

# **Gustave Joseph Yaki**

## **by Bernadette Montero**

Imagine you could stop pollution and save the animals suffering from the harassment by the misuse of nature. How would that affect your daily life? You would be able to hear the birds sing in the morning and look into the sky without a cloud of smoke blocking your view. This was what Gus Yaki's passion for nature drove so many Albertans to think about. Yaki's life and contributions were an example of how we could help maintain a healthy and thriving environment.

At an early age, Yaki started to take an interest in nature. When Yaki was five, birds would meet him along the path he took to school from his family farm, in Northern Saskatchewan. He closely observed the birds to discover the name of the species at school. Yaki's enthusiasm for birds grew with his age. However his passion for nature didn't end with birds. His interest spread through other aspects of environmental studies, up to the point where Yaki was nicknamed the 'Dean of Nature'. He undoubtedly lived up to his title as he established recreational activities for Canadians to educate themselves about their surroundings and the environment.

In a world where technology has cultivated the interests of individuals of every age, it's difficult to turn off a screen and appreciate the world around us. According to Gus Yaki's son, David Yaki, "If he saw something that he could make better, he tried to make it better,". Yaki inspired Canadians to cherish animals and their habitats. In doing so, he became a member of the directors of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. For two years, Yaki was the President of the

local Nature club in Lindsay, Ontario. During the years he spent in Ontario, Yaki helped establish the Niagara Falls Nature club where he was the first president. Yaki was involved in the establishment of the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Bruce trail, the longest and oldest hiking trail in Canada. To further enlighten the knowledge of animals of Canadians, Yaki created his own nature tourism business called the Nature Travel Service where he guided trips all around the world. During the twenty years that he ran his company, Yaki was able to travel around all the seven continents. After years of operating his business, he sold Nature Travel Service and settled down in Calgary where he became a long-time editor of Nature Calgary's publication PICA. Yaki helped Calgarians in finding their fascination with nature in their city.

Do individuals living in urban areas take interest in the environment? In a big city with a population of approximately 1.4 million people, it's easy to predict that most don't take the time to acknowledge the presence of animals in their daily lives. Yaki organized field trips with the Friends of Fish Creek in Calgary. He would personally tour Calgarians around the regions and give presentations to schools. I was able to reach out to a local birder, T. Timmons, who had the privilege of participating in these field trips with Yaki. He said that Yaki inspired him to, "To lead nature walks for local birding groups, to join groups like Nature Conservancy of Canada, Birds study Canada, participate in Christmas bird counts, and May species counts.". Yaki was very gregarious and always made his participants feel welcome. On Victoria Day in 2000, Yaki led a group of people in an attempt to find 100 species in 24 hours inside the city limits of Calgary. They were able to find 116 species in 10 hours. Yaki suggested holding competitions to see who could find the largest quantity of bird species in the city for a year. His suggestion created a lot of enthusiasm about nature in Calgary. Yaki received the Loren Goulden Award on

April 14, 2012. Unfortunately, Yaki was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and passed away on August 10, 2020, just before his 88th birthday. Throughout the time he was sick, he was still optimistic and inspiring to Canadians.

To educate the next generation about conserving nature, I've volunteered at the public library for the children. During these sessions, we would teach them about the importance of cleaning up and we would always make sure to pick up our garbage in the building. This school year, I was given the opportunity to take a course called Leadership. In this class, we go to every room in the school and collect their recycling once a week. Our school created the Agape Market where we take donations from the school and sell them at discounted prices to the district. I've volunteered to sort the donated items and assist the school in running the market. This event will help decrease the amount of wasted clothing and other plastic materials that pollute the environment. In the future, I plan to be more involved in nature activities. During the summer time I've decided to try to visit provincial and national parks to further appreciate the environment.

In my painting, the birds are trapped in a cage surrounded by garbage. The garbage depicts the pollution that harms the environment. Animals often find themselves in contact with wasted human products that have been dumped into their habitat. These products may contain chemicals that can put these animals in danger. We can help these animals by educating ourselves on their habitats and how they live. If we put our garbage and recycling in the right places, we can help decrease the amount of pollution in the environment. Our daily habits affect the world. How much water we use, how we dispose of our garbage and whether we walk or

drive to school, are all factors that could contribute to pollution. We can use Gus Yaki's life as an example of how we can help save the birds and plants.

Gus Yaki was a beloved birder who spent his life trying his best to make the world better. His aspirations taught Albertans that it is up to humans to protect animals and the environment. The state of the world is determined by our actions and if we have what it takes to save it.

#### Sources

<https://birdscalqary.com/gus-yaki-1932-2020/>

<https://albertachampions.org/Champions/yaki-gus-1932-2020/>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/gus-yaki-death-obit-tributes-naturalist-birding-birds-nature-calgary-1.5685090>