



# Sherman Alexie

# *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

- Why do you have to read this book??????  
Because you're going to love it! It's a story about a kid your age who has a lot of the same issues that you have. He's a great, funny, and very real story-teller, and he draws pretty awesome cartoons and comics. This is his diary.

# Alexie's Inspiration

- I read one poem in particular that was revolutionary and revelatory. The line was, 'I'm in the reservation of my mind.' It was by Adrian Louis, a Paiute Indian poet. For me, that was like, 'In the beginning . . .' It was, 'Because I could not stop for death, death kindly stopped for me . . .' It was, 'I sing the body electric . . .' It was all that and more. It was the first line I ever read in any work, any fiction anywhere that ever applied to something I knew. Literally, it was this flash of lightning, roll of thunder...I understood everything that I ever wanted to be...[it was] like a light switch. And at that moment I knew I wanted to be a writer.“

-from Bob Ivry, "From the Reservation of His Mind." *Bergen Record* 28 June 1998

# The Rez

- Spokane/Coeur d'Alene
- Spokane Indian Reservation, Wellpinit, WA  
(50 miles NW of Spokane)
- 1100 Tribal members

# Childhood



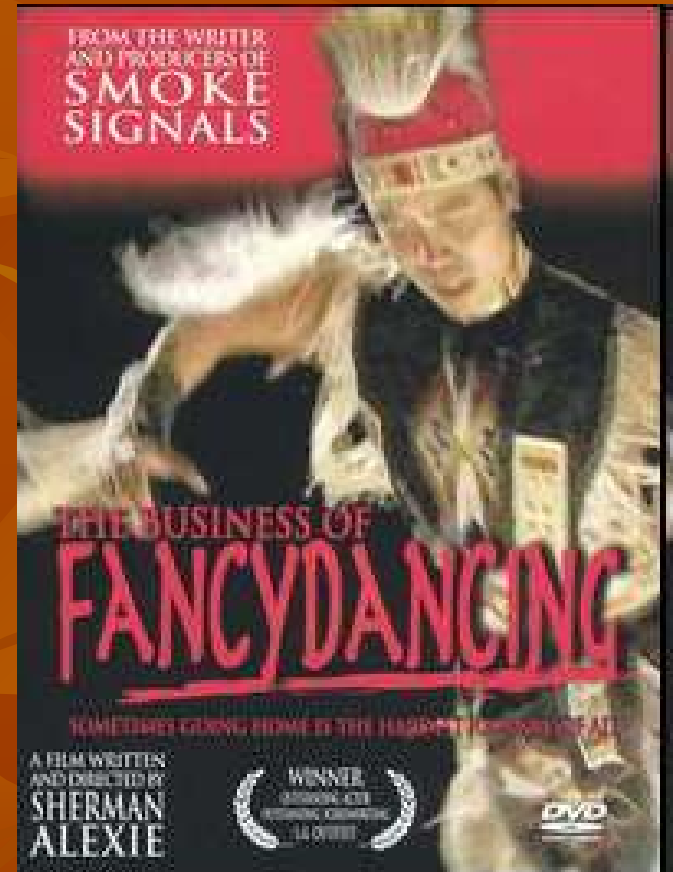
- Born in 1966 hydrocephalic (water on the brain)
  - Underwent brain operation at 6 mo.s; was not expected to survive; he did.
  - Doctors said he would have severe mental retardation
- Learned to read by age 3
  - *Grapes of Wrath* by age 5
  - ostracized from peers
  - the brunt of jokes from other kids

# Adolescence

- Left the rez after finding his mom's name in his textbook – went to Reardan, WA
  - Was the only Indian (other than the mascot)
  - Became star basketball player
- 1985 graduated
  - attended Gonzaga U., Spokane, then, WSU, Pullman, WA
  - Planned to be a Dr.; fainted too many times in anatomy class
  - Stumbled into poetry workshop and eventually received W.S. Arts Commission Poetry Fellowship National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship

