

YES
PLEASE



AMY POEHLER



yes please



yes please

AMY POEHLER



DEY ST.

AN IMPRINT OF WILLIAM MORROW PUBLISHERS

Dedication

For my bold and beautiful boys.

contents

Dedication

Writing Is Hard: A Preface
Instructions for How to Use This Book

PART ONE:

SAY

WHATEVER YOU WANT

How I Fell in Love with Improv: Boston
Plain Girl vs. the Demon
Laughing to Crying to Laughing
The Day I Was Born
Sorry, Sorry, Sorry
My Books on Divorce
Talk to Yourself Like You're Ninety

PART TWO:

DO

WHATEVER YOU LIKE

How I Fell in Love with Improv: Chicago
The Russians Are Coming
Humping Justin Timberlake
Every Mother Needs a Wife
My World-Famous Sex Advice
Gimme That Pudding
Bad Sleeper

PART THREE:

BE

WHOEVER YOU ARE

How I Fell in Love with Improv: New York
Parents Just Do Understand
Don't Forget to Tip Your Waitresses
Treat Your Career Like a Bad Boyfriend
Partner in Crime
I'm So Proud of You
Let's Build a Park
Things They Don't Tell You About the Biz
Time Travel
Obligatory Drug Stories, or Lessons I Learned on Mushrooms
My Boys

The Robots Will Kill Us All: A Conclusion
Acknowledgments

About the Author
Credits
Copyright
About the Publisher

writing is hard:

a preface

MEADOWBROOK SCHOOL
BURLINGTON, MA

NAME Amy Poehler TEACHER Cynthia Systrom
GRADE Kdg. DATE June, 1977

ACADEMIC READINESS:

	ALWAYS	USUALLY	SELDOM
Completes work		✓	
Knows letters	✓		
Knows beginning sounds	✓		
Knows numbers	✓		
Counts by rote	✓		
Listens carefully	✓		
Retains information	✓		
Contributes to group	✓		

COMMENTS: *Amy is an excellent student.*

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT:

	ALWAYS	USUALLY	SELDOM
Relates well to children	✓		
Relates well to adults	✓		
Shares willingly	✓		
Enjoys large group activities	✓		
Enjoys small group activities	✓		
Participates enthusiastically	✓		

COMMENTS:

I LIKE HARD WORK AND I DON'T LIKE PRETENDING THINGS ARE PERFECT. I have learned that about myself. And I don't have any fear of writing. I have been writing my whole life: stories and plays and sketches and scripts and poems and jokes. Most feel alive. And fluid. Breathing organisms made better by the people who come into contact with them. But this book has nearly killed me. Because, you see, a book? A book has a cover. They call it a jacket

and that jacket keeps the inside warm so that the words stay permanent and everyone can read your genius thoughts over and over again for years to come. Once a book is published it can't be changed, which is a stressful proposition for this improviser who relies on her charm. I've been told that I am "better in the room" and "prettier in person." Both these things are not helpful when writing a book. I am looking forward to a lively book-on-tape session with the hope that Kathleen Turner agrees to play me when I talk about some of my darker periods. One can dream.

It's clear to me now that I had no business agreeing to write this book. I have a job that keeps me shooting twelve hours a day, plus two children under six. I am going through a divorce and producing many projects and falling in love and trying to make appointments for cranial massage. All of these things are equally wonderful and horrible and keep me just off balance and busy enough to make spending hours alone writing seem like a terrible idea. Plus, I am forty-two, which is smack-dab in the middle. I haven't lived a full enough life to look back on, but I am too old to get by on being pithy and cute. I know enough now to know I know nothing. I am slugging away every day, just like you. But nonetheless, here we are. I've written a book. You have it.

Everyone lies about writing. They lie about how easy it is or how hard it was. They perpetuate a romantic idea that writing is some beautiful experience that takes place in an architectural room filled with leather novels and chai tea. They talk about their "morning ritual" and how they "dress for writing" and the cabin in Big Sur where they go to "be alone"—blah blah blah. No one tells the truth about writing a book. Authors pretend their stories were always shiny and perfect and just waiting to be written. The truth is, writing is this: hard and boring and occasionally great but usually not. Even I have lied about writing. I have told people that writing this book has been like brushing away dirt from a fossil. What a load of shit. It has been like hacking away at a freezer with a screwdriver.

I wrote this book after my kids went to sleep. I wrote this book on subways and on airplanes and in between setups while I shot a television show. I wrote this book from scribbled thoughts I kept in the Notes app on my iPhone and conversations I had with myself in my own head before I went to sleep. I wrote it ugly and in pieces. I tried hard not be overly dramatic, like when I wrote this poem in Social Studies class at age thirteen:

Amy Poehler

May 21, 1985
Social Studies
1:10

When life attacks you from every side.
It hurts -
Too much
And the most
painless
easiest way out is -
death
to survive.

