

# Sherman Alexie

A MINI-BIOGRAPHY



- Born: 1966 on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit, Washington
- A Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian
- He is a poet, novelist, short story writer, director, songwriter, comedian, etc.
- Died: Not yet, but maybe in a train accident some day

**Sherman Alexie--Life**

- Books
  - *The Business of Fancydancing* (poems)
  - *Face* (poems)
  - *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (short stories)
  - *Reservation Blues* (novel)
- Poems
  - "House Fires"
  - "Spontaneous Combustion"
- Films
  - *Smoke Signals*
  - *The Business of Fancydancing*
- Album
  - *Reservation Blues*

## Sherman Alexie—Selected Works

“House Fires” by  
Sherman Alexie

The night my father broke  
the furniture and used the pieces  
to build a fire, my mother tore me  
from my bed at 3 a.m. Eyes and mouth

wide with whiskey, she told me  
we were leaving that place  
and would never come back.  
We drove for hours, under the gates

of this reservation, as she recanted  
years of life with my father,  
the man who pulled  
our house from its foundations  
and sent us all tumbling down

to a café in Colville. We took penance  
in a breakfast special, she told me  
she forgave all our sins. We drove back

to my father, gathering ash  
in his hands, planning to bury it all  
in the graves we had chosen for each other.

## “Powwow Ghazal” by Sherman Alexie

Can you hear the drums? Can you hear the drums?  
Tonight, the reservation is aflame with drums.

Who’s that drum group? They’re good, but they’re kids.  
They have no idea how their lives will change with drums.

And what about those drummers? O, they’re old school.  
They’re everybody’s elders. They’ve gone gray with drums.

O, listen to that singer! He’s equal parts joy and hurt.  
His hands and vocal cords are bloodstained with drums.

Damn, look at that fancy dancer spin in circles.  
She’s weeping! The girl is going insane with drums.

Who’s the head man dancer? He’s been sober for ten years.  
Now he only gets drunk, stoned, and dazed with drums.

Who’s the head woman dancer? That’s a grandmother.  
She speaks in sermons. She offers us grace with drums.

That jingle dancer, ah, she’s a reservation beauty.  
Talk to her, cousin, because you can get laid with drums.

That nostalgic Indian is wearing blue suede shoes.  
He’s the Indian Elvis, mixing his pomade with drums.

Hey, look at that tribal cop with a shiny badge and gun.

She wants to solve a crime. She’s Sam Spade with drums.

But don’t forget that powwows can be dangerous, too.

You better duck or get punched in the face with drums.

Do you have a question? It can be answered here.

There is nothing that can’t be explained with drums.

No, I’m lying. Indians are glorious deceivers.  
We love to obscure, obfuscate, and exaggerate with drums.

During powwow, even God wants to sing and dance,

So God makes thunder, lightning, and rain with drums.

Nobody has gone to bed yet. We’ve been awake for days.

I sometimes think that every Indian is made with drums.