

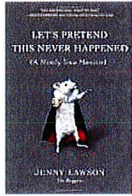


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## Let's Pretend This Never Happened (Lawson)

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### Let's Pretend This Never Happened (A Mostly True Memoir)

Jenny Lawson, 2012

Penguin Group USA

336 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780399159015

#### Summary

For fans of Tina Fey and David Sedaris—Internet star Jenny Lawson, aka The Bloggess, makes her literary debut.

Jenny Lawson realized that the most mortifying moments of our lives—the ones we'd like to pretend never happened—are in fact the ones that define us. In the #1 *New York Times* bestseller, *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, Lawson takes readers on a hilarious journey recalling her bizarre upbringing in rural Texas, her devastatingly awkward high school years, and her relationship with her long-suffering husband, Victor.

Chapters include: "Stanley the Magical, Talking Squirrel"; "A Series of Angry Post-It Notes to My Husband"; "My Vagina Is Fine. Thanks for Asking"; "And Then I Snuck a Dead Cuban Alligator on an Airplane." Pictures with captions (no one would believe these things without proof) accompany the text. (*From the publisher.*)

#### Author Bio

- Birth—N/A
- Where—N/A
- Education—B.A., Angelo State University
- Currently—lives in Texas Hill Country

Jennifer Lawson is an American journalist and blogger from Wall, Texas. She is a graduate of Angelo State University. She is the author of *The Bloggess* and *Ill Advised* blogs, co-author of *Good Mom/Bad Mom* on the *Houston Chronicle* and a columnist for *SexIs* magazine. She is best known for her irreverent writing style. She also used to write an advice column named "Ask The Bloggess" for *The Personal*

*News Network* (PNN.com) until she quit because they stopped paying her. She suffers from rheumatoid arthritis, OCD, depression and an anxiety disorder.

She was recognized by the Nielsen ratings as one of the Top 50 Most Powerful Mom Bloggers and *Forbes* listed thebloggess.com as one of their Top 100 Websites for Women. She was a finalist in the 2010 Weblog awards for Best Writing and Most Humorous Writer, and a finalist in the 2011 Weblog awards for Best Writing, Most Humorous Writer and Weblog of the Year. In 2011 *The Huffington Post* named her the "Greatest Person of the Day" for her work in raising money for struggling families in December 2010. She was also interviewed on CBC News Network's *Connect with Mark Kelley* during the fundraising campaign.

She has written an autobiography called *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, released on April 17, 2012 by Amy Einhorn Books which was, on May 6th, 2012, the number 1 *New York Times* bestseller. (From Wikipedia.)

#### Book Reviews

Lawson relishes revealing plenty about her life, except perhaps just how much she may exaggerate about it. Fall into her writing, though, and she proves that a memoir need not be exact to be enjoyable. She removes the onus of perfectly reported recollections and leads her readers down the rabbit hole of her memories.... The result: a satisfying, blithe tale of a curious adulthood and curiously childhood. The book skims through a series of comic essays, akin to [David] Sedaris if he were an anxiety-stricken Texas mother with a fascination with the zombie apocalypse.

**Melissa Bell - Washington Post**

Jenny Lawson is hilarious, snarky, witty, totally inappropriate, and 'Like Mother Teresa, Only Better.'

**Marie Claire**

In punchy chapters that cover a fairly uneventful life in the southern Republican regions, blogger Lawson achieves an exaggerated sarcasm that occasionally attains a belly laugh from the reader ("I grew up a poor black girl in New York. Except replace 'black' with 'white' and 'New York' with 'rural Texas'"), but mostly descends into rants about bodily functions and dead animals spiced with profanity. The daughter of a taxidermist whose avid foraging and hunting filled their "violently rural" Wall, Tex., house with motley creatures like raccoons and turkeys and later triggered some anxiety disorder, Lawson did not transcend her childhood horrors so much as return to them, marrying at age 22 a fellow student at a local San Angelo college, Victor, and settling down in the town with a job in "HR" while Victor worked "in computers." In random anecdotal segments Lawson treats the vicissitudes of her 15-year marriage, the birth of daughter Hailey after many miscarriages, some funny insider secrets from the HR office, and an attempt to learn to trust women by spending a weekend in California wine country with a group of bloggers. With little substantive

writing on these subjects, however, Lawson's puerile sniggering and potty mouth gets old fast.

***Publishers Weekly***

She's famed on the Internet as the Bloggess ("like Mother Teresa, only better") and also writes an (I hope) tongue-in-check parenting column and a self-styled satirical sex column that must be sizzly because my office computer denies me access. Here, Lawson revisits her rural Texas childhood. With lots of media attention expected and comparisons to Chelsea Handler, this book is one to watch.

***Library Journal***

In this mordant memoir, Lawson, who calls herself "The Bloggess," displays the wit that's made her a hit on the Web.... Lawson, whose award-winning website, TheBloggess.com, averages more than half-a-million page-views per month, ... is funny, but her over-the-top tales eventually take their toll, prompting jaded readers to wonder how much of this stuff she's making up.

