

Christine

This podcast is produced on the ancestral homeland of the Nooksack and Lummi people. They have been its' stewards since time immemorial, respecting the land, river and ocean with the understanding that everything is connected, related and alive. We acknowledge the elders and their collective and individual plights and achievements. We consider the legacies of violence, displacement, migration and settlement that bring us together today and we pursue ongoing action to build lasting relationships and grow together so that all may prosper.

(interlude music plays)

Neil

WCLS in Whatcom County presents Library stories, a podcast to open your eyes to all the ways your local public libraries matter. Join us as we reveal the power of sharing at the library. I'm your host, Neil McKay Online Experience Coordinator for the Whatcom County Library System and today...

OK, recording.

Mary

singing

Neil

Is that our new theme song?

Mary

No, definitely not.

Neil

Alright, I'm here with Mary Vermillion, my boss, once again.

Mary

Hi Neil. It's good to see you.

Neil

It's good to see you.

Mary

Yeah.

Neil

Not like we don't see each other nearly every single day.

Mary

I know, right? What a surprise. It's Neil.

Neil

So, we're here today getting ready for another podcast, a special podcast episode in a number of ways.

Mary

Yes.

Neil

The first way is it's going to be #50.

Mary

Whoo. 50!

Neil

50 podcasts. It's since, whatever. When did we start this in the mid 70s or something?

Mary

Right. No, but I was, when you told me it was the 50th, like, wow, we've really done a lot. I mean, when did we start?

Neil

2022, I think. May.

Mary

Well we will confirm our information and post it in the show notes. Regardless, it hasn't been that long because of course this isn't the only thing that you do.

Neil

It's not the only thing I do.

Mary

Yeah. So it's just one of many things. And so thanks everybody who's listening and following along and sending us story ideas including, that's how you got this one, yeah.

Neil

That's how I got this from an e-mail I got from Sue Green, who is the President of the Friends of the Ferndale Library. I did all that without checking my notes. I don't even have notes.

Mary

That's right. Well, after 50 episodes, you're getting really good at this. I'd tell you. Yeah.

Neil

I'm pretty good at talking now.

Mary

So, hi, Sue. And thanks very much for the for the tip.

Neil

That's right. Sue emailed me and said we have a friend's volunteer who is going to turn 100.

Mary

That's amazing.

Neil

And in September, 100 years old, and she's volunteering at the Friends of the Ferndale Library twice a week, she's coming in. You'll hear all about it because I get to talk to her. And boy, what of ball of energy and she, I was told that I had to come in when she was working and meet her because she comes in and she does her job, and then she goes home and she doesn't have time for just messing around, hanging out.

Mary

Talking to nosy podcasters, yeah.

Neil

To this whipper snapper over here. So, I came into the Ferndale Library and they had the conference room set up too.

Mary

Because she works in the bookstore, right? The friends bookstore? Yeah.

Neil

She cleans the books and marks them and prices them.

Mary

Fantastic.

Neil

Along with a few other volunteers. They're always looking for more volunteers, so as all of our friends of the library groups are, so we have, what do we have like 10 groups?

Mary

Yeah, we have a friends of the library group for every open and operating branch and of course the ever-powerful Friends of the Birch Bay Library who have been instrumental in raising funds and awareness of the Birch Bay Vogt Community Library, which will be opening in 2025. Fingers crossed, yeah.

Neil

That's right, first came the friends. Then comes the library.

Mary

Yep, that's how it works. Yeah, that's how libraries are built. The community says, "hey, we'd love a library here, and then we hopefully can work together to make that happen.

Neil

Yeah. So, yeah, all of our all of our friends groups are doing, you know, just wonderful things supporting the programs and supporting the libraries and raising money for the things that our budget doesn't include so that we can have special events and special things going on at the library.

