

## T E S C                      on N B C

In the archives you will find a copy of an NBC-TV program which was shot in 1970 and broadcast in 1971. This is the story of how the planning faculty of Evergreen came to appear in this program and of how, after some 20 years, we were able to acquire it for the archives.

The story began when the Provost and Deans asked Willi Unsoeld to organize and to run a camping retreat for the planning faculty. Merv Cadwallader had impressed upon us, from his experience in forming and working with teaching teams, the importance of developing cohesion and habits of collaboration from the start. Don Humphrey knew Willi Unsoeld through their connection with Oregon State University. Willi was internationally known for his having ascended, with Tom Hornbein, the West Ridge of Mount Everest. Besides his mountaineering reputation and his academic credentials in philosophy and comparative religion, Willi had also been serving as an administrator and spokesperson for Outward Bound – a program which developed physical stamina and built the sense of community among groups of young people through rigorous wilderness experiences. We were fortunate to have as a colleague in our new enterprise such an experienced leader.

The contracts of the Planning Faculty were to take effect on September 15, 1970. As the Provost's Council and Willi decided, the Planning Faculty members would have a few days to settle into their offices in the prefab temporary buildings which would be their home for the planning year of 1970-71. Then we would all go off on a camping trip for three days and two nights to get to know each other and do some teambuilding exercises. To select the location, Willi consulted his mountaineering friends about likely spots in the Cascades, especially those which would be in rain shadows. He decided upon a campground which would be about a mile from the end of the road running along the North Teanaway River on the east side of the Cascades, just to the south of Mount Stuart. And so, in a van or two and a fleet of private cars, in the third week of September, some seventeen members of the Planning Faculty, the three Academic Deans, and the Provost set off on the opening adventure of our time together.

We drove up to meet Interstate 90 at North Bend, proceeded through Snoqualmie Pass to Cle Elum, where we turned northeast onto the road connecting with route 97. Shortly thereafter we turned to go north-northwest on the Teanaway River Road, which was paved for about half of its 22 miles and then, as it entered the forest, became a dirt and gravel affair. Sure enough, Willi had chosen an excellent spot – a campground in a glade next to the river, about fifty yards from the road and parking spaces, with a fire circle surrounded by logs for sitting, soft and level dirt for sleeping, and a clearing for our exercises. We unloaded and carried up the packs, food, and equipment. Most would sleep in two- or three-man tents. Some five or six of us were to sleep in a tepee which Bob Sluss had contributed. Those who had volunteered, or had been urged by Willi to do the cooking began to prepare the stew for the evening meal on a white-gas

camping stove we had brought along. The rest of us were to devote the remainder of the late afternoon to some of Willi's Outward Bound activities.

Two of the exercises stick in mind. The first involved tying a rope about ten feet from the ground between two trees about eight feet apart. We were to devise and execute a method to get everyone from one side up over the rope and then down to the ground on the other side. After much inelegant shinnying, boosting, tree-hugging, and catching on the far side, we succeeded. The second involved having as many men as possible get off the ground onto a very large, evenly sawn tree trunk. Here the proceedings were more elegant -- heavy men linking arms in the center, lighter men hanging on to them at the periphery. Twelve of us were more or less on the stump at the same time.

We asked Willi what the correct solutions to the problems might be. He said he didn't know -- his job was to think up problems; our job was to solve them. From this remark and from some moves that Willi would be making the next day, we began to understand that one strategem for teambuilding involved uniting the team in mutual irritation toward the coach.

We got a fire going in the fire circle, and by that time our stew was ready for supper. Afterwards we were sitting and standing around, smoking, drinking coffee, or starting to work on the cheap red wine we had brought along for the sake of conviviality. Then we heard coming up the road from a distance the sounds of several motors and the crunching of tires on gravel. The sounds got louder, and we saw the headlights of three or four vehicles -- which turned out to be a van and several cars. The motors stopped, and people got out. One of them called to us, "Is Willi Unsoeld there?" With a sigh, and an air of philosophic resignation, Willi said, "Will they never leave me alone?" and went to the road. For the rest of us, further bonding occurred through mutual bewilderment.

After about a half-hour, Willi came back to us as the vehicles of the strangers started up, turned around, and went back down the road into the night. Willi said, "Guys, when you get out of the tents tomorrow morning, it might be a good idea to have some pants on, because an NBC camera crew is going to be here." "WILLIE! What's going on???"

