why Neil Patrick Harris Would Be the Most Successful Mass Murderer Ever – If You See My Liver, You've Gone Too Far

## Summary

And That's Why Neil Patrick Harris Would Be the Most Successful Mass Murderer Ever – Jenny is now twenty-one. She heads to the local bookstore where she meets a guy in the new age section who seems to be about her age. He looks like Neil Patrick Harris. The Harris lookalike says he has had a dream about a girl in a coat just like Jenny's. He introduces himself as Victor and invites Jenny back to his dorm room. She agrees to go hang out even though Victor could be a mass murderer. They both attend college in nearby San Angelo. Jenny learns Victor is wealthy, ambitious, a member of the Young Republicans, and unlike any guy she has ever dated before. Jenny falls in love with him, while Jenny's mother encourages Jenny to move in with Victor and to marry him. Jenny and Victor decide to rent their own apartment.

No One Ever Taught Me Couch Etiquette – Before Victor tells his parents Jenny is living with him, he asks her to meet his parents, who live in Midland, Texas. Jenny agrees. Although Victor's stepdad is out of town, his mom, Bonnie, is home. While sitting on the couch, Victor quietly reminds Jenny not to lean against the pillows because those are only for decoration. When Bonnie heads out to get some drinks, Jenny wonders why Victor has never taught her couch etiquette. Afterwards, Jenny worries she and Victor won't work because of their different backgrounds, but Victor reassures he does not care about these things or about couch etiquette.

Just Your Average Engagement Story – It is 1996. A year after living together, Victor decides to propose to Jenny. They drive around for hours and stop to eat. After eating, they drive around longer because Victor is so nervous about proposing. Jenny says yes.

It Wasn't Stew – Jenny steps back in time to one of the first times Victor comes home for dinner with her family. Her father tosses a live bobcat onto Victor. Victor seems confused rather than scared, as is the bobcat. Later, Victor explains he was indeed terrified at the time, but he did not let it show. Victor, however, comes to feel horrible because in his attempts to get to know Jenny's father, he struggles to meet expectations, such as helping out with taxidermy, stringing a bow, and almost shooting himself in the foot with the bow.

Victor decides to make Jenny's father an Indian medicine bag using a wolf face, a turtle, and leather. Jenny finds it disturbing, but her father loves it and hangs it by the fireplace. Time passes. Just before Jenny and Victor are to be married, Victor brings his parents



over to meet Jenny's parents. Victor's mom is terrified to learn that Jenny's dad is boiling skulls, after which Victor's parents quickly leave.

Married on the Fourth of July – As the wedding approaches, Victor develops a habit like Jenny's dad, where he finds live snakes, captures them, tames them, and then resells them. Jenny grows anxious about the coming wedding because so many people will attend. Though neither Jenny nor Victor are particularly religious, they do believe in God and decide to have their wedding in a chapel. They are married on the Fourth of July.

There's No Place Like Home – Jenny and Victor buy a small home in San Angelo, where Jenny goes to work in HR and Victor goes to work in computers. As the year 2000 dawns, Victor takes a job in Houston, and he and Jenny move to the city. Jenny comes to miss home. Each trip back to West Texas reveals changes in Wall that include fewer farm fields, more subdivisions, and her father's taxidermy business becoming a real, professional business. When a Starbucks comes to San Angelo, Jenny feels as if the changes have truly reached a tipping point. She realizes she is now homesick for a place that no longer exists. Jenny comes to realize that home is wherever she is with Victor.

A Series of Helpful Post-It Notes I Left Around the House for My Husband This Week – Jenny leaves a series of Post-It Notes for Victor around the house. One asks why cleaning up cat vomit is always her job. Another wants to know why Victor can't throw away an empty pizza box. Another threatens to stab Victor if he leaves a wet towel on the floor.

The Dark and Disturbing Secrets HR Doesn't Want You to Know – Jenny explains that choosing to work in the human resources department of any company is like choosing to work in the complaint department of Hell. Jenny says there are three kinds of people who choose to work in HR: sadistic assholes who were tattletales in school; idealists who think they can make a difference; and those who like to watch train wrecks. Jenny begins to keep a journal of the strange things she encounters in HR. Among them are a woman who applies for the same job she has just quit (Jenny rehires her); a woman brought in only to clarify what she meant by being fired from her last job for sleeping on a cat (which turned out to be a car); and dealing with several men sending pictures of their penises to female employees at work.

If You See My Liver, You've Gone Too Far – Jenny has always wanted to be a mother; so, when she becomes pregnant, she is very happy. However, she miscarries. When this happens a second time, Jenny switches doctors and learns she has antiphospholipid antibody syndrome, a rare autoimmune disease which causes blood clots. The condition usually worsens during pregnancy. Jenny goes on blood thinners and becomes pregnant a third time. Finally, Jenny and Victor have a baby girl they name Hailey. Jenny considers it all to have been worth it.



## Analysis

In college, Jenny begins dating someone unlike anyone she would typically date—a wealthy Young Republican named Victor who looks like Neil Patrick Harris. Jenny is smitten with him and gives him a chance, coming to discover he is a wonderful person. Jenny is especially thrilled that Victor not only does not hold her eccentric father against him, but actually comes to get along well with him, going so far as to make her father a wolf-faced medicine bag. Jenny recounts how, on one of Victor's first visits, her father dumped a live bobcat onto Victor's lap. Although Victor played it cool, he later admitted to being terrified. Yet such is Jenny's argument that people are defined by how they react to life's imperfect moments, and that there is joy in embracing life's absurdities.

Life's absurdities definitely come to make the relationship between Victor and Jenny even better. Victor must not only contend with the craziness of Jenny's father, but Jenny must contend with Victor's parents' crazy idea that one does not lean on decorative pillows on a couch. Jenny almost comes to break up with Victor because of his family's wealth, finding it absurd that two people from two different worlds could ever work out—but it is Victor who casually and gently dismisses this fear, knowing that it is absurd. Their differences in wealth are the least absurd things about either one of them, and Victor reassures Jenny that he does not care about things like couch etiquette. Because they embrace life's absurdities, Jenny and Victor come to find love and joy in one another.

Jenny and Victor are later married, something which makes both sets of parents happy. While married life takes them to Houston, Jenny and Victor travel back to West Texas as frequently as they can to visit family. Each time they return, the reader should note, Jenny sees how things are changing. She comes to see farm fields being plowed over by subdivisions and Starbucks popping up in small town settings. This completely throws her off, because home seems to be something she has lost. Her childhood home and its surrounding environs are no longer what they once were. However, Jenny comes to realize that home is wherever Victor is. Here, Jenny comes to be appreciative of what she has, rather than what she has lost. Jenny's struggles to become pregnant are a sad note to Jenny's otherwise good life—but her eventual successful delivery of Hailey with Victor allows Jenny to embrace what she has, rather than dwell on what she has lost.

Victor also comes to embrace the absurdities of life—such as his wife's absurd sense of humor, which he often counters with his own—and comes to love married life with Jenny because of her own eccentric humor. Post-It Note arguments are one such absurdity, with Victor being perfectly willing to engage his wife in an argument on Post-Its. Jenny, in her first job in human resources, comes to embrace the absurd aspects of life. Here, Jenny is given a clear window into the absurd nature of people in general, from sending random penis pictures at work to rehiring a woman who has just quit. Rather than stress out over the crazy issues she must deal with in HR, Jenny allows herself to be entertained by them, and to embrace her job in HR as a result.