Mary

Yeah. So if you love, if you love libraries or you know if you're new to Whatcom County, joining a friends of the library group is a really great way to support something you love, the library, and get to know your neighbors because the different people who volunteer who are members of our friends groups are readers, they're curious folks who want to learn more, learn about you, learn how they can help the community, learn how they can help

the libraries. They all do different things, not all of them have a bookstore like they do in Ferndale, some of them are working more on community events like Whatcom Grooves, our summer music series, or other types of programs that are appropriate, are relevant for their community. So, again great way to get involved with your community and help libraries. And we'd love for you to consider that if you're looking for a way to get involved. And you can learn more at the webpage that you created, Neil.

Neil

That's right. Wcls.org/friends.

And you know one of things, one of the most important things that all of the Friends of the Library do is raising money and they don't all have bookstores like you said, but they all have book sales.

Mary

Yeah, mostly. And again, it's all a little bit, everybody's a little bit different, so you know.

Neil

And in Blaine, they're doing something interesting.

Mary

Right. Ohh thanks very much for the segue, yeah. So, the Friends of the Blaine Library have a really great project going, an innovative project going on right now. So we had these book totes that we use to transfer materials and not just book totes. They're totes that we use to transfer materials among libraries and they're plastic totes and little closing lids. Well, they've been around for a few years and there is cracks and some wires sticking out of the top etc. And they just weren't really up for the job anymore and so we didn't want to just send them to the dump, we wanted to see if there were community groups out there who could use these very serviceable plastic totes in some other way. And so we put the call out to all the Friends groups and to a few other community groups as well. And up in Blaine, Jonathan, who's the manager at the Blaine Library, shared them with Kelly, with Blaine CORE and said "what would you make with this?" and Blaine CORE leads a lot of gardening programs at the Blaine Library. And Kelly took one look at them and thought "worm bins" and so worm bins, and then the friend said, "Oh no, they're not just worm bins. They're book worm bins, of course." And so go to our website and I guess you can put this in the show notes, right? And you can link it. And we wrote a press release about it. It's out there in the world if you want to learn more about this really cool project that the Friends of the Blaine Library and Blaine CORE are doing in partnership. Please go to the

show notes and find that release. That's just one example of you know the Friends, seeing the need, seeing an opportunity, finding a way to raise funds for the library and also say that the most important thing that our Friends groups can do for the library is to raise awareness of the library and to be advocates for library services. So, reminding people of all the good things that the library does in our communities and encouraging people to get a library card so that they can take advantage of the amazing resources at the library. So, for sure, raising money to pay for programs that our budget doesn't cover and to support staff there at each branch. But we very much value friends for their efforts in helping more people learn about the library and use the library.

Neil

Yeah, that's right. And so, to celebrate at least one of our friends at this particular moment, I'm going to be chatting with Clara Jacobson.

Mary

Yeah. And you posted a little behind the scenes photo on social media and in that post you said that she has a secret.

Neil

She does.

Mary

To a happy life.

Neil

When I interviewed her and she's just great to talk to. More well-spoken than I am, I think. You know, I asked her because you always have to ask your elders, what's the secret? What's the secret to a happy life? And she told me. And I'm not going to say that now.

Mary

Yeah, well, we have to stay tuned.

Neil

But yeah, you'll hear her, listen for it. And it's something that that I think we all could learn from. Also, I did speak with Alix Prior, who is the Ferndale Branch Manager about the Friends and the wonderful things that they've done for the Ferndale Library.

Mary

Oh, great, that would be great to hear from Alix. Good. Yeah.

Neil

So it's gonna be a full session today.

Mary

Yay! I can't wait. Well, I guess from both of us and all of us here at WCLS. Thank you to all of our Friends who support the library. We are so grateful for you, but especially thank you, Clara and happy 100th birthday.

(interlude music plays)

Neil

OK, I'm here with Alix, who is the manager of the Ferndale Library. How are you today, Alix?

Alix

I'm good. Thanks.

Neil

I'm talking to you because the other day I came in and interviewed one of your Friends of the Ferndale Library.

Alix

Yeah.

