

SKAGIT HEROES

When I was growing up my mother told me stories that she heard when she was young. The storyteller was her great grandfather Franklin Gilkey. He used to tell when he first came to the Skagit Valley and walking through the huge tall old growth trees in what is now rich farmland, he could look up and see cougar sitting in these trees. He also related of his times spent fighting for the north in the Civil War. His legacy was to put a name to our valley 'Skagit'. Franklin Gilkey was one of the first county commissioners from this district in the days when Whatcom County reached from the Snohomish County line to Canada. When action was taken to divide the county in two, Gilkey said in casting his vote "And we shall call the south half 'Skagit County'.

Sergeant Franklin E Gilkey was awarded a Certificate of Union Service of the 86th Infantry Company K New York 1861 to 1865. He fought in a battle near Fredricksburg Va. My younger sister lives in that area of Virginia and on one trip to see her, we went over to the National Park Visitors Center and the Ranger looked in the computer, found Franklin and the unit he was in and then proceeded to a large book of maps showing us hour by hour his regiment and where they fought. He was taken prisoner and told the story of seeing Robert E Lee riding on his horse into the camp.

After his service in the Civil War he came west and landed in Seattle in 1875. One of the first men he met was Jake Harding fiddling in a dance hall on Yesler way. A little later he hired out as a teamster to haul logs at Centerville known now as Stanwood. Those were the days of horses and the logging industry was just beginning to boom. Gilkey got ahead in the world and also owned a hotel at Edison besides running a hop farm. He passed away in 1931 at the age of 92 and had led an active life up to within three weeks of his passing. In his obituary it stated he left 192 direct descendants to mourn his death. The large family was a source of pleasure to Gilkey and he loved to tell stories and he was supposed to have said his favorite sport was talking. That was several generations ago so his legacy has had many additions to that family since then.

I found an article from a newspaper written in 1925 that stated: Eighty-eight crabs, 15 gallons of ice cream, a wash tub full of clams and other delicacies in like amounts vanished when the annual Conn-Gilkey family reunion picnic was held at Birch Bay. More than 200 members of the two families were present. A tug of War, baseball game, and other sports were featured at the big reunion. "Chief" Frank Gilkey 90 years old was one of the honored guests.

I consider my great-great-grandfather Franklin Gilkey to be a Skagit Hero for his contribution politically in his time as well as leaving behind a family tree of many branches. He had four daughters, Lela Butler, Ada Watkinson, Emma Taggart and Ida Conn along with their spouses and many more generations to come.

My Kind Skagit Hero

Maya Angelou said, "I think a hero is anyone intent on making this a better place for all people." I agree. There is no doubt heroes exist whose professional positions and uniforms perform endless selfless acts of putting others first while denying their own safety and wellbeing. Their existence as the anchor of all communities, appreciation a word that never fulfills the grateful coffers. I also feel heroes arrive in one's life to validate a moment that needs the slightest recognition. Words, gestures, and actions are the heroes that have entered my life. The simple acknowledgment recognized me and shared a desire without expecting anything in return.

Through words, you are the hero who shouts to me as we get into our cars, "have a nice day, "it looks like another rainy day. Take care, have a good day." You sit at our dinner table listening to our stories and sharing your stories, uninterrupted sharing. You were the trick-or-treater whose dark evening thank you was layered with a boomcrang Happy Halloween. You approached me with gentle words, "good to see you. You look great. How have you been?" Or "what can I do for you? No rush. Take your time. It's OK. I am not in any hurry. I understand how you are feeling. I have had those kinds of days. But, no, I think you were first."

How many gestures have just simply put made my day? While I slowly inched my car from a parking space, wedged in by two big trucks, you waited for me to pull out. You were the one who waved me onto the freeway lane, reducing your speed. You welcomed me with a calming smile while holding my Moderna vaccine. You welcomed me to the Farmer's Market and thanked me for buying your produce. You listened to me patiently when I tried to describe a

plant that I had just read about with a name that sounded like a mythical god. You are the one who stands patiently behind me at the grocery counter or Movie Theater while I pay with my check.

