

# Obituary – Bea Lingle – July 1927 – November 2022

By [Guest Contributor](#) | December 9th, 2022

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Skagway's beloved matriarch, Beatrice Hillery Lingle, 95, died where she always wanted to be — at home in her own bed — on the evening of Nov. 20, 2022.

Bea had been in a period of declining health, but it had not kept her down until a few weeks ago. She got up two more times — to be a Halloween witch, and to meet her coffee group at the White Pass depot — then went home to bed after one last alley drive around her town.

Skagway is in mourning for this true community angel. Hundreds of praises and memories were shared on social media following her death. And when her body was taken from the clinic to the airport for her flight to the Juneau crematorium, a mile-long procession of vehicles followed the ambulance to witness her departure. The procession even took a turn down an alley. A pair of eagles circled high overhead.

Bea was born in Skagway on July 20, 1927. She was the fourth child of Tad and Jeannette de Gruyter Hillery and a descendant of two gold rush families. It was said that Bea was unexpected, and very tiny at birth, so much so that Doctor V. I. Dahl told her mother to place her in a box on the open oven door of the wood cookstove overnight. If she was awake in the morning, then she had a good life ahead.

Was he ever right! She was a survivor from an early age, beat cancer twice after her children were born and lived a full, active life.

After her parents divorced when she was just four months old, Bea was taken to Seattle and raised there by her mom and grandmother. She would spend summers in Skagway with her dad and older sisters Helen, Jean and Virginia. Early photos from her albums show the girls dressing up for dances and going on hikes and various excursions to Dyea or Lake Bennett on the train. Their dad was a conductor on the White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad (WP&YR).

Bea did spend one year of elementary school in Skagway but most of her education was in Seattle, where she graduated from Ballard High School in 1945. After graduation, she came right back to Skagway, which she always felt was home, to live with Helen and Virginia. She also met discharged Navy seaman John O'Daniel, and they were married in February 1946. They had four children over the next decade: Mike, Kathleen, John and Dorothy.

Bea's first marriage ended in divorce. Soon, however, she found a new beau in another veteran, Ben Lingle, who had moved to Skagway with his family. After a stint with a railroad battalion in Korea, he finished high school in Skagway and worked for the WP&YR as chief mechanic.

About 1960, he began helping out at Skagway Hardware. While the owners, the Dewars, were away on a trip, Bea ran the business and hired Lingle to thread pipe and cut glass.

"I would like to buy this store," he told Bea one day. "Will you marry me?"

Bea said she didn't know right then that she would "stop getting paychecks and become part of the inventory."

They eventually sealed the deal with a marriage on June 9, 1961. This merger resulted in one of the biggest families in Skagway, with her four children and Benny's daughter Robin. And they even took in some neighbor kids for a while. She loved piling them in the back of her truck "Penelope" and heading out to Dyea for a picnic.

The store at Fourth and Broadway was Benny's domain for years. He even "fired" his wife a few times, but they grew the business together. It expanded to the building next door, and they also bought a lumberyard across the alley. The hardware store at one time or another employed all the kids (and now grandkids and great-grandkids). It still remains in the family.

Benny, a pilot, also co-founded Skagway Air Service, which operated for more than 40 years and was later run by son Mike. Bea's can-can girl logo adorned the tails on their fleet of planes.

Bea was a gifted artist and set up her "Paintin' Place" in sister Virginia's Shamrock Music Box store, just north of A.B. Hall. Bea later worked with other artists in setting up the Skagway Artists' Co-op at Fifth and Broadway (see Lainey Papageorge's article).

The Lingles loved to socialize. From fun times at nearby Moe's Frontier Bar after work, to bowling with the Hardware "Everything from Nuts to Nipples" team at the Elks, to their Christmas Eve fudge and eggnog open houses, they knew how to have a party. For many years, their home on Third Ave was the place to be on New Year's Day, with all the chili and hangover salad you could eat and an open bar to cure any survivors from the night before.

Benny and Bea never really retired. They were always on the go. They would drive their big motorhome down to Mesa, Arizona for the winters, and spend long summer weekends at their Carcross cabin or camping in the Yukon. When their families started a canoe trip on some Yukon river, Bea and Benny would show up in their camper van "Awesome" to see them off. But their base was always Skagway.

The Lingles were married 48 years. After Benny passed away in 2009, Bea did not slow down. Her daughter Kathleen and husband Bob decided to move back to Skagway after retiring as teachers in Juneau to help care for Bea. She agreed to have their old home torn down to build a bigger one. It had a new lair for the Queen Bea to entertain visitors. From there, she could watch the birds and squirrels at her feeder, or sneak onto the porch for a dip in the hot tub near the bar.

Even more of a legendary tradition was Bea's annual "Champagne Moose Turd Picnic," in which she gathered up a group of local women and headed to the Yukon to celebrate the arrival of summer. The only men allowed were designated drivers.

Bea would zip around town until she could no longer drive, and even tried out a motorized scooter for a time. Later Bob and Kathy would load her in the van, pick up a few friends, and head to coffee and alley drives. Bea could tell anyone what was being built in town, and if anything was out of place. She loved her Skagway, and Skagway loved her back. Bea loved to find the "good" in everyone she met.

Bea was dedicated to her community and was one of the early winners of the Helen B. Clark Award, which was named for her sister. Bea's early work with the Chamber of Commerce's Clean Sweep, American Legion Auxiliary Christmas Doll and other causes made her an easy choice for the award, and she continued to support community causes until her passing.

The family is very grateful for the care Bob Deitrick gave his mother in-law over these past few years, especially after the loss of our beloved Kathleen to cancer in 2020.

Bea was preceded in death by her husband and sisters, and daughters Kathleen and Robin. She is survived by: sons Mike (and Sylvia) O'Daniel, John (and Janet) O'Daniel, daughter Dorothy (and Jeff) Brady, and son in-law Bob Deitrick, all of Skagway; 16 grandchildren, 26 great-grandchildren; seven great-great grandchildren; and several nieces and nephews and their families; and the entire Skagway Hardware and Skagway Air Service extended family.

At her request, there will be no memorial service. The community will again gather at the traditional eggnog open house on Christmas Eve at the Hardware. Also watch for announcements about a "Champagne Moose Turd Picnic" celebration this summer in the Yukon. – *Compiled by Jeff Brady for the family*

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This article was submitted to The Skagway News as part of a press release, opinion, obituary or letter to the editor.