Neil

So. So let's start out for the audience, who doesn't necessarily know what a friends group is. Can you tell me what a Friends group is?

Alix

Yeah, Friends at the Library is a 501C3 nonprofit, and they're different nonprofits associated with different libraries, and each of our branches. So, the Ferndale Library has a dedicated Friends of the Ferndale Library group and they are their own nonprofit entity, so they're separate from Whatcom County Library System, and they work to volunteer and advocate for the importance of libraries in our communities so that can look like a lot of different things, advocating for the importance of services in our communities, helping make those a reality and we have dedicated volunteers who do fundraising for us and that

money supports the amazing services that we're doing that we don't have a budget for. So, a lot of our volunteers support our bookstore. If you visit the Ferndale Library, we have a bookstore inside of the library and all of the funds raised through that come through the Friends of the Ferndale Library and is gifted to us.

Neil

So that's a used bookstore?

Alix

Yes.

Neil

Gently used. Nice, nice.

Alix

Yeah. Always great finds in there.

Neil

Yeah. I love going through a used bookstore cause there's treasures and the Friends are all volunteers. Is that right?

Alix

Yeah, we have volunteers who come in weekly and work in our bookstore and then we have a board as well. And so those volunteers are helping make decisions about the finances that the Friends are bringing in and how to support library services. We also have volunteers who manage the social media, the Friends of the Ferndale Library, to spread word about the work that they're doing.

Neil

So if so, if you're living in the Ferndale community and you want to get involved in the library, this is the way to do it right?

Alix

Yes, 100% and there are volunteer opportunities, like I said weekly and also to serve on our board and that's more of a minimal time commitment. So, kind of something for everyone. depending on what your hopes are.

Neil

Let's talk about the Ferndale Library because how long have you been the manager here?

Alix

Now, just about two years just yeah.

Neil

Two years, it seems like you've been here forever. Does it feel that way to you?

Alix

It does. Yeah. I feel like I have been a part of the community for a long time now, just with how open and welcoming everyone has been.

Neil

Yeah, because I remember interviewing you when you first came in. We sat probably at this very table.

Alix

Uh-huh.

Neil

And talked about how you were you were new to the library system, but you'd been in entrenched in the community in various social services. You worked for.

Alix

I worked with Opportunity Council and I was on the Board of Ferndale Community Services at the time that I started here, yeah.

Neil

That's right, that was and it was a good transition because the library, you know, and obviously it's a community service. You wouldn't think of like a social work background coming in handy at the library, but I feel like maybe it is important to have that.

Alix

Yeah. Yeah, I feel like it has been very relevant to my work and being able to think about the needs of the community and the kinds of services that we're providing. And we have, you know, developed a lot of community partnerships over the past couple of years to make sure that we have services accessible. So, folks and just really being a center for the community and creating opportunities for connection, which is something that I really love

about the Friends of the Ferndale Library, thinking about Clara and her volunteering with our bookstore volunteers on a weekly basis. And just the amount of dedication and time that our volunteers give and it's just an opportunity to be building relationships and staying connected through the community.

Neil

Well, then let's talk a little more about Clara. And so, I was contacted by Sue Green, who's a member of the Friends of the Ferndale Library.

Alix

Yeah. Sue is our Board President.

Neil

Board President and she's seemed great and very excited to get me to interview Clara.

Alix

Yeah, Sue is I feel like just a huge force in our community and she is really dedicated to making sure that the library is providing the best services possible. She has been volunteering as a bookstore volunteer and then moved into the president role. But is really organized and dedicated and passionate, and she just does a great job of recognizing the hard work of all the volunteers and making sure that the community knows about them.

Neil

And so, Sue had reached out and said it would be great if you would interview one of our Friends because she's going to be turning 100 in September.

Alix

Yeah.