## Vocabulary

surreptitiously, profanities, superhumanly, ostentatious, hereditary, macabre, machismo, fatuous, invariably, adamantly, vehemently



# **My Vagina is Fine, Thanks for Asking – I Am the Wizard of Oz of Housewives (In That I Am Both “Great and Terrible” and Because I Sometimes Hide Behind the Curtains)**

## **Summary**

My Vagina is Fine, Thanks for Asking – Jenny reveals that being a mom is something that she sometimes forgets as she is going through her daily routine. She also recounts how her doctor told her that vaginas naturally tear during childbirth, but a natural tear heals better than an incision.

Phone Conversation I Had With My Husband After I Got Lost for the Eighty Thousandth Time – Jenny calls her husband after running out to get milk in the evening because she is lost. She explains everything looks different in the dark and that she left the GPS at home because she does not like the tone of the voice of the GPS robot, and because it mispronounces street names. Jenny discovers she knows where she is, then gets lost again. Victor drives out to find her to lead her home.

And Then I Got Stabbed in the Face by a Serial Killer – Jenny’s anxiety makes even simple tasks like speaking with someone at the grocery store difficult. Jenny hates herself for this, yet comes to learn that she has generalized anxiety disorder after a series of panic attacks in her twenties.

Even e-mails take time for Jenny to write. Jenny knows this will come as a surprise to many readers of her blog, who would never have guess at such a thing. Jenny is at least thankful that she has a part of her brain that allows her to filter the things she writes and says.

She also notes that her panic attacks are much more disturbing to watch. She relates one story of making Victor dress up with her as Craig and Arianna, the Spartan cheerleaders from Saturday Night Live, for the Halloween party of Victor’s boss. At the house, they discover they are the only ones dressed up, until they realize they have the wrong street. Jenny thanks God for the mistake as they head to the correct address where people are dressed up. He reminds her to be careful about what she says, ranging from divorce and death to how much she loves Obama. But when a man dressed up as John McCain speaks to her about politics, Jenny does her best to avoid the topic by saying she was once stabbed in the face by a serial killer. She explains she was watching a show about a serial killer, fell asleep and dreamed she was being



attacked by a serial killer, and woke up with blood on her face. She explains the blood came from a scratch from a cat who had fallen on her face.

Thanks for the Zombies, Jesus – Jenny records some car conversations she has with Victor. One such conversation has to do with Resurrection of believers and reanimation of zombies. Jenny considers them to be the same thing. The conversation bends to body parts that zombies need, then to organ donation, then to Victor donating any needed body parts to Hailey if she would ever need them, such as an arm which would prevent a boy from getting fresh with her.

Making Friends with Girls – Jenny explains she does not really like girls. Part of this is because she was too anxious misfit to make friends with them when younger, and because she sees girls as fickle, judgmental, and cruel. When Jenny begins blogging, she has a change of heart regarding other girls because she is able to find other female misfits like her. Jenny even makes friends online and in real life with another blogger named Laura, who in turn introduces Jenny to other bloggers. She even reluctantly agrees to go on a four-day getaway with Laura to the Broad Summit in Napa Valley, hosted by a blogger named Maggie. Jenny worries about this because bloggers write about everything. If she does something stupid, everyone will be writing about it. Laura reminds Jenny to relax because the entire thing will be laid-back and casual. Karen, a friend introduced to Jenny through Laura, helps Jenny go shopping for jeans before the event.

At the hotel, Jenny meets many other girls who are warm and friendly, but she forgets their names because she struggles not to say anything awkward. That evening, all the girls wear pajamas, but Jenny wears a red wig to give her courage around other people, and to give herself cover if she screws something up by asking who the weird redhead was. Because cell coverage is bad, the girls are forced to talk to one another. The next day, they go on tours of wineries, but Jenny must bow out early in the evening fearing a panic attack. Everyone is very understanding of this. By the final day, Jenny realizes how much she has enjoyed the trip. She comes to realize the shields she has put up to keep others out. She probably would have prejudged all the girls at the retreat under different circumstances.

I Am the Wizard of Oz of Housewives (In That I Am Both “Great and Terrible” and Because I Sometimes Hide Behind the Curtains) – Jenny explains that Victor’s definition of a clean house includes everything being in its place without raising a hand to make it happen, while Jenny is okay with a live-in look so long as it is sanitary. Jenny has experienced numerous problems cleaning the house, such as accidentally putting hand soap in the dishwasher, causing the kitchen to be flooded by foam. Jenny argues that she is actually a pretty good housewife despite the accidents and mistakes she makes, such as using the new oven before removing the paperwork inside.



## Analysis

Though Victor is very patient with Jenny, fully aware of her anxieties, he worries about how she will react to certain social situations –such as the Halloween party where he's taking her. However, he respects that his wife's issues stem from a legitimate reason, an anxiety disorder. Victor's support is appreciated by Jenny, who ultimately turns to blogging. While Jenny may not have the social graces or public confidence she wishes she had, she does not dwell on this loss. She embraces her imperfections through blogging, which, ironically, come to help her in the end.

As a blogger, Jenny comes to befriend fellow blogger, Laura. Laura and Jenny hit it off so well that they become friends not only online, but in their daily lives as well. It is through Laura that Jenny agrees to attend a convening of other female bloggers in Napa Valley. There, Jenny is able to enjoy herself because she is among so many other kind, warm, and nonjudgmental girls and women very much like herself. Interestingly, Jenny realizes that she has been prejudging everyone around her. Under different circumstances, she never would have become friends with any of the girls on the retreat because she would have judged them before being introduced.

Jenny's embracing of her own flaws help her to grow and to reinforce her thematic argument that human moments make people who they are. Additionally, Jenny's argument that life is defined by how one reacts to imperfect moments, and that there is joy in embracing life's absurdities, both come together in Jenny's decision to keep an open mind and get to know the other girls she is in Napa with receives substance in Jenny's own handling of the situation. The retreat is an imperfect moment for Jenny at first, but by coming both to embrace the retreat, and to approach it with an open mind, Jenny comes to enjoy it. She becomes a stronger, better, and more accepting person because of the retreat.

Jenny continues to document daily absurdities –from the accidental (flooding the kitchen from putting soap in the dishwasher) to the amusing (such as getting lost on the way home from getting milk). Rather than allow herself to be overwhelmed by frustration, stress, or even anger, Jenny embraces the mishaps and misadventures in her life by writing about them instead. She understands that there are so many good things in her life –such as being a writer, a wife, and a mother –that the mishaps and misadventures do not compare. Her self-acceptance and self-confidence continue to grow.