***Booklist***

A mostly funny, irreverent memoir on the foibles of growing up weird. In blogger Lawson's debut book, "The Bloggess" (thebloggess.com) relies entirely on her life stories to drive an unconventional narrative. While marketed as nonfiction, it's a genre distinction the author employs loosely (a point made clear in the book's subtitle).... While Lawson fails to strike the perfect balance between pathos and punch line, she creates a comic character that readers will engage with in shocked dismay as they gratefully turn the pages.

***Kirkus Reviews***

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**Discussion Questions**

1. What specific aspects of Lawson's childhood particularly intrigued or repelled you? Is it possible to have both reactions at the same time?
2. What are some ways in which the book explores themes of individuality?
3. Were you surprised by the ending of Stanley the Magical Squirrel? Is it possible to find laughter in such horrific stories?
4. Lawson describes her hometown as "violently rural" and struggles to find a point to its existence. In your opinion, did growing up in this town help or hinder her?
5. Some reviewers have said this book is about individuality, and others feel it's a book about family. What do you believe is the overall theme of the book?
6. Lawson and her husband have extremely different personalities, beliefs, and

political backgrounds, yet they've managed to stay happily married. What is behind the success of their relationship? In what ways can being opposites help people in a relationship?

7. Lawson wrote about her OCD, phobias, and other mental struggles. Did this make her more or less relatable to you? Have you or has someone you know had a phobia or mental illness so severe that it affected your life?

8. Lawson made the decision to infuse humor into even her most traumatic stories of dealing with infertility, loss, and arthritis. What do you think of this choice? Have you ever used humor for healing?

9. Lawson had family members read and vet the book before it was published, giving them the opportunity to give their opinions on the writing. Is this a good idea for a memoirist? Is it ultimately stifling or respectful? Are there times when someone's life story is not his or hers to tell?

10. What did you think about the author's voice, her use of run-on sentences, stream-of-consciousness narrative, profanity, and invented words to create a unique narrative?

11. In the chapter about infertility, Lawson discusses her struggles with suicidal tendencies. What purpose does this section have in the narrative?

12. This book deals with mental illness, poverty, suicide, miscarriage, disease, and other traumatic subjects, yet most people consider it a humor book. Do you agree with this classification?

13. What was your favorite story? Why?

14. Of all the people described in the book, whom did you most relate to or empathize with, and why?

15. What do you think Lawson was looking for in her life? Do you think she has found it?

*(Questions issued by publisher.)*

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## About the Author

Full text biography:

### Jenny Lawson

Birth Date : 1973

Place of Birth : United States,Texas,Austin

Nationality: American

Occupation : Journalist

Table of Contents:

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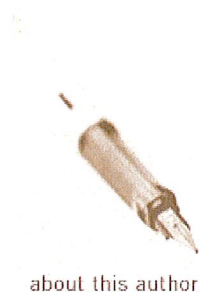
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about this author

### Awards:

"Top 50 Most Powerful Mom Bloggers" citation, Nielsen Ratings; "Top 100 Websites for Women" citation, *Forbes*, for *The Bloggess*; "Greatest Person of the Day" citation, *Huffington Post*, 2011, for charity work.

### Personal Information:

Born December 29, 1979; married; husband's name Victor; children: Hailey. **Education:** Graduated from Angelo State University. **Addresses:** Home: TX. **E-mail:** jenny@thebloggess.com.

### Career Information:

Writer. Creator of *The Bloggess* (2007) and *Ill-Advised* blogs. *Houston Chronicle*, "Good Mom/Bad Mom" columnist; *Sex/s* magazine, columnist; *The Personal News Network*, "Ask the Bloggess" columnist.

### Writings:

- *Let's Pretend This Never Happened: (A Mostly True Memoir)*, G.P. Putnam's Sons (New York, NY), 2012.

### Sidelights:

Blogger and columnist Jenny Lawson launched her career by founding the Web site *The Bloggess* in 2007. She went on to parlay her immense blogging success into a publishing deal for her 2012 book *Let's Pretend This Never Happened: (A Mostly True Memoir)*. As Christopher Kelly pointed out in the *New York Times*, Lawson "provides hope for those still tapping away on laptops that the Internet can be a breeding ground for serious (or at least seriously funny) writing. In 2010, after more than a decade of blogging, first for the *Houston Chronicle*, and then as author of *The Bloggess*, Ms. Lawson ended up at the center of a two-day auction among 12 publishing houses for the rights to her debut memoir."

