

William Garolitz 1928 – 2018

William Garolitz, longtime northerner and resident of Fort Simpson, died the morning of April 25 at age 90 in Fort Simpson. Bill, or 'Grizzly' as he was known around town due in part to his cantankerous disposition at times, had lived in the community for 46 years.

His father, Tom, had immigrated to Canada in 1908 from Ukraine and met Bill's mother, Lil, in Smoky Lake, AB, before moving to Grand Forks, BC. In 1928 Bill was born in Grand Forks and went to school there before leaving home at 17 to make his way in the world. His first job was at the mine at Copper Mountain near Princeton, BC, as a 'nipper' that helped with blasting. He later worked underground in mines at Keno Hill in the Yukon and the Tulsequah Chief mine on the Taku River. In 1948, he went to work at the Con Mine in Yellowknife for several years.

In 1950, Bill moved on from mining to work on building the DEW Line for Fraser-Brace-Terminal Constructors out of New York. He worked 18 months straight in a dry camp in Frobisher Bay on one tour. On getting back, while in St. John, NB, he bought a brand new Ford hardtop for \$1,500 and drove across Canada back to Grand Forks where he was the 'man about town' for a period.

Then it was on to Whitehorse and a job operating equipment for several years replacing the wooden bridges along the Alaska Highway, including those at Slims River and Donjek River. This was followed by a job in Fort Providence working for the government. Bill was well versed in operating and maintaining equipment, such as his own crane that he worked with after retirement. After Fort Providence, Bill was the government maintenance man in Fort Liard, which involved looking after the Nursing Station for NHS, which was still a federal department at the time.

In 1972, Bill made his last move heading to Fort Simpson as a married man with his wife, Margaret, who had been a nurse in Fort Liard. For many



years he was in charge of maintenance at the Fort Simpson Hospital along with being responsible for the outpost nursing stations in Wrigley, Fort Liard and Nahanni Butte. This work involved regular flying. One spring Bill was a passenger in C-185 when the pilot attempted to land on a muddy strip at Fort Liard. The aircraft went upside down with Bill left hanging by his seatbelt with his tools scattered everywhere – he was less than impressed. Bill enjoyed flying and decided to take flying lessons, obtaining his private pilot's licence in 1979.

With the transfer of departments from federal to territorial control, Bill moved on to be foreman for highway maintenance in the Fort Simpson area, including the winter roads and ice crossings. He took great pride in getting his Bombardier snow machine out to get the

highway ice crossings opened as early as possible.

Bill retired in 1993 at age 65, but he wasn't done working yet. He had his crane, which was in occasional demand, and he ramrodded the completion of the upgraded road into Jean-Marie River assisted by Bill Hancock, another retiree. Up until recent years, Bill did many odd jobs around the community, including grass cutting, furnace repairs (his specialty) and keeping the boilers in working order at the Nahanni Inn, a place where he frequented so often over the years that he became a fixture there, complete with his own chair that one best not sit in.

Bill suffered a fall last summer and had been a patient in Yellowknife before being transferred back to the Fort Simpson Long Term Care facility. He was well looked after there and even remarked "the grub is pretty good in here." Chuck Jacobson has provided much needed support for Bill over the past several years.

In accordance with Bill's wishes there will not be a service.