## Vocabulary

expressly, blathering, innately, lucrative, disheveled, aghast, dubiously, non sequitur, nonchalant, patronizingly, mortify, prerequisites, quantifiable



# The Psychopath on the Other Side of the Bathroom – I’m Going to Need an Old Priest and a Young Priest

## Summary

The Psychopath on the Other Side of the Bathroom – When Jenny learns that her friend Lotta’s colon cleanse allows her to lose three pounds, Jenny decides to try it. Jenny wants to ask the pharmacist for a colon cleanse product, but she gets in a panic when she must ask him for what she needs. She decides to buy laxatives instead, figuring they will have the same effect. Over the course of an evening and a morning, Jenny takes eight laxatives. That afternoon, the laxatives hit. Jenny attempts to counter the effect by taking Pepto-Bismol. The Pepto-Bismol has no effect at all. Jenny begins to think that there may be a rapist in the house when paper is slid under the bathroom door. She comes to realize it is only the cat batting paper under the door. When Victor gets home, he tells her she cannot be trusted home alone unsupervised.

An Open Letter to My Husband, Who is Asleep in the Next Room – Jenny tells her husband it is her fault the butter tub has a weird pattern because she is dipping her Eggo waffles directly into the tub of butter.

Just to Clarify: We Don’t Sleep with Goats – Lisa tells Jenny she believes there is a goat in their parents’ house. This concerns her because their kids are all staying with the grandparents down the hall where the kids can be heard screaming. Upon investigating, Jenny and Lisa discover their dad has brought in a sack full of baby ducks and turned them loose. Their mother is ticked off. Jenny and Lisa must help chase down the ducklings.

Victor arrives the next day to celebrate his and Jenny’s thirteenth wedding anniversary, though Jenny finds the number to be unlucky and says they will be celebrating their second twelfth wedding anniversary. They attend a play where drinking and throwing popcorn at the villain is encouraged. Jenny ends up hitting the people in front of them with popcorn, which Victor blames on other people sitting nearby. From there, a huge popcorn fight breaks out, with Victor spending all of the money he planned to use for a nice hotel on popcorn for the fight. Jenny is thrilled with how the evening turns out. The next day, Jenny and the family celebrate the Fourth of July. Her father declares that Lisa’s six year-old Tex could help light off an antique Civil War cannon her father owns, though her father is actually the one to use a blowtorch to fire it. On the way in, Victor and Jenny notice a dead bear carcass lying on a table raised by chains into the ceiling of the carport.

Stabbed by Chicken – Jenny explains that her fingers have swelled up after her dog stabbed her finger with a chicken treat. While carrying the family pug Barnaby Jones





Pickles to bed, Barnaby jumps out of her hands, almost breaks her middle finger, runs between her legs, and causes Jenny to fall on the floor. She calls for Victor, who discovers Jenny has a gash in her hand. Jenny then realizes the cut is from a dried chicken strip dog treat. Jenny believes Victor is out to kill her. Jenny goes to the ER in the morning to make sure everything is okay. Jenny relates another incident where she goes to see her doctor because she thinks she has finger cancer. Instead, Jenny is diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. In particular, she has a rare form called polyarthritis, which moves around in the body, showing up in different places on different days. Jenny explains she has tried all kinds of treatments, including acupuncture. There are days when Jenny is bedridden and days when Jenny has no pain at all. She is grateful for even bedridden days because her daughter cuddle up with her and watch Little House on the Prairie episodes.

It Wasn't Even My Crack – Jenny quits her HR job to try writing and keeping house full-time, while Victor quits his job to work from home as an executive at a medical software company. Victor's method of working is to walk around the house on a headset, including wandering into Jenny's office. To get him to leave and talk elsewhere, Jenny turns on porn. Both Jenny and Victor decide to leave Houston. Jenny suggests a nice house in the country with a couple of acres of land. Victor agrees, and they move back to West Texas to a beautiful place thirty miles from the nearest grocery store. The family begins packing. Jenny's very conservative father-in-law, Alan, comes over to help during which time he finds a Ziploc bag of what he thinks might be crack. Jenny explains it is fake-snow powder. Jenny later learns that the stretch of Texas they live in reportedly haunted, and that a family is buried somewhere near the backyard, but has been lost to overgrowth. Jenny encourages Victor to help her find the cemetery, but they do not have any luck initially.

Honestly, I Don't Even Know Where I Got That Machete: A Comic Tragedy in Three Parts/Days – One day, when Jenny lets Barnaby out, she discovers him dead a short time later. It turns out he has been bitten by a rattlesnake. A kind neighbor explains the same thing has happened to her dogs. Jenny buries the dog, but a giant vulture attempts to disinter the dog to eat him. Jenny must continually chase them away with a machete. Laura comes over to help Jenny remove the dog. Jenny has the dog cremated.

I'm Going to Need an Old Priest and a Young Priest – Jenny comes to believe her home is possessed. Jenny notices foxes coming through the property, which neighbors explain are quite tame. Jenny wants Victor to urinate around the house to mark boundaries and territory. Victor will not even dignify this with an answer. Jenny also comes to worry about the scorpions in the attic, so she considers getting chickens to eat the scorpions, but then remembers the foxes would eat the chickens. A squirrel dies in the walls of the house, and an exterminator uses Rat Sorb to absorb the bad smell when he is unable to locate and remove the corpse. The house is later discovered to be infested with mold, so a huge section of the house is cordoned off until the mold can safely be removed. With Victor out of town, Jenny begins to hear weird noises in and out of the house. Jenny comes to believe a Native American smudging is needed, which in turn sets off the fire alarms but appeases the ghost because she finally finds the long



lost cemetery shortly after. All in all, Jenny still loves the new home, despite the scorpions.

## Analysis

Life's absurdities become a focal point of the majority of the chapters in this section. As Jenny has argued before, and continues to argue now, embracing life's absurdities will, in the end, bring joy. The reader should note the long assemblage of comedic mishaps and humorous misadventures, ranging from taking far too many laxatives to her father setting loose a group of baby ducks to the scorpion infestation, dead squirrel in the walls, and mold hazard of the new home to which she and Victor move. While Jenny is almost ready to give up on the country house because of her belief the place is possessed, she and Victor see things through. They embrace and find joy in their miseries, rather than allowing them to be overwhelming.

Here, the reader can again see the thematic argument which Jenny makes, in that life is defined by how people react to life's imperfect moments. While scorpion infestations are terrifying to Jenny, she takes everything in stride by contemplating how to get rid of the scorpions, and later by calling in an exterminator multiple times. The same is true of the dead squirrel in the walls, and learning there is an old cemetery adjacent to her property, perhaps leading to the house being haunted. Instead of being driven out of her home, Jenny makes a stand and refuses to concede the fight. She becomes a stronger, more confident, and more capable person as a result of this –and is also able to appreciate and enjoy the decidedly good things she has in her life.

This is especially important when Jenny is diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. The variety of arthritis that Jenny has moves around, targeting different parts of her body every time. Some days, Jenny experiences no pain at all, while other days, she is bedridden and unable to move much. While Jenny could feel horrible about this, she chooses not to. She writes on bedridden days when it is possible to do so, and spends her other time cuddling with Hailey while watching *Little House on the Prairie* episodes. While being bedridden with rheumatoid arthritis is not a thrilling thing for Jenny –indeed, it troubles and depresses her greatly –she focuses on the important and good things she does have in her life –such as being able to cuddle with her daughter, and to write, in spite of the arthritis.

