

NATE BARGATZE

A portrait of comedian Nate Bargatze. He has short, dark hair with some grey, a full beard, and is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. He is wearing a dark blue jacket over a black shirt. The background is a solid, bright blue.

*stories
from a
simpler
mind*

BIG DUMB EYES

NATE BARGATZE

BIG DUMB EYES

Stories from a Simpler mind



GRAND
CENTRAL

New York Boston

[OceanofPDF.com](https://oceanofpdf.com)

Copyright © 2025 by Lynnlee Publishing, LLC

Cover design by Albert Tang. Cover photo by Peter Yang.

Cover copyright © 2025 by Hachette Book Group, Inc.

Hachette Book Group supports the right to free expression and the value of copyright. The purpose of copyright is to encourage writers and artists to produce the creative works that enrich our culture.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book without permission is a theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like permission to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), please contact permissions@hbgusa.com. Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Grand Central Publishing

Hachette Book Group

1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104

grandcentralpublishing.com

@grandcentralpub

First Edition: May 2025

Grand Central Publishing is a division of Hachette Book Group, Inc. The Grand Central Publishing name and logo is a registered trademark of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

The Hachette Speakers Bureau provides a wide range of authors for speaking

events. To find out more, go to hachettespeakersbureau.com or email HachetteSpeakers@hbgusa.com.

Grand Central Publishing books may be purchased in bulk for business, educational, or promotional use. For information, please contact your local bookseller or the Hachette Book Group Special Markets Department at special.markets@hbgusa.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024952822

ISBNs: 978-1-5387-6846-4 (hardcover), 978-1-5387-6848-8 (ebook), 978-1-5387-7491-5 (signed edition), 978-1-5387-7490-8 (B&N signed edition)

E3-20250321-JV-NF-ORI

OceanofPDF.com

CONTENTS

COVER

TITLE PAGE

COPYRIGHT

DEDICATION

INTRODUCTION: THE MOST WORDS

THE BIGGEST LITTLE SPEED TRAP IN TENNESSEE

RAISED BY A CLOWN

I WAS ALMOST A GENIUS

RANDOM FOOD THING 1: I GUESS SUSHI IS OLD

MY SISTER THE ALIEN

THE BALLAD OF OLD BLUE

THE PERFECT SOCK

THE TIME I MADE THE NBA

I'M IN YOUR HEAD

BOWLING 101

RANDOM FOOD THING 2: I HATE ONIONS

KISS THE GIRL

GET YOUR HEAD ABOVE WATER

HELP WANTED: MUST LOVE SNACKS

I WOULD LEAVE A NOTE

NO MORE GUILT-TIPPING

RANDOM FOOD THING 3: YOU CHANGED, MCDONALD'S. YOU CHANGED.

THE DOG CHAPTER

NO RUNNING IN THE MADHOUSE

THE BET

RANDOM FOOD THING 4: MY PARENTS WAITED IN LINE THREE HOURS FOR WHATABURGER

I AM DEFINITELY NOT SHOPPING RIGHT NOW

THIS IS TOTALLY OUR YEAR

TAKE ANOTHER BREATH. YOU'RE WELCOME.

I BELIEVE IN ELVES

MY BARBER MAKES ME WORK OUT

RANDOM FOOD THING 5: I BETTER TALK THIS OVER WITH MY WIFE

THE BARGATZE WAY

CONCLUSION: CONGRATS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DISCOVER MORE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

OceanofPDF.com

*For Laura and Harper, who always tell me
to be funny before every show.*

OceanofPDF.com

Explore book giveaways, sneak peeks, deals, and more.

[Tap here to learn more.](#)



OceanofPDF.com

INTRODUCTION:

THE MOST WORDS

I was on a call with the publisher, and they asked me what I wanted to call my book. So I'm like, "Okay. I got the perfect title. *Big Dumb Eyes*."

And there was this silence on the other end.

