**BIOGRAPHY**

Winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, the PEN/Malamud Award for Short Fiction, a PEN/Hemingway Citation for Best First Fiction, and the National Book Award for Young People's Literature, Sherman Alexie is a poet, short story writer, novelist, and performer.

He has published 24 books including *What I've Stolen, What I've Earned*, poetry, from Hanging Loose Press; *Blasphemy: New and Selected Stories*, from Grove Press; and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian,*a novel from Little, Brown Books for Children.

He has also recently published the 20th Anniversary edition of his classic book of stories, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven.*

*Smoke Signals,*the movie he wrote and co-produced, won the Audience Award and Filmmakers Trophy at the 1998 Sundance Film Festival.

A Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian, Alexie grew up in Wellpinit, Washington, on the Spokane Indian Reservation.

Alexie has been an urban Indian since 1994 and lives in Seattle with his family.

Sherman Alexie

Poet

Sherman Joseph Alexie, Jr. is an American poet, writer, and filmmaker. Much of his writing draws on his experiences as a Native American with ancestry of several tribes, growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. He lives in Seattle, Washington. [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie)

[**Born**](https://www.google.ca/search?biw=1024&bih=667&q=sherman+alexie+born&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LUz9U3ME4zza7UEstOttIvSM0vyEkFUkXF-XlWSflFeQBjrLBfJQAAAA&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0CKIBEOgTKAAwHWoVChMIks-5y_SNyAIVSjaICh2FrwiV)**:**October 7, 1966 (age 48), [Wellpinit, Washington, United States](https://www.google.ca/search?biw=1024&bih=667&q=wellpinit+washington&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LUz9U3ME4zza5U4gIxTZJNjbOTtcSyk630C1LzC3JSgVRRcX6eVVJ-UR4AiydCOjEAAAA&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0CKMBEJsTKAEwHWoVChMIks-5y_SNyAIVSjaICh2FrwiV)

[**Spouse**](https://www.google.ca/search?biw=1024&bih=667&q=sherman+alexie+spouse&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LUz9U3ME4zza7UkshOttIvSM0vyEkFUkXF-XlWxQX5pcWpAKXISTYnAAAA&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0CKYBEOgTKAAwHmoVChMIks-5y_SNyAIVSjaICh2FrwiV)**:**[Diane Tomhave](https://www.google.ca/search?biw=1024&bih=667&q=diane+tomhave&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LUz9U3ME4zza5U4tVP1zc0TDIrSs7OzSjRkshOttIvSM0vyEkFUkXF-XlWxQX5pcWpAFdYCyM2AAAA&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0CKcBEJsTKAEwHmoVChMIks-5y_SNyAIVSjaICh2FrwiV)

[**Movies**](https://www.google.ca/search?biw=1024&bih=667&q=sherman+alexie+movies&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LUz9U3ME4zza7UkshOttIvSM0vyEkFUkXF-XlWufllmanFAJrpRD0nAAAA&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0CKoBEOgTKAAwH2oVChMIks-5y_SNyAIVSjaICh2FrwiV)**:**[Smoke Signals](https://www.google.ca/search?biw=1024&bih=667&q=smoke+signals+movie&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LUz9U3ME4zza5UAjNNTQzS4rUkspOt9AtS8wtyUoFUUXF-nlVufllmajEA8s0y3zIAAAA&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0CKsBEJsTKAEwH2oVChMIks-5y_SNyAIVSjaICh2FrwiV), [The Business of Fancydancing](https://www.google.ca/search?biw=1024&bih=667&q=the+business+of+fancydancing&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LUz9U3ME4zza5U4gIxjczySuILtCSyk630C1LzC3JSgVRRcX6eVW5-WWZqMQD2gCIaMwAAAA&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0CKwBEJsTKAIwH2oVChMIks-5y_SNyAIVSjaICh2FrwiV)

