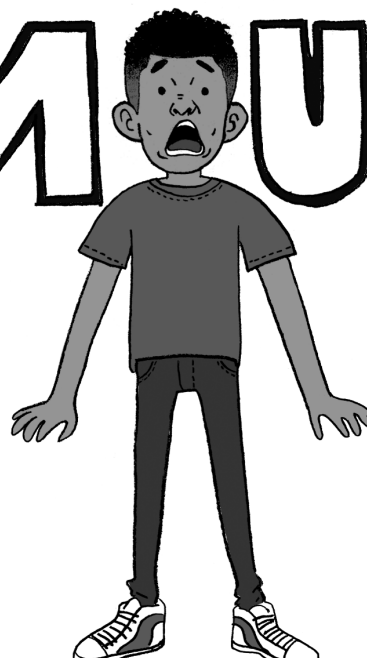
MY BIG MOUTH



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chain reaction *(noun)*

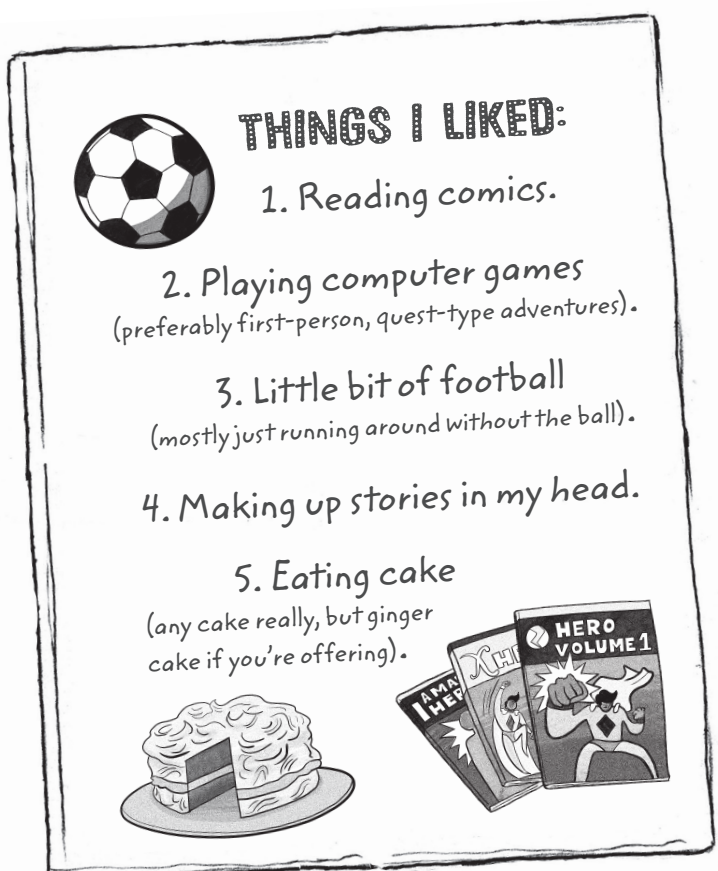
A series of events, each caused by the previous one.

1

It all started when I was ten.

What was I like when I was ten?

Let me paint you a picture.



THINGS I DID NOT LIKE:

1. Custard (basically egg snot).

2. Those annoying people who just seem to be really good at pretty much everything without even trying.

3. Birthday cards with no money in. (What's that all about? 'Here you go, a slice of tree with some scribbles on it.' Whoopee.)

4. Being ignored.

5. Owls.

(I'm sorry, but any living thing that can turn its head pretty much all the way round whilst staring right at you is creepy, and those eyes? No thanks. Keep 'em.)



I wasn't too tall, wasn't too short. I could run quite fast, but I never once won a race. I wasn't the goody-goody teacher's pet kid at the front of the class photograph with jazz hands and cheesy

grin, but I wasn't the tearaway rebel sneaking out of the shot to set the fire alarm off either. I was just in the middle. A regular ten-year-old boy.

And one thing I never was, ever . . .

