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Lost Bird of Wounded Knee: Spirit of the Lakota.
By Renée Sansom Flood. New York: Scribner,
1995. Notes, bibliography, index. 384 pp.
\$25.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

Most writers would be hard pressed to encounter a better story line, a deeper, richer vein of raw material, than the one in Sansom Flood's book: a baby girl miraculously found alive beneath the frozen corpse of her Lakota mother four days after the massacre at Wounded Knee; adopted as a "souvenir" of the battle by a brigadier general, later the assistant US attorney general, who initially ignored her, then sexually abused her, and finally disowned her; raised by a doting mother, a tireless, world-famous suffragist, who steadfastly refused to abandon either her deeply

troubled Indian daughter or her philandering, ne'er-do-well husband; a young woman ultimately rebuffed by whites because she was too Indian and by her own people because she was too white, whose tragic life ended—at age twenty-nine, of syphilis—in a lonely California flophouse.

Sansom Flood offers a wealth of superb reporting that both fleshes out the story line and illuminates some previously darkened corners of the much written about massacre. She has pored over an astonishing range of source material, laboriously tracked down some of the girl's former classmates, and even tells us what the temperature was in Milford, Nebraska, on 21 April 1908—a salient detail in a later chapter. Among the story's strongest, most poignant elements are the numerous letters the Indian orphan wrote to her adopted white mother that Sansom Flood includes in the volume.

Yet there is also a chronic editorial problem pervading the narrative's assemblage of facts. Their reporting is frequently used as a weapon, a club to bludgeon readers into feeling what the writer wants them to feel. As a result, the attempts to orchestrate a desired pathos come off as awkward at best, heavy-handed and self-defeating at worst. Given the wealth of factual detail preceding it, a sentence like the following, with its recurring editorial excess, can simply numb the reader: "The child cried out miserably, cried out in the frozen stench of her mother's blood, and her own defecation." One desperately wishes at times that Sansom Flood had simply hewn her narrative more along the lines of the old Sergeant Friday dictum: "Just the facts, ma'am." Given the power of those facts, most readers are astute enough to draw their own conclusions.

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