TRAVELING WITH AN Eggplant

by Sarah Mullin

At first glance, Traveling with an Eggplant may look like a common cooking book or cause a confused expression to cross a reader's face. But in spite of the title, this first book by Amherst native Alycia Ripley is less about produce and more about relationships. The eggplant merely represents a turning point on which protagonist, 34-year old aspiring music journalist Alison, begins her Friendship/romance with Seymour Dollar.

BOOK REVIEW

Traveling with an Eggplant takes the reader straight into Alison's mind; at times, this perspective can make a reader feel trapped, and it is difficult to tell where reality ends and where Alison's altered thoughts and memories begin. It is a unique reading experience.

Finding herself on the steps of her old college apartment, 34-year-old Alison reminisces about decade-old romances, sickness, and inspiration from Elvis Costello.

During Alison's reverie, she is faced with her best friend's sudden, cancerous brain tumor, her isolated, lifeless, almost non-existent relationship with neuroscientist Seymour Dollar and a 'disease' that allows her to become a receiver for radio signals and people's voices. This disease involves an imaginary, yet all too real, person named Chloe.

While transporting the reader into the world of 1980s music, this book plays with the plane of existence, causing Alison to confront her childhood memories of Anthony, her mother's abusive boyfriend, and make a hard decision that will determine if someone close to her lives or dies.

In short, Ripley weaves an imaginative story that brings to life a character so vivid and strong that readers will feel like she is standing right next to them.