I was very little, my great, randmother never let the an touch me. She protected said that she was the boss."

Beavert was still a young r great, great-grandmother She just fell over one day hopping wood. She was 120 d."

ntinued. "My family decided me away with other relatives er the funeral was over. They t to protect me. A medicine d told them that since my great-grandmother felt so me, she might want to take her into her new life."

vity is a family trait; 's mother, Ellen Saluskin, 1, lives with her daughter and companies her to tribal s and other events.

ork of medicine men is also rtant part of tribal culture, explained. "There are In- eople gifted with special powers. My aunt had the ability to take cataracts from people's eyes, and I once watched an old woman pull gall stones out of an ill man with her healing powers."

Beavert, whose Indian name is "Lxswayat," which, she explains, roughly translates to mean the sparkles that pop out of campfires, turned her love for linguistics into a profession, earning a degree in anthropology at Central Washington University.

She subsequently taught Native American studies at CWU and currently conducts night classes at Yakima Valley Community College for school teachers on the Yakima language.

Her current project is writing a history book of the Yakima Indian Nation, including changes in the tribal government structure and policies handed down through generations.

Some of the book's material was compiled by her step-father, the late Alex Saluskin. He was the one who first interested Beavert in languages, and it was his early work that she transformed into the Yakima dictionary after his death.

VIRGINIA BEAVERT
. . . 'a life of firsts'

Languages and anthropology may be her first loves, but horses, too, are in the running. As a young woman Beavert was both a rodeo rider and a race-horse trainer.

One of her favorite horseback destinations was riding up the slopes of Mount Adams to set up camp in the summer.

And someday, when she isn't spending time on book research, she'd like to head back up the mountain.

She explained, "After we finished camping each year when I was a girl, my grandmother would leave the things there on Mount Adams that she knew would be needed on the next year's trip. She buried cast-iron pots, filled with dried food, deep into the soil, and every spring she always knew where to find them.

"I know they're all still buried up there somewhere; maybe sometime I'll go back and find them."

Retelling of Indian legends instills cultural values in children

ia Beavert can hold an au- nthralled, spinning the same that regaled her as a child. from elder to child, these mbody the values and tradi- e Yakima Indians wanted to their children for all time.

are shortened versions of Beavert's favorite legends:

The Thistle Sisters

eren't for a group of thistles, l mosquitos would still be ter- the land. The thistle sisters d to convert a man-eating mosquito of old into a harmless pest, by outsmarting him and playing on his gluttony.

After cooking vast amounts of food one day, the sisters lured mosquito into a cave, where he ate so much, he couldn't get back out the hole. When he was finally shoved out, he passed through the thorny thistles which disbursed his strength through the air, turning him into a little bug with a little bite.

How the Chipmunk Got His Stripes

Even though he was warned by his parents not to wander far from home, chipmunk frolicked off one day in the forest and met up with an old witch. He was just the kind of morsel she coveted, so she chased after him, clutching at him with her long claws. He finally escaped but not without sustaining scars, or stripes, on his back to remind him always to obey his parents.

The Little People and the Moccasins

Tradition says that Indian moccasins are almost always sewn with an extra piece of buckskin protruding from the heel. Long ago a young woman, who was very conceited, was to be thrown to a monster. However, she saw the error of her ways and was saved from her fate through the aid of miniature people. They added a leather strip to the end of her mocassins and then stood on it, holding her tightly to the ground. Three times a man attempted to lift her and fling her to the monster, but each time he failed. The woman lived, and mocassins to this day have a place where little people can stand.

Woman selected to lead Tribal Council

TOPPENISH — The new chairman of the Yakima Indian Nation Tribal Council is a woman.

Levina Washines, who had served as an alternate to the 14-member tribal governing body, was elected to succeed outgoing Chairman Melvin Sampson.

Sampson announced recently that he would resign after the annual General Council meeting, which concluded Friday at the Yakima Nation Community Center off Meyers Road southeast of here.

Washines is the first female tribal member to be elected head of the Tribal Council, which was called the Fourteen Chiefs Council before 1944.

No other details on Washines' election were available.

In other matters before the tribe's general membership, Cecil Sanchey of White Swan ousted incumbent William Don Tahkeal. And Harvey Adams, an incumbent who this week had twice lost out in his bid to gain an eighth term on the Tribal Council, defeated incumbent Hazel Umtuch for the last open position on the council.

Adams, who is 82, was knocked out initially by Harry Smiscon. He was later nominated to run against incumbent Augustine Howard, but was soundly defeated.

Friday, Adams was renominated — a move questioned by some tribal members — to run against Umtuch, who was seeking a second term.

Umtuch was subsequently elected to a council alternate position.

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(Staff photo by Jane Gargas)

Virginia Beavert uses gestures to help illustrate a Yakima Indian legend.

From cave to Smithsonian

Yakima Nation member leads busy and unusual life

By JANE GARGAS
Of the Herald-Republic

TOPPENISH — For Virginia Beavert, it's been a life of "firsts."

A decade ago she finished writing the first dictionary ever published of her native Yakima Indian language.

She was the first woman ever elected secretary-treasurer of the General Council of the Yakima Indian Nation, serving from 1978-85.

And if she wasn't the first young Indian woman to earn money for school by working as a waitress in a Chinese restaurant in Portland, surely she was one of only a few.

Likewise, with her birth. She was born in a bear cave in the Blue Mountains of Oregon during a winter blizzard that had stranded her parents on a hunting trip.

Beavert is one of several local women singled out for recognition by the Woman's Century Club in Yakima as part of its celebration of National Women's History Month in March.

From her childhood days of living with her great, great-grandmother in a cabin with no electricity, water or furniture to the five months she spent in the 1970s on a fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., conducting research on Indian Languages Beavert has led an unusual life.

At 66, her current passion is preserving the Yakima Indian language, both in written and spoken forms. She has devoted her life to researching early languages of the area and delving into the cultural customs intertwined with them.

She's also highly-sought as a legend-teller, holding area school children spellbound as she weaves tales of animals and people and how the world came to be.

Those stories became the basis of her first literary effort, "Inaku Iwacha, The Way It Was," a 1974 book of Yakima Indian legends she helped compile.

Beavert, who speaks five Northwest Indian languages in addition to Yakima, learned her legends at the knee of her great, great grandmother who raised her in a cabin near Zillah.

"Because legends tell a moral, they are an important way for the elders to teach the young," explained Beavert. "The stories reinforce concepts children have been told for years and years — staying close to home, obeying commands, being modest, arising early, working hard."

Just as Beavert learned life's lessons listening to the ancient legends, she also absorbed the values set by her great, great-grandmother's example.

"In my great, great-grandmother's day, you stayed married for life and were faithful for life, too. If your husband died, then someone else from his family, a brother or cousin, would take his place and become your provider. That was understood.

"But if you were unfaithful, your nose or your ear would be cut off."

Although present-day customs are less harsh, Beavert believes much can be gained from studying the ways of elders and how their lifestyles affected their language.

The whip man was a tradition from her childhood. Parents and grandparents didn't mete out discipline to children; instead, one person in the village known as the whip man took care of punishment.

"However," she said, with a smile,

(See Smithsonian, page 3)