[**Education**](https://www.google.ca/search?biw=1024&bih=667&q=sherman+alexie+education&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LUz9U3ME4zza7Uks5OttIvSM0vyEkFUkXF-XlWqSmlyYklmfl5AFb86eIqAAAA&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0CK8BEOgTKAAwIGoVChMIks-5y_SNyAIVSjaICh2FrwiV)**:**[Gonzaga University](https://www.google.ca/search?biw=1024&bih=667&q=gonzaga+university&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LUz9U3ME4zza5UAjMNkwxzs7Sks5Ot9AtS8wtyUoFUUXF-nlVqSmlyYklmfh4A9iWaCTUAAAA&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0CLABEJsTKAEwIGoVChMIks-5y_SNyAIVSjaICh2FrwiV),[Washington State University](https://www.google.ca/search?biw=1024&bih=667&q=washington+state+university&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LUz9U3ME4zza5UAjMNMyyKsrWks5Ot9AtS8wtyUoFUUXF-nlVqSmlyYklmfh4AkAbClzUAAAA&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0CLEBEJsTKAIwIGoVChMIks-5y_SNyAIVSjaICh2FrwiV), [Reardan High School](https://www.google.ca/search?biw=1024&bih=667&q=reardan+high+school&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LUz9U3ME4zza5U4gIxzc2yjNPitaSzk630C1LzC3JSgVRRcX6eVWpKaXJiSWZ-HgA0hFIeNgAAAA&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0CLIBEJsTKAMwIGoVChMIks-5y_SNyAIVSjaICh2FrwiV)

Quotes

*My only purpose is to teach children to rebel against authority figures.*

*All I owe the world is my art.*

*If I wasn't writing poems I'd be washing my hands all the time.*

Rob Casey

Sherman Alexie is a preeminent Native American poet, novelist, performer and filmmaker. He has garnered high praise for his poems and short stories of contemporary Native American reservation life, among them *The Business of Fancydancing*(1992), *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven*(1993), which won a PEN/Hemingway Award, and *Smoke Signals*(1998), a critically acclaimed movie based on one of Alexie’s short stories and for which he co-wrote the screenplay. An acclaimed performer of his own work, Alexie held the World Heavyweight Poetry title for four years. He continues to perform many of his poems at poetry slams, festivals, and other venues, and has received praise for the energy and emotion he brings to his work.

A Spokane/Coeur d’Alene tribal member, Alexie grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit, Washington. Alexie was born hydrocephalic and underwent an operation at six months of age; he was not expected to survive. Though he lived through the experience, he was plagued with seizures as a child and spent most of his childhood reading. In the eighth grade, he decided to attend Reardan High School, located twenty miles outside the reservation. His achievements in high school secured his admission to Spokane’s Jesuit Gonzaga University in 1985, where he had a successful academic career but began to abuse alcohol. Alexie transferred to Washington State University in 1987 and began writing poetry and short fiction. In 1990 Alexie’s work was published in *Hanging Loose* magazine, a success he has credited with giving him the incentive to quit drinking. He has remained sober ever since.

In his short-story and poetry collections, Alexie illuminates the despair, poverty, and alcoholism that often shape the lives of Native Americans living on reservations. His poems, novels and short stories evoke sadness and indignation yet also leave readers with a sense of respect and compassion for characters who are in seemingly hopeless situations. Involved with crime, alcohol, or drugs, Alexie’s protagonists struggle to survive the constant battering of their minds, bodies, and spirits by white American society and their own self-hatred and sense of powerlessness. As Alexie asserted in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Native Americans “have a way of surviving. But it’s almost like Indians can easily survive the big stuff. Mass murder, loss of language and land rights. It’s the small things that hurt the most. The white waitress who wouldn’t take an order, Tonto, the Washington Redskins.” While he depicts the lives of Native Americans who attempt to escape their situation through alcohol and other forms of self-abuse, Alexie’s characters also access a mental, emotional, and spiritual outlet, which he refers to as “fancydancing.”