From what he told us in the next few minutes and what we learned from the camera crew during the lunch-break the next day, the sequence went something like this:

The first Earth Day had occurred on April 22 of 1970. This observance provided a focus for and intensified a concern with our environment, a concern that had been growing for a number of years but now entered the broader public consciousness. A producer had persuaded the powers-that-were of NBC Television to finance a project which would result in an hour-long (49 minutes plus commercials) "wilderness special." So a director and camera crew were sent out to film impressive natural settings, mainly in the West. By mid-September they had shot their

fill of waterfalls, mountain peaks, large trees in the mist, and the like. What they needed now were some people.

The producer and director had the idea of setting up a debate within the show between spokespersons for developers – of the petroleum industry, mining, and other commercial interests – and spokespersons for conservation of the natural environment. When they asked around for someone who might be an eloquent representative of the environmentalist cause – someone who knew his stuff and would be both charismatic and telegenic – they were told, "Find Willi Unsoeld." And they were directed to Oregon State University in Corvallis. People there would surely know where he was to be found.

All of this was occurring before there were laptops, an Internet, and cell phones. But the director did get in touch with OSU, where he learned that Unsoeld had just taken up a faculty position with a new college in Olympia, Washington. He must have gotten clear instructions about how to find Evergreen, because when he and his entourage had driven up I-5 and taken the turns onto Route 101 and Overhulse Road, by mid- afternoon they had reached our temporary campus. (This was no mean feat. At that time there were people living on Overhulse Road who did not know that a new college was being built just to the north of them.) So the caravan had pulled up at our cluster of prefab buildings, and the director had gone inside to ask for Willi.

The answer: "He's not here ." (Disappointment. Dejection. All that way for nothing.) "No, he's out on a camping trip with the other members of our planning faculty. He's putting them through some sort of wilderness exercises." (Elation. Jubilation. Willi was available, and perhaps there would be other environmentalists. There would be people doing stunts. Free actors!) And so the NBC-TV team, following the precise directions which Willi had left, found us on the North Fork of the Teanaway. They had their talk with Willi and went off to spend the night at a motel in Cle Elum before returning to our camp in the morning.

They did not catch us coming out of our tents, but they pulled up in the parking area just as we were finishing breakfast. Willi and Don Humphrey and Dave Barry took the NBC crew across the road and part way up the ridge just beyond it. Willi had done a bit of scouting and had determined where we would be doing our rudimentary mountaineering exercises. Don had done his share of climbing and trekking; Dave had been a leader in the Mountaineering Club when he was at the University of Iowa (sic -- if there can be a U.S. Coast Guard installation in Iowa, there can most certainly be a mountaineering club at the University.) They helped the crew to carry up and to set up their cameras and other gear for the best angles to film what the rest of us were going to be doing.

Willi had us carry up the gear he had brought along -- climbing ropes, carabiners, harnesses -- to

the open slopes above the road. When we came to a relatively flat area, Willi held a master-class about three-on-a-rope climbing, using some of our more experienced colleagues to demonstrate belaying to the rest of us. Then we all had the chance to form teams, rope up, and try the techniques for ourselves under Willi's critical eye. We had to learn to trust each other.

The need to trust became much more intense in the second main exercise of the morning. By a combination of hiking and scrambling, Willi led us to a flat place at the top of a cliff so that we could learn how to rappel. Again, he called on some of our more experienced colleagues to show how we could use ropes and carabiners to support ourselves in harnesses and let ourselves down. Then, one by one, retrieving the gear when each of us had reached a ledge below, he sent us over the edge and down the vertical face of the cliff. As he did so, he balanced himself on the balls of his feet at the very edge and rocked back and forth as he sang a mountaineers' song -- something on the order of "fifteen men on a dead man's chest," but replete with imagery of bodies hurtling through space, bones breaking, and blood spurting. This activity did little to increase the sense of security for those of us who had never before engaged in "a controlled fall." But we went over. And the NBC cameras were cranking.

Willi's balancing act was all the more impressive because we knew that he had lost nine of his toes to frostbite. When he and Tom Hornbein had made the first ascent of Mount Everest by the West Ridge and then were making the first traverse to go down by the South Col route, they overtook Barry Bishop and Lute Jorstad, who had reached the summit earlier by the South Col. All four were exhausted. The oxygen was running out, and it was too dangerous for them to continue down in the darkness to the highest camp. So these men had sat outside through the night. Willi's feet had frozen, and so this epic climb had cost him all but one of his toes. Nevertheless, he proved in his time together with us to be the most agile and best-coordinated athlete of the bunch.

