

Neal Gray: A Life In His Own Words and Pictures



A Life Well and Fully Lived 1924-2009 Part I: History

Compiled from Neal Gray's Emails, 2009
By Sandra Waddock

From Knickers to 85: Neal's History in Words and Pictures

June 2, 2009

Dear Angels and Friends:

In response to many requests let's look back again to the 1920's and 1930's. This is a more complete version of one sent a while back:

I'm now officially 85. It does not feel a lot different from 84, but then it isn't like going from 12 to 13 or 20 to 21. Those were big milestones. At 13, I no longer had to wear knickers and could now wear pants. At 21, I could now legally drink alcohol.. Yes, big milestones. 84 to 85, Poof, just another year older and like the song "deeper in debt." Well, not really, but really deeper in friends. Below, me in knickers in the summer. The car behind me is an Auburn, **I think.**



Ahh, the Auburn. At one point in this time frame the family owned an Auburn Pheaton. It was four doors, and the top folded down. If you put it up when it rained, you put on "side curtains". These were canvas with isinglass (plastic to you) windows stitched in. My MG's had them as did my Austin Healey.

Anyway, one night my sister borrowed the car to take friends to a yacht club dance. It had two jump seats in the back seat area and would hold 8 passengers. Well, they got....shall I say drunk, no, just feeling very, very good.

In leaving the club, they went up Beaver Dam Road and turned left on Hazel Ave. maybe to avoid a cop in the harbor on Front St. Hazel paralleled Front St. At the southern end of Hazel, you had

to turn onto Brook St one way or the other. My sister did not. She went straight. This was the driveway of Scituate's Chief of Police!!! It ended at his garage, but she kept going. The car somehow knocked the back of the garage up in the air, the car went through, and the back of the garage swung down back in place.

The noise awoke the chief as his dog was barking up a storm. He came out in his nightshirt - the garage looked OK, but he heard a radio playing??? Further inspection revealed the Auburn sitting up on some boulders so that the wheels were still turning, the radio blasting away, and the car's riders thinking they were still driving along. Everyone in the car was amazed when they saw the chief in his nightshirt. They thought he was a ghost! How could he keep up with them when the car was moving? They tried to speed up, but he **stayed right** with them.

Needless to say, they spent most of the rest of the night in the town jail and my father had to bail them out, pay a large bill to get the car out of the back of the chief's yard, repair the car, and the garage.

I can look back at things you can only read in history. The Great Depression, cars with running boards (as above and below), the first TV, World War Two, the first atom bomb, and the first cell phone. Interesting odd bits you'll never experience, but who needs them? You'll have your own little odd bits when you get older.

How many people can fit on a Model T Ford. I was way too young when this photo was taken and I think it was taken in Vermont as the driver is a family friend named Ethan Allen, nicknamed Eatin' Allen. My mother is at far right. Pop (my father) took the photo. Note, this car has a running board. J.R. Benton, Massachusetts Attorney General has his foot on it.



Fire engines had hard rubber tires so they never had to worry about a flat. In Brookline, MA, Mrs. Fisher who lived on a hill, had it named after her. She often drove to Cleveland Circle in the morning in her Baker electric car to get the morning paper. My father also went there to a book-lending library (much like today's Blockbuster) to rent a book.

Streets not being plowed of snow, but having a "pung" (sort of like a flat bottomed boat with stones in it) pulled by horses to pack down the snow.

They'd close off our street (top and bottom) so we could go coasting on our toboggans and sleds. We put chains on our car tires to get a grip on the ice and snow.

Groceries delivered by horse and wagon from S.S. Pierce at Coolidge Corner (five or so miles from our house). Coal for our furnace delivered by a chute from the truck on the street through one of our hedges down into a cellar window that served as our coal bin.

John D. Runkle, my grammar school and the cast in a pageant. I'm not sure if I'm the one in black hat on the left. Probably not, but I recognize a few of my old friends.



At the back door to our house was a large brick walled yard where our servants hung out our clothes to dry so the neighbors didn't have to look at such an unsightly thing (we didn't have clothes driers or hair driers).

