

The Life of Gustave Joseph Yaki - 1932 to 2020

By Daria Spribille-Wagner

Prologue

The natural world is immense and full of life. It is the world that made us, the world that gives us water and food. Going out into the forest, hearing the soft chirping of the birds - it has stuck with me forever. It never becomes less amazing to me. Nature is full of surprises, whether it be glow-in -the-dark fish, or white lipped peccarys, with their astounding clicking noises. Some other animals, such as deer, can whistle in a way I can only dream about.

Some people, like Greta Thunberg and Gus Yaki have inspired me to learn more about nature, and to try to keep it intact. This article is on Gustave Joseph Yaki, a hero of the natural world, has been fighting for conservation for many years. Gus is the Albertan hero of this story.

Early Life

Gustave Joseph Yaki was born on August 19, 1932, in Sandwith, Saskatchewan. He would listen to birds on his daily five-kilometer walks to and from school, then try and find out what species they were using a book that his teacher had.

As a young adult, he continued informing himself about the world around him. In 1951, he began serving the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. He was trained in Regina, Saskatchewan, before being sent to Toronto by the RCMP, where he decided to join the Toronto Field Naturalists.

I hear the calls.

The soft "tweet, tweet" of the birds, and I look up and around me. A pileated woodpecker taps a dying tree.

A yellow-billed cuckoo calls from the dawn light.

An American Robin flies from a paper birch to a quaking aspen. The dawn cries out with joy, and light pierces the mist. A river swerves around a small hill. A lonely island sits waiting - waiting for the birds to come with the wind.

Nature is coming.

Adulthood

Gustave Joseph Yaki was soon stationed at the Six Nations Reserve in Ohswekan, Ontario. During the 1960s, he lived in Lindsay, Ontario, and served as the president of the Nature Club for two years. In 1966, he became the first president of the Niagara Falls Nature Club, where he was committed to preserving nature and speaking up about environmental issues. Even though the Niagara Falls Nature Club only existed for one year, it featured 400 members. This led Gus down the path to be on the Federation of Ontario Naturalists's (FON's) board of directors. In this role, he voted to create a land conservation organization, which turned into the Nature Conservancy of Canada. He was also involved in the establishment of a trail called the Bruce Trail (a 900 kilometre trail that goes along the Niagara precipice). It is the oldest hiking trail in all of Canada. He started his very own nature exploration company, NTS (Nature Travel Service), offering nature-based tourism all over the planet.

Accomplishments

Gus traveled internationally and had visited every single continent by the end of the twenty years in which he ran Nature Travel Service (NTS). On one trip (NTS's 30th anniversary), Lyn Hancock was a participant, who decided to write a book on it called *Looking for the Wild*. The famous wildlife artist Robert Bateman joined for the Alaskan part of the trip. Even after deciding to retire, Gus kept making his contribution to the birds, the natural world, and to humans. For instance, In 2005, he started birding classes with Friends of Fish Creek, which attracted hundreds of participants. One of the most amazing things Gus did during this time, was the challenge he beat at the age of 84: a hike from Saskatchewan to Waterton Park, in southwestern Alberta, to mark Canada's 150th birthday, in support of ornithology and conservation. In the year 2019, he was awarded the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers by the Governor General of Canada.

Gustave Joseph Yaki died on August 10, 2020, of pancreatic cancer. The knowledge that he carried and the influence he had will never be forgotten. Gus was a hero of ornithology and conservation, and a champion of the natural world. And, most importantly, he was a true Albertan hero.

Personal Connection

Gus Yaki has inspired me to write these poems and protect our beautiful world. Gus has also inspired me to research more about climate change, and he has also made me realize how precious our environment really is. My poems were inspired by the beauty of nature that the life of Gus Yaki has made me see. Gus clearly cared a lot and has inspired me to do more for the Earth in the upcoming years.

Where the wind blows, where the trees stand tall, clutching the scars of time, a fish swims in a silver stream, glistening in the maroon dusk.

A yellow-billed cuckoo flies off, a river encircles a hill, and an island is home to many birds.

Bibliography

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