

Becoming “Uncle Willy”: An Alternative Account

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For at least the last forty years of his life, Dr. William A. Longacre, Ph.D., was known to faculty, friends, and students as “Uncle Willy” (sometimes spelled in print as “Willie”). At the field-school symposium event of the School of Anthropology’s centennial celebrations in October 2015, “Uncle Willy” shared his memory of how and why he acquired that avuncular appellation. He recalled that it appeared in the 1960s after taking over as director of the University of Arizona Archaeological Field School at Grasshopper, when he was only in his late twenties and looked much younger. He had encouraged students to call him Bill, he related, yet they felt that name was too familiar for a faculty member and director. Instead, they combined the familiar with a reference of respect to produce the name “Uncle Willy.” That was his story then, and we are certain he would stick to it today. As an anthropological aside, there is no indication then or now that common ethnographic kinship terms or relationships, such as mother’s brother, played any role in the etymology.

We, on the other hand, have a different account that we offer as an alternative, if for no other reason than we mentioned the story in our history of Grasshopper research (Reid and Whittlesey 2005). In the section on the 1975 season in the chapter titled, “Transition and Change: 1974–1978,” we concluded: at some point during the season, Longacre became “Uncle Willy.”

Another memorable event, and in many respects the most frightening, was Bill Fash’s twenty-first birthday party. Further exposition must await the Grasshopper social history (Reid and Whittlesey 2005:121). But we cannot wait for that social history to add a celebratory note to the life and work

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of Bill Longacre that is so pithily captured in the sobriquet, "Uncle Willy."

We offer this claim for a strong memory of the past to support our account, even though ambiguities remain. We both recall vividly the summer of Grasshopper 1975. It was a season of common purpose and uncommon geniality. Staff and students alike worked and played hard. Graduate students who would go on to illustrious careers included Frank Bayham, Cheryl Claasen, Patty Crown, Bill Fash, Ingrid Herbich, Terry Klein, John Olsen, and Rebecca Storey, among others. Richard Ciolek-Torrello, T. J. Ferguson, Michael Graves, Tim O'Meara, Bill Reynolds, Connie Silver, and Alan Sullivan supervised the crews in excavation, survey, and in the laboratory

There were many memorable dances in the dining room and dormitories, fueled by boom boxes powered by D-cell batteries. Whittlesey recalls Terry Klein schooling her in reggae dancing. Cheryl Claasen fought for equal opportunity for women athletes on the volleyball court. Longacre was not the only one to earn a nickname that summer. Patty Crown became known as "Patty Pie," an irresistible choice in a camp where cattle grazed. There was the usual trickery with artifacts, guitar music, and an incredible field trip that involved a traveling water-balloon fight that culminated at Canyon de Chelly. Reid's red Volkswagen bus carried the organizers and perpetrators, who hurled balloons at the carryalls, each of which took on the character of a team.

The most memorable, of course, was the previously mentioned birthday party for Bill Fash that involved tequila, guacamole, illustrations of Maya deities that Bill drew and gave to everyone as presents, more tequila, and other events that should not be mentioned. Needless to say, this summer earned a reputation.

We contend that it was Dr. Sally J. Holbrook, Ph.D., a visiting paleoecologist, in cahoots with Michael Graves, who first began calling Bill "Willy" rather early in the summer. We speculate that the initial moment was most probably on the director's porch, which had been constructed by director Raymond H. Thompson to face away from the camp and

toward the open forest to the southeast. It was common for field staff and the occasional student to gather for drinks and gossip after a shower and before the six o'clock dinner bell. In this atmosphere of small talk and booze, "Willy's" easy-going personality and ready wit—often punctuated by horrendous puns—gave rise to adding "Uncle" to his name.

This addition was not so much out of respect for his academic position as for the humanistic character of his personality and his pioneering work in the New Archaeology—he was famous! Uncle was the only male kin term that fit. He was not father, brother, grandpa, or cousin. He remained "Uncle Willy" for the next forty years.

We hope our "Uncle Willy" would have been pleased with this tale. Regardless, our memories of Grasshopper 1975 and fondness for its director will remain strong for the rest of our lives.

Reference Cited

Reid, Jefferson and Stephanie Whittlesey

2005 *Thirty Years into Yesterday: A History of Archaeology at Grasshopper Pueblo*. University of Arizona Press, Tucson.