Clothes were washed in soap stone sinks in the laundry below the kitchen using washboards (a corrugated piece of galvanized metal held in a wooden frame. Also used by folk bands as a rhythm maker.) These things are so common in my mind, but I realize some of you haven't the faintest idea of what a washboard looks like

The houses on our block hired an ex-German prisoner of war from World War One to be a night watchman for the whole block. My brother and sister got in **big trouble** one night by tying a tope across his path so that he tripped and fell with loud curses in German and much hollering.

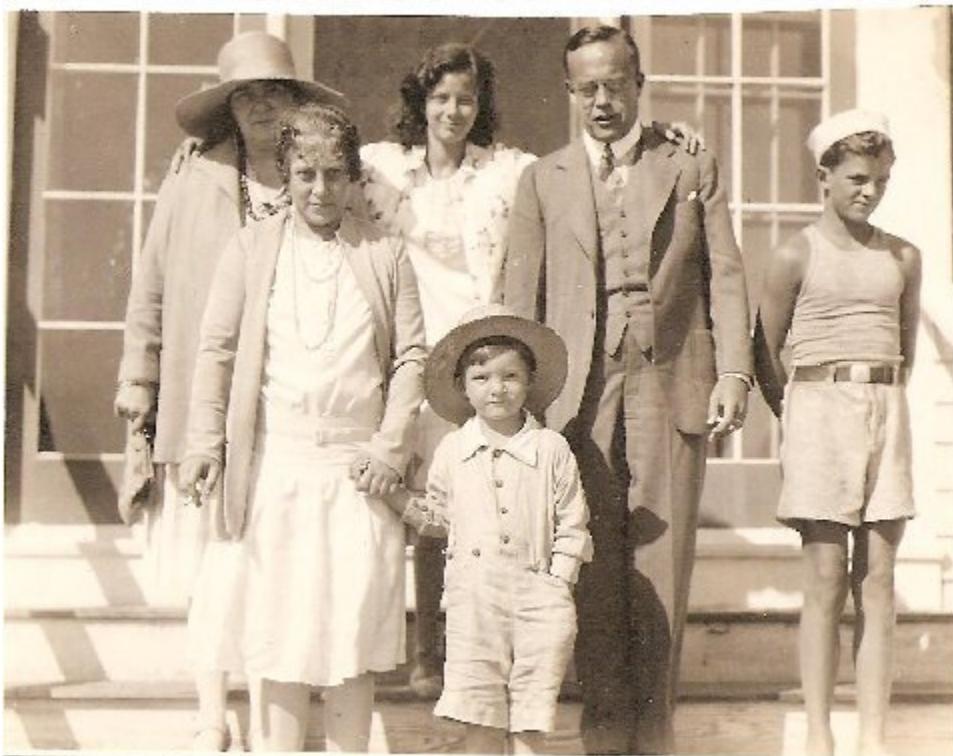
In the spring, my older brother (8 years older) and sister (9 years older) , got a stepladder on a warm day, set it up on the third floor, and climbed onto a small level gravel space on our roof to sun bathe.

Also, they would board a trolley at Cleveland Circle in Brookline and ride with various transfers all the way to Nantasket in Hull for 10 cents! 'Course, it probably took two to three hours. Plus, if you so desired, you could go through Hingham (out what is now Route 228) to Rockland and on to Brockton as well. Trolleys went everywhere.

We seemed to have more snow in those long ago winters and I walked to school - a couple of miles. We (mostly my brother and older kids) built huge snow houses - ones that an adult could stand up in and they lasted for days. My father took movies in those days and they are reminders

of what it was like. Today, my son-in-law has an "excavator". Back then we had a steam shovel - it ran on steam! And so did fire engine's pumps.

My sister in the middle in the back, my brother in the sailor hat at right; me hanging onto mummy (the "flapper") in front with family friends Cy (in summer with a vest?) and Genevieve (Skinny, which she wasn't) Barnes. How old am I? Maybe 4 or 5? The year would be 1929?

