

s. Ac-  
mmit-

facets  
ven to

H.H.  
had an

---

## Virginia R. Beavert

(1921 - )

*Virginia R. Beavert*



---

Virginia Beavert, native daughter of Yakima Indian Nation, will be remembered for her dedication to preserving the Indian language and culture through storytelling, teaching, and publishing. Virginia's storytelling ability, recollections of the past sixty years and her knowledge of anthropology add up to authentic and entertaining lore of Northwest Indians. Her education and experience are of unusual value to the Yakima Nation, Central Washington University, and the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

Virginia's interest in the language and culture of the Yakima Indians was fostered by her step-father, Alex Saluskin, Chairman of the General Tribal Council of the Yakimas for eight years. Alex Saluskin in cooperation with Dr. Rigsby, anthropology linguist of the University of Washington, began the standardized spellings and printing of the unpublished Yakima Indian language. Upon Saluskin's death around 1978, Virginia assumed the charge to complete and publish the *Yakima Indian Language Dictionary* (1975). She also earned an anthropology degree from Central Washington University. Virginia, who speaks five Northwest Indian languages, has received fellowships for study in history and language research at Newberry Library in Chicago, Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. and at Dartmouth College. In 1974 Virginia authored the Yakima Indian legend book, *Inaku Iwacho*. These legends were learned at the knee of her great, great grandmother who raised her. The stories reinforce values of her tribe — staying close to home, obeying commands, being modest, arising early, working hard. Today she is highly-sought as a legend teller for area school children as she retells the tales of animals and people and how the world came to be.

Stories of her younger days reveal Indian life in the 1920's and 1930's which are in sharp contrast to her life today. She is the daughter to Ellen Hoptonix and Henry Beavert. She was born in a cave while they

were on a late fall horseback hunting trip with relatives in the Blue Mountains. An early blizzard forced the group to seek shelter in a cave. The women made a papoose carrier that was made to hang from the saddle horn for the new baby. Her parents were later divorced; she and her brother were raised by a great, great grandmother for several years. Virginia lived near Zillah where they drank and bathed in the springs, slept on the floor, and lived like "a wild Indian" so called. Great, great grandmother knew the Chinook language used by the French fur traders and was involved in trading with the white man. She and her brother rejoined their mother when she married Alex Saluskin, who was a fisherman. Home was near the Dalles from March to October, and Toppenish the rest of the year. Mrs. Tonnemaker, her favorite teacher, at the Lincoln School in Toppenish "tamed me" to school life she reports. Virginia managed to stay in school through eleventh grade and completed twelfth grade in the Army during World War II.

Virginia was the first woman to be elected Secretary-Treasurer, a full time job, to the General Tribal Council of the Yakima Indian Nation, serving in that capacity from 1978-1985. While on the Council, Virginia promoted the Tribe's Code of Ethics that serves as a watchdog on the performance of elected officials. She promoted Town House Meeting idea (1979-1983) that resulted in seminar type meetings held before the General Council Meeting for all Yakima Indians. This change helped Indians to be better informed of issues that are brought before the General Council.

Growing up, she enjoyed playing baseball and riding horses. She knew where the frogs laid their eggs and the birds nested. Her favorite story was Hiawatha. Later she wrote a pageant about Hiawatha. During her late teens and young adult years she concentrated on trick and rodeo riding, raising, showing, and racing horses.

During World War II Virginia married Alex Martin. She also served her country as a wireless radio operator in Clovis, New Mexico. After the World War she trained as a medical records' clerk and worked for the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission at Hanford, Washington.

Today, when the Yakima Indians have a keen desire to preserve their language and their culture, Virginia is a sage and a "doer" for the Yakima Indian Nation, preserving the culture in print and encouraging Yakima Indian traditions.

A S  
chemistr

Lill  
graduate  
of becom  
ment be  
dominat  
out bef  
course a  
from M  
holding  
ticism o  
job.

Bes  
Lillian  
brother  
her fres  
phanage  
first job  
aid, sav  
endeav

He  
Michiga  
tu on  
the Dep  
the pos  
and de