A key characteristic of Alexie’s writing is irony, and his dark humor is often buoyed by an exquisite sense of timing. His poetry collections *The Business of Fancydancing*and*First Indian on the Moon*(1993) expose the “fraudulent illusions that tempt us all in America today,” noted Andrea-Bess Baxter in *Western American Literature.*Commenting on *The Business of Fancydancing,* Alexie’s first published poetry collection, Leslie Ullman in the *Kenyon Review* wrote that the author “weaves a curiously soft-blended tapestry of humor, humility, pride and metaphysical provocation out of the hard realities…the tin-shack lives, the alcohol dreams, the bad luck and burlesque disasters, and the self-destructive courage of his characters.” Such irony is also a major force in Alexie’s prose, particularly his early short story collections, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist-Fight in Heaven*and *The Toughest Indian in the World*(2000), which Ken Foster for the *San Francisco Chronicle*described as having a “consistently dark comic tone.” In an interview Alexie commented on his progression from poems to short stories to novels as occurring “pretty naturally because…my poems are stories. It felt natural for me to evolve to a larger form. Not to say it wasn’t difficult for me at first, though…I had this thing about going beyond one page, typewritten. I’d get to the bottom of a page and freak out, because I wouldn’t know what to do next. But the stories kept getting bigger and bigger…They began to demand more space than a poem could provide.”

Alexie was named to Granta’s Best of Young American Novelists list in 1996. Editor Ian Jack said the judges had “liked his [Alexie’s] work because it had something to tell us. Native American life, life on the reservation, is a pretty under-described experience.” He added that “fiction, if it’s any good, should persuade you of individual and inner lives. Alexie’s book wasn’t sanctimonious or pious or a piece of political pleading—it introduced you to characters who were native American and made them as complex and odd as everyone else.” Alexie’s early work was often described in such terms. Verlyn Klinkenborg noted in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* that Alexie writes effectively for “a divided audience, Native American and Anglo. He is willing to risk didacticism whenever he stops to explain the particulars of the Spokane, and, more broadly, the Native American experience to his readers. But Alexie never sounds didactic. His timing is too good for that”; Abigail Davis in *Bloomsbury Review*declared that “this first novel by Sherman Alexie comes as close to helping a non-Native American understand the modern Indian experience as any attempt in current literature. The reader closes the book feeling troubled, hurt, hopeful, profoundly thoughtful, and somehow exhausted, as if the quest of the characters had been a personal experience.”

But as Alexie’s prose writing has matured, it has become less focused on exposing a uniquely Native American world to Anglo audiences. Ken Foster, in his review of *The Toughest Indian in the World* for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, described how the nine stories in the collection retrace Alexie’s familiar territory of Native-white conflict without feeling “the need to instruct his readers in the details of contemporary American Indian culture, and why should he? The lives he portrays are so finely detailed.” Eric Weinberger, in his review of Alexie’s short story collection *Ten Little Indians*(2003), likewise noted that the “the most successful stories in *Ten Little Indians*don’t traffic in their Indianness.” Alexie’s 2007 novel *Flight*also treads his familiar themes in new ways. In the story of 15-year-old foster kid “Zits,” his adventures through time, and his reincarnation as various historical characters, Alexie “skillfully explores both sides of the proverbial war. Zits witnesses brutal violence through the eyes of whites and Indians, fathers and sons, and he begins to understand what it means to be the hero, the villain and the victim,” wrote S. Kirk Walsh in his review for the *New York Times.* Released the same year, Alexie’s semi-autobiographical young adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*received major critical praise and won a host of awards, including the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature.

Alexie has also been active in film, helping to create the first all-Indian movie. *Smoke Signals*(1998) which was a major studio release, writing and directing the adaption of his own book *The Business of Fancy-Dancing*(2003), and writing the script for the independent film *49?* (2003). Based on an Alexie short story,*Smoke Signals*was produced, directed, and acted by Native American talent. The plot follows a young man living an aimless life in Idaho. Victor Joseph, who has lost contact with his Native roots, embarks on a journey to “discover his past and accept his present,” as *Los Angeles Magazine* writer James Greenberg put it. The finished film took top honors at the Sundance Film Festival; on the occasion of its 1998 wide release, Alexie told a*Time* interviewer that he hoped *Smoke Signals* would open doors for Indian filmmakers. He pointed to African-American director Spike Lee as a role model: “Spike didn’t necessarily get films made as much as he inspired filmmakers to believe in themselves. That’s what’s going to happen here. These 13-year-old Indian kids who’ve been going crazy with their camcorders will finally see the possibilities.”