Finally they go, "Uh, that is really not the kind of book we had in mind here. That sounds way too dark. Um. Kind of inappropriate, actually."

So I try to explain, right? I'm like, "Well, the thing is, whenever people talk to me, they always speak real slow. They pause after each word, like I'm not all there. Like I can't follow. And it's all because I got these big dumb eyes."

Then they go, "Ohhhhhh! Right. Okay. You talk kinda funny with that Southern accent. We thought you said 'Big *Demise*.'"

From then on, they would only communicate with me over email. By the way, what does "demise" mean anyway? Wait, I'm gonna look it up.

Ohhhhhh. De-*mise*. This book is definitely not that.

You might be a little nervous opening these pages, because I am very on the record about not liking to read books. It's a big part of my act, going on about how every book is just the most words. How it never lets up, and there's just more and more words until it's like, "What are you talking about? Please, just make it stop."

And here I am, writing one of my own.

But you're in for a real good time. Real good. Because I have taken everything bad about books and made it the best. So I can personally guarantee that you will love this book. Or at least that it is, in fact, a book.

Because that is what I've been told.

Now, is it perfect? Let's not get crazy. I mean, it has a lot of pages. And I wanted lots more pictures. But it's pretty darn close, because this is the very first book in the history of the world that was written to not be a whole complicated thing. I'm not saying I wrote it for cats and dogs, but I bet they could knock a couple chapters out if they put their minds to it.

It's light. It's funny. It's relaxing. It's full of a bunch of stories about me and my hometown in Tennessee, my friends and my family, my old car named Old Blue, and how I flunked bowling my only semester in college. There's another chapter about how I was almost a genius, but I swear that is not a contradiction. So, basically I talk about the same kind of stuff I talk about on stage, but with new stories that have more fun details and background on everything and everyone in what I like to call Nateland.

This book is never trying to say anything even close to important. At first, I had a thirty-page chapter right in the middle called "The Meaning of Life," and I really do think I had it all figured out, but we got to the last draft of the book, right before publication, and I was like, "No! Too important! *Delete.*" And now I forgot it.

You can read this book anywhere or any way you want. You can read it in bed. You can read it upside down. You can read it in the car, but only when you're driving. That's a joke, in case that is not clear. When you're done, you can leave it on your coffee table. I tried to tell the publisher to make it an actual coffee table, like Kramer's book in *Seinfeld*, but they said I'd need to write a lot more words for a book that big, so that was out.

You can read this book from beginning to end, or you can open it to any random chapter you want and you'll be just fine. There isn't any real order. No rhyme or reason behind much of anything. I was trying to think of one big chapter that said everything I ever wanted to say about food, then I realized my one big idea was "I love food. I love to eat food. Food is good." So instead I have a few smaller chapters about me and food I'm thinking of calling "Bites." Or maybe "Snacks." Or probably "Random Food Things." Either way, you won't need any special information to read any of it. You

won't need facts or opinions or, like, smarts. I promise, you won't find that pesky stuff here. So just dive right in.

As I was learning to read, one of the most annoying things about books was having to keep track of all the characters' names. It's possible I shouldn't have started with *War and Peace*. So in my book, I will always remind you who I'm talking about, even if you met them before. Like my friend P-P comes up in a few chapters, and I will always helpfully remind you that he's called P-P because he got hit in the pee-pee by a football when he was in high school. Also because I love reminding P-P of that same story. How you doin', P?¹_—

I will make sure to have some breaks, a few blank pages to help you keep your head above water, just in case you're crazy enough to read the book from front to back, which I don't even know if that's allowed. And I promise you there will not be lots of big words, because—I'm sorry, “cause”—I don't like them.

There is one thing I should clear up, and that has to do with how I talk. Actually, the publishers told me I had to add this note, I think because they still feel burned by the whole “demise” thing.