Jenny's thematic argument that few people have fathers like hers returns in force in this part of her memoir. Now with kids of their own, Jenny and Lisa are subjected to an entirely new round of craziness from their father. Rather than rejecting these absurdities, Jenny and Lisa embrace them and patiently do their best to tolerate them the way their mother does. The latest round of eccentric behavior includes letting loose baby ducklings in the house from a sack, and then using a blowtorch to fire off an old Civil War cannon with children present. Jenny and Lisa come to recognize that such situations do the family more good than anything else, because they bring family closer together and allow for a sense of continuity between the generations.

## Vocabulary

deviants, errant, vulnerable, harrumphed, behooves, cairn, plaintively



# And That's Why You Should Learn to Pick Your Battles – Bonus Chapter: There's a Serious Lack of Prostitutes on This Tour

## Summary

And That's Why You Should Learn to Pick Your Battles - Jenny and Victor argue over buying new towels. Jenny wants new towels, while Victor reminds her she just bought new towels. When Jenny goes shopping with Laura, Jenny buys a giant metal rooster instead. She leaves it at the front door of her house, rings the doorbell and hides, and watches Victor come to the door. He sighs and closes the door. Jenny names the rooster Beyonce. She positions the chicken to look in Victor's office window. Jenny considers it the best fifteenth wedding anniversary ever. She believes that Beyonce would never have been purchased if she would have been allowed to purchase new hand towels.

Hairless Rats: Free for Kids Only – The local gas station features a community bulletin board with everything from open invitations to barbecues to someone trying to sell squirrels. One offers hairless rats for free to kids. Jenny and Victor find this amusing and realize they have truly changed with their time in the country.

And Then I Snuck a Dead Cuban Alligator on an Airplane – It is November 2009. Jenny and Victor are at an estate sale when Jenny sees a mounted boar's head that appears to be smiling that she decides she will name James Garfield. Jenny urges Victor to bid on the head. To make Jenny and Hailey happy, Victor purchases the head on the condition it does not become the beginning of a collection.

It is now April 2010. Jenny has purchased half a squirrel mounted on a plaque wearing Wild West clothing and holding a tiny revolver in his paw. It is now January 2011. Jenny purchases a stuffed, preserved mouse performing Shakespeare's Hamlet with a tiny skull in his paw.

It is now April 2011. Jenny purchases a fifty year-old Cuban alligator dressed as a pirate, which she blames on Victor. Having broken his arm, Victor is accompanied to North Carolina on a business trip by Jenny, during which time she finds the alligator. Jenny names the alligator Jean Louise. On the plane home, Jenny sets Jean Louise up on Victor's tray table, which annoys Victor but allows Jean Louise to look out through the window.

You Can't Go Home Again (Unless You Want to Get Mauled by Wild Dogs) – Jenny and Lisa know that no matter when they cross the river to go back to the home of their



childhood, something strange will happen –whether is Victor discovering a swampy area from skull boiling water, or Jenny getting attacked by wild dogs. Jenny explains that after dinner, Hailey wanted to see Uncle Larry’s border collies, but one thought Jenny was moving to attack and so attacked Jenny instead. Hailey was safe, Jenny explains, but Jenny herself ended up with bites on her arm and her back, some of which required stitches. Jenny also explains it means she is less selfish than she thought, having safely carried Hailey away.

Epilogue – Jenny is thrilled with her life, from her husband to her daughter to how both cope with her father. Jenny also comes to see the things that made her different are the things most important about her. Jenny says how people react to life’s situations is what defines a person; and there is joy in embracing life’s absurdities.

The End (Sort Of) – Jenny argues with her editor about disguising her book as a book about how some squirrels can breathe underwater to win a fight with Victor. Jenny then calls her mom about the time she and Lisa went swimming in the river when squirrels came floating by. Jenny’s mom tells her the squirrels were dead and probably drowned in a flood upriver.

True Facts – Jenny presents some true facts, including milk having no discernible smell. Also, some squirrels have gills.

Bonus Chapter: There’s a Serious Lack of Prostitutes on This Tour – Jenny presents a bonus chapter for the paperback edition of her book. Jenny goes on tour for the hardcover edition of the book across the country, during which time her therapist announces she will be out of the office after having a baby. Jenny learns that at each tour stop, she will be met by an escort who will guide her to where she wants to go. Jenny asks her agent if this means she will be met by a prostitute. Jenny goes on CNN to promote her book and is asked about politics. She explains she will vote for whoever handles real issues, such as preparing for the zombie apocalypse. Jenny comes to struggle with her bed at a Holiday Inn, because the bed glows like a light and must ask Inn workers how to turn it off. Jenny also comes to receive bizarre gifts on her tour, such as a dead frog playing a harp and a bowl of teeth, things which she comes to find perfectly normal. Jenny comes to sign at least five boobs on tour, meets Tom Brokaw but mistakes him for Dan Rather at first, and meets husbands who sympathize with Victor.

## Analysis

Victor has long ago come to accept his wife’s sense of humor and quirky ways. Victor embraces –and even fires back sometimes at –Jenny and her eccentricities. The reader should not that, while on tour for her book, husbands are happy to meet Jenny and to express their sympathies for Victor and what he must put up with. While Jenny may be able to argue that her father is unique, Victor can definitely argue that his wife is unique. When Jenny is told not to buy any new hand towels because she has just purchased new hand towels, she purchases a giant metal rooster instead. The lack of reaction on



Victor's part is reflective of his non-surprise at such a situation arising, as such things occur frequently. This is also true of Jenny's collection of taxidermy animals, obviously an influence gained from her father, and something which Victor has resigned himself to. Jenny may have unusual collecting habits, but Victor loves her deeply.

As Jenny concludes her memoir with a bonus chapter, she also expands on her argument that being human makes people who they are. No one is perfect. Everyone has flaws, issues, and situations they find themselves facing. For Jenny, her anxiety disorder is central to her life –but with the love of family and friends, such as Victor, Hailey, Lisa, and Laura, Jenny is better able to cope with these things. Rather than become angry with herself because of her anxiety disorder, or even her rheumatoid arthritis, Jenny comes to accept that this is who she is –and is happier in the end because she is not at war with herself over things she cannot change.

As Jenny concludes her memoir, she also once again argues that there is joy in embracing life's absurdities. Jenny's own life has been –and continues to be –full of many absurdities. Some are even of her own making –such as the giant metal rooster. Jenny's grudging teenage acceptance of her father's love of taxidermy leads to her own love of taxidermy as an adult, though the taxidermied animals that Jenny collects are in costumes (which arguably exceeds her father's love of taxidermy). Jenny comes to delight in her own collection of preserved animals. Life should be embraced despite its many absurdities. Embracing life means that joy can eventually be found in those absurdities one way or another. Jenny's anxiety and her blog ultimately leads to a book and a tour –things which she bravely faces. Rather than freaking out at the strange and absurd gifts she receives on the tour, Jenny embraces these gifts as a unique aspect of her life.

## Vocabulary

disgruntled, oxymoron, melancholy, noncommittally, magnanimously, senile, mimicked, metaphorically



# Important People

## Jenny Lawson

Jenny Lawson is a blogger and the author of the memoir *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*. Born in West Texas, Jenny struggles with awkwardness and a feeling of not fitting in because she suffers from an anxiety disorder that will not be diagnosed until she is an adult.

