

# Back at Wellpinit High

## Writing a graduation speech

Good morning, my name is “Sherman Alexie”. But you can also call me “Arnold Spirit” or even “Junior” as everyone has called me here on the rez. Yes, I also have been growing up here. I lived in the white house next to the bunch of trees behind school. But my life was not as easy as you might think if you are seeing me now standing in front of you.

As soon as I was born it was clear that I really would have problems in my life. The doctors diagnosed a disease that you maybe know as “water brain”.

Yea, that’s why I have a big “pumpkin head”.

But back to story: My family was really poor we could not even bring our dog to hospital when he was ill. We had to shoot him. That was the cheapest “solution”. Just think of it for a moment: Everybody hates you because you are looking ugly and your parents have to shoot your best friend, maybe the only one who you think of can understand you because it is the cheapest. Think of it! I really wanted to hate my parents, but I also knew that they had no other option. We just have been poor since our family has been on earth.

My life continued like that: Everybody hated me. I just had one friend called Rowdy and he really was mad! But that was what helped me: He protected me against everybody, and I was the only person on earth that he had not beaten up and that he was friendly to. Even though everything seemed to be bad I could enjoy my life with Rowdy. We played together from the beginning to the end of the day. And of course we went to this school here. But then there was an event that would change everything: One day when our math teacher gave us “new” geometry books I found the maiden name of my mother in it! That sucks! This book had to be tremendous old! The only action this could lead into (at least for me at this moment) was smashing it with all my force into the face of my teacher. Guess what? I was suspended from school. But one or two days later as I was sitting out there, I saw my teacher walking over to me. And I at first had of course this feeling / this fear that he wanted to correct what I was doing or punish me. But against all my expectations he told me that this reservation was meant to be a prison and that there would not be any hope for me here in this rez. So, he told me to leave. I would be the best for me, he said. Two days later I was on a different school. It was outside the rez on a “white” territory. That day I lost my best friend again. This time it was Rowdy. He could not understand why I wanted to leave and called me a “white lover” (as anybody else on the rez). At Reardan, the white school, I was of course bullied all the time. I mean what did I expect? I was the only Indian standing out just because of my skin colour. But one day I have beaten up the guy who has told me the racist “joke” ever. That day I became accepted at Reardan. At least a little bit. And the story goes on for a long time...

So, should you now all leave the rez and beat everybody that does not like you?!

No, of course not! But what do I then want to tell you? I want to tell you that Indians or

Native Americans (to be politically correct) do not have to be bad at everything and that they do not have to drink alcohol all day. By the way I lost my sister, my grandmother and my father's friend (he was basically like an uncle to me) just because of alcohol. Leave your fingers away from these bottles! You are the living proof! You have made it! You have proved that you are good at schools, but that is not everything in life! One particularly important criteria is to be self-reflected. Try to think what the person facing you thinks and foremost reflect what you were doing. That really helped me and maybe was the only way to come back to Rowdy. One day he came to be and wanted to play with me. At this time, we really hated each other, and he did not come because he wanted to say "Sorry". He was just bored. If I had said now, we maybe would never have done anything together anymore.

And from the beginning let nobody tell you what you have or have not to do especially because you have a different skin colour. If you want to leave the rez leave it. It was meant to be prison. If you want to stay here stay! Then it has become our home. And do not forget: Let your fingers off the alcohol!

Thank you!