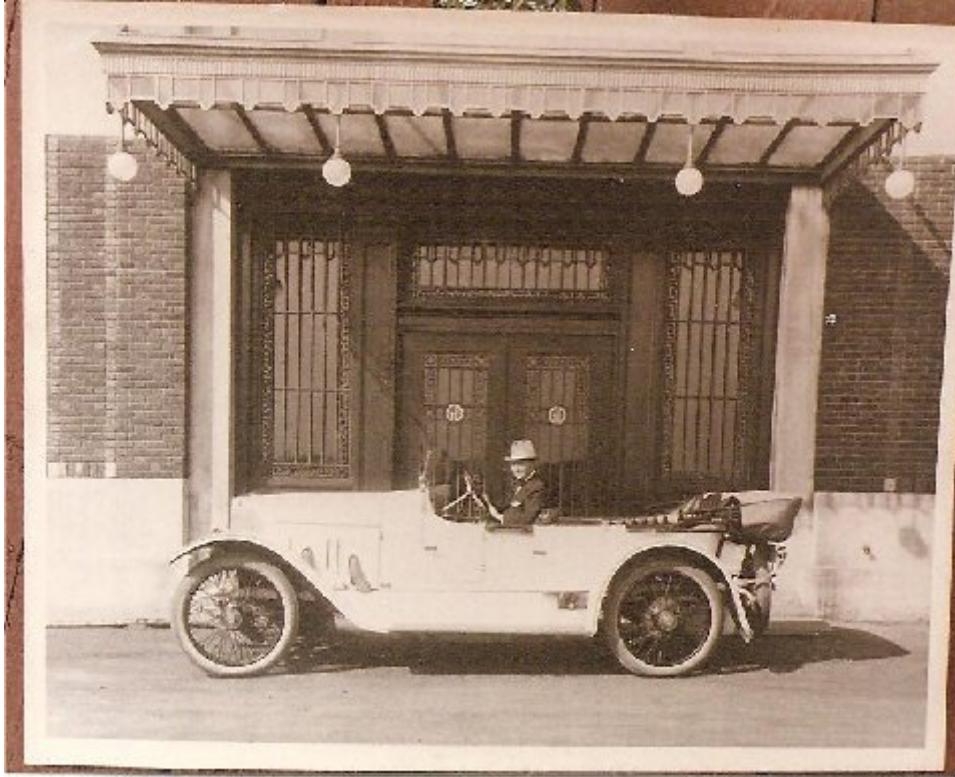


Yes, those were the days - life and cars seemed to go slower. Cars had "running boards." I never understood why they were called "running" boards. You didn't run on them. Maybe if you missed your ride and ran after the car, you jump on the "running" boards. Hmm.

For a long time our car driver's seat was on the right like English cars although we drove on the right as we do today. Early cars had a tiller much like a sail boat to steer the car. Around 1913 a trip between my father's plant in Cambridge and his other plant in Amesbury was considered a major event, but my father thought nothing of it and often did it once or twice a week. On the way, due to horrible roads he could get one or two flats. Some cars had split rims so you could take off a flat and replace it with another inflated tire and not have to pump it up. 'Course, you still had to have patches and inner tubes as well; in case you got more flats than you had spares.

His was a speed demon (30 miles an hour was speeding) and had a long running problem with a local sheriff. One day in his 1913 Mercedes Benz, he had run over the sheriff's St. Bernard dog. He did not kill him, but the hot exhaust burned all the hair of the dog's back. On a beautiful St. Bernard, this was intolerable! The sheriff would set traps to catch my father, but the best friend of the sheriff was also a good friend of my father. He would call (we had telephones in those days) on a particular day and tell my father where the sheriff had his trap that day. My father would come bombing up the straight as a die Newburyport Turnpike and a few hundred feet from the sheriff would take a left, go a few blocks and turn right to get back on the pike. After a while the sheriff got wise and eventually my father got caught. He paid damages for the dog and his speeding tickets.

