

A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

The  
Absolutely  
True  
Diary  
of a  
Part-Time  
Indian



A NOVEL BY

SHERMAN  
ALEXIE

ART BY ELLEN FORNEY

# The Black- Eye-of- the-Month Club



I was born with water on the brain.

Okay, so that's not exactly true. I was actually born with too much cerebral spinal fluid inside my skull. But cerebral spinal fluid is just the doctors' fancy way of saying brain grease. And brain grease works inside the lobes like car grease works inside an engine. It keeps things running smooth and fast. But weirdo me, I was born with too much grease inside my skull, and it got all thick and muddy and disgusting, and it only mucked up the works. My thinking and breathing and living engine slowed down and flooded.

My brain was drowning in grease.

But that makes the whole thing sound weirdo and funny, like my brain was a giant French fry, so it seems more serious and poetic and accurate to say, "I was born with water on the brain."

Okay, so maybe that's not a very serious way to say it, either. Maybe the whole thing *is* weird and funny.

But jeez, did my mother and father and big sister and grandma and cousins and aunts and uncles think it was funny when the doctors cut open my little skull and sucked out all that extra water with some tiny vacuum?

I was only six months old and I was supposed to croak during the surgery. And even if I somehow survived the mini-Hoover, I was supposed to suffer serious brain damage during the procedure and live the rest of my life as a vegetable.

Well, I obviously survived the surgery. I wouldn't be writing this if I didn't, but I have all sorts of physical problems that are directly the result of my brain damage.

First of all, I ended up having forty-two teeth. The typical human has thirty-two, right? But I had forty-two.

Ten more than usual.

Ten more than normal.

Ten teeth past human.

My teeth got so crowded that I could barely close my mouth. I went to Indian Health Service to get some teeth pulled so I could eat normally, not like some slobbering vulture. But the Indian Health Service funded major dental work only once a year, so I had to have all ten extra teeth pulled *in one day*.

And what's more, our white dentist believed that Indians only felt half as much pain as white people did, so he only gave us half the Novocain.

What a bastard, huh?

Indian Health Service also funded eyeglass purchases only once a year and offered one style: those ugly, thick, black plastic ones.

My brain damage left me nearsighted in one eye and farsighted in the other, so my ugly glasses were all lopsided because my eyes were so lopsided.

I get headaches because my eyes are, like, enemies, you know, like they used to be married to each other but now hate each other's guts.

And I started wearing glasses when I was three, so I ran around the rez looking like a three-year-old Indian *grandpa*.

And, oh, I was skinny. I'd turn sideways and *disappear*.

But my hands and feet were huge. My feet were a size eleven in third grade! With my big feet and pencil body, I looked like a capital *L* walking down the road.

And my skull was enormous.

Epic.

My head was so big that little Indian skulls orbited around it. Some of the kids called me Orbit. And other kids just called me Globe. The bullies would pick me up, spin me in circles, put their finger down on my skull, and say, "I want to go there."

So obviously, I looked goofy on the outside, but it was the *inside* stuff that was the worst.

First of all, I had seizures. At least two a week. So I was damaging my brain on a regular basis. But the thing is, I was having those seizures because I *already* had brain damage, so I was reopening wounds each time I seized.

Yep, whenever I had a seizure, I was *damaging my damage*.

I haven't had a seizure in seven years, but the doctors tell me that I am "susceptible to seizure activity."

## ADDED MATERIAL, INCLUDING A DISCUSSION GUIDE AND AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST!

Junior is a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian reservation. Born with a variety of medical problems, he is picked on by everyone but his best friend. Determined to receive a good education, Junior leaves the rez to attend an all-white school in the neighboring farm town where the only other Indian is the school mascot. Despite being condemned as a traitor to his people and enduring great tragedies, Junior attacks life with wit and humor and discovers a strength inside of himself that he never knew existed.

Inspired by his own experiences growing up, award-winning author Sherman Alexie chronicles the contemporary adolescence of one unlucky boy trying to rise above the life everyone expects him to live.

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