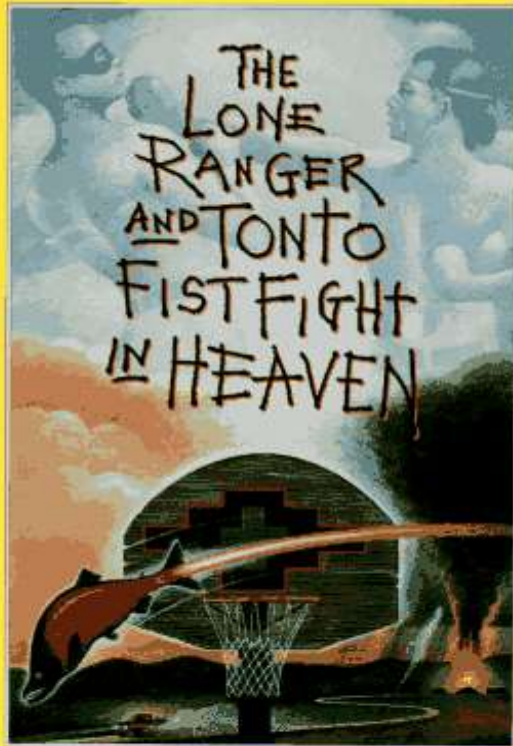
# Early Publications

- Wrote *The Business of Fancydancing* and *I would Steal Horses* one year after graduation
- Alcoholic; became sober after *Fancydancing* was published





# *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*



SHERMAN ALEXIE

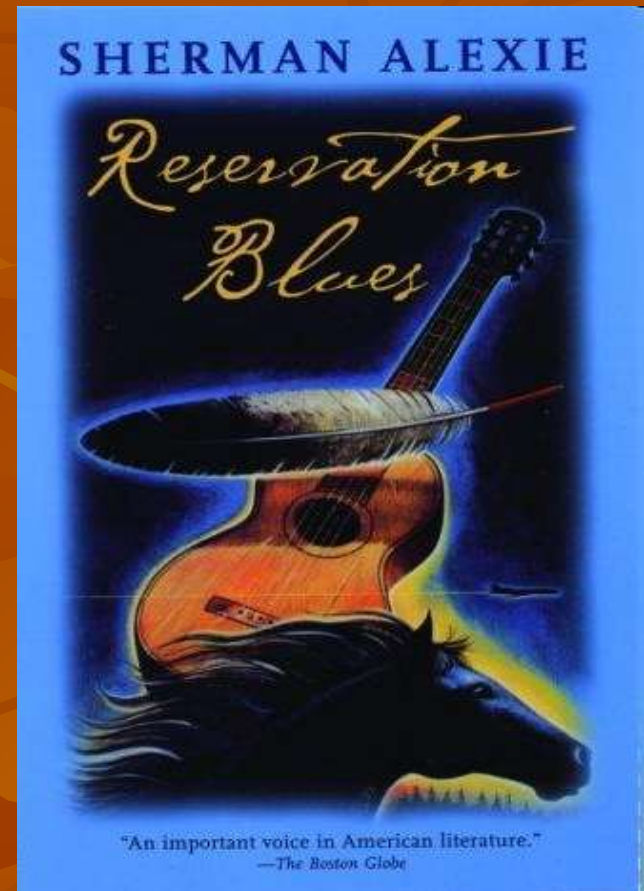
"Again and again, Alexie's prose startles and dazzles with unexpected, impossible-to-anticipate moves. With this stunning collection, Sherman Alexie has become quite clearly an important new voice in American literature." —Boston Globe

- Short story collection
- Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993
- Received Pen/Hemingway Award for Best First Book of Fiction
- Awarded Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' award



# *Reservation Blues*

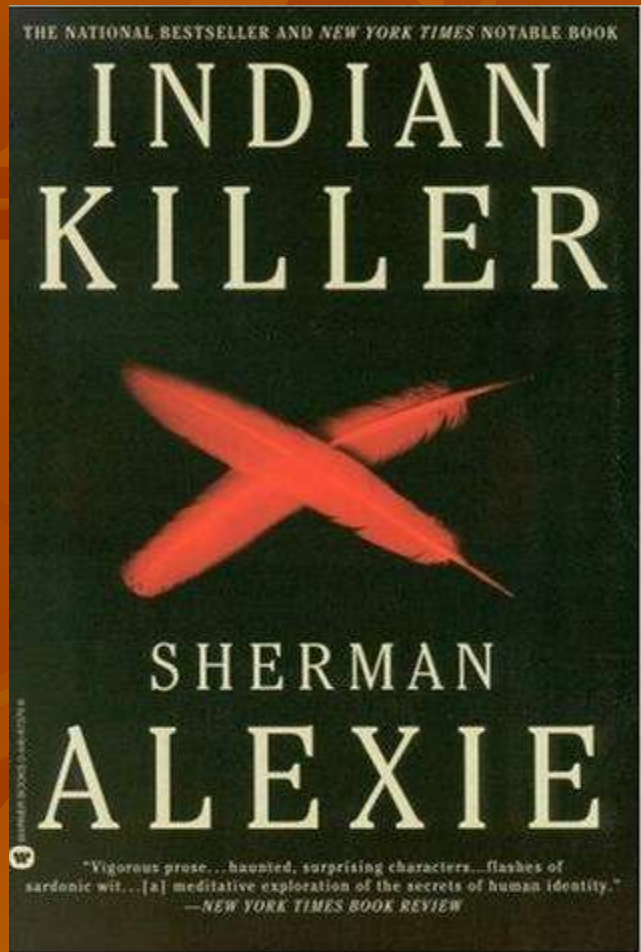
- First novel,
- Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995
- Murray Morgan Prize
- In the 111-year life of the Spokane Indian reservation, not one person has arrived by accident-until the day the black stranger appears with a guitar slung over his back: legendary bluesman Robert Johnson, in flight from the devil and presumed long dead. When he passes his enchanted instrument to young Thomas-Builds-the-Fire-storyteller, misfit, and musician-a magical odyssey begins.