Pop's 1913 Mercedes-Benz:



I believe I've already mentioned what our first radio looked like, but it was about four feet long, a foot high and about a foot deep. The antenna was a wire about 25 feet long that Pop draped all around the room on top of the curtains. The speaker was a big horn like those on the early talking machines (Like record players except they played cylinders about 2-1/2 inches in diameter and 6 inches long. I'll have to get it out of the attic some day.). The radio had lots of radio tubes in it. These tubes looked like clear light bulbs with funny looking metal plates inside. Photo below from

Gray's Mausoleum collection



A World War One trench horn looked a big Aah-ooga horn and was turned with a crank. It was used to announce incoming artillery or to let men know when to charge Pop probably bought it at an Army/Navy store after World War One. Pop would place it on an open window sill and turn the crank to call me in for supper. **Neighbor's for miles around knew when the Gray family was having supper.**

At one point in my young life we had a "war" among us neighboring kids. It was supposed to be fun. At a distance of 400 or 500 feet, I hit my best friend in the eye with a BB. He didn't lose sight of the eye, but I was not allowed to have any more guns except antique guns. I also got quite a sore backside. One of those antique guns came loaded and I fired it at a tree that was five feet away and missed! The bullet missed the tree, but went through two fences, a garage door and just missed the neighbor's chauffeur who was polishing their car. Another gun gone and another sore backside (spanking was a problem for children in those days, usually applied with a hairbrush).

Well, that's it for now.

Love, Neal

April 7, 2006

William 'Billy' Gray

Dear Chris:

Thanks for writing to me. Probably Mick Moloney (Maloney?) told you of my search for a particular song my father remembered from the H & H days; either "Boogey-Boo" or "Borgy-Boo." The song was about a ship manned unfortunately by 14 "Corkonians" and 14 "Far-downs." Yet the ship actually sank because it was set on fire by the captains pipe. I only know the first verse. It was what is called an "Irish Come-All-Ye" because it starts with those words.

Now about your question. I have a wonderful photograph showing Johnny Wild, "Billy" Gray & Ned Harrigan in costume. Johnny Wild and my grandfather are in blackface. Ned Harrigan is in a sort of military coat with a medal on his chest. Incidentally, my grandfather played the part of Reverend Palastine Pewter according to the photograph.

Have you read the book, "The Happy Partners" about Harrigan & Hart? I believe my brother, Preston, now in a nursing home, has a copy somewhere.

Ned Harrigan had a son whom he named William after my grandfather and somewhere I have a photograph of him at my family's beach home when he came to meet my father in the ??? 1940s (I think).

My father was born in 1869, the year of Halley's Comet. His parents were of course "Billy" Gray and his mother one of the Whiting Sisters who were also part of the H & H family of singers and actors. I have photos of both of them although not very good quality. My father's parents died six months apart when my Dad was 13. He was adopted by Tony Hart, Ned Harrigan's partner.

My father never remembered much about his father or mother, but I have some of his diary while his was a part of Tony Hart's family and he loved his adopted mother. Later on, when Tony Hart started getting dementia, Mr. Hart had him adopted by a man named Burris who taught my father how to do business and he became a salesman for Mr. Burris who sold upholstery to the manufacturers of carriages (before the automobile)

Dad was not happy with Mr. Burris, but stayed with him until he became of age (either 1887 or 1889). Then he struck out on his own and Mr. Burris was not happy about it, but Dad was of age. He became a valued salesman for a company that made lamps for carriages in Amesbury, MA (Atwood Lamps) He saw the rapid deterioration of lamps made out of steel. Not many roads were paved in those days. He resolved start his own company and to make lamps out of brass.

He married his first wife in Amesbury and started his own lamp company in 1893. He was one of the pioneers in mass production methods - where parts were interchangeable and men only did one job (not doing all the operations in making a lamp). The firm was called Gray & Davis. They pioneered the "Brass" era of automobiles (lamps and lighting equipment made from brass). My father's lamps were of such quality that people would move them from their old car to their new car, and as oil lamps changed to electric lamps, they would electrify their G & D lamps! His lamps were standard equipment on many, many makes of cars.