After we had done our rappels, we packed up the climbing gear and went down to our camp for lunch. Then Willi led most of us out for a hike and some scrambling exercises. Dave Barry and Don Humphrey and a few others stayed behind, helping the NBC camera crew with their equipment, and explaining to them who we were and what kind of college we were going to be planning. While some of us were out on our hike with Willi, the NBC crew moved their van up a mile to the end of the road and set up their cameras, their reflecting panels, and a camp stool in order to hold some interviews.

Willi had already marched us part way up the road and told us we would be taking a trail to go up on the ridge. The entrance to the trail was marked by a pathfinding cairn, which none of us noticed. True to form, Willi let us all go by the marker before remarking that we had missed it and taking us back to it to begin our climb. The first part amounted to walking and gaining

altitude by switchbacks. Then Willi led us off to the side and instructed us in three-point scrambling – using our two hands and two feet so that three of the appendages would be firmly anchored while we gained a new hold with the fourth. Because we had no climbing helmets, we worked our way upwards spread out across the slope, shouting "rock" if we dislodged anything. After we had come about three quarters of the way up the ridge, Willi had us turn to the left, form a single file, and make a traverse parallel to the road below. This was mainly a careful walk, but we did need some handholds in the shrubs and stunted trees along our route.

When we had come to a point even with the end of the road far below, we now were on a scree slope. Willi said, "Let me go up and see if you can make it to the top of the ridge," and started upward with a gait almost as fast as a scamper. In a few minutes, he was back with us and said, "No, you can't make it." At this moment, a call came up from the road's end below: "Willi, ... they want to ... interview you ... before the ... sun goes down." Willi said to us, "Look, fellows, you can make it down now on your own." As the least experienced mountain walker in the group, I asked, "What am I supposed to do if I lose my footing on this stuff?" With just a bit of exasperation in his voice, Willi said, "Charlie, I don't have to tell you what to do. Your body knows what to do. If you start sliding, you'll be digging in your heels and then your hands until you come to a stop. Then you'll roll over on your chest and push yourself up so that you can walk sideways down to the bottom." And then he turned and loped down, reaching the road's end in about 10 minutes while the rest of us were taking over a half hour to come down.

By the time we were down, Willi had given his interview, and the NBC crew were starting to pack up. All that the director could tell us was that the show would probably air in the winter but that, for sure, it would be narrated by Hugh Downs. The NBC people left us. We had our well-deserved evening meal, our red wine, our good night's sleep, and our breakfast the next morning – after which we packed up and drove back to Evergreen. As we settled into a fall and early winter of defining how our "theme teams" would work and then planning what our offerings would be for the first year, the specific memories of our time on the North Fork of the Teanaway faded, but the sense of our being a community remained. The wilderness retreat had done its job.

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In the winter of 1971, I was spending a weekend with my parents in Allentown, PA, between working for Evergreen in Washington DC and in New York City, interviewing applicants for faculty positions and trolling for grant support at Endowments and Foundations. In Saturday's mail came a copy of the weekly TV Guide; listed for late in the next week, was an NBC "wilderness special," narrated by Hugh Downs. There was no mention of Evergreen, just a brief summary promising majestic scenery and a discussion of the pros and cons of the new environmental movement. But it clearly would be our show. On Monday, I called my secretary

from New York City. Among other business items, I asked her to inform Dick Nichols, our Public Relations officer, about the TV listing, so that he could spread the word around our small temporary campus and alert his Western Washington media contacts to the upcoming appearance of Evergreeners, representatives of the regional new college, on national television.

When I was back on campus on Thursday morning, I called Dick to learn if the word had been spread. He told me, however, that he had not alerted the newspapers, radio stations, and NBC regional affiliates, because he had not been able to find out for sure if any footage about Evergreen would be included in the final production. In those days before videotape, videocassettes, and DVD's, NBC would be showing and feeding to its affiliates a film which was already completed, in the can, and unavailable for prior spot-checking. Though Dick had done his best with King TV in Seattle and NBC in New York, no one to whom he spoke was able to tell him about the contents of the finished show. Neither the producer, the director, nor Hugh Downs was available for comment on short notice. Accordingly, Dick did not dare to risk his and our credibility by alerting regional media to something which might not happen. Disappointed as I was, I had to agree that he was doing the right thing. There were enough misunderstandings, misgivings, and even hostility swirling around our radically alternative new college. We did not need any more doubts or any embarrassments.

