

Lewis and Clark

Life Care built and operates a skilled nursing facility in Lewiston, Idaho, which, along with Clarkston, Washington, make up twin cities named in honor of the famed explorers William Clark and Meriwether Lewis. Located at the confluence of the Snake and Clearwater Rivers, surrounded by gently rolling hills, the Lewis-Clark Valley is located 465 river miles from the Pacific Ocean and is at the head of the navigation system of the Columbia/Snake rivers. The area is often referred to as the “Banana Belt” because of the area’s low elevation (731 feet above sea level).

As the two explorers and their Corps of Discovery – commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson to find a water route to the Pacific and explore the uncharted West – came through this area in 1805, they were provided much-needed assistance from the Nez Perce Indians in the region. In fact, their expedition almost came to an untimely and deadly end. Half-starved and almost frozen, the men staggered out of Idaho’s snowy Bitterroot Mountains and into the camp of the Nez Perce. Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns tell the story in *Lewis and Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery*.

Lewis and Clark were the first white men ever to reach the homeland of these Indians. In the absence of more prominent leaders, who were out on a war party, a chief named Twisted Hair had to decide what to do with the weak but wealthy strangers suddenly in their midst. According to the tribe’s oral tradition, some of the Nez Perce proposed killing the white men and confiscating their boxes of manufactured goods and weapons. The expedition’s rifles and ammunition, in particular, would have instantly made the Nez Perce the region’s richest and most powerful tribe.

But an Indian woman came to the Corps of Discovery’s aid. As a young girl, she had been captured by an enemy tribe on the plains, who in turn sold her to another tribe farther to the east. Eventually, she had been befriended and treated kindly by white people in Canada before escaping and making her way back to her own people. They called her Watkuweis (“Returned from a Faraway Country”), and for years she had told them stories about the fair-skinned people who lived toward the rising sun. She was aged and dying by the time the explorers arrived.

When she learned about possible plans to destroy the expedition, tribal tradition says, she intervened. “These are the people who helped me,” she said. “Do them no hurt.” Her advice was followed.

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Think about the return on an investment. Some strangers' simple acts of kindness, years before, saved the lives of an entire expedition. A little kindness, you see, can have amazing and unexpected results. Some of it sown today can produce a wonderful harvest, even years down the road.

--Beecher Hunter