

A photograph of a wooden boardwalk winding through a forest. The boardwalk is made of dark wooden planks and is covered with fallen autumn leaves. The forest is dense with tall, thin trees, many of which have yellow and orange leaves, indicating the fall season. The sky is overcast and grey. The word "INTRODUCTION" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters in the center of the image.

# INTRODUCTION

Hey, person I can't see, I'm Jenn McAllister. I'm used to talking to people I can't see, because I've been making and posting videos on YouTube for almost seven years under the username Jennxpenn. In other words, I'm pretty much a really professional Internet person. If you've watched some of my videos you probably already know a lot about me. Like that the title of this book is my sarcastic Twitter bio or how I came up with my username for my YouTube channel, which I created on January 15, 2009. I wanted my username to be Jennpenn because my name is Jenn (obviously) and at the time my friend called me "Penn," but that was already taken, so I put an *x* in the middle. I think Jennxpenn sounds catchier than Jennpenn anyway. You may also know I won't hesitate to prank call my own mother and tell her that I'm pregnant or I got arrested. Or that I once held the world record for most alternate-hand selfies. Also, I hate the word *selfie*.

So much of my life is on the Internet: what I like, what I don't like, what I look like, who my friends are, where I'm from. But so much of it isn't. Even if you've watched every single one of my videos, there's still a lot of stuff you don't know about me. For example, I bet you didn't know I developed a paralyzing fear of butterflies after watching the episode of *SpongeBob SquarePants* where Wormy turns into a butterfly. That close-up scene when he lands on the glass is engraved into my brain. Or, on a more serious note, I bet you didn't know I used to suffer from extreme anxiety and often had panic attacks. There's a reason you don't know that stuff about me: I didn't want you to.

Even though I post weekly videos of myself on the Internet, I've always been a pretty private person. When I first started posting videos, I didn't want to tell anyone how old I was or my last name, basically because I believed everyone on the Internet was a creepy dude with pizza sauce on his sweatpants living in his mother's basement. Obviously, I've learned since then that's not true. So, for the record, I'm nineteen and my last name is McAllister (in case you didn't read the first sentence of this book). When I got my first PO box, I picked a post office in New Jersey—even though I lived in a town called Holland in Bucks County, Pennsylvania—so people wouldn't try to figure out where I lived (also because it was

cheaper). But there were reasons beyond a fear of stalkers and weirdos that I didn't reveal a lot of things about who I am; I wanted to put on the facade that I was perfect or, at the very least, normal.

I am aggressively not perfect. I fall down the stairs an inordinate amount. I say the word *coffee* like it has a *w* in it. And when I don't have the energy to clean my room, I'll just shove everything into the corner so it doesn't show up on camera when I make my videos. Perfectionism is something I've always struggled with. Like writing this book, for example. While I was writing this book, I had this notion that whatever I wrote had to be exactly right because it was going to be published, and therefore, short of the apocalypse or some sort of *1984* book-burning situation, it's always going to be there. I spent forever reading sentences over and over again until my eyes turned red and I had a pounding headache. I was the same way in school; I was so nervous about turning in papers because I always felt like there was more I could be doing. With my videos, I'm never really "done." I always try to add more to them until eventually I decide I have to stop working on them. But if I kept working on this book until it was "perfect" I would be working on it forever, because perfection is not really a thing.

When I first started getting sucked into the Internet, I read a quote somewhere that went, "Never tell anyone your problems. Twenty percent don't care and the other eighty percent are glad you have them." I went through life with the mind-set that if I talked about certain things, people either wouldn't care or would use them to try to tear me down. I know now that's just sort of an awful way to live. It's good to talk about our faults, our fears, our weaknesses, and our experiences with our close friends for a lot of reasons. For one thing, talking about things takes away their power. When you can say out loud, "You know what, I am not a great dancer, but that's okay," it makes it a whole lot easier to attempt to twerk to Beyoncé at a school dance. But for me, the most important reason to talk about these things is that someone might be going through exactly what I've been through.

This book is full of the things you don't know about me. These are the stories about the times I didn't feel normal, the stories I wanted to forget. But they are also the stories of how I became the person

I am today, how I get to live my dreams and do what I love every single day—make YouTube videos for all you beautiful people—and more. I wanted to write this book because I wanted you guys to know that I believe in you, even if you don't feel like anyone else does. I am living proof that if you're passionate about something and you have faith in yourself, there is literally nothing you can't do. If you know what you want and work hard at it, no one can stop you. Not even that asshole in your class who shoots spitballs at the back of your head. Not even him.

Love,

Jenn

P.S.

Except for YouTubers and my two best friends from home (Hi, Jordyn and Gabriela!), I have changed all of the names of the people mentioned in this book to protect the guilty. Partly because I didn't want to give these people the satisfaction of seeing their names in print, but also because hopefully they aren't harassing anyone anymore. I have changed, and it's possible they have, too. Just like I don't want anyone to tell me who I am, I didn't want to tell them who they are. The people in this book are characters in my story; I wouldn't want to tell their story for them.