While he explores many of the same themes in all his chosen genres, Alexie’s poetry is arguably even more self-conscious and ironic than his prose. A mix of narrative, formal innovation and gorgeous lyricism, his poetry collections often contain extended prose pieces, as in *The Business of Fancy-Dancing*, *First Indian on the Moon*(1993), and *One Stick Song*(2000), which *Publisher’s Weekly*praised for its “ability to handle multiple perspectives and complex psychological subject matter with a humor that feeds readability.” His collection *Face*(2009) includes poems written in forms like the sestina and villanelle, as well meta-textual effects like extended footnotes and frame-breaking moments of self-awareness. The effect, according to Stephen Ross in the*Oxonian Review*, is “light-hearted without being light, colloquial without being cliché, and serious without being sententious.”

Alexie has been the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including the 2009 Mason Award, the 2008 Stranger Genius Award, a Pushcart Prize, the PEN/Malamud Award, a National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship, and numerous honorary degrees. He is a highly sought-after public speaker and has been a guest on nationally-broadcast radio and TV programs like the McNeil-Lehrer Report, NOW with Bill Moyers, and the Colbert Report. He lives in Seattle, Washington with his wife and two sons.

# Sherman Alexie

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

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| --- |
| **Sherman Alexie** |
| Sherman alexie 2007.jpgAlexie at the Texas Book Festival in 2008 |
| **Born** | Sherman Joseph Alexie, Jr.October 7, 1966 (age 48)[Spokane, Washington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spokane%2C_Washington), USA |
| **Occupation** | Poet, author, screenwriter, filmmaker |
| **Nationality** | [Spokane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spokane_people)/[Coeur d'Alene](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coeur_d%27Alene_%28tribe%29)/American |
| **Genre** | [Native American literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_American_literature), humor, documentary fiction |
| **Literary movement** | Indigenous Nationalism |
| **Notable works** | • [*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Absolutely_True_Diary_of_a_Part-Time_Indian)• [*Smoke Signals*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smoke_Signals_%28film%29)• [*Reservation Blues*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reservation_Blues)• [*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lone_Ranger_and_Tonto_Fistfight_in_Heaven)• [*War Dances*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_Dances) |
| **Notable awards** | [American Book Award](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Book_Award)1996[National Book Award](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Book_Award)2007[PEN/Faulkner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PEN/Faulkner_Award_for_Fiction)2010 |
| **Website** |
| [fallsapart.com](http://fallsapart.com/) |

**Sherman Joseph Alexie, Jr.** (born October 7, 1966) is an American poet, writer, and filmmaker. Much of his writing draws on his experiences as a Native American with ancestry of several tribes, growing up on the [Spokane Indian Reservation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spokane_Indian_Reservation). He lives in [Seattle, Washington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seattle%2C_Washington).[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-konigsberg-1)

Some of his best-known works are [*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lone_Ranger_and_Tonto_Fistfight_in_Heaven) (1993), a book of short stories, and [*Smoke Signals*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smoke_Signals_%28film%29) (1998), a film based on that collection, for which he also wrote the screenplay.

His first novel, [*Reservation Blues*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reservation_Blues), received one of the fifteen 1996 [American Book Awards](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Book_Awards).[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-ABAaba-2) His first [young adult](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young-adult_fiction) novel, [*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Absolutely_True_Diary_of_a_Part-Time_Indian) (2007), is a [semi-autobiographical novel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autobiographical_novel) that won the 2007 U.S. [National Book Award for Young People's Literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Book_Award_for_Young_People%27s_Literature)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-nba2007-3) and the [Odyssey Award](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odyssey_Award) as best 2008 [audiobook](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Audiobook) for young people (read by Alexie).[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-odyssey-4) His 2009 collection of short stories and poems, [*War Dances*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_Dances), won the 2010[PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PEN/Faulkner_Award_for_Fiction).[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-PEN-5)

Alexie is the guest editor of the 2015 [Best American Poetry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Best_American_Poetry).

