

Obituary of William Jungers

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OBITUARY



Bill Jungers

William Jungers was born November 17, 1948, in Paliaclos, Texas, and while still a child moved with his family to Streator, Illinois. During his high school career in Streator, Bill excelled both academically and as a basketball player. (He never gave up his love for basketball, and later in life would play almost every weekend with similarly inclined colleagues.) Bill received a B.A. summa cum laude from Oberlin College in 1970 and followed this up with a Ph.D. in Biological Anthropology from the University of Michigan in 1976. He immediately assumed his first academic faculty position as Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Illinois. While not unhappy in that position, Bill's abiding interest in both quantitative and experimental approaches to understanding primate evolutionary morphology led him in 1978 to take a lesser-ranked position as postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Anatomical Sciences at S.U.N.Y. Stony Brook School of Medicine. In that setting, Bill flourished. He became an Assistant Professor one year later, an Associate Professor in 1983, a Professor in 1988, Chair of the Department of Anatomical Sciences in 2006, and a Distinguished Teaching Professor in 2008.

At Stony Brook, Bill excelled in the three academic realms of service, teaching, and research. His university service roles are too numerous to list but included Chair of the Medical School Admissions Committee for an astounding 18 years. His service to the anthropological community is also legion, including stints as Associate Editor and Editor of the *Journal of Human Evolution*, Associate Editor of *Contributions to Primatology*, Editorial Board of *Folia Primatologia*, National Science Foundation Panel Member for Physical Anthropology, External Advisory Committee for the Duke University Primate Center, and Executive Committee of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists. His colleagues at Stony Brook used to kid Bill that one of his biggest personality defects was an inability to say no when asked to take on a new responsibility.

Since his arrival on campus, Bill was one of the core faculty members of the human gross anatomy course for first-year medical students. He was invariably the last teacher to leave the lab, surrounded by a group of 10 or so students listening to his summary of the take-home messages from the day's work. Add to this the time he spent with individual medical students who visited his office to

get special help, or with whom he agreed to meet in the lab outside classroom hours, it is indisputable that Bill had more student-contact hours than any other faculty member in the School of Medicine. Such devotion contributed to a ranking by students that can only be described as phenomenal, far surpassing all other faculty members in the course. On seven occasions Bill was chosen by a medical class to hood the graduates, an honor hardly ever given to a basic scientist. In 1994, Bill received the Aesculapius Award for Teaching, which is the highest teaching award offered by the medical school. In 2010, the graduating class of Stony Brook medical students elected Bill to membership in the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society. It is no exaggeration to say that Bill was one of the very best teachers in the entire history of the medical school.

The only term to describe Bill's role in the anatomy and anthropology doctoral programs is indispensable. That is why, in 2002, Bill was the first person ever selected to receive the Dean's Award for Excellence in Graduate Mentoring. It is unsurprising that in 2007 he received the Chancellor's and President's Award for Excellence in Teaching, and was promoted to Distinguished Teaching Professor in 2008. Not only did he teach in a variety of graduate and undergraduate courses on primate evolution and functional morphology, he also created for graduate students a new course in human anatomy that emphasized the comparative, rather than clinical, approach.

Bill was also one of Stony Brook's most knowledgeable biometricians and a steady source of quantitative and statistical advice for virtually every graduate student at one time or another. Students at all levels of their training were constantly knocking on his door. He was recognized by students as being the faculty person most devoted to their welfare and most willing to make time for them in his otherwise busy schedule. Add to this the fact Bill had an extraordinary depth of knowledge, was a walking encyclopedia of the literature, had professional friends and colleagues all over the world, and was a meticulous scientist, it is no wonder that a student would choose him as a thesis advisor or a member of a thesis advisory committee. Indeed, he far surpassed all other faculty members in the number of students he successfully shepherded to a Ph.D. and the number of thesis committees on which he served.

Bill was Principal Investigator or co-Investigator on more than 50 research grants, reflecting the exceptional breadth of his scientific interests. This breadth is equally evident in the more than 175 research articles he authored and the 5 books he co-edited. His first love among scientific topics is embodied in the title of a book for which he was the sole editor—*Size and Scaling in Primate Biology*. This topic continued as one on which he authored publications throughout his career. He was a world-recognized authority on the relationship between body size and musculoskeletal design, both in living and fossil primates ranging from giant subfossil lemurs to extinct hominins. Nonetheless,

such research is just a fraction of what he pursued. Bill was intimately involved in all of Stony Brook's studies bearing on the locomotion of *A. afarensis*. He was an active participant in the experimental research for which Stony Brook was noted, among other things being senior author on a paper dealing with gibbon forelimb muscle chains published in *Science*. More recently, Bill was a major contributor to the description and analysis of *Homo floresiensis*. He showed that the osteological remains of this hominin reveal a surprising mosaic of primitive and derived features, and the locomotor skeleton recalls that seen in australopithecines and earliest *Homo* in many respects.

Finally, Bill had long and abiding love of living and fossil Malagasy primates, studying positional preferences of the former and reconstructing the paleo-communities of the latter. He accomplished much of this work with another long-time collaborator, Laurie Godfrey of the University of Massachusetts. Among other things, he showed that extinction of the giant lemurs was a slow, synergistic process implicating habitat destruction, hunting, and climate change, and that giant lemurs co-existed with the earliest human colonizers of Madagascar for well over a millennium.

One of the authors of this obituary (JS) taught with Bill in gross anatomy lab over a span of 37 years. I had lunch with Bill most days over the same span. We walked into each other's offices several times a day. We conducted innumerable EMG experiments on nonhuman primates, and a few on each other. We attended the same parties and scientific meetings (he with much greater regularity than I). Bill was as wonderful a colleague and friend as one could hope for. He always held up his share (often more) of any burden, was very funny, and set a standard to which all should strive. I was very lucky that I had colleagues at Stony Brook who made me look forward to going to work every day. Bill was right up there with the best of these. In the last few years my contact with Bill has solely been by Zoom. Nonetheless, his death has brought back a flood of memories that evoke a sense of great personal loss.

The other author (KLB) knew Bill as a postdoctoral supervisor and later as a fellow faculty member at Stony Brook. We collaborated on projects related to both Malagasy subfossil lemurs and *Homo floresiensis*. Bill's encouragement provided a much-needed confidence boost through several professionally challenging moments. Bill took a particular thrill in scientific debate and showed me that there was gratification in leaning into a disagreement rather than avoiding conflict. Bill's warm, approachable, and funny character made him an ideal mentor and friend. I will always treasure my memories of lunch with the other faculty, tailgating at Seawolves games, and Bill (and Brigitte Demes) surprising me in the maternity ward after the birth of my first child. Bill will be missed, but his many colleagues, collaborators, students, and mentees will carry his legacy and memory forward.