1. When I write “golly,” it should actually be read as “gaaaaaaaahhhhhhhly!”
2. Take any word that you say, and I probably say it different. Like “boil” is really “bowl.” Though come to think of it, I don't think “boil” is actually in the book. But I do bowl. Whatever. Just read it in my voice and you'll have way more fun.
3. If you haven't actually heard my voice before, I talk slow. It doesn't feel slow to me. But you are not me. And I am not you.

And that's all you need to know. If you forget, just come right back to the beginning, and it'll be right here waiting for you.



Proof that I let my daughter Harper write this book for me.

Footnote

¹ We've always written his name as "P," or if you wanna get formal, "P-P." Some might argue we should spell it out, but I've never been good with biological terms.

[OceanofPDF.com](https://oceanofpdf.com)

THE BIGGEST LITTLE SPEED TRAP IN TENNESSEE

I grew up in this tiny little town in Tennessee that thought it needed six police officers. I'd say no one knew why we had so many police officers, except we did know why. They were there to give us all speeding tickets.

That was it. That was the only reason.

They weren't there to fight crime or stop bad guys from doing bad things. I'm sure there was some of that. But even if we wanted to do something bad to someone, we kinda couldn't, because we pretty much all knew each other. If somebody broke the law, it would be like, "Okay, let's talk about this at the church barbecue with the other twelve people in our town, half of whom are apparently cops."

My town was so tiny it actually existed *inside* another tiny town. Seriously. You can look at a map of Tennessee and you'll find a little blob called Old Hickory, and inside that little blob you'll find an even smaller, blobbier blob called Lakewood, which is so small and so blobby I usually only talk about Old Hickory in my act. I do not know how it is legally possible for one town to exist inside another town—and I never will, because that would require me to read a book—but it must be legal, because Lakewood existed, and it was my home.^{[1](#)}

My parents had moved us there in the early nineties—my mom says 1991 or 1992 or maybe 1993, and she's the one in the family who's good with dates. So I was twelve years old. Or thirteen. Or fourteen. Or fifteen or eleven depending on the month, which she says was definitely December or absolutely July. Whatever it was, it was a good year. And extremely memorable.

Our previous town was, in fact, Old Hickory, which was one or two miles down the road. So yeah. It was a big transition for all of us.

Lakewood is the kind of place where if you go to the school and look at old class photos, you'll see pictures of your buddies' grandparents when they were kids, because no one ever leaves. It's the kind of place where if you fall down a cliff and get a concussion, your neighbor will pick you up and carry you back to your mom. I know this because it happened to me. It's the kind of place where there are two different families both named Thompson, then they had kids, and two of those kids got married. Now I can't figure out if that means there's one Thompson family or three.

In the winter, if there was a half inch of snow, people would just go crazy. We barely ever saw any snow in the South, we had no idea what was going on. Everything would shut down. We're talking schools, offices, grocery stores, hospitals, everything. Like you'd have emergency surgeries scheduled, patients flatlining on the edge of death, and the doctor would call in and go, "You kidding me? Have you seen those roads? I'm going sledding!"

And that's what we'd do. The entire town would gather at the one big hill that was behind our church and right next to the golf course. Everyone would be there. Friends, neighbors, all three Thompson families—or two or one, or whatever—we'd all go. We'd take trays and trash can lids and we'd flop down on our bellies, me on the bottom, my sister on top, my brother sandwiched in between, and we'd bolt right down that single snowy hill, and after five minutes it was nothing but mud. Just pure slop. We'd keep going and going till we were totally covered in muck. Like, "Woohoo! It's a winter wonderland!"

My dad got so excited one year he went out and bought one of those classic red sleds with the metal runners like something out of *A Christmas Story*. Got to the mud hill and it was like trying to slice through a Big Mac with a butter knife. I mean, slicing through a Big Mac with a butter knife would be insane to do. I feel dumb even writing it, because no one would ever try that. I don't think a butter knife has ever even been *near* a Big Mac.

But if you did try to cut one, and you used a butter knife, it would be as effective as going down that muddy hill on my dad's sled. That's all I know, and that is the kind of town I'm from.