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## Life[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=1&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Life)]

### Childhood[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=2&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Childhood)]

Alexie was born on October 7, 1966[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Native_Americans_today-6) at Sacred Heart Hospital in Spokane, Washington, and spent his childhood on the Spokane Indian Reservation, located west of Spokane.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-7) His father, Sherman Joseph Alexie, was a member of the [Coeur d'Alene](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coeur_d%27Alene_people) tribe and his mother, Lillian Agnes Cox, was of [Colville](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colville_tribe), [Choctaw](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Choctaw), [Spokane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spokane_people) and [European American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_American) ancestry.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8)One of his paternal great-grandfathers was of [Russian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russians) descent.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-9) Alexie was born with [hydrocephalus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydrocephalus), a condition that occurs when there is an abnormally large amount of cerebral fluid in the cranial cavity,[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-About_Alexie-10) and had to have brain surgery when he was six months old. He was not expected to survive, or, was at high risk of [mental disabilities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental_disabilities) if he did.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8) Alexie's surgery was successful and he survived with no mental damage but had other effects.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-About_Alexie-10)

His father was an [alcoholic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcoholic) who often left the house for days at a time. To support her six children, Alexie's mother Lillian sewed quilts and worked as a clerk at the Wellpinit Trading Post.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-About_Alexie-10)

Alexie has described his life at the reservation school as challenging because he was constantly teased by other kids. He was nicknamed "The Globe" because his head was larger than usual due to the hydrocephalus as an infant. Until the age of seven, Alexie suffered from seizures and bedwetting and had to take strong drugs to control them.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-About_Alexie-10)[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11) Because of his health problems, he was excluded from many of the activities that are rites of passage for young Indian males.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11) Alexie excelled academically, reading everything available, including auto repair manuals.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Alexie_Encyclopedia-12)

### Education[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=3&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Education)]

In order to better his education, Alexie decided to leave the reservation and attend high school in [Reardan, Washington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reardan%2C_Washington%22%20%5Co%20%22Reardan%2C%20Washington).[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-About_Alexie-10)The school was thirty miles off the reservation and Alexie was the only Indian student.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11) He excelled at his studies and became a star player on the basketball team, the Reardan High Indians.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-About_Alexie-10) He was elected as class president and participated as a member of the debate team.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-About_Alexie-10)

His successes in high school won him a scholarship in 1985 to [Gonzaga University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gonzaga_University), a Roman Catholic school in[Spokane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spokane).[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-About_Alexie-10)[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11) Originally Alexie enrolled in the pre-med program with hopes of becoming a doctor,[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11) but found he was squeamish during dissection in his anatomy classes.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11) Alexie switched to law, but found that was not suitable, either.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11) He felt enormous pressure to succeed in college and he began drinking heavily to cope with his anxiety.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) Unhappy with law, Alexie found comfort in literature classes.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11)

In 1987 he dropped out of Gonzaga and enrolled at [Washington State University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington_State_University) (WSU),[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11) where he enrolled in a creative writing course taught by [Alex Kuo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alex_Kuo), a respected poet of Chinese-American background. Alexie was at a low point in his life, and Kuo served as a mentor to him.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8) Kuo gave Alexie an anthology entitled *Songs of This Earth on Turtle's Back*, by[Joseph Bruchac](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Bruchac). Alexie has said this book changed his life as it taught him "how to connect to non-Native literature in a new way."[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8)[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11)[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Sherman_Alexie_Interview-14) He was inspired by reading works of poetry written by Native Americans.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8)

With his new appreciation of poetry, Alexie started work on what was published as his first collection, *The Business of Fancydancing: Stories and Poems,* published in 1992 through Hanging Loose Press.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8)[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Official_Sherman_Alexie_website-15) With that success, Alexie stopped drinking and quit school just three credits short of a degree. In 1995 he was awarded a bachelor's degree from [Washington State University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington_State_University).[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11)

### Today[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=4&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Today)]

In 2005, Alexie became a founding board member of [Longhouse Media](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longhouse_Media), a non-profit organization that is committed to teaching filmmaking skills to Native American youth, and to using media for cultural expression and social change. Alexie has long supported youth programs and initiatives dedicated to supporting at-risk Native youth.[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-16)