When the show ran, however, it turned out that at least one fifth of the running time dealt with the activities and interviews filmed during the Planning Faculty retreat. Though some media technicians had already come on board, we were not equipped to record the show off the air. And so Evergreeners were left with memories of a few minutes of early fame.

Others had been watching the show around the country. Within the next month, we received some mail from viewers. The general reaction amounted to "Good for you" and "Good luck." But a few sharp-eyed viewers had noticed that there were no women to be seen and questioned why such an otherwise forward-looking college would be settling for a conventional old-boys' network. There was really no suitable answer to this question, and so we simply responded by noting their concern.

In the next summer, however, and the summer after that, we learned that the NBC show had been a useful tool for recruitment. From the students who wanted to join us in the first two years of operation, we required essays which would include information about how the applicants had first heard of Evergreen and why they wanted to enroll. Did they know what they were getting into? A good number of these applicants mentioned the wilderness special as having been their introduction to us and as having sparked their interest in finding out more about this new college. So the NBC production unit had their free actors, and Evergreen had its free national publicity. For his role in having organized and led the retreat and his powerful statements on camera, Willi Unsoeld remained the most influential figure in the whole episode.

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The next two decades brought much sorrow to and elicited much bravery from the Unsoeld family. On September 8, 1976, Willi's and Jolene's daughter Nanda Devi, already a talented climber, died of high altitude sickness on an expedition led by Willi to fulfil their dream of having her get to the top of the peak for which she was named. On March 4, 1979, when he was leading a team of Evergreen students down from the summit of Mount Rainier, Willi died in an avalanche. Jolene went on to serve two terms – 1984 to 1988 – in the Washington State House of Representatives, and then to serve three terms – 1989 to 1995 – in the U. S. House of Representatives. Willi's and Jolene's two sons, Regon and Krag, became teachers, settled in the South Sound, and continued to work for environmental, political, and humanitarian causes. The surviving daughter, Terres, had a career as an actress in the 1980's.

One of Terres's acting colleagues became fascinated with the story of Willi Unsoeld and determined to develop a characterization of Willi as a one-man play. He studied all of the audio-visual materials he could find to imitate Willi's voice, movements, and mannerisms as a lecturer. Terres must have coached him well so that he could produce an accurate and powerful impersonation. My wife Lilo and I attended one of his performances at the Act Theater of Seattle and were amazed at this feat. Not only the physical impersonation but also the content of the acted lecture – by turns witty, philosophical, down-home practical, and wise -- made for a moving experience.

On the drive home, I commented that it was too bad we didn't have more of Willi's presence at Evergreen recorded in audio-visual documents. And then for the first time in many years, I thought of the Planning Faculty retreat and the NBC broadcast. In the next few weeks, in the microfilms of the New York Times from the winter of 1971, I was able to find the date and time of the broadcast. From King TV I was able to get the telephone number and extension for the NBC Archives in New York. Yes, the broadcast kinescope had been turned into a video cartridge. No, there was no way that the archivists could retrieve only the footage dealing with Evergreen. A copy of the whole show would cost \$500 and could be acquired by Evergreen for archival purposes only – no public showings or re-broadcasting would be allowed. But at least it existed.

In the early 1990's, \$500 still meant something, and I approached the Evergreen Foundation and the Alumni Office for help in acquiring the Wilderness Special. No funds were available for the acquisition, but an item appeared in the next Alumni Magazine, "Please help Charlie Teske to raise \$500 for the purchase of an NBC broadcast featuring the 1970-71 Planning Faculty." I was not feeling particularly sanguine about the likelihood that donations would be forthcoming.

Then, to the rescue, came Donnagene Ward, the Manager of Conference Services – an office which belonged to the administrative side of the College but, like the bookstore, was not

involved with state funding. She and her co-workers had experienced a prosperous summer of hosting conferences and conventions, and so they would be finishing the fiscal year with a surplus. They had been thinking about buying a picnic-table-with-benches unit or two for the second-story terrace of the Campus Activities Building. Now the acquisition of the NBC show seemed more important. And thus, some two decades after the events and the broadcast had occurred, we received for the Archives this bit of the early history of Evergreen.