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WARM SPRINGS

Community tries to preserve language as elders slip away



Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs elders from front to back, Viola Governor, 82, Marcia Minthorn, 78, Willard Tewee, 72, and Lonnie James, 63, in a classroom where native language is taught on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation.

More than 20 people at Warm Springs have died from COVID-19, taking their knowledge of language and tradition with them

BY MICHAEL KOHN • The Bulletin

In a brightly lit classroom on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, sitting among other senior-aged language instructors, 84-year-old Viola Governor closed her eyes and broke into song in Sahaptin, her native language. The melody rose and fell as the others listened intently to her impromptu song. There may not be many more times to hear it.

Governor is one of the last speakers of her language, and there are fewer now in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which claimed the lives of more than 20 Warm Springs community members, some of them fluent speakers of their indigenous language.

The pandemic, which has cut short millions of lives, is now threatening the traditions and languages of indigenous people in Oregon. Those who know the traditions the best, the elder population, have seen their numbers dwindle to the point where the stream of knowledge is being undercut.

Governor, who was hospitalized herself with COVID-19, lost friends to the disease and spent months in isolation. She missed the powwows and meetings. She missed out on funerals for loved ones. Mostly, she missed the opportunity to pass along knowledge of her fragile culture.

"We don't get together too often anymore to share it with the younger generation," said Governor, wisps of gray and black hair framing a face burnished during a youth spent riding horses in the sunshine near her home on Mutton Mountain, close to the village of Simnasho.

"I thank the lord that I was able to leave the hospital and I am still here doing the work that I really enjoy. Our language has to go on," she said.

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"We have a certain way that we put our dead away; it used to be two to three days. We haven't been able to have our washat, our drumming, when we sing over the body. We haven't been able to dance around the deceased; it's hurtful and very depressing"

— Marcia Minthorn, a 78-year-old Warm Springs community member



RANDALL KILBY | ACCUSED OF MURDER IN BEND

Neighbors were afraid of suspect for years

BY GARRETT ANDREWS

The Bulletin

Arriving home from work, Susan Stanyer's heart would fall whenever she saw Randall Kilby's car parked outside her neighbor's home at 60971 Granite Drive.

Neighbors like Stanyer, who lives across the street, say their corner of the Romaine Village subdivision in Bend is quiet and crime-free. But when Kilby showed up five years ago, after a stint in prison, he brought an air of menace. He lived in a trailer on the Granite Drive property, often yelling at people there.

"We just felt different when Randall was living here," Stanyer said. "We've been uncomfortable with him for five years."

There was reason to feel that way about Kilby. He had a string of police arrests and criminal convictions dating back to November 2001 that included burglary, theft and assault. But none of that prepared neighbors for what they discovered last Sunday.

Kilby, 35, now stands accused of killing three people in the Granite Drive house: A March 20 hatchet attack on brothers-in-law Jeffrey Allen Taylor, 66, and Benjamin "Benny" Harlin Taylor, 69, and an alleged Christmas Day beating of 43-year-old Daphne Banks, who was in a coma for weeks and died in January after being taken off life support.

Kilby is due to be arraigned Monday in Deschutes County Circuit Court.

The killings left many in the community asking questions, notably, why Kilby wasn't in jail earlier. These people include neighbors, relatives and alleged victims who say they were shocked by killings, but not surprised Kilby is the suspect.

"Quite a few people around here didn't care that much for Randall," said neighbor Dorothy Evans. "A lot of people said that he was bad news."

An offer of help

Kilby had a friend in Jeffrey Taylor, though.

The two met when they worked for an independent contractor that cleaned commercial kitchen stove hoods.

Taylor let Kilby park a trailer outside his Granite Drive home when Kilby got out of prison.

Jeffrey Taylor once ran a catering business in Bend but lately had been on disability. With the neighborhood mailboxes located outside his house, he was known to say hello to everyone picking up mail.

For years, neighbors told Jeffrey Taylor that Kilby was "no good," but he insisted his friend just needed help.

"He was very laid-back. Very nice guy," said neighbor Jerry Stanyer, Susan's husband. "He maybe trusted people too much is what he did."

Neighbors grew to recognize the signs Randall was around: loud arguments that spilled into the street, strangers working on cars at odd hours.

Kilby had grown up in Bend, his parents operating the 7-Eleven franchise on East Third Avenue.

He has a criminal record throughout his adult life — burglary, vehicle theft, resisting arrest — but nothing as severe as the murder charges he's facing.

Kilby's attorney, TJ Spear, declined to comment for this article, citing the conduct code of the Oregon State Bar.

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