You are the hero that acts, always aware. You hold the door open for me or move over to make room for me on a bleacher seat. You gave me a stone with an embedded paw print when my cat died. You shoveled my driveway when I was away on a trip. You sent a thank you note stuffed with a gourmet candy bar that cost more than the card. You trimmed our yard rid of the nasty weeds with a smile lacking any signs of fatigue. You gave me a giant plate size dahlia identifying me as a special customer. You had your car lights flashing on the windy road signaling a fawn stood at the road's edge. You sold me the freshest farm-fresh eggs. You stop when the school bus stops flashing its lights. You applaud loudly at community musical performances. You gave me your homegrown bay leaves for fall stews. You offered me free movie popcorn at the final evening show.

My heroes step into my life with a selfless gesture, a flash moment of reaching out and sharing themselves through a word or action. My heroes do not wear any identification, more than often, they are nameless. I have faced that one person who said, did, or offered themselves in a single moment.

I reflect and recognize that I, too, have been a hero to others through the years. I was not thinking, only doing, not expecting anything but being there for someone. I suppose I, too, can sit at that table of Skagit heroes who want only to reach out to their community and make it a better place for all people.

(Word count 631)

Skagit Heroes

Swinomish brave moves stealthily, steadily around bends and corners, bringing fish to his tribe.

Enriching the shoreline, he caresses his ancient love's shoulder as he briskly drifts by.

He watches her sleep lazily under the sun, amidst the woodsmoke and ancient sounds of a drum.

Her veiled appeal sat quiet for centuries, nakedly sparring the gales that did come.

Her fair cousin, the Skagit flows west through the valley, peacefully winding lest tempest enrage

She then swells, crying richness over the flatlands, causing endless new life to uncoil.

They came to the valley, first some and then many, enticed by the beauty and bounty for all!

Calhoun and Sullivan, with much effort built dykes, then cleared and turned over the land.

Timber, fish and farmland abundant, now the race for the riches began.

Boats started the Swinomish and awakened enchantment, safe harbor on her vast breasts they did find.

She delighted the adventure and smiled while John Hayes commenced trading right there on her side.

Business picked up but sold to John, another, who loved his wife so, named his enchantment LA Conner.

Brave Swinomish was wary of the push on his waters and where is his beauty? now covered with huts!

Rejoicing, they cleared Skagit's log jam allowing settlers to move, Thank God, they could build somewhere else!

Populace grew in the valley, upstream Clothier and English naming Mount Vernon, a saloon and hotel she did boast

La Conner again quiet, providing fishermen and farmers nearby, allured many artists to gather around her by flaunting her infinite charm.

Then a man named Roozen arrived in the valley with a head full of knowledge and a bag full of bulbs.

Now striped with such vibrance, Spring sees carloads of tourists' flock to the valley to view his spectacular show.

Swinomish himself had moved in abeyance until they discovered his Chanel passed through to San Juans.

Hence peppered with boaters his purpose has changed not only to crab boats but for delivering fun!

Colorful shops adorn our beauty, her neckline attractive to so many more that joy and laughter regularly pour from her doors.

Population expanded and La Conner got busy and needed a leader to help with her growth.

Another man named Hayes stepped up and took charge, an entrepreneur, gifted with insight, a concert pianist to boot.

He led them to put a necklace on beauty and skirted her with new roads and retreats,

Now folks walk by businesses so close to Brave Swinomish they can observe his love for LA Conner matured.

Generous blessings have reigned on the Skagit, too many heroes to count over time, For me limited to name one person as such, Ramon Hayes would have to be mine.

"Beautiful Bay View"

Cascades awaken an outline glow
Red on Padilla Bay as sun sets low

Breathing in joy on a farmer's dike
Inviting inspiration along the hike

Goose feathers dance all in white
Swans in mass-peak eye's delight

Great Blue Herons nest in "Trust"
Amidst refinery steam combust

Sea Otters play in the shallow bay
While farmers harvest fields of hay

We post an annual cougar sighting
Snow, Strong Winds, and Lightning

Blues melt from a spiral stairway
Steps from an aquarium doorway

Educate with access explore & enter
the "Breazeale Padilla Bay Center"

Our "Bay View Civic Hall" has it all
Live fiddlers beckon friends to call

Potlucks and Spaghetti Feeds
To benefit our Fireman's needs

The Chapel on 3rd Street fills the soul
"Love Thy Neighbor" as the goal

Sponges filled with appreciation
Life in Bay View is like a vacation!