Neil

And you run into someone who's going to turn 100 and is volunteering for the Friends of the Library. You know, you got to jump to on that. So, I got to come in and what Sue had said, what Sue had told me was that Clara comes in and she has a job to do. And she does her job. And so, if you want to interview her, you gotta come in when it's her time to come in and do her job and work around her, because that's the important thing that she does here. Can you talk to that dedication that these folks have?

Alix

Yeah, they're a lot of our volunteers have been dedicated in here for years and I do not know the inner workings of the bookstore, but I know that they have a very specific process of looking at the materials that are donating, assessing their value. You know, putting a price on the book, determining if it's something that is worth selling or donating, and then, you know, handling all the merchandising of that as well. And so they work really, really hard to make sure that they're providing quality books that people have access to for a really low price.

Neil

I mean, it's great and I've filled my shelves.

Alix

Anytime you come into the library, you can browse books to buy and it is dangerous to walk in there and not walk away with anything.

Neil

Do you walk away with books? Sometimes you buy some books from there.

Alix

Ohh all the all the time. Yeah, especially kids books and I have found some really good kids puzzles. You know, that is something that I don't necessarily want to spend a lot of money on, but once you do a puzzle a couple of times, they get bored. So. It's great to be finding, yeah, new things to bring home, yeah.

Neil

That's a great idea. Kids puzzles there. Alix, it's been great talking to you.

Alix

Yeah. Thanks, Neil.

(Interlude music plays)

Clara

We can teach you how to do this.

Speaker 6

This is a surreptitious training session.

Speaker 6

I think they're trying.

Neil

Are they recruiting you to join the friends? I should have brought my. I have a lots of books ready to donate. They're mostly art books.

Neil

But I forgot to bring them in today.

Speaker 6

Well, there's another day.

Neil

There's always another day. I'm gonna. I'm gonna put your headphones in just so I can hear what the mics sound like. So I'm going to look a little funny but.

Clara

Yeah, because. I can't do anything anyway.

Neil

And actually, if you have a chance to like, I can let you use my phone to.

Clara

So let's.

Neil

Take a picture. Of us together, if that would be, would it be alright if we got a picture together just while we're talking?

Clara

Oh, sure.

Neil

I haven't broken it yet. So OK, so we're if we can just talk for a few minutes and then I know you have a lot. Of. Work. To do, but maybe I can talk to you while you're working. I'm going to put.

Clara

Well.

Neil

Not there and not there. It'll be fine. I'm just going to move this close so we can hear. Hear what you have to say, and I'm going to pretend like, well, like, I don't really know anything about you. So you, which I don't know much about you, so you get to tell me all sorts of things, but I'm going to start saying so this is like a radio show. Right? And so I'm interviewing you.

Clara

Yeah.

Neil

So I'm here with Clara Jacobson, who's one of our many volunteers who have joined the Friends of the Ferndale Library. How are you doing, Clara?

Clara

I'm doing fine. Thank you.

Neil

That's great. And so how long have you been a member of the Friends of the Library?

Clara

I have forgotten, but it was before COVID. I don't know how long before that and I enjoy coming down and meeting the people and being able to help.

Neil

Yeah. What do you do here?

Clara

I cleaned the children's books and the young adult books and reprice them for resale.

Neil

How often do you come down?

Clara

Mondays and Fridays.

Neil

OK, so if our if our audience comes Monday or Friday, they'll see you working away at your books and you come in the morning, right?

Clara

Yeah. 9 o'clock. Sometimes I'm here an hour and sometimes I get over swamped and I'm here for two hours, but most of the time it's just an hour or more.

Neil

Oh, wow.

Clara

And I really enjoy it.

Neil

So, Clara, where did you grow up?

Clara

I grew up here in Whatcom County. I was born out by Sumas. I'm a family of eleven children.

Neil

OK. And where are you in the 11?

Clara

#3 and my two older ones are gone. There are seven of us left.

Neil

OK. No.

Clara

Very fortunate. Yeah. And I went to school out by Everson out where the sawmill is. 1st to the 8th grade.

Neil

Ok. You went through up to 8th grade.

