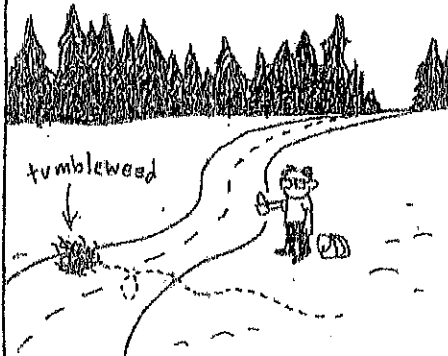


Why I Did Actually Miss a Lot of School

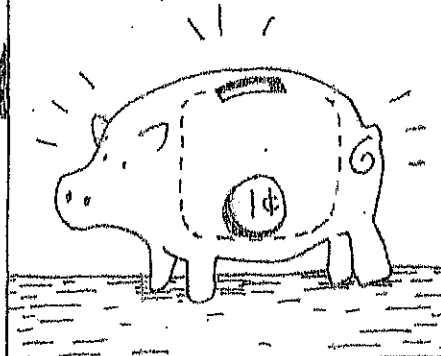
① Wakes and funerals.



② Couldn't find a ride.



③ No money in the house.



④ Mom wanted me to stay home because she was scared.



⑤ Mom & I had to go search for my father so we could bring him home & keep him safe.



I slumped into her class and sat in the back of the room. "Oh, class," she said. "We have a special guest today. It's Arnold Spirit. I didn't realize you still went to this school, Mr. Spirit."

The classroom was quiet. They all knew my family had been living inside a grief-storm. And had this teacher just mocked me for that?

"What did you just say?" I asked her.

"You really shouldn't be missing class this much," she said.

If I'd been stronger, I would have stood up to her: I would have called her names. I would have walked across the room and slapped her.

But I was too broken.

Instead, it was Gordy who defended me.

He stood with his textbook and dropped it.

Whomp!

He looked so strong. He looked like a warrior. He was protecting me like Rowdy used to protect me. Of course, Rowdy would have thrown the book at the teacher and then punched her.

Gordy showed a lot of courage in standing up to a teacher like that. And his courage inspired the others.

Penelope stood and dropped her textbook.

And then Roger stood and dropped his textbook.

Whomp!

Then the other basketball players did the same.

Whomp! Whomp! Whomp! Whomp!

And Mrs. Jeremy flinched each and every time, as if she'd been kicked in the crotch.

Whomp! Whomp! Whomp! Whomp!

Then all of my classmates walked out of the room.

A spontaneous demonstration.

Of course, I probably should have walked out with them.

It would have been more poetic. It would have made more sense. Or perhaps my friends should have realized that they shouldn't have left behind the **FRICKING REASON FOR THEIR PROTEST!**

And that thought just cracked me up.

It was like my friends had walked over the backs of baby seals in order to get to the beach where they could protest against the slaughter of baby seals.

Okay, so maybe it wasn't that bad.

But it was sure funny.

"What are you laughing at?" Mrs. Jeremy asked me.

"I used to think the world was broken down by tribes," I said. "By black and white. By Indian and white. But I know that isn't true. The world is only broken into two tribes: The people who are assholes and the people who are not."

I walked out of the classroom and felt like dancing and singing.

It all gave me hope. It gave me a little bit of joy.

And I kept trying to find the little pieces of joy in my life. That's the only way I managed to make it through all of that death and change. I made a list of the people who had given me the most joy in my life:

1. Rowdy
2. My mother
3. My father
4. My grandmother
5. Eugene
6. Coach
7. Roger
8. Gordy
9. Penelope, even if she only partially loves me

I made a list of the musicians who had played the most joyous music:

1. Patsy Cline, my mother's favorite
2. Hank Williams, my father's favorite
3. Jimi Hendrix, my grandmother's favorite
4. Guns N' Roses, my big sister's favorite
5. White Stripes, my favorite

I made a list of my favorite foods:

1. pizza
2. chocolate pudding
3. peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
4. banana cream pie
5. fried chicken
6. mac & cheese
7. hamburgers
8. french fries
9. grapes

I made a list of my favorite books:

1. The Grapes of Wrath
2. Catcher in the Rye
3. Fat Kid Rules the World
4. Tangerine
5. Feed
6. Catalyst
7. Invisible Man
8. Fools Crow
9. Jar of Fools