A hero is defined as someone who is admired for their talents and achievements. Anyone can be a hero to another person which means they do not have to meet a universal appeal like that of the hero Odysseus or Martin Luther King Jr. As long as someone is able to motivate and impact one person, they can be considered a hero. My Skagit County hero is a man named John Wilkinson. I've come to know him as an intelligent, humorous, and incredibly inspirational person over the last two school years. Despite not knowing him very personally, what I do know is enough about John to call him my hero.

Every Tuesday and Friday, my AVID class routine is to get into groups to do tutorials. Each group has a tutor who is either the teacher or a volunteer who comes in to help guide the students. I find tutorials themselves to be helpful since my group gives me support when I present questions that've stumped me in my core classes. So far I've had John as my tutor twice over the last 2 school years and I couldn't be more thankful for it. I usually bring in questions from my Chemistry and Algebra II Honors classes which would normally pose a problem since many of my other AVID classmates are not currently enrolled in either of them. However, I do not have to worry much because I have both John and my teacher Mrs. Downs to help me when all seems lost. Sometimes we do need to rely on Google for extra assistance, which is not a shameful thing to do, but John himself is still very insightful on my puzzling algebraic questions.

What makes John all the more extraordinary is his humor. It was very surprising to me at the start since our first interaction had been over zoom during the Covid-19 online school protocol. I got the impression that he was a very serious and straightforward person due to his calm demeanor. Although now that the mandates have been lifted, I have been able to describe his personality in greater detail. John is a curious sort of person and is good at socializing with the people around him, the people being the students in his tutor groups. He is observant and

notices things about people that I would have never seen a pattern in until he's pointed them out. He notices how Tierney brings in questions pertaining to humanity and morals, and at the same time he picks up on Karma's interests in crime-related stories. John is also quick with a joke and doesn't fail to make my tablegroup giggle. Sometimes it may even cause a roar of laughter that needs to be hushed. If he wasn't serving the community as an AVID tutor, it's possible he could've entertained as a stand-up comedian.

Before writing this essay, I asked John what his favorite part about Skagit County was. He told me he likes, "that it connects the sea to the mountains". After which he and my tablegroup laughed a little. But it's true, the view around the county, from the ocean to the trees, is breathtaking. Another aspect about John that I've found to be intriguing is the amount of travel he's experienced in his life. He's been to different continents, and yet he's come to grace the Anacortes community as an AVID tutor. I do not recall much of the places he's been to, but I remember them inspiring my aspirations for travel. In every place he has been to, John has accumulated many different accents which has given him a particular way of speaking. I now begin to wonder about the unique slang I'll pick up on and the amazing places I'll visit.

Since 2014, John has assisted the community as an AVID tutor. For 2 of those years he has been one of my tutors, and within that time frame I've also come to know him as one of my heroes. Heroes can be admired for their bravery, their charms, intelligence, and outstanding feats. The reason why John is my Skagit County hero is made up of a compilation of reasons. I know I can rely on him to help me when I am stumped on Unit Circles and Trigonometric equations. I know that Tuesdays and Fridays aren't very boring days at school because I have his humorous quips during tutorials to look forward to. And because of John, I know that my future can be as adventurous as I desire.

Today I would like to discuss Linda Deziah Jennings.

Jennings was a writer, as well as a women's rights activist; and I consider her my skagit county hero for the helping hand she had in activism and equality for women's rights.

Linda Deziah Jennings was born in New Jersey, 1870. In her early life she and her two parents, Isaac Jennings and Margaret James, moved to LaConner, Washington. Her Father began farming on Whidbey Island, then he would relocate his family one last time to the Ridgeview area.

In the early 19th century Jennings would attend the University Of Washington. She would also attend the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

Jennings would throughout her life support herself as a writer. She would edit for Coast Magazine, where her short story "The Finding of a Prodigal" would be published. The short story would detail what life was like in the pioneering communities. In 1905 The Pacific Monthly would publish another short story of hers, The Rural Phone. A comedy about a man who is in a panic over the women in his town using a telephone.

In 1908 Jennings would serve as the editor for the Washington Women's Cookbook.

The Washington Women's Cookbook compiled a list of various recipes, and in conjunction would have political essays sprinkled throughout.

On page 116 of the book, detailing confectionery, they would quote Theodore Roosevelt; "I believe in women's rights as much as in men's, and indeed, a little more."

Historian Paula Becker had this to say on the book; "The Washington Women's Cook Book soothed men who worried that voting women would throw off their domestic traces, and offered suffragists a Trojan Horse. The thick pro-suffrage crust surrounding the homey recipes invited a woman to pursue the message of equality while warming the oven to bake a Hot Water Sponge Cake."