Alexie is married to Diane Tomhave, who is of [Hidatsa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hidatsa), [Ho-Chunk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho-Chunk) and [Potawatomi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potawatomi) heritage. They live in Seattle with their two sons.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Official_Sherman_Alexie_website-15)

## Literary works[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=5&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Literary works)]

Alexie's stories have been included in several short story anthologies, including [*The Best American Short Stories*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Best_American_Short_Stories) 2004, edited by [Lorrie Moore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorrie_Moore); and [*Pushcart Prize*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pushcart_Prize) XXIX of the Small Presses. Additionally, a number of his pieces have been published in various literary magazines and journals, as well as online publications.

### Themes[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=6&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Themes)]

Alexie's poetry, short stories and novels explore themes of despair, poverty, violence and alcoholism among the lives of Native American people, both on and off the reservation. They are lightened by wit and humor.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) According to Sarah A. Quirk from the *Dictionary of Library Biography,* Alexie asks three questions across all of his works: "What does it mean to live as an Indian in this time? What does it mean to be an Indian man? Finally, what does it mean to live on an Indian reservation?"[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8) The protagonists in most of his literary works exhibit a constant struggle with themselves and their own sense of powerlessness in white American society.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)

### Influences[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=7&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Influences)]

Alexie’s writings are meant to evoke sadness, but at the same time he uses humor and pop culture that leaves the readers with a sense of respect, understanding, and compassion.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) Alexie’s influences for his literary works do not rely solely on traditional Indian forms. He “blends elements of popular culture, Indian spirituality, and the drudgery of poverty-ridden reservation life to create his characters and the world they inhabit,” according to Quirk.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8) Alexie's work is laced with often startling humor. According to Quirk, he does this as a

"means of cultural survival for American Indians-survival in the face of the larger American culture's stereotypes of American Indians and their concomitant distillation of individual tribal characteristics into one pan-Indian consciousness."[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8)

### Response to Arizona's House Bill 2281, which banned the study of his books in schools[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=8&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Response to Arizona's House Bill 2281, which banned the study of his books in schools)]

*Let's get one thing out of the way: Mexican immigration is an oxymoron. Mexicans are indigenous. So, in a strange way, I'm pleased that the racist folks of Arizona have officially declared, in banning me alongside Urrea, Baca, and Castillo, that their anti-immigration laws are also anti-Indian. I'm also strangely pleased that the folks of Arizona have officially announced their fear of an educated underclass. You give those brown kids some books about brown folks and what happens? Those brown kids change the world. In the effort to vanish our books, Arizona has actually given them enormous power. Arizona has made our books sacred documents now.*[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-17)

### Poetry[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=9&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Poetry)]

Within a year of graduating from college, Alexie received the Washington State Arts Commission Poetry Fellowship and the National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship.[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-18) His career began with the publishing of his first two collections of poetry in 1992, entitled, *I Would Steal Horses* and *The Business of Fancydancing.*[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8) In these poems, Alexie uses humor to express the struggles of contemporary Indians on reservations. Common themes include: alcoholism, poverty and racism.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8)Although he uses humor to express his feelings, the underlying message is very serious.

*The Business of Fancydancing* was well received, selling over 10,000 copies.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11) Alexie refers to his writing as “[fancydancing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fancydancing%22%20%5Co%20%22Fancydancing),"[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Alexie_Encyclopedia-12) a flashy, colorful style of competitive [Pow wow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow) dancing. Whereas older, traditional forms of Indian dance may be ceremonial and kept private among tribal members, the fancydance style was created by Native American veterans from World War II as a form of public entertainment.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Alexie_Encyclopedia-12) Alexie compares the mental, emotional, and spiritual outlet that he finds in his writings to the vivid self-expression of the dancers.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) Leslie Ullman commented on *The Business of Fancydancing* in the *Kenyon Review,* writing that Alexie

"weaves a curiously soft-blended tapestry of humor, humility, pride and metaphysical provocation out of the hard realities...: the tin-shack lives, the alcohol dreams, the bad luck and burlesque disasters, and the self-destructive courage of his characters."[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)