Some cars required you to equip your car - sometimes they even came without engines!

Stanley Steamers, Cadillac, Higher-priced Fords (Model K), Pierce-Arrow, Mercedes-Benz to name a few of his customers. He designed a lamp whose lens matched the famous M-B grille of the time and gave them the design for free. There are many more things I know of my father, (he

was 55 when I was born), but I don't know much about his days as a youngster with H & H, except what is in his diary.

He bought out Davis in 1906. The plant he eventually built in Amesbury was the largest factory devoted exclusively to the manufacture of lamps. During WW One, his company was one of the few in the USA able to manufacture things in metric sizes. He made shells, primers and shell cases for the French 75 mm cannon. He was personally thanked by General Pershing after the war.

As electricity came to be used in autos, my father built a large plant on the Charles River in Cambridge across from the city of Boston. This plant manufactured electrical equipment for cars, trucks, and in particular, fire engines. Finished in 1913 it's walls were 60% glass!

In 1920, he saw the auto industry concentrating around Detroit and my mother (his second wife) did not want to move; so he sold the entire business to American-Bosch. They in turn sold the Amesbury plant (who still made lamps) to three men who took over the making of lamps including searchlights. This business was sold in 1932. The building became the Amesbury Machine Tool Company, was bought out later by another company and went out of business in the 1950s

My father lost the major portion of his money in the Stock Market "Crash" of 1929.

My father and mother died 6 weeks apart in 1950.

I would be happy to mail you a copy of the photo I mentioned about the three men in costume, provided credit is given to me for any further publication of this photo. This is a photo I've had restored. I think I took the photo from the book "The Happy Partners" and maybe a credit has to be given for that source.

Sincerely; Neal Gray

June 29, 2009

Dear Angel and Friend

Here is a photo of myself and my friend Albie Merrill on the top of Mt. Cranmore in North Conway, NH around 1940 (?) Note the bugle hanging from my neck. I played it while riding up the old Skimobile which was like a golf cart fastened to a cable underneath and it carried you up the mountain. Looks like it is snowing.



Love, Neal

June 30, 2009

Dear Angel and Friend:

You all know I was in the US Navy in WWII, but in the summer of 1945, I was living the good life on Martha's Vineyard training to go to a carrier in the Pacific. We were training for full night-time carrier operations.

I guess I was Senior Aviation Ordnanceman on the base although only a second-class petty officer. I had devised a safer way to launch aerial targets pulled by a plane. I also had removed, reinstalled and bore-sighted guns on a Marine's F4U Corsair. None of the other guys said they could do it.

Well, on the day that became VJ-Day, we were all sitting around with our ears glued to the radio. I guessed peace was going to happen and I cut our to go into Vineyard Haven to see how the town would take the news. Just after I left the base, my car radio said peace had come!

Vineyard Haven was a nut house! Everyone was out in the streets shouting and dancing. I had the top down and picked up a couple of friends and we headed for Oak Bluffs.

This is the car that made it through VJ Night



Some guy in Oak Bluffs had made his own aerial bombs (fireworks) and was firing one every minute - he did this at least until Midnight. You could set your watch by them. One minute **BOOM!** One more minute **BOOM!** and so on all night! At Oak Bluffs I picked up more people. By this time there were several people on or in the car I didn't know. We were all cheering and singing patriotic songs. As we approached Edgartown, I was now sitting on top of the seat so I could see over the 26 people !!! who were on/in the car and steering with my feet - the car, of course, moving slow at idle maybe one or two miles an hour.

We had become part of an impromptu parade. I do recall singing the National Anthem at least three times.

We stopped in the middle of town for more singing, some speeches and I got the people off the car as I was afraid the tires would go flat. The rest of the evening is a blur as we were receiving

free drinks and I had to watch it as I was driving. I got back to the base somehow and found they had closed the gate as soon as peace was announced. No one got into town after that. I was lucky to have these memories.

We could still hear **BOOM!** every minute.