Along with her sister, Lisa, Jenny witnesses firsthand her father's strange behavior and sense of humor, which will come to heavily influence Jenny's own in the future.

Jenny meets and marries Victor, and they have a daughter named Hailey. To help deal with the anxiety, Jenny turns to blogging, and through blogging begins to make friends both online and in person. As a result, Jenny comes to accept who she is as a person, and she realizes that there is joy to be found in even the absurdities and difficulties of life. By treating her own life with a sense of humor, Jenny hopes to be able to help others come to be more accepting of theirs.

## Victor

Victor Lawson is the husband of Jenny, the father of Hailey, and the CEO of a medical software company. Resembling Neil Patrick Harris, Victor first meets Jenny at a bookstore not far from where they both attend college. Victor is from a wealthy background and is a member of the Young Republicans. Despite their different backgrounds, he and Jenny quickly fall in love and marry. Victor is very supportive of his wife's health issues. He learns how to tolerate and reciprocate Jenny's wry sense of humor.

## Jenny's Father

Jenny's father is the strongest childhood influence on Jenny, which in turn comes to affect her adulthood. Jenny's father has a strange and twisted sense of humor, such as the Stanley the Magic Squirrel incident. He makes a living through taxidermy. Jenny's father's uniqueness comes to impact and influence her own sense of humor and her love of taxidermy. Jenny lovingly refers to her father as insane throughout the memoir.

## Jenny's Mother

Jenny's mother is a sweet and patient woman from whom Jenny learns about tolerance and acceptance. Jenny's mother is the one who often deals with Jenny's father's oddball sense of humor. It is from Jenny's mother that Jenny learns much about being a



wife and mother, as well as how to be accepting of others despite differences. This is important when Jenny begins dating Victor, who is in most ways her exact opposite.

## Hailey

Hailey Lawson is the daughter of Jenny and Victor. Jenny and Victor deeply love Hailey, for she is Jenny's third, but first successful pregnancy. Jenny comes to be especially appreciative of Hailey because Hailey will spend days when Jenny is bedridden cuddling with Jenny and watching old episodes of *Little House on the Prairie*. Hailey helps Jenny focus on the small, good things in life that matter and minimize life's imperfections.

## Lisa

Lisa is Jenny's sister. While Jenny is a misfit in high school, Lisa fits in well and is very outgoing. Despite their differences, Jenny and Lisa are both very close. They want to make sure that their respective children are close as they grow up.

Even in adulthood, Jenny and Lisa must contend with their father's craziness –such as firing off a Civil War cannon for the Fourth of July with the kids around. Jenny talks to Lisa and visits with her regularly. She says that Lisa helps to keep her sane.

## Laura

Laura is the first real friend Jenny makes from blogging. Laura, also a blogger, becomes Jenny's first in-person as well as online friend. Laura is a kind and accepting woman who understands that Jenny is who she is and loves her for it. It is through Laura that Jenny comes to meet many other bloggers, and it is because of Laura that Jennie goes away on a Napa Valley getaway with other bloggers.

## Maggie

Maggie is a blogger and friend of Jenny's who organizes a four-day getaway to Napa Valley for a group of fellow female bloggers. It is through Laura that Jenny and Maggie meet one another. Maggie invites Jenny along for the retreat. Maggie is a very kind, warm, and accepting woman who has ensured all the girls on the trip are the same – and all treat Jenny with a gentle understanding, which means the world to Jenny.

## Barnaby

Barnaby Jones Pickles is the Lawson family pug. Jenny loves Barnaby, but she comes to suspect he wants to kill her when he leaps from her arms, causing her to cut herself with a chicken jerky dog treat. Barnaby is later found dead in the backyard, presumably



killed by a rattlesnake. After he is buried, vultures begin to dig him up to eat him, causing Jenny and Laura to have to exhume the dog. Afterward, he is cremated.

## **Alan**

Alan is the father-in-law of Jenny, and he is the stepdad of Victor. Alan is a kind and generous man who does all he can to be supportive of Victor and Jenny. This includes helping them to pack up for their move back to West Texas. During this time, he finds what he believes to be a bag of crack. It turns out to be instant-snow powder.



## Objects/Places

### Stanley the Magic Squirrel

Stanley the Magic Squirrel is the star character in one of the most traumatizing experiences from Jenny's childhood. Stanley appears when Jenny and Lisa are awakened as children late one night by their father. He introduces them to Stanley the Magic Squirrel. Remarkably, Stanley is able to do math and tricks. Then, Jenny discovers the squirrel is a corpse, and her father has stuck his hand up inside the squirrel to use it as a puppet. The squirrel's blood covers his shirt sleeve

Ironically, the horrific meeting with Stanley the Magic Squirrel fuels Jenny's quirky sense of humor when she becomes an adult.

### Taxidermy

Taxidermy is the process of preparing and preserving deceased animals by mounting and stuffing them. Jenny's father is a taxidermist, one who performs taxidermy. As a child, Jenny finds her father's taxidermy to be strange and off-putting. Over time, however, Jenny comes to accept this as just another one of her father's eccentric behaviors. Ironically, as an adult, Jenny collects animals that have been preserved by taxidermy. However, hers are dressed up in costumes.

### Jenny's Blog

Under the name The Bloggess, Jenny writes about her daily life on her blog. In her blog posts, she makes light of the situations in which she finds herself. She hopes that her writing will entertain and encourage others. Jenny comes to befriend Laura through blogging. They attend a blogging retreat with other bloggers in Napa Valley. The retreat helps Jenny to become more accepting of herself and of others. The success of Jenny's blog ultimately comes to secure a book deal for her.

### Little House on the Prairie Episodes

Little House on the Prairie episodes are watched by Jenny and Hailey. The episodes symbolize how Jenny appreciates the small but important things in life, even in difficult times. Jenny and Hailey watch Little House on the Prairie while cuddled up on days when Jenny's rheumatoid arthritis is so bad that she is bedridden. This prompts Jennie to encourage readers to focus on the simple, good things in life and not dwell on the negatives.



## Giant Metal Rooster

Jenny buys a giant metal rooster to teach her readers a lesson about picking battles with her. Her anecdote begins when Victor tells Jenny that since she had just purchased hand towels she could not purchase new ones. So, Jenny decides to purchase a giant metal rooster. She names the rooster Beyonce. She leaves Bdyonce at her front door for her husband to discover. Then, she positions it so it stares through his office window.

## Wall, Texas

Wall, Texas, is the hometown of Jenny and her family. Wall is so rural and so unknown that its high school yearbook features the title “Where’s Wall?” Despite the small town circumstances, Jenny comes to love Wall in her later years, and she looks back with nostalgia at the place. However, when subdivisions and new businesses come in, Jenny stops considering the place home any longer.

## San Angelo, Texas

San Angelo, Texas, is a town near Wall where Jenny and Victor both attend college. San Angelo is a small town, though much larger than Wall. During her college years, Jenny spends time between both Wall and San Angelo, where Victor has a dorm room. San Angelo is one of the places that begins to change much too quickly for Jenny as she grows older, moves away, and comes back to visit.

