



Voices  
from the  
Gaps

# Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve

“

*I Watched an Eagle Soar*

*Grandmother,  
I watched an eagle soar  
high in the sky  
until a cloud covered him up.  
Grandmother,  
I still saw the eagle  
behind my eyes.*

— Dancing Teepees

”



## Biography

Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve (last name rhymes with “navy”) was born on February 21, 1933. She was raised on the Rosebud reservation in South Dakota and is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe. In addition to her achievements as an award-winning writer, Sneve has had a full career as an English teacher and school counselor. She is also the mother of three, and has four grandchildren. She and her husband, Vance M. Sneve, currently live in her home state.

One of Sneve’s most recent books for adults, *Completing the Circle*, traces the history of the women in her family. A brief sketch of Sneve’s own life is incorporated in the narrative. Sneve describes her childhood on the Rosebud reservation as secure and happy even though her parents (James Driving Hawk and Rose Ross Posey) struggled financially, especially during the Depression years.

### Quick Facts

- \* Born in 1933
- \* Native American novelist and teacher
- \* Member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe

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# Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve

## Biography continued

Her father, a minister in charge of the local Episcopal church, was a man of high integrity, and his values served as a precedent in Sneve's own life. Her mother, an active member of their community, provided a loving home for Virginia and her brother Edward. Out of financial necessity, Sneve's parents traveled off the reservation to find seasonal work. While Sneve's parents were away, she and her brother spent alternate summers at the homes of their two grandmothers. These women, whom Sneve describes as strong, dignified and loving, became the source of inspiration behind many of her books. Sneve's paternal grandmother, Flora Clairmont Driving Hawk, was an avid storyteller. Both the traditional legends and Flora's animated style of narration left a vivid impression on the author's young mind. Sneve's maternal great-grandmother, Hannah Howe Frazier, also entertained the young Driving Hawk children with folk tales and native histories. Hannah's stories of the Ponca and Santee tribes excited Sneve's curiosity, and after becoming established as a writer, she compiled a series of children's books on the cultural practices and histories of a number of Indian tribes.



Sneve began her professional writing career in 1972 with the publication of *Jimmy Yellow Hawk*. The year before, she had submitted the manuscript to an annual contest sponsored by the Interracial Council of Minority Books for Children. Her manuscript won the category for Native American writers and publication soon followed. Since then, Sneve has published 16 children's books of fiction and non-fiction.

Sneve was first inspired to write juvenile literature when she discovered that the books available to her own young children reflected only stereotypical representations of their native heritage. A need for the realistic portrayal of American Indians prompted Sneve to draw on her native background and fill that void herself.



# Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve

## Biography continued

Sneve responded to the same need for culturally representative literature when she began writing books for adults. In *The Dakota's Heritage*, Sneve combined historical research with the oral histories and traditional teachings she had received growing up. The book touches on aspects of the Dakota culture ranging from the geography of the area to the lives of tribal women, from the mystical and supernatural to the practical and political. Accordingly, her book offers a well-rounded, insider's perspective on the tribe's history and culture — a perspective that had previously gone unacknowledged in mainstream literature.

Even closer to home, Sneve explores her personal and cultural history — based on the “neglected feminine half of her family” — in *Completing the Circle*. This carefully researched and engaging work recognizes the quiet struggles and personal achievements of Sneve's ancestors, setting them against a backdrop of broader cultural issues and profound change. In the case of her grandmothers, it is a tribute to the women who influenced Sneve directly. Remarkably, as with all her works, Sneve has simultaneously succeeded in filling the cultural gaps left by non-Indian writers in America's literature and history.



# Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve

## Selected Bibliography

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