So come on down to the Vineyard on Saturday, July 11th evening and hear the NEC Millennium Gospel Choir & me sing in the Tabernacle in Oak Bluffs. I do think the man with the homemade aerial bombs has gone up yonder.

Love, Neal

September 5, 2009

Dear Angel and Friend:

Years ago (maybe 25 or so) anyway, before kayaks became popular, I once sailed my canoe (yes, sailed) down my marsh early (6:30 AM) on Sunday morning on Labor day weekend. The wind was just right and I had planned the tide carefully so I'd make it under the bridge at Cohasset Haabaa. I got there at the proper time and had to lower my sail a little as it was rubbing on the underside of the bridge. It was a lateen rig. Out into Cohasset Haabaa I went intent on making it to my destination.

Where was that?

To my brother's house on the southern side of Third Cliff in Scituate. How Far was that? 8-10 miles, I don't know, maybe more.

Am I nuts? This is a long way to go in the ocean in a canoe with a sail. The wind held blowing from the Northwest. I worked my way through the many ledges and rocks off of the Glades by looking at the water closely. If I saw an unevenness or slight swirl I'd steer clear of that. I'd never been through there before. Then as I came along North Scituate Beach, I wanted salute my friend George Wattendorf who lived on Surfside Road next to where my family's house used to be.

I'd had the forethought to bring my cannon and rest it on the forward seat tied to the mast so it wouldn't go overboard when I fired it. I came in to about 500 hundred yards from shore and gave a blast. It must have been around 8:00 AM and George was nursing a hangover and did not appreciate the wake up call. I thought it was prudent that I'd stayed out of shotgun range.

Anyway on and on I went, headed South. In the Sand Hills area there is a rocky bar that extends out quite a ways. People on shore were yelling; "There's rocks ahead of you!" But, the seaweed swirling around the rocks gave me notice as to where the rocks were and I sailed on between them.

Off of Scituate Haabaa I received a call from Mother Nature. I had to pee. Well, I'd thought of this possibility and had brought along a galvanized pail. The trouble was I was not too far out from shore and a canoe in the ocean under sail was drawing lots waving people. Maybe they were offering to help or warn me of rocks or just being friendly. Well, I couldn't pee on that side of the sail, could I? On the other side were boats exiting the haabaa for a day fishing, cruising, sailing or whatever people do in their bigger goats on a Sunday. I thought that those people would have a more liberal attitude towards my predicament, so that's the side I chose. I'm in a sailing canoe. It is hazardous enough just sailing; now I have to go. I'm used to going in a standing position, but this is out of the question. I'm not about to sit on the sharp edges of the pail either. Somehow I managed although there were! a couple of tense moments.

First Cliff is south of Scituate Haabaa, followed by Second Cliff and then Third Cliff. As I rounded Third Cliff and my brother's house came into view, I once again gave a salute with my cannon. My brother immediately returned the salute with a blast from his cannon and the family made their way to the beach to welcome me.

We carried the canoe up on the sand and I went up to his house for peanut butter sandwiches and milk for lunch. There was much talk of my trip down from my house and whether they wanted to take me and the canoe back to my house by car. "Absolutely not!" I said. Plus, to my advantage the wind had shifted to Southeast which would favor the return trip.

I bid them goodbye with an exchange of salutes and off I went headed North. The trip back had lost some of its excitement of exploration and several boats came near to see if I was OK. I often thought I might reply that I was coming from Provincetown, but t didn't.

As I worked my way back through the rocks at the Glades and was about to turn the corner (as it were) into Cohasset Haabaa, I happened to think, the wind might suddenly go Southwest and I'd better be ready for it. No sooner had the thought passed through my head than the boom came whipping over as that change of wind came. I adjusted the sail and my body position and started into the outer part of Cohasset Haabaa called Brigg's Haabaa.

All this area has wonderful sand and at half tide it is only 6 to 8 inches deep. People in the channel are shouting; "It's shallow over there!" "Yes it is!" I shouted back. My canoe floats in about two inches of water. The lee boards tilt up of their own accord and I moved forward a little so the rudder wasn't making a grove in the sand. The canoe was flying over the part of the haabaa and my excitement level was high again. To get into Cohasset Haabaa proper however, I had to go into the channel as Bassing's Beach and a breakwater block the shallow part.