At this very moment I am attempting to write this preface in the dark while my oldest boy, Archie, sleeps next to me. He is dreaming and talking, and I am turning down the light on the screen as I write about how hard it is to write. Writing a book is awful. It's lonely, even with Archie beside me and my editors nagging me. During this process I have written my editors e-mails with subject headings such as "How Dare You" and "This Is Never Going to Work" and "Why Are You Trying to Kill Me?" Most authors liken the struggle of writing to something mighty and macho, like wrestling a bear. Writing a book is nothing like that. It is a small, slow crawl to the finish line.

Honestly, I have moments when I don't even care if anyone reads this book. I just want to finish it.

If you are reading this, it means I have "finished." More likely, it means my editors have told me I can't keep tinkering anymore. I will take this time now to thank you for buying this and reading it and eventually turning it into a feature film with Kate Winslet/Katy Perry/Katie Couric as the star.

Let me offer this apology. Please excuse this self-indulgent preface. I know what I am doing. I am presenting a series of reasons as to why you should lower your expectations, so that you can be blown away by my sneaky insights about life and work. I am a grown woman. I know my own tricks! I know how good I am at bemoaning my process and pretending I don't care so that my final product will seem totally natural and part of my essence and not

something I sweated for months and years. One of the things I have learned about me while writing about me is that I am really onto myself. I have got Amy Poehler's number, I'll tell you. I also learned that writing topless tends to relax me. Go figure. Life is a mystery.

While writing this book I made many mistakes. I kept a copy of Nora Ephron's *Heartburn* next to me as a reminder of how to be funny and truthful, and all I ended up doing was ignoring my writing and rereading *Heartburn*. I also kept a copy of Patti Smith's *Just Kids* nearby, which was awful because her writing is beautiful and poetic and how dare she. I also read and reread wonderful books by wonderful women: Rachel Dratch's *Girl Walks into a Bar . . .*, Sarah Silverman's *The Bedwetter*, Mindy Kaling's *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?*, Lena Dunham's *Not That Kind of Girl*, Caitlin Moran's *How to Be a Woman*, and Tina Fey's *Bossypants*. All are superb and infuriating. My dear friend and *Parks and Recreation* cast-mate Nick Offerman had the nerve to start and publish his book *Paddle Your Own Canoe* in less time than it took me to write this preface. I congratulated him when he presented it to me and then immediately threw it in the garbage.

I made other terrible mistakes while I tried to write this book. I asked people who have already finished books for advice, which is akin to asking a mother with a four-year-old what childbirth is like. All the edges have been rounded and they have forgotten the pain. Their books are finished and in their libraries, so all they end up talking about is how you need to "stick to your guns" and "not let the editors push you around" and that "your title is important." Stick to my guns? I am hiding from my editors because I feel so guilty that I haven't worked hard enough and given them something genius or interesting or new. My title is important? Well, I am screwed, because right now I am vacillating between *The Secret 2* and *Mosquitos Love Me: A Woman's Guide to Getting Her Funk On*. The only people I can stand to read right now are Pema Chödrön, who reminds me that life is messy and everything is a dream, and Stephen King and Anne Lamott, who are two of my favorite writers on writing. But now that I think of it, both of them are funnier than me, so they can tie their sixty-eight books to their ankles and go jump in a lake.

Many people suggested ways I could carve out more time for my writing, but none of their suggestions involved the care and consideration of the small children who live in my house. Every book written by men and women with children under the age of six should have a "sleep deprived" sticker. I could find lots of discussion online about "waiting for the muse" but not enough about having to write in between T-ball games. I want more honesty from people who write books while they have small children. I want to hear from people who feel like they have no time. I remember once reading about J. K. Rowling, and how she wrote *Harry Potter* while she was a single mom struggling to make ends meet. We need to hear more stories like that. However, I do need to point out that J. K. never had to write a personal memoir AND make it funny AND do it while she had to be on camera with makeup on, AND she had ONLY ONE KID AT THE TIME IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY. (This could be wrong; editors, please fact-check. Also let marketing know I am very interested in *Yes Please* becoming the next *Harry Potter*.)

In my desperation, I searched out other writers who were struggling and asked them if they wanted to take a break from their own misery and contribute to my book so I would have fewer pages to fill. I thought about asking Hillary Clinton but realized she was too busy writing, finishing, and publishing her own book. If I had timed it better, I could have contributed to her book and she could have contributed to mine. But I blew it. I guess my essay "Judge Judy, American Hero" will have to be read in *Harper's* at a later date.

Writing this book has been so hard I wrote a *Parks and Recreation* script in three days. It was a joy, writing in a voice that wasn't my own. I have also written two screenplays in the

time it has taken me to crank this sucker out. (This isn't true but whatever. I can write a screenplay in my sleep. Shiiiiit.)

So what do I do? What do we do? How do we move forward when we are tired and afraid? What do we do when the voice in our head is yelling that WE ARE NEVER GONNA MAKE IT? How do we drag ourselves through the muck when our brain is telling us youaredumbandyouwillneverfinishandnoonecaresanditistimeyoustop?