Alexie's other collections of poetry include:

* *Old Shirts and New Skins* (1993)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)
* *First Indian on the Moon* (1993)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)
* *Seven Mourning Songs For the Cedar Flute I Have Yet to Learn to Play* (1994)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)
* *Water Flowing Home* (1996)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)
* *The Summer of Black Widows* (1996)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)
* *The Man Who Loves Salmon* (1998)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)
* *One Stick Song* (2000)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)
* *Face* (2009), Hanging Loose Press (April 15, 2009) hardcover, 160 pages, [ISBN 978-1-931236-71-3](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/9781931236713) [[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)

### Short stories[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=10&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Short stories)]

Alexie published his first prose work, entitled [*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lone_Ranger_and_Tonto_Fistfight_in_Heaven)*,* in 1993.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8) The book consists of a series of short stories that are interconnected. Several prominent characters are explored, and they have been featured in later works by Alexie. According to Sarah A. Quirk, [*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lone_Ranger_and_Tonto_Fistfight_in_Heaven) can be considered a [bildungsroman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bildungsroman) with dual protagonists, "Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-the-Fire, moving from relative innocence to a mature level on experience."[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8)

[*Ten Little Indians*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Little_Indians_%28Alexie%29) is a collection of "nine extraordinary short stories set in and around the Seattle area, featuring Spokane Indians from all walks of urban life," according to Christine C. Menefee of the *School Library Journal*.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) In this collection, Alexie "challenges stereotypes that whites have of Native Americans and at the same time shows the Native American characters coming to terms with their own identities."[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)

[*War Dances*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_Dances) is a collection of short stories, poems, and short works. It won the 2010 [PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PEN/Faulkner_Award_for_Fiction). The collection, however, received mixed reviews.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)

Other short stories by Alexie include:

* *The Toughest Indian in the World* (2000) (collection of short stories)[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-19)
* "What You Pawn I Will Redeem" (2003), published in *The New Yorker*[[1]](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2003/04/21/030421fi_fiction)
* *Blasphemy: New and Selected Stories* (2012)[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-20)
* "Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star−Spangled Banner' at Woodstock"

### Novels[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=11&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Novels)]

In his first novel, [*Reservation Blues*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reservation_Blues) (1995), Alexie revisits some of the characters from [*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lone_Ranger_and_Tonto_Fistfight_in_Heaven)*.* Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Victor Joseph, and Junior Polatkin, who have grown up together on the Spokane Indian reservation, were teenagers in the short story collection. In *Reservation Blues* they are now adult men in their thirties.[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Klinkenborg-21) Some of them are now musicians and in a band together. Verlyn Klinkenborg of the [*Los Angeles Times*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Angeles_Times)wrote in a 1995 review of [*Reservation Blues*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reservation_Blues): "you can feel Alexie's purposely divided attention, his alertness to a divided audience, Native American and Anglo."[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Klinkenborg-21) Klinkenborg says that Alexie is "willing to risk didacticism whenever he stops to explain the particulars of the Spokane and, more broadly, the Native American experience to his readers."[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Klinkenborg-21)

[*Indian Killer*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Killer) (1996) is a murder mystery set among Native American adults in contemporary [Seattle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seattle), where the characters struggle with urban life, mental health, and the knowledge there is a serial killer on the loose. Characters deal with the racism in the University system, as well as in the community at large, where Indians are subjected to being lectured about their own culture by white professors who are actually ignorant about Indian cultures.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)

Alexie's young adult novel, [*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Absolutely_True_Diary_of_a_Part-Time_Indian) (2007) is a coming-of-age story that began as a memoir of his life and family on the Spokane Indian reservation.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) The novel focuses on a fourteen-year-old Indian named Arnold Spirit. The novel is semi-autobiographical, including many events and elements of Alexie's life.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) For example, Arnold was born with hydrocephalus, and was teased a lot as a child. The story also portrays events after Arnold's transfer to Reardan High School, which Alexie had attended.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) The novel received great reviews and continues to be a top seller. Bruce Barcott from the [*New York Times Book Review*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_Times_Book_Review) observed, "Working in the voice of a 14-year-old forces Alexie to strip everything down to action and emotion, so that reading becomes more like listening to your smart, funny best friend recount his day while waiting after school for a ride home."[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)