It was also the kind of town that didn't need any police officers, except for one reason, and that was to give people speeding tickets.

That was all the Lakewood PD did. The six of them would get to work in the morning and they'd look at each other and go, "What's it gonna be today? Drug busts?"

"Nope."

"Murder?"

"Uh-uh."

"Grand theft auto?"

"Nah."

"How about we park across from the Piggly Wiggly and catch anyone going 35 in a 30?"

"Sounds right to me."

Everyone knew the speed trap was there, but we all kept speeding anyway. I don't know why. There was just something about Old Hickory Boulevard that made you want to speed on it. I mean, it's four lanes, with a lane in the middle. So is that five lanes? Whatever it is, you ain't going the speed limit. But honestly, the whole thing was so ridiculous it was kind of fun.

One time they got us while we were driving to church on a Sunday morning. My dad was behind the wheel, drinking a Big Red. Big Red is a cream soda. It's red and it's delicious. It's also why my dad has diabetes. He loved it so much he would go down to Kentucky on weekends and buy cases of the stuff, because that was the only place you could get it in old-fashioned glass bottles, and everyone knows soda always tastes better in bottles than cans.

This policeman pulled us over, looked at my dad and us kids all dressed up to go to church at 9 a.m., and he thought, "These people are up to no good." So he spots the fizzy red beverage my dad's drinking, and he goes,

“What you got in there? Is that alcohol?”

My dad goes, “No, Officer, it’s a cream soda. It’s red and it’s delicious.”

The cop thinks about this for a second. “Well, I should prolly get a little sip. Just to be sure.”

He took that sip. And just like that he also got diabetes.

Once, the Lakewood PD tried to pull over my mom, and she actually managed to lose them in the neighborhood. I’m serious. This is a thing that really happened.

My mom heard the sirens, she saw the flashing lights, she said, “Nope, not today, Po-Po,” and she outran this cop behind the wheel of a used Mazda.² She probably had to floor it just to get up to 35, that’s how fast that car was. And this neighborhood is like ten blocks long. You couldn’t lose your wallet on one of these streets. I have physically gone to this spot, put on a blindfold, turned myself around, and tried to get confused, and I could not do it. But my mom in her Mazda was able to lose this cop.

To be clear, she’s usually a law-abiding citizen, but she didn’t want to have to tell my dad she got us another ticket so soon after we got busted for driving under the influence of soda pop.

Eventually, me and my brother grew up and moved out, and my parents and my little sister moved to a different town, Mount Juliet, about ten miles away. It wasn’t that big, nothing in Tennessee really is, but it was still about twice the size of Lakewood. It wasn’t as blobby. It had more than just one muddy hill in the winter. Its police did real police things.

And eventually, Lakewood lost its police department. I don’t mean there was a budget cut or a downsize. Once the town became unincorporated, the cops disappeared. One second the Lakewood PD was sitting across from the Piggly Wiggly, shaking down families on their way to church, and the next second they were gone. Just like that.

It was all right, I guess. But still, we were kind of sad. They were *our* pointless, annoying cops, and now they were gone. Like maybe we should’ve

made special trips back to the speed trap. Driven even *faster*. *More* dangerous. Just to give them more to do, even if it was the only thing they ever did.

To this day, whenever I'm driving through on my way to visit family, heading down that single main street where no one ever breaks a single law, I always put my foot on the brake and make sure I'm going under 30, in memory of the Lakewood Police Department.

Then, to be honest, I do speed up. Because the street has too many lanes to go that slow.

Footnotes

¹ I say “existed” because at some point they decided to make it unincorporated, which is a technical term my mom told me. So it kinda isn't there anymore, even though we all still call it Lakewood. Anyway, talk to my mom.

² For people who keep track of these things, this was not my old Mazda “Old Blue,” which we discuss in another chapter, but a different old Mazda that was red. If my mom ever called it anything, it was basically just “My Old Mazda” or “That Car.” She never was much for car nicknames.