Clara

8th grade, and I never went to high school as my mother needed help at home.

Neil

OK.

Clara

And I haven't regretted it.

Neil

You haven't regretted it. All right. And did you marry a local boy?

Clara

No, he was from, actually, Minnesota. He was born in Minnesota and grew up in Colorado, and I was married 73 1/2 years.

Neil

Wow.

Clara

Till I lost him.

Neil

How many kids do you have?

Clara

Just the one daughter.

Neil

Just one daughter who's sitting over here.

Clara

Blessed with her.

Neil

How are you doing?

Clara's daughter

I'm good, thank you.

Neil

It's good to have the family together here. That's nice. So, this is always a touchy subject for me to talk about age. I'm very careful about that normally in life, but I hear you have a birthday coming up.

Clara

It's just a number that just got bigger.

Neil

Yeah. And how old? Well, when is your birthday?

Clara

September 27th.

Neil

And how old will you be?

Clara

100.

Neil

100 years old. That's just amazing.

Clara

I can't believe it. It's.

Neil

And you're still working.

Clara

Now let's take care of myself. I'm able to take care of myself. Yeah, and I drive. Yeah, yeah.

Neil

You're driving?

Clara

Yeah.

Neil

OK. OK. So, 100 years old. And you're still keeping active and busy.

Clara

Yes.

Neil

What do you attribute that to?

Clara

One day at a time.

Neil

One day at a time.

Clara's daughter

Can I add?

Neil

Yes.

Clara's daughter

I attributed it to her being so ornery.

Neil

So ornery. OK, yes. I can see that. My mother was pretty ornery, and she made it to 96.

Clara's daughter

See? That's great.

Clara

Yeah, it works.

Neil

Yeah, just keep that fire going inside.

Clara

And I have wonderful friends where I live in Quail Park. They're all trying to help me. Kind of do too much for me at times.

Neil

So what do you what do you remember? Do you remember going to the library as a child?

Clara

I didn't know what the library was. I didn't know much about books until I come here because I was married 17 and.

Neil

Yeah.

Clara

He was in the army for six years.

Neil

OK.

Clara

So, the books are all new to me. I go through those children's books and I've never had any of those. In fact, that didn't have many with my daughter when she was growing up because they couldn't afford the books. And I didn't know about libraries.

Neil

Yeah. So and you are in Sumas, so there's been a Sumas library for a while.

Clara

Most of the time we're on Everson, except we, after he got out of the service, there was no work here in Whatcom County. So, we went down the other side of Seattle. And was there for 40 years before we came back up here.

Neil

Really?

Clara

So everything was all new to me.

Neil

OK.

Clara

I had never been in Ferndale that I know of.

Neil

So, you came up here, what do you remember around what year that was?

Clara

No, that was about 76, 75.

Neil

OK, OK. And so you came up to Ferndale. What did your husband do in Seattle?

Clara

He did, he done all kinds of different work. He was a disabled veteran and he worked at several different jobs and he was always working and he was never without work with him. And I was proud of him.

Neil

What part of Seattle did you live in?

Clara

Well, we went to Kent and we lived in the Renton, made it to Renton first, then Kent and then Maple Valley.

Neil

OK. No. Wow, all the South side. I grew up in the South end around Burien. Do you remember Burien?

Clara

I remember Burien, we had a laundry there for 14 years.

Neil

You had a laundry there?

Clara

Uh-huh.

Neil

Wow.

Clara

They did shirts, mostly shirts.

Neil

That's interesting. Was it a dry cleaner or a?

Clara

It was a laundry.

Neil

A whole laundry room.

Clara

Commercial. Yeah.

Neil

Oh, big. Yeah.

What do you remember about growing? I'm thinking about, like when you were, when you got married, you were young. Did you listen to music back then?

Clara

Mostly western music.

Neil

OK, who is? Did you have some favorite singers?

Clara

The first one I ever heard was Gene Autry.

Neil

Gene Autry. OK. And that was around the time when you were 17. That was probably around the time World War 2 started, yeah.