# On Heroes

- Most of my heroes are just decent people. Decency is rare and underrated. I think my writing is somehow just about decency. Still, if I was keeping score, and I like to keep score, I would say the villains in the world are way ahead of the heroes. I hope my writing can help even the score.
- from Laura Baratto, "On Tour: Writers on the Road with New Books." *Hungry Mind Review Summer 1995*: 22.

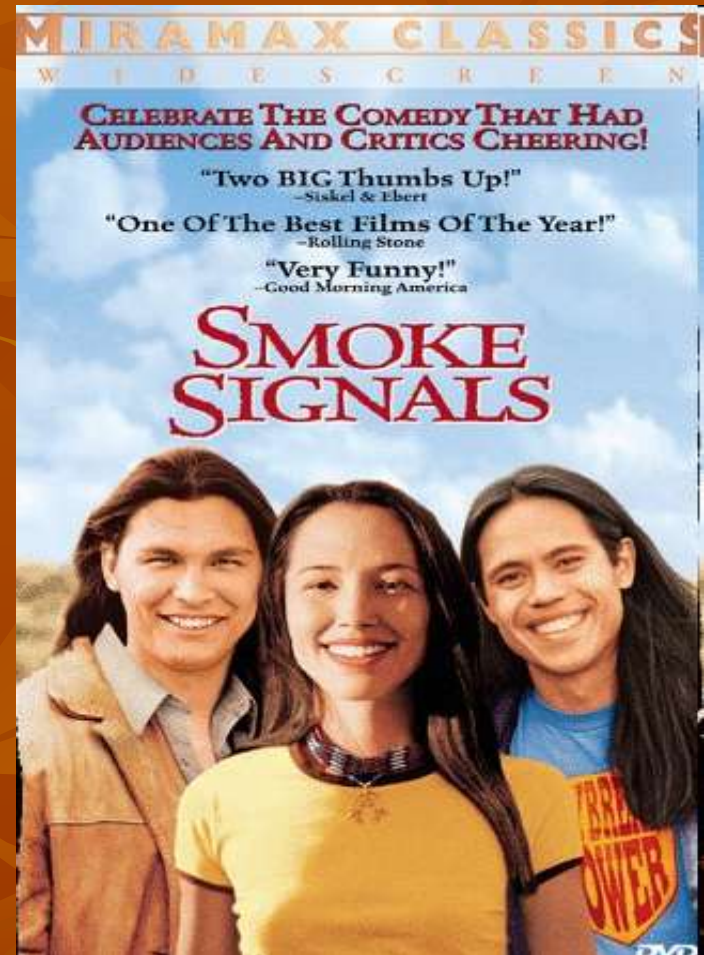
# *Indian Killer*



- Second novel
- Atlantic Monthly Press, 1996
- Named a New York Times Notable Book

# *Smoke Signals*

- Film
- Released at Sundance Film Festival, 1998
- Received Christopher Award
  - Presented to creators of artistic works “which affirm the highest values of the human spirit”
  - Nominated for 1999 Independent Spirit Award for Best First Screenplay





# Poet, Comedian

- 1998 World Heavyweight Poetry Bout
  - Taos, New Mexico
  - Competed against world champ Jimmy Santiago Baca
  - First competition; he won
  - Only poet to hold the title for four consecutive years
- Stand-up comedian – still performs



# Recent Work

- Has won awards too numerous to mention
- Recent work includes:
  - *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*
    - Little Brown and Company, 2007
    - Won 2007 National Book Award in Young People's Literature
  - *War Dances*, a collection of stories and poems
    - *Hanging Loose Press, 2009*

# Work in Progress

- Currently lives in Seattle, WA with his wife and two sons
- Working on a documentary, *Learning to Drown*, as well as several new writing projects
- Frequently gives readings
  - has read at Auntie's Bookstore in Spokane several times and was at Helena High a few years ago