Jennings would pass away in 1932 in Washington State. But no doubt, she had a helping hand in furthering women's right to vote, and in women's rights as a whole.

Jennings's work remains relevant to me because without her and many other brave and strong women, who knows where we would be now? We are still fighting for equal rights among men and women and I sincerely hope that Jennings's story can serve as inspiration for others. A sign of hope, no matter how tough the situation seems, how much the odds seem stacked against us, we still have so much to keep fighting for. Make no mistake, it's an uphill battle from here, but maybe we can provide hope for future generations just as Jennings and other women provided hope for us now.

As we move onto tackling various other social issues, such as the rampant racism, homophobia, transphobia, and many other problems in our American society, I hope this story can remain as an example of regardless how the odds seem, we have hope, and that's something that nobody can ever take away from us.

I truly had a blast researching for this competition and I look forward to the next time I have a chance to research local history.

In the book of history, heroics arise
A phoenix breaking away from ashes
Soaring amongst ourselves
Awed as the fire dances and flies

In the passages of time, tales unfold
Truths that reside only within spirits
Ancestors, family, legends
Make themselves known so stories can be told

Authors, politicians, scientists, and more
People who changed the tides, turned the tables
Some who couldn't, but some who could
These were the ones the future had in store

A county means more than land built from soil
To fit likings, choices, and decisions
Only the greats could conjure change
With promising results ahead, these heroes worked in toil

Pioneers of power, sultans of superiority
One may disagree, one may differ
Only the likeminded remain strengthened
History was birthed, and the Valley became a rarity

Support, care, and generosity surround
Loved ones of heroes, helping them onwards
Nobody can travel a path alone
Effort was fruitful, and prosperity was to be found

In the book of history, heroics stay
A phoenix flying high within the air, graceful and magnificent
Never delving back down into the darkness
In the book of history, one can never be led astray

My History teacher is Genni
And she teaches us plenty
I don't live places long
But she makes me feel like I belong
She says she teaches history
So it doesn't repeat itself
So we end up with a victory
She teaches history by herself
She didn't know I was writing a poem about her
I hope it finally occurs
That she is amazing
And deserves all this praising

An Unconventional Hero W.R. (Blanket Bill) Jarman

What is an unconventional hero? It was when I was told to read Yarns of the Skagit Country by Ray Jordan, that I came across W. R. Jarman's story. W.R. Jarman is clearly a great example of an unconventional hero. W.R. Jarman later known as Blanket Bill was a very adventurous and free-spirited man who traveled all over the world, and was Skagit's first settler.

Jarman was born very far away, in Gravesend, England on April 3rd, 1820. He was only 17 years old when he left home and set sail to Australia. He abandoned ship in Tasmania, but soon after this, he boarded the Platypus, a fur-trading ship. The Platypus was destined to reach the rich Pacific Northwest coast. The goal was to get to the Columbia River but the ship never made it there and instead anchored in the Nootka Sound, in Vancouver Island, Washington.

The arrival of Jarman's ship did not go well. As soon as they reached land, they were attacked by Indians. Jarman and his friend were stranded when the crew left them behind. Jarman was kidnapped but his friend wasn't as lucky and was unfortunately killed. Even though the story says that Jarman was kidnapped, it seems that he lived peacefully with the Indians for 2-3 years and even had two Indian wives! While he was living among the Indians he learned about their rich culture and liked it so much, that he adopted their way of living. When Governor

Douglass of the Hudson's Bay Company found out that there was a white man captive by the Indians they ransomed him for a pile of 32 blankets as tall as him, he then got the nickname "Blanket Bill." Bill claimed that it was 1848 when Governor Douglass paid his ransom, today the story does not seem true because Douglass did not become the Governor of the Hudson Bay Company until 1951.

Blanket Bill arrived in what is now Jarman Prairie, in 1868, five years before any trace of the government. Bill then settled there with his wife Alise; they lived there for a long time, farming and living off the land.

A dark moment in Blanket Bill's life was when a fight broke out in the saloon he worked at, after a patron insulted Bill's sister, the patron then tried to grab Bill's gun but Bill was faster and then shot and killed the patron. He then turned himself into the police and was sent to serve a short sentence in jail. After his sentence was over, he went back to England and lived there for ten years.