Clara

Yeah, it was World War 2. Started only after we were married. We were married in '42. April '42.

Neil

And what do you remember about World War 2?

Clara

Well, he was gone for a while. He was in Belgium and went.

Neil

OK.

Clara

He was in Port Townsend and transferred to the Capon in California from there to Texas. And I was with him at Camp Hahn at the town Riverside, and then they sent him to Texas. So, he said don't follow me there because they'll be shipping me out again. And he went from there to Maryland and got on the big ship and went over to England from there, they sent him to France and then Belgium. And he was injured in Belgium. Came back to England and then let him come home to Ferndale for furlough. He was 14 months in the hospital, he had 85% of his body burned. So, they did a lot of skin grafting.

Neil

Wow.

Clara

Yeah. And then he got out and we worked and in '78 we took as we started traveling around the United States. Every state except Hawaii.

Neil

Wow.

Clara

And he said "I can't take my RV there, I'm not going."

Neil

So, you were driving around? What was your favorite state to go to?

Clara

I think Colorado, because there's so much to see there and that's fun for **us and**. Every place was wonderful, something wonderful to see. I couldn't see going over overseas. There's so much to see here.

Neil

That's right.

Clara

I'd hear there's a lot in Washington I've never been to.

Neil

Yeah, it's a big country and Washington's almost like two different states, right? It's the west side and the east side. Yeah.

Clara

Yeah.

Neil

Let me see. OK, let's talk about the library and your work here. It seems like this is important, this job that you're doing.

Clara

It is because I enjoy it. I enjoy those ladies. They're all wonderful to work with and I pick up, get books and I do more reading now than I ever did.

Neil

Yeah. Do you have? Are you reading something now, right now?

Clara

Yes, I couldn't tell you the name of the book though, I forget.

Neil

That's all right. What kind of books do you like to read?

Clara

Adventure, mystery.

Neil

OK.

Clara

Love stories that always end up good.

Neil

Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's the rule about romance stories. They always have to have a happy ending. Well, that's fun. So, can you tell me a little about the friends group? What I mean, why do we have a Friends of the Library group.

Clara

Well, I'm not sure what she got started with the donations.

Neil

Yeah.

Clara

Sometimes we have very few donations. Next time we're overloaded.

Neil

Oh, yeah. So Cathy's sitting here with us and we have other Friends of the Library working hard on sorting books right now. And Clara is probably anxious and getting ready to get her job done. So, maybe we'd better cut this short. It's been a pleasure talking to you, Clara.

Clara

Thank you.

Neil

So happy birthday to you.

Clara

Thank you very much.

Neil

Alright. That's it.

(music begins to play)

Or give me land lots of land under starry skies above. Don't fence me in. Let me ride through the wide-open country that I love. Don't fence me in. Let me be by myself in the evening breeze. Listen to the murmur of the Cottonwood trees. Send me off forever. But I ask you, please don't fence...

Neil

Well, that was our 50th podcast episode in what an episode. We want to thank our special guest Mrs. Clara Jacobson, whose 100th birthday will take place on September 27th. 2024 it was an honor to speak with such an interesting, well traveled and happy person who's still making a difference in her community. Thanks also to Clara's daughter, Kathy, who may or may not have inherited some of her mother's orneriness. I may have to do a follow up interview to determine that. And thanks to the Friends of the Ferndale Library for allowing me to embed myself into your Friday morning workflow, I hope I didn't slow things down too much. Let me thank Alix Prior, manager of the Ferndale Library, for her thoughts on the value of library, friends groups and to all our friends groups. Keep up the good work. Thanks of course, to my boss, Mary Vermillion. Normally I'd dig up a relevant quote to finish off the podcast, but on this 50th podcast episode it seems fitting to let Clara Jacobson have the last words of wisdom. Clara, we want to wish you a very happy birthday. And please tell us once more what is the secret to a long and happy life.

Clara

One day at a time.