

Klutzhood by Chris McMahan

Booktalk by Rhonda Wills

(read the opening paragraphs of Chapter 1 - below)

I hadn't had so much fun since the time I got locked out of the house in my underwear. Today was my first day at a brand-new school in a brand-new town. I arrived at the drop-off area in front of the school in a rusty old pickup truck with *Fast Eddy's Manure Sales* written across both doors and a load of guess-what in the back. A crowd of people lined the sidewalk, staring at the heap of a pickup: one headlight missing, the front bumper held on with twisted wire, and an engine that backfired so often it sounded like a fireworks display on wheels.

The driver of the truck-my mom- didn't help make my arrival exactly smooth. She wasn't used to the gear-shift, so every time she tried to shift gears it sounded like an out-of-whack dentist's drill, and the truck would lurch forward, hopping like a gigantic, manure-filled, metal Easter bunny. When we finally pulled up to the curb, the engine let off a final ear-splitting BANG! before it died.

With all of those strangers staring at me from the sidewalk, I refused to get out of the truck. No one-not even my mom- could make me get out and walk through that crowd and go inside to register at my new school.

I have had embarrassing moments in my life. I mentioned the underwear incident. And then there was the time I accidentally ate cat food at a friend's birthday party. But neither of those times came close to the embarrassment I felt with all those people staring at me like I was an alien in a manure-powered UFO.

And so begins school life for Arlo in East Bend, a small town in the west of Alberta. Used to the warmer climate and big city life in Victoria, British Columbia. Arlo is less than thrilled that he and his Mom have had to move to East Bend for his mother's new job. It is February and "so cold...[that Arlo] thought... [his] eyeballs were going to freeze solid and roll out of their sockets." (p. 19) "The walls of snow along the side of the road were so high, it felt like we were in a gigantic bobsled run." (p. 16) But it's not just the weather that bothers Arlo. He has heard that all of the kids play ice hockey. "It'll be a new experience for you," says his Mom. (p. 13) Arlo's reply is almost hysterical.

"If people were meant to play ice hockey, they wouldn't have teeth!" I yelled. "Plus, I think I'm allergic to small rubber disks! And besides, my feet think skates are foreign objects!... Overreacting! I'm not overreacting! Do you realize, Mother, that I am probably the only kid my age in Canada who can't skate? The only ice I've ever seen floats in a glass!" (p. 13)

Through several half-truths, Arlo manages to avoid the embarrassment of showing the other kids in grade eight that he can't skate. In an attempt not to be a total outcast, Arlo tells more lies and eventually tries some forbidden stunts to impress the members of the Dumpster Dudes, and gain admittance to this group who don't like hockey either. But how long can he deceive everyone? Does he really want to spend his recess times in the dumpster behind the school? The decisions that Arlo makes are often hilarious. Will he give the other kids a chance to get to know him? Will he find that he can be himself and belong at East Bend Elementary School? Read *Klutzhood* by Chris McMahan to find out.