[*Flight*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flight_%282007_novel%29) (2007) is a collection of interconnected short stories.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13)

### Films[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=12&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro" \o "Edit section: Films)]

In 1998 Alexie broke barriers by creating the first all-Indian movie, [*Smoke Signals*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smoke_Signals_%28film%29).[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) Alexie based the screenplay on his short story collection, [*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lone_Ranger_and_Tonto_Fistfight_in_Heaven), and characters and events from a number of Alexie's works make appearances in the film.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) *Smoke Signals* was directed by Chris Eyre, a [Cheyenne-Arapaho](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheyenne_and_Arapaho_Tribes) Indian filmmaker, and the entire production team and cast is Native American.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Authors_.26_Artists-11) The film tells the story of two young Indians, Victor Joseph ([Adam Beach](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Beach)) and Thomas Builds the Fire ([Evan Adams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evan_Adams)), who leave the reservation on a road trip to retrieve the body of Victor's dead father ([Gary Farmer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gary_Farmer)).[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) During their journey the characters' childhood is explored via flashbacks. The film took top honors at the Sundance Film Festival.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-Artists_2011-13) It received an 86% and "fresh" rating from the online film database [Rotten Tomatoes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotten_Tomatoes).[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-22)

[*The Business of Fancydancing*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Business_of_Fancydancing), written and directed by Alexie in 2002, explores themes of Indian identity, cultural involvement vs [blood quantum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood_quantum), living on the reservation or off it, and other issues around makes someone a "real Indian." The title refers to the protagonist's choice to leave the reservation and make his living performing for predominantly-white audiences. [Evan Adams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evan_Adams), who plays Thomas Builds the Fire in "Smoke Signals", again stars, now as an urban gay man with a white partner. The death of a peer brings the protagonist home to the reservation, where he reunites with his friends from his childhood and youth. The film is unique in that Alexie hired an almost completely female crew to produce the film. Many of the actors improvised their dialogue, based on real events in their lives.

Other film projects include:

* *49?* (writer, 2003)
* *The Exiles* (presenter, 2008)
* [*Sonicsgate*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonicsgate) (participant, 2009)

## Awards and honors[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sherman_Alexie&action=edit&section=13&editintro=Template:BLP_editintro)]

**1992**

* [National Endowment for the Arts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Endowment_for_the_Arts) Poetry Fellowship

**1993**

* [PEN/Hemingway Award](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PEN/Hemingway_Award) for Best First Book of Fiction for the story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8)

**1994**

* Lila Wallace-*Reader's Digest* Writers' Award[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-DLB_278-8)

**1996**

* [American Book Award](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Book_Award) ([Before Columbus Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Before_Columbus_Foundation)) for *Reservation Blues*[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-ABAaba-2)
* [Granta Magazine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Granta_Magazine): Twenty Best American Novelists Under the Age of 40
* New York Times Notable Book for *Indian Killer*
* [People Magazine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People_%28magazine%29): Best of Pages

**1999**

* [The New Yorker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_Yorker): 20 Writers for the 21st Century

**2001**

* [PEN/Malamud Award](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PEN/Malamud_Award)

**2007**

* National Book Award, Young People's Literature, for *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-nba2007-3)

**2009**

* American Library Association [Odyssey Award](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odyssey_Award) as the year's "best [audiobook](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Audiobook) for children or young adults", read by Alexie (Frederick, MD: [Recorded Books](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recorded_Books), LLC, 2008, [ISBN 1-4361-2490-5](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/1436124905))[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-odyssey-4)

**2010**

* PEN/Faulkner Award for *War Dances*[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-PEN-5)
* [Native Writers' Circle of the Americas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_Writers%27_Circle_of_the_Americas) Lifetime Achievement Award
* Puterbaugh Award ["](http://www.ou.edu/worldlit/puterbaugh.htm), the first American Puterbaugh fellow
* [California Young Reader Medal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_Young_Reader_Medal) for *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherman_Alexie#cite_note-23)