## Napa Valley, California

Napa Valley, California, is where Jenny attends a four-day getaway organized by Maggie for female bloggers. While there, Jenny makes some important realizations about herself. Jenny is worried about the retreat at first. However, she decides to approach it with an open mind. She comes to realize the other girls are warm, understanding, and accepting. She also comes to realize that the shields she has been putting up have prejudiced her against others by prejudging them for fear they will prejudice her. With these realizations, Jenny understands that she needs to be more understanding of others and their differences.

## West Texas Countryside

When Jenny and Victor become able to work from home, they move with Hailey and Barnaby to the West Texas countryside. They want their daughter to grow up with a taste of the country, and both long for the roots of their own childhood. The West Texas countryside is a mixed blessing for Jenny. On one hand she has beautiful scenery, peace, and wonderful neighbors. However, on the other hand, she must deal with



scorpions, vultures, and animals dying in the walls of the house. All in all, Jenny loves the countryside.

## Home

At first, home is a place and a time that Jenny struggles to fix. However, later on she discovers the real meaning of a home. Each time Jenny and Victor visit their hometown area, they are struck by the number of new developments and major retail businesses springing up in the area. Everything they knew as children and young adults is either changed or has disappeared completely. As a result, Jenny comes to reflect on the idea of home. She comes to understand that home is not a particular place. It is wherever Victor happens to be.



# Themes

## **Few people have a father quite like Jenny's.**

In the memoir *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, Jenny Lawson argues that few people have a father quite like her father. Jenny's father greatly influences her life, particularly her sense of humor. Jenny lovingly refers to her father as insane throughout her memoir.

As a child, Jenny is mortified by her father's taxidermy and bizarre sense of humor. The turkeys he brings home one day chase Jenny and her sister, Lisa, across the yard. They follow Jenny to school the next day.

While playing tag, Jenny accidentally runs into the middle of a deer carcass her father is preparing. The most traumatizing event of Jenny's childhood is when her father makes a puppet from the fresh corpse of a squirrel and names him Stanley the Magic Squirrel.

In her twenties, her father's behavior continues unabated. On one of Victor's first visits for family dinner, Jenny's father drops a live bobcat in his lap.

When Jenny and Lisa have children of their own, their father doubles down in his crazy but good intentioned antics. He releases a sack full of baby ducklings into a bedroom so his grandchildren can enjoy them. He fires a loaded Civil War cannon on the Fourth of July with his grand kids around.

Despite these eccentricities, Jenny comes to love them in the end for numerous reasons. Among these are a sense of continuity between the generations and a chance for the entire family to be close through humorous and bizarre occurrences. Jenny also comes to respect her father's love of taxidermy. Surprisingly, Jenny herself begins a taxidermy animal collection. Her animals, however, are dressed up in costumes.

## **Very human moments make people who they are.**

Very human moments make people who they are, argues Jenny Lawson in her memoir *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*. Very human moments include the accidents, mistakes, and misadventures people undertake, in addition to their own flaws, problems, or adversities (such as illnesses). Jenny thinks that people should not be ashamed of such things. Instead, they should embrace them because they do, to some degree, define people.

Jenny argues this through the example of herself and her own life. As a child and teenager, Jenny was very awkward in social situations and had a constant feeling of dread, as though something bad was always just about to happen. She always thought the worst of situations that have not yet come to pass. It is not until her twenties that Jenny is diagnosed with severe anxiety disorder. Even with the diagnosis, Jenny does



not have an easier time accepting herself. Only through blogging and the support of her family does Jenny come to fully accept herself because those around her at home and those whom she meets online accept her.

Jenny, despite the popularity of her blog and the fame she has attained as a result of that and her book, is not perfect. She does not know everything there is to know. She is still learning. Jenny learns important lessons from her Napa Valley trip. She recognizes that under different circumstances she never would have befriended any of the girls on the trip. Instead, she would have prejudged them because they were different from her. There is hypocrisy in Jenny judging others while not wanting others to judge Jenny. Jenny comes to realize this, and immediately changes course. As a result, she has a very good weekend and becomes friends with the other girls.

Despite the fun Jenny has from book tours, cable news television interviews, and her fame, Jenny's home life is very much normal and full of very human moments. Jenny candidly recounts many of these throughout her memoir, such as the time she got lost coming back to the house with milk or the time she put hand soap in the dishwasher and flooded the kitchen with foam.

Jenny relates other mishaps and misadventures, such as taking too many laxatives and not burying her dog deep enough to keep his corpse from vultures. Jenny demonstrates through many examples that neither she nor her life is perfect. However, her imperfect life filled with human moments have made her who she is now. She would not have it any other way.

## **People are defined by how they react to life's imperfect moments**

In her memoir *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, Jenny Lawson argues that people are defined by how they react to life's imperfect moments. Life will be full of twists, turns, and chaos. Some of it will be one's own making, while other things will be out of one's hands. Regardless, how one chooses to react to these things will determine the individual's nature. Jenny uses herself as an example of this.

When Jenny is younger, she is embarrassed and traumatized by her father's bizarre sense of humor. Rather than embracing her father for who he is, she spends much of her young life trying to either cope or avoid her father's insanity. This gives her a sense of feeling out of place. As an adult, Jenny learns to accept her father's antics. She reflects his quirkiness by becoming a taxidermist herself. In general, Jenny becomes a more accepting and tolerant person toward others and life.

When Jenny, Victor, and Hailey move into a country community in West Texas, things seem perfect at first. Jenny comes to discover their property must be haunted due to an adjacent cemetery and a series of animal-related issues. For example, the family experiences a scorpion infestation, the death of Barnaby the pug, and dead a squirrel trapped in the walls. Rather than recoiling in fear and fleeing the house in a panic,



Jenny decides to stand and fight for her home. After a Native American smudging ceremony and an exterminator's visit, peace finally comes to the house.

Jenny also tells about a number of simple, imperfect moments in daily life that shape her as a person. For example, when Jenny first meets Victor, he is everything she does not like in a guy –from being a Republican to being wealthy. Since she is willing to see through her personal dislikes, she is able to find the love of her life in Victor.

Getting lost on the way home from getting milk turns into a misadventure where Jenny must call her husband for help. Then, she gets lost all over again and her husband must come to get her. Jenny could become frustrated and annoyed with the experience. Instead, she decides to make light of the situation and enjoy it.

## **People must try to be appreciative of what they have, rather than what they have lost.**

In the memoir *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, Jenny Lawson believes that people must try to be appreciative of what they have, rather than what they have lost. Jenny notes that her imperfect life is complicated, but she must not let that get in the way of loving life itself as a whole. Dwelling on life's negatives makes for a negative life.

Jenny suffers from lifelong anxiety disorder, although it is not properly diagnosed until she is in her twenties. Jenny's anxiety disorder involves everything from social awkwardness to full-blown panic attacks. Instead of letting this derail her life, Jenny fights to get through her day-to-day life of being a working wife and mother. She draws strength from her loved ones. Even then, it is still difficult to deal with social situations. For that reason, Jennie turns to blogging.

Through blogging, Jenny meets many other understanding and accepting bloggers with whom she becomes friends. Jenny realizes this as a positive outcome of having an anxiety disorder. It allows her to have a new career as a writer.