Lawson's debut, however, was begun long before *The Bloggess*, as she initially wrote *Let's Pretend This Never Happened* as a personal family history. The book focuses largely on the milestones in Lawson's family life, describing her upbringing in rural Texas, her marriage at the age of twenty-two, and the birth of her daughter, Hailey. The sarcastic tone that made *The Bloggess* famous also drives *Let's Pretend This Never Happened* as Lawson details her childhood in a Republican home with a taxidermist father who filled the house with stuffed raccoons and other creatures. The meat of the animals that adorned her living room was stored in the fridge, and Lawson traces the roots of her anxiety

disorder to these memories. From there, Lawson recounts meeting her husband in college, her work in human resources, and a series of miscarriages before her daughter was conceived.

Addressing Lawson's career and memoir in an online *Huffington Post* profile, Lisa Belkin wrote that the author "is a big booming voice on the web. Her online name--the Bloggess--demands attention (and, looked at through a certain lens, worship). Her tales are bawdy, irreverent, searingly honest, big and loud. Her following is outsized, too, with 2 to 3 million hits per month. She keeps her readers in stitches (who SAYS women can't be funny?), and she proves that blogging can be a force for good ... just ask the thousands of needy families she's helped through her personal do-good, pay-it-forward campaigns." Belkin added: "In her new book ... her voice is much the same." A contributor to the *Definitely Not for the Birds* Web site also highlighted the humorous tone in *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, asserting, "Overall, this book was quite funny, and I think Lawson would be really cool to hang out with. If you are looking for something light & funny, including many moments where you literally laugh out loud, this is for you. There are some serious moments, but I think humor reigns supreme."

Commending the memoir in her *Washington Post Book World* review, Melissa Bell found that "the humor ... allows Lawson to dwell lightly on some of the more painful parts of her life--those memories that the title suggests might be best left repressed. She skims past her anorexia; she makes light of her anxiety disorder; and while she knocks you out with the sorrow of her miscarriages, she has you laughing by the next page." Bell went on to conclude, "The tale is meandering, though never boring. ... The plot, though, is never the point. It's following the strange paths down which Lawson's mind wanders." Along these lines, a *Kirkus Reviews* critic called *Let's Pretend This Never Happened* "a mostly funny, irreverent memoir on the foibles of growing up weird," one that "creates a comic character that readers will engage with."

#### Related Information:

#### BOOKS

- Lawson, Jenny, *Let's Pretend This Never Happened: (A Mostly True Memoir)*, G.P. Putnam's Sons (New York, NY), 2012.

#### PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, April 1, 2012, Allison Block, review of *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, p. 19.
- *California Bookwatch*, May, 2012, review of *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, April 1, 2012, review of *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*.
- *Maclean's*, May 7, 2012, Patricia Dawn Robertson, review of *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, p. 61.
- *New York Times*, May 6, 2012, Christopher Kelly, "From Misfit with Blog to Author with Deal," p. A31B.
- *Publishers Weekly*, March 12, 2012, review of *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, p. 55.
- *Washington Post Book World*, June 1, 2012, Melissa Bell, review of *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*.

#### ONLINE

- *Definitely Not for the Birds*, <http://definitelynotforthebirds.wordpress.com/> (May 3, 2013), review of *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*.
- *Huffington Post*, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/> (April 18, 2012), Lisa Belkin, "Let's Pretend This Never Happened: How the Bloggess Jenny Lawson Found Her Voice Online."
- *Ill-Advised*, <http://thetir.cafemom.com/> (August 21, 2013), author blog
- *Oprah.com*, <http://www.oprah.com/> (August 21, 2013), Abbe Wright, review of *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*
- *WBEZ 91.5 Web site*, <http://www.wbez.org/> (December 7, 2012), Claire Zulkey, "The Jenny Larson Interview."\*

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**LET'S PRETEND THIS NEVER HAPPENED (A MOSTLY TRUE MEMOIR)**

**Jenny Lawson**

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[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

This memoir of mom blogger Lawson's eccentric Texas childhood and rambunctious married life is not Saint Augustine's Confessions or Emma Goldman's Living My Life, but it does fit the new life-writing-meets-Tumblr genre. It's a manic set of essays that pays tribute to her rural upbringing ("Most people don't go out into the woods to catch armadillos so that their father can race them professionally"), while simultaneously nodding and winking at her primary reader--the loyal members of her extensive blogging community. The influences of Chicago satirist Jen Lancaster and wickedly funny Atlanta columnist Hollis Gillespie are evident here, along with a sprinkling of Amy Sedaris's Simple Times: Crafts for Poor People.

Lawson's is a popular blog--she draws a half-million readers a month--but her rambling style occasionally stalls when she attempts the tightrope walk that is the essay form. In an ideal world, Lawson's self-conscious banter would be trimmed to allow her strongest material to take centre stage. Still, she has a storyteller's timing and instincts. The best material comes out of Lawson's goofy adventures with her husband (and straight man), Victor. He reminded me of Phyllis Diller's hapless husband, "Fang."

A heady mix of bad-boy shocker Borat and critter-collecting Elly May Clampett, Lawson has written a bold, raucous adventure of a book.

Robertson, Patricia Dawn

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