I should now tell you that I had arranged with my wife to meet me in the haabaa at the town pier. To let me know she sees me coming in the haabaa, she was going to blow one my bugles (no cell phones in those days). She studied trumpet in music school.

Now, I'm in the middle of the anchorage of many of Cohasset's well-to-do yachtsmen. Big beautiful sailboats on either side. Late afternoon cocktails are being served. Social chatter greets my ears. Suddenly, the beautiful tones of a bugle call are heard. **Wow!** I didn't know she could play that well! My acknowledgement was to fire the cannon of course. I steadied the canoe, yanked the lanyard. **BOOOOM!** I looked to my right and saw what appeared to be a martini complete with olive rising up out a man's glass. I ducked under the sail and heard him exclaim; "What the F___ was that!" I sailed silently on still hearing these beautiful bugle calls.

Would I fire the cannon again? **No Way, Jose.**

The bugler turned out to be a professional who was rehearsing for a ceremony the next day. My wife arrived sailed with me back into the Gulf River and home.

Happy Labor Day!

Love, Neal

February 2, 2009

In the Navy, January 1943

How many of you were in the Navy in World War 2? Not many I guess.

Well, I was working at Bethlehem Steel's Hingham Shipyard after I got out of high school and heard that the Navy was going to stop enlistments and draw people it needed from the draft. That did it! I had to be in the Navy or the folks would disown me.

I had to go to Chelsea Naval Hospital and get a waver as I wore glasses and they were not taking guys with glasses. The doctor put on my waver; "Makes 15-20 by hard squinting," but I got in. The quota for December 1942 was full so I got Christmas at home and was called up in January of 1943.

I got lucky and got Newport, RI for my boot camp instead of some place in Michigan. I was cold enough in Newport. I didn't need to go to Michigan.

Our first experience on arrival was a medical check up. This was the first time I'd ever saw or stood in line with a couple of hundred naked men. All of us trying not to look too close at each other. We passed by several doctors, corpsmen (like nurses), all asking questions in rapid-fire order. "Did you ever have...?"

Near the end of this line that wove back and forth through the whole big room was where we got shots for God knows what. There were corpsmen on each side, and I think, but I'm not sure, we got three or four shots by these guys.

As we approached this section, conversation suddenly picked up. We were nervous and needed to talk to someone. Naked men ahead of would occasionally turn green, faint, fall to the floor and were just left there until someone came with smelling salts to revive them. Some would actually throw up. It was a bizarre scene. I think I got a bit green, but no other ill effects. However, I did get some "A's" painted on my stomach in mercurochrome. This indicated they found a problem with me. One of course was the eye sight; next was flat feet and third was scars on the bottom of my feet. This got me a higher level interview with a doctor.

All worked out OK as I explained about the waver for my eyes, scars from having Planter's Warts burned off with Radium (they didn't know then that it was a virus and treated it as though it was cancer). The doctor said; "I don't know why they called out your flat feet. You're not going to do much marching."

Well off to join my Company 1026 and learn to sleep in a hammock. What, no bed? You're told to make the hammock as taut as possible, but this also makes it hard to get into. There is an iron pipe overhead that you grab to lift yourself up and wiggle into the hammock. Hopefully, before your strength goes. In the morning if your hammock was good and tight, you don't have a backache. You learn fairly fast not to try to turn over in a hammock. You do have a safety rope below the hammock that slows your fall to the floor, but some guys thought they didn't need them. They learned faster.

The guy's hammock next to you is six inches away and if he falls out, he may try to grab your hammock to save himself. This often led to fights. You're peacefully asleep and suddenly some guy is trying to climb into your hammock with you!

Everything was done in company with all your fellow sailors, no privacy whatever. Physical oddities or lack of cleanliness were quickly picked on. Some nicknames I'm sorry I can't relate as they were beyond vulgar.