Well, the first thing we do is take our brain out and put it in a drawer. Stick it somewhere and let it tantrum until it wears itself out. You may still hear the brain and all the shitty things it is saying to you, but it will be muffled, and just the fact that it is not in your head anymore will make things seem clearer. And then you just do it. You just dig in and write it. You use your body. You lean over the computer and stretch and pace. You write and then cook something and write some more. You put your hand on your heart and feel it beating and decide if what you wrote feels true. You do it because the doing of it is the thing. The doing is the thing. The talking and worrying and thinking is not the thing. That is what I know. Writing the book is about writing the book.

So here we go, you and me. Because what else are we going to do? Say no? Say no to an opportunity that may be slightly out of our comfort zone? Quiet our voice because we are worried it is not perfect? I believe great people do things before they are ready. This is America and I am allowed to have healthy self-esteem. This book comes straight from my feisty and freckled fingers. Know it was a battle. Blood was shed. A war raged between my jokey and protective brain and my squishy and tender heart. I have realized that mystery is what keeps people away, and I've grown tired of smoke and mirrors. I yearn for the clean, well-lighted place. So let's peek behind the curtain and hail the others like us. The open-faced sandwiches who take risks and live big and smile with all of their teeth. These are the people I want to be around. This is the honest way I want to live and love and write.

Except when it comes to celebrities without makeup. I want my celebrities to look beautiful. I don't need to see them pumping gas.

I tried to tell the truth and be funny. What else do you want from me, you filthy animals?

I love you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, looped 'y' at the end.

instructions for
how to use this book

THIS BOOK IS A MISSIVE FROM THE MIDDLE. It's a street-level view of my life so far. It's an attempt to speak to that feeling of being young and old at the same time. I cannot change the fact that I am an American White Woman who grew up Lower-Middle-Class and had Children after spending most of her life Acting and Doing Comedy, so if you hate any of those buzzwords you may want to bail now. Sometimes this book stays in the present, other times I try to cut myself in half and count the rings. Occasionally I think about the future, but I try to do that sparingly because it usually makes me anxious. *Yes Please* is an attempt to present an open scrapbook that includes a sense of what I am thinking and feeling right now. But mostly, let's call this book what it really is: an obvious money grab to support my notorious online shopping addiction. I have already spent the advance on fancy washcloths from Amazon, so I need this book to really sell a lot of copies or else I am in trouble. Chop-chop, people.

In this book there is a little bit of talk about the past. There is some light emotional sharing. I guess that is the "memoir" part. There is also some "advice," which varies in its levels of seriousness. Lastly, there are just "essays," which are stories that usually have a beginning and an end, but nothing is guaranteed. Sometimes these three things are mixed together, like a thick stew. I hope it is full of flavor and fills you up, but don't ask me to list all the ingredients.

I struggled with choosing a quote that would set the table for you and establish an important tone once you started reading.

I thought about Eleanor Roosevelt's "A woman is like a tea bag; you never know how strong it is until it's in hot water."

I dabbled with "A woman who doesn't wear perfume has no future" from the seemingly hilarious and real "girl's girl" Coco Chanel.

I was tempted by "I always play women I would date" from Angelina Jolie.

But Wordsworth stuck with me when he said, "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." This book is a spontaneous overflow in the middle of chaos, not tranquillity. So it's not a poem to you. It's a half poem. It's a "po." It's a Poehler po. Wordsworth also said that the best part of a person's life is "his little, nameless, unremembered, acts of kindness and of love." I look forward to reading a book one day in which someone lists mine. I feel like I may have failed to do so. Either way, it's obvious I am currently on a Wordsworth kick and this should give you literary confidence as you read *Yes Please*.

The title *Yes Please* comes from a few different places. I like to say "Yes please" as an answer to a lot of things in my personal and professional life. The "yes" comes from my improvisational days and the opportunity that comes with youth, and the "please" comes from the wisdom of knowing that agreeing to do something usually means you aren't doing it alone.

It's called *Yes Please* because it is the constant struggle and often the right answer. Can we figure out what we want, ask for it, and stop talking? Yes please. Is being vulnerable a power

position? Yes please. Am I allowed to take up space? Yes please. Would you like to be left alone? Yes please.

I love saying “yes” and I love saying “please.” Saying “yes” doesn’t mean I don’t know how to say no, and saying “please” doesn’t mean I am waiting for permission. “Yes please” sounds powerful and concise. It’s a response and a request. It is not about being a good girl; it is about being a real woman. It’s also a title I can tell my kids. I like when they say “Yes please” because most people are rude and nice manners are the secret keys to the universe.

And attention, men! Don’t despair! There is plenty of stuff in here for you too. Since I have spent the majority of my life in rooms filled with men I feel like I know you well. I love you. I love the shit out of you. I think this book will speak to men in a bunch of different ways. I should also point out that there is a secret code in each chapter and if you figure it out it unlocks the next level and you get better weapons to fight the zombie quarterbacks on the Pegasus Bridge. So get cracking, you task-oriented monkey brains.

I still wish this book was just a compendium of searing photographs I took in Afghanistan during my years as a sexy war correspondent, but hey, there is still time.

Shall we?