When she travels back to her home town, Jenny comes to feel as if the world she knew as a child no longer exists. Interstate highways have replaced familiar landmarks. Then, she realizes that her home is wherever she is with Victor.

Jenny also becomes appreciative of the lessons that obstacles teach her. She agrees to go away to Napa Valley with Laura on a retreat for bloggers. Jenny worries about others judging her, and she finds it difficult to relax at first. Only by forcing herself to keep an open mind does Jenny finally loosen up and come to befriend the other bloggers. Jenny realizes that she would never have become friends with everyone had she prejudged them as she normally does everyone else. Her anxiety has caused her to put up shields to protect herself from being judged while simultaneously judging everyone else. Jenny learns a valuable lesson from this, and she is very appreciative for it because it moves her life in a positive direction despite the negative source of it (her anxiety).



When Jenny is diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, she comes to find most days feature some kind of pain. Some days she is pain-free, while other days she is bedridden. Jenny does not allow herself to dwell on the negatives of being down with rheumatoid arthritis. Instead, she notes that she can sometimes use bedridden time to write. While she has lost much freedom, she has also gained the chance to spend more time with Hailey. Jenny cuddles with Hailey on bedridden days, and the two watch old episodes of *Little House on the Prairie*. Despite being bedridden, Jenny finds that the time she spends with her daughter is worth the pain. She focuses on the small, simple, good things such as spending time with her daughter rather than the fact that she is bedridden.

## **There is joy in embracing life's absurdities.**

In her memoir *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, Jenny Lawson argues that there is joy in life's absurdities. Some things are out of one's hands, while others are of one's own making. Jenny explains that only by embracing these absurdities does one find any joy in life.

When Jenny is younger, she is horrified by her father's bizarre sense of humor and his taxidermy. Jenny's greatest horror comes not only through Stanley the Magic Squirrel, but when her father throws a live bobcat on Victor's lap during one of his first visits. Jenny and Victor both come to appreciate Jenny's father's sense of humor. They even feed into it –such as when Victor makes a wolf-faced medicine bag for Jenny's father.

As an adult, Jenny ensures her own child is exposed to her father's sense of humor, and this brings about a closeness of family and a sense of continuity between generations. By embracing such absurdity, Jenny ensures a deeper love and closeness of family –and finds joy in doing so.

When Jenny and Victor move to the countryside in West Texas, Jenny never expects to come to believe that their house is haunted. Between a scorpion and mold infestation, Jenny refuses to be chased from her house and her new life in the country. She stands and fights by conducting an Indian smudging ceremony and hiring an exterminator. She is able to calm whatever restless spirits may be causing her so many problems. Jenny makes light of the entire situation, cracking jokes and finding humor in the insanity of it all. Jenny is able to appreciate, rather than be repelled by her new home. By embracing the absurdity of living in a haunted place, Jenny is able to find joy in living there.

Jenny comes to enjoy absurdities of her own making by making light of them. When Victor refuses to let Jenny buy any new hand towels because she has just bought new hand towels, she gets even with him by buying a giant metal rooster to put in the yard. She positions the rooster so it looks in at Victor when he works. Victor grins and bears the absurdity, while Jenny enjoys the chaos she has caused.

Jenny also finds humor when she gets herself into a situation from taking too many laxatives with the intent of doing a body cleanse. This becomes fodder for her blog and



her book. It is a humorous anecdote that demonstrates finding humor in imperfect outcomes of one's own making is preferable to fretting over them.

# Styles

## Structure

Jenny Lawson divides her memoir *Let's Pretend That Never Happened* into titled chapters that follow the course of her life from childhood through her most recent book tour. This simple and straightforward approach to her book is reflective of the fact that it is a memoir, which in turn traces poignant and important moments of her life from her time as a child through her present life.

Each chapter's title reflects the contents of that chapter. For example, the chapter *There's No Place Like Home* explores Jenny's realization that home is not a particular place. It is wherever she is with her husband, Victor.

The chapter titled *Making Friends With Girls* recounts Jenny's four-day trip to Napa Valley with several other female bloggers.

The paperback version of the memoir (used by this study guide) includes a bonus chapter detailing Jenny's time on the road touring for the hardcover edition of the same memoir.

## Perspective

Jenny Lawson tells her memoir *Let's Pretend That Never Happened* from her own point of view in the first-person, often breaking the fourth wall to directly address her readers. Since the book takes the form of a memoir, it is logical that the story be told by the person who lives it, Jenny.

Jenny speaks directly to readers at numerous points throughout the novel in order to directly engage and relate to her audience. She notes in the untitled introduction of the book, referencing both herself and the readers of the book, "I've reserved the very best stories of my life for this book... to celebrate the strange, and to give thanks for the bizarre. Because you are defined not by life's imperfect moments, but by your reaction to them."

## Tone

Jenny Lawson tells her memoir *Let's Pretend That Never Happened* in language that is casual, engaging, humorous, and profane. Jenny, who is from a typical American background heavily flavored by the casual atmosphere of Texas, writes as a regular American for other regular Americans and readers throughout the world. She enjoys using, in humor and in sarcasm, the southern colloquialism "y'all." She never hesitates to use profanity in copious amounts.



Jenny is direct in her writing, never attempting to sugarcoat even the most terrifying, disturbing, or disgusting situations. The situations range from telling about Stanley the Magic Squirrel to taking too many laxatives. Jenny makes light of her life and life in general; therefore, it is only natural that she adopts a humorous tone, such as when she writes “My father was perpetually disappointed by our lack of trust, but I reminded him that just last week he’d brought his own mother a box he’d filled with an angry live snake that he’d found on the road on the way to her house” (45).



## Quotes

This book is a love letter to my family. It's about the surprising discovery that the most terribly human moments –the ones we want to pretend never happened –are the very same moments that make us who we are today.

-- Jenny Lawson (Untitled Introduction paragraph n/a)

**Importance:** Prior to the Introduction, Jenny Lawson provides an untitled preface that explains the purpose of the book, which is to write a love letter to her family. It is her way of saying thank you to them for teaching her lessons in life. In the untitled preface, she also tells the theme of the book which is that human moments make people who they are in life. This was the most important lesson that her family taught her. It is the one for which she is most grateful.

I've reserved the very best stories of my life for this book... to celebrate the strange, and to give thanks for the bizarre. Because you are defined not by life's imperfect moments, but by your reaction to them.

-- Jenny Lawson (Untitled Introduction paragraph n/a)

**Importance:** As Jenny Lawson continues her untitled introduction to the book, she reveals a second important theme in the book. The second theme is that human life is not defined by imperfect moments; it is defined by how people react to those moments. This is especially important for Jenny in her own life.

My father was perpetually disappointed by our lack of trust, but I reminded him that just last week he'd brought his own mother a box he'd filled with an angry live snake that he'd found on the road on the way to her house.

-- Jenny Lawson (Jenkins, You Motherfucker paragraph n/a)

**Importance:** Jenny explains that her father's penchant for doing insane things has her wary of him whenever he says he has something to show them. When he brings them out at night to show them what is in his pickup truck, they distrust him. However, the girls are surprised and relieved to find a dozen turkey in his truck.