. . . was cool.

2

I had a dog. Gus.

Same age as me.

Dad brought him home the week I was born. He said it was important to remember that human beings aren't the only species.



Lovable Gus. Rough fur like a toilet brush. He was a something crossed with a something else, like all the best characters, and nobody understood him like me. He slept in my room and I knew the sweet spot between his shoulder blades that when you scratched it, made him roll over and howl a thank you.

Every now and then he'd get this crazy glint in his dark eyes.

Not crazy like '*I'm gonna bite your grandma!*'-type crazy. No. More like:

What's that?

It's your tail, Gus.

Nah, man. It's a snake.

Gus, it's your tail.

Snake.

Tail.

Snake!

Gus . . .

Snaaaaaaaaaake!!!!!!!!

That kind of crazy.

By the time I was ten, Gus was, like, seventy in dog years, which, looking back now, makes complete sense, seeing as all he did most days at that point was sleep underneath my bedroom radiator and fart.

But he was a great listener, and when everyone else would ignore me, I always knew I could count on Gus to share my problems.

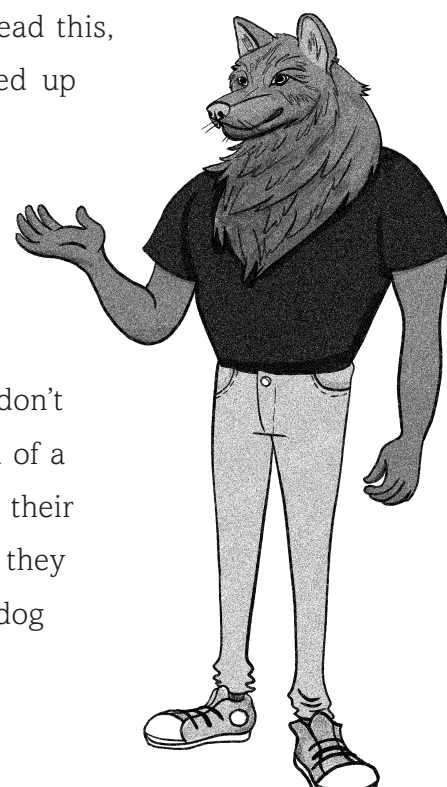
OK, stop. Hold on.

Are you a dog person? That phrase means someone who likes dogs, but it always makes me picture a human with a dog's head.

If you had a dog's head, which dog would it be? I'd go with German shepherd, I reckon, or maybe one of those cool wolf-dogs with one blue eye and one brown eye. Yeah. Wolf-dog. Definitely.

Maybe you've got a dog? Have you?

Maybe as you read this, there's a dog curled up underneath *your* radiator, snoring a doggy snore and dropping the occasional fart.



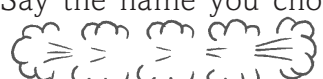
Some people don't like dogs. The idea of a dog sleeping under their radiator is not one they enjoy. They're not dog people.

I am. I would happily have a dog in every room in the house.

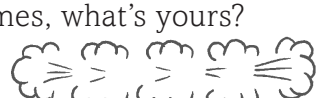
I'm a cat person too. In fact, I'm pretty much an any-animal-in-the-whole-world person, really. Except owls.

You don't have to have a dog to be a dog person. Maybe you don't have a dog, but you'd like one. If you could have a dog, what would it look like? Would it be massive, or a tiny pocket dog that hides in your coat all day, yapping at strangers? Something in between?

What would you call it?

Say the name you chose out loud right now.  Done? Good. Words are powerful. Ideas can come to life when you speak them. Trust me. It's like speaking them can make them real.

Speaking of names, what's yours?

Say it out loud.  Nice. I could use that.

My name? Are you sure you need to know?

I could tell you that my name is Lord Dungfart

Trumplestink and it wouldn't matter whether I was telling the truth, would it? It wouldn't change what happened.

Exactly. But I suppose I should start honest, at least.

My name is Jason Gardner.
People call me Jay.
And I have a
story to tell you.