Blanket Bill came back from England with his niece, and lived with her and her husband in Ferndale, for the rest of his life. Even in his old age, when Bill was in his seventies, eighties, and nineties, he still felt the call of adventure. He wanted to join a war in his 70s-80s but his niece talked him out of it. Blanket Bill died at 92 years old in June 1912, but his legend lives on.

I hope that this story helps you understand W.R. Jarman (Blanket Bill) the way I do as a very interesting character who traveled the world having adventures along the way. His name still burns bright as his adventure once did.

Skagit Heroes

Deep in the forest, below a blanket of maple and pine branches, two humans walked through the underbrush, displacing fallen branches and trampling plants and crunching across dry leaves. The elk watched from behind a clump of maple trees, small hooves soundlessly padding across the layer of fallen leaves. The elk had been searching for tender seedlings to eat, but it was mid-autumn, and none were to be found. His ears flicked backward as the two humans began speaking to one another.

"Should we cross the creek once we get there?" one of the humans asked the other, its unusually pale hair shining in the sunlight streaming through the red-and-gold leaves.

"There's a half-eroded bridge upstream from the old oak tree," the other replied, while her hazelnut curls bounced as she jumped over an alder log and held back a blackberry vine so the other could pass through. The elk could not understand what they were saying, but it was intrigued enough to follow them through the brush. He was cautious, of course, but curious. He hadn't seen their kind for many seasons. The elk assumed they stayed close to their home most of the time.

As the elk watched the humans followed faint game trails through the trees, trekking past towering pines and twisted maples. They eventually stopped near a creek, the amber water churning and frothing in small whorls on the surface. A crimson maple leaf drifted down from the leafy canopy, the trees spreading their regalia for all the forest creatures to see. The leaf landed upon the surface of the water, spinning, and dipping beneath the surface before bobbing back up again. The golden-haired human pointed to the leaf and smiled, poking the other in the shoulder to get its attention.

"I had a bad day today," the human said, and the chestnut-haired girl's grin evaporated.

"Why?" she asked, stopping in the middle of heaving a large rock into the creek.

"People were knocking things off my desk, and I got a C- in math."

"Well, I can help you figure it out. What kind of math is it?"

The elk observed as they continued to talk, occasionally stopping, and drawing strange symbols in the mud on the bank and flinched every time a rock was thrown into the creek. The rocks eventually coalesced into a bridge, and the elk watched as they crossed. The elk eventually traversed the creek, staying just inside the shadow of the trees.

"Thanks for helping," The pale-haired one said, smiling softly at the other human.

"You're *very* welcome," the hazel-haired one replied. They continued to walk through the forest for a while, and suddenly, they both stopped. The taller human wrapped its arms around the other, and the smaller human mirrored the action.

They stayed that way for several minutes, then silently broke apart and turned around and began to walk back the way they came. The elk stood there, silent, and watched until the two humans faded into the underbrush. As he brought his head down to sniff at the leaves, he noticed a tiny green shoot pushing its way up out of the ground. The elk stood there, and promptly decided not to eat it.

The elk saw hope in the little emerald sprout, and he came back to that spot every day, and watched it grow into an apple tree. The two humans returned several times, sometimes with a red-orange dog with a white tail-tip. One day, years later, the elk came back to the apple tree and found thousands of tiny pink blossoms covering the tree, like a soft blanket keeping the tree warm until summer arrived. The elk lay down beneath the tree and let out what could only be described as a sigh. He closed his eyes, the scent of new rain in the air cooling his fur and fell asleep.

My sister is my Skagit Hero, no matter what day it is or what mood she is in. She is a mountain biker, an artist, and most importantly my favorite person in the world.

SKAGIT HEROES

2022

Youth Poetry 1st Place
Miah Ortiz

The heroes of Skagit County,
brave, strong, helpful, and kind.
They stand up for what's right,
never act cowardly.

Police, doctors, construction workers,
and firefighters.

They keep you safe,
they help this place.

They are people that we
shall embrace. People that are filled with
grace. Thank you Skagit heroes for
saving the day.

2022

Youth Poetry 2nd Place

Patrick Swan

My nan is the best.

She is better than all the rest.

She makes it sunny on rainy days.

Nan homeschooled me during the pandemic.

She helped me learn when I couldn't go to school.

Nan always makes my birthday special, too.