Pretty much everyone hates high school. It's measure of your humanity, I suspect.

-- Jenny Lawson (If You Need an Arm Condom, It Might Be Time to Reevaluate Some of Your Life Choices (Alternate Title: High School is Life's Way of Giving You a Record Low to Judge the Rest of Your Life By) paragraph n/a)

**Importance:** Jenny explains that most people hate high school and she hates it, too. Jenny attempts to reinvent herself in high school, but she is unable to do so because she has grown up with everyone in her class. When she goes through a rough time of feeling like she does not fit in with the other kids, she tries drugs

All that mattered was that we loved each other.

-- Jenny Lawson (Married on the Fourth of July paragraph n/a)



**Importance:** Jenny and Victor are married on the Fourth of July. They have a simple ceremony in a chapel and a short reception. It is nothing fancy, but Jenny does not care about this. All that matters to her is that she loves her new husband, Victor.

I rocked in silence, and realized for the first time that 'home' wasn't this place anymore. It was wherever Victor was."

-- Jenny Lawson (There's No Place Like Home paragraph n/a)

**Importance:** After Jenny and Victor get married, they move to Houston. Each time that they go back home to visit family, things have changed. There are new subdivisions and a Starbucks in San Angelo. Jenny is heartbroken, missing the places she called home as a child. Her home town will never be the same. Then, Jenny realizes that home is not a place. Her home is wherever Victor happens to be.

Personally, I always labeled myself as 'socially awkward' and reassured myself that there are lots of perfectly normal people who don't like to talk in public.

-- Jenny Lawson (And Then I Got Stabbed in the Face by a Serial Killer paragraph n/a)

**Importance:** Jenny reveals that her anxiety disorder has not diminished with age. It continues to matter in her daily life. Even simple tasks like talking to a stranger at the grocery store is an ordeal for Jenny. After believing that the anxiety is her own fault and beating herself up over it, Jenny learns that she has an anxiety disorder. This helps her to better accept and understand herself.

In short? It is exhausting being me.

-- Jenny Lawson (And Then I Got Stabbed in the Face by a Serial Killer paragraph n/a)

**Importance:** As Jenny reveals she has anxiety disorder, she also notes how difficult her life can be because of it. For example, she has severe difficulty writing e-mails. She explains this will come as a surprise to many readers of her blog. She overthinks everything in her life, which leads to mental and emotional stress.

Women scare me enough, but bloggers can be even more frightening to deal with. Most bloggers are emotionally unstable and are often awkward in social situations, which is why so many of us turned to blogging in the first place. Also, they are always looking for something to write about, so if you fuck something up it will be blogged, Facebooked, and retweeted until your death.

-- Jenny Lawson (Making Friends with Girls paragraph n/a)

**Importance:** In this quote, Jenny is explaining her reasoning for becoming a blogger and her fears about going to a blogger getaway for four days with Laura. Jenny blogs because it allows her to express herself without awkward social encounters. Blogging keeps her from dealing with people fact-to-face. She can consider what she says as she writes it rather than just randomly blurting things out (such as being stabbed in the face by a serial killer at the Halloween party). At the same time, she knows that by going



away in person with other bloggers, she opens herself up to being blogged about. That could be very bad.

I'd used those same shields to judge and dismiss people who I suspected had more than me, in the exact same way that I'd been judged for having less as a kid.

-- Jenny (Making Friends with Girls paragraph n/a)

**Importance:** When Jenny goes away for a four-day retreat with a group of other female bloggers, she never expects to enjoy herself or to make good friends. Jenny realizes that she has built walls to keep others out and that she has also been using the walls to judge other people. She comes to recognize that, under different circumstances, she would have prejudged all of the girls she was with at the retreat. It is an eye-opening and important lesson.

I try to be appreciative of what I have instead of bitter about what I've lost.

-- Jenny Lawson (Stabbed by Chicken paragraph n/a)

**Importance:** After Jenny is diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, she comes to value the things that she has in her life. Though she has lost a relatively physically pain-free life to a handful of pain-free days and days of being bedridden, she has a lot for which to be grateful. For example, when she is bedridden with pain, she is thankful for her daughter cuddling up with her and watching Little House on the Prairie episodes.

There is joy in embracing –rather than running screaming from –the utter absurdity of life.

-- Jenny Lawson (Epilogue paragraph n/a)

**Importance:** Jenny explains that life is not only about how one reacts to difficult situations. Embracing the absurdities and craziness of life is important, too. For example, Jenny comes to love her father's crazy ways. Also, she loves to be able to go at it with Victor, such as when she buys a giant rooster because he refuses to let her buy new hand towels. To embrace crazy situations-rather than to shy away from them-helps give people a better sense of life. In turn, people learn to better appreciate their lives.



## Topics for Discussion

### **Jenny's father is unique.**

Jenny argues that her father is unique, and she lovingly calls him insane. What evidence does she provide to support this claim? How does Jenny deal with her father as a child? How does this change by the time she is an adult and has Hailey?

### **Jenny's father influences her life.**

Jenny's father serves to be a tremendous influence in Jenny's life despite her misgivings about her father when she is younger. How does Jenny's father come to influence her own life? In what ways does he influence her life? How does this affect Jenny's own career in writing?

### **Human moments are important.**

What are human moments? What are the human moments that Jenny speaks about in her memoir? How do these moments define and shape who she is as a person? Why does Jenny place so much importance on human moments making people who they are?

### **Human moments make people who they are as individuals.**

What are some of the day-to-day human moments that Jenny has? What do these daily human moments reveal about Jenny as a person? Why is this important both to Jenny and to her reaching out to readers?

### **Imperfect moments occur in life.**

Why does Jenny argue that people are defined by how they react to life's imperfect moments? What sorts of moments does she have in mind regarding her own life? Discuss three of Jenny's personal moments.

### **People are defined by how they react to life's imperfect moments**

Some of life's most imperfect moments for Jenny come in her new house in the country. What do these imperfect moments entail? How does Jenny react to them? How do her



reactions to these moments help to define her as a person? Why does Jenny relate these stories and tribulations to readers?

## **Try to be appreciative of what one has, rather than what one has lost.**

Jenny argues in her memoir that one should try to be appreciative of what one has, rather than what one has lost. How does Jenny explain this? What examples does she use from her own life to illustrate this? Why is this message so important for Jenny to convey to readers?

## **An individual's definition of home can change throughout life.**

One of Jenny's most poignant moments in her memoir is when she discusses the perception of home. Prior to the Starbucks event, what is Jenny's definition of home? When does Jenny's definition of home actually change? Why?

## **There is joy in embracing life's absurdities.**

Jenny argues that there is joy in embracing life's absurdities. What kinds of absurdities does Jenny have in mind? What examples of absurdities from her own life does Jenny relate? How does Jenny embrace these absurdities? How do the absurdities affect her life after she embraces them?

## **There is joy in embracing the uniqueness of other people.**

One of the greatest absurdities Jenny comes to embrace in her life is her own father and his ways. Why does it take so long for Jenny to embrace her father and his absurdities and insanity? Why does Jenny come around to embrace him? How does this affect and influence Jenny's life, and her own family?