

## 1b4- Arriving in a new school

So, feeling worthless and stupid, I just waited. And pretty soon, a janitor opened the front door and all of the other kids strolled inside. (...)

"Okay," I said to myself. "Here I go."

I walked into the school, made my way to the front office, and told them who I was.

"Oh, you're the one from the reservation," the secretary said.

"Yeah," I said. I couldn't tell if she thought the reservation was a good or bad thing?

"My name is Melinda," she said. "Welcome to Reardan High School. Here's your schedule, a copy of the school constitution and moral code, and a temporary student ID. We've got you assigned to Mr. Grant for homeroom. You better hustle on down there. You're late."

"All, where is that?" I asked.

"We've only got one hallway here," she said and smiled. "It's all the way down on the left."

I shoved the paperwork into my backpack and hustled down to my homeroom. I paused a second at the door and then walked inside.

Everybody, all of the students and the teacher, stopped to stare at me. They stared hard. Like I was bad weather.

"Take your seat," the teacher said.

He was a muscular guy. I walked down the aisle and sat in the back row and tried pore all the stares and whispers, until a blond girl leaned toward me. Penelope!

"What's your name?" Penelope asked.

"Junior," I said.

She laughed and told her girlfriend at the next desk that my name was Junior. They both laughed.

Word spread around the room and pretty soon everybody was laughing. They were laughing at my name.

I had no idea that Junior was a weird name. It's a common name on my rez, on any rez.

You walk into any trading post any rez in the United States and shout, "Hey, Junior!" and seventeen guys will turn around. And three women. But there were no other people named Junior in Reardan, so I was being laughed at because I was the only one who had that silly name. And then I felt smaller because the teacher was taking roll and he called out my name name.

"Arnold Spirit," the teacher said.

No, he yelled it. He was so big and muscular that his whisper was probably a scream.

"Here," I said as quietly as possible. My whisper was only a whisper.

"Speak up," the teacher said.

"Here," I said.

"My name is Mr. Grant," he said.

"I'm here, Mr. Grant."

He moved on to other students, but Penelope leaned over toward me again, but she wasn't laughing at all. She was mad now.

"I thought you said your name was Junior," Penelope said.

She accused me of telling her my real name. Well, okay, it wasn't completely my real name. My full name is Arnold Spirit Jr. But nobody calls me that. Everybody calls me Junior. Well, every other Indian calls me Junior.

"My name is Junior," I said. "And my name is Arnold. It's Junior and Arnold. I'm both."

I felt like two different people inside of one body. No, I felt like a magician slicing myself in half, with Junior living on the north side of the Spokane River and Arnold living on the south.

D'après *The Absolute Diary of a Half-Time Indian*, Sherman Alexie, 2007

## 1b5- Trying to understand the rules

Man, I was freaked. I didn't say another word for six days.(...) Well, let's get something straight. All of those pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty white girls ignored me. But that was okay. Indian girls ignored me, too, so I was used to it. And let's face it, most of the white boys ignored me, too. But there were a few of those Reardan boys, the big jocks, who paid special attention to me. None of those guys punched me or got violent. After all, I was a reservation Indian, and no matter how geeky and weak I appeared to be, I was still a potential killer. So mostly they called me names. Lots of names. And yeah, those were bad enough names. But I could handle them, especially when some huge monster boy was insulting me. But I knew I'd have to put a stop to it eventually or I'd always be known as "Chief" or "Tonto" or "Squaw Boy."

But I was scared. I wasn't scared of fistfighting with those boys. I'd been in plenty of fights. And I wasn't scared of losing fights with them, either. I'd lost most every fight I'd been in. I was afraid those monsters were going to kill me. And I don't mean "kill" as in "metaphor." I mean "kill" as in "beat me to death."

So, weak and poor and scared, I let them call me names while I tried to figure out what to do. And it might have continued that way if Roger the Giant hadn't taken it too far. Roger the Giant and his gang of giants strutted over to me.

"Hey, Chief," Roger said. It seemed like he was seven feet tall and three hundred pounds. He was a farm boy who carried squealing pigs around like they were already thin slices of bacon. I stared at Roger and tried to look tough. I read once that you can scare away a charging bear if you wave your arms and look big. But I figured I'd just look like a terrified idiot having an arm seizure.

"Hey, Chief," Roger said. "You want to hear a joke?"

"Sure," I said

"Did you know that Indians are living proof that niggers fuck buffalo?"

I felt like Roger had kicked me in the face. That was the most racist thing I'd ever heard in my life. Roger and his friends were laughing like crazy. I hated them. And I knew I had to do something big. I couldn't let them get away with that shit. I wasn't just defending myself. I was defending Indians, black people, and buffalo. So I punched Roger in the face. He wasn't laughing when he landed on his ass. And he wasn't laughing when his nose bled like red fireworks. I struck some fake karate pose because I figured Roger's gang was going to attack me for bloodying their leader. But they just stared at me. They were shocked.

"You punched me," Roger said. His voice was thick with blood. "I can't believe you punched me." He sounded insulted. He sounded like his poor little feelings had been hurt. I couldn't believe it. He acted like he was the one who'd been wronged.

"You're an animal," he said.

I felt brave all of a sudden. Yeah, maybe it was just a stupid and immature school yard fight. Or maybe it was the most important moment of my life. Maybe I was telling the world that I was no longer a human target.

"You're crazy," Roger said.

He got to his feet and walked away. His gang stared at me like I was a serial killer, and then they followed their leader. I was absolutely confused. I had followed the rules of fighting. I had behaved exactly the way I was supposed to behave. But these white boys had ignored the rules. In fact, they followed a whole other set of mysterious rules where people apparently DID NOT GET INTO FISTFIGHTS.

"Wait," I called after Roger.

"What do you want?" Roger asked.

"What are the rules?"

"What rules?"

I didn't know what to say, so I just stood there red and mute like a stop sign. Roger and his friends disappeared. I felt like somebody had shoved me into a rocket ship and blasted me to a new planet. I was a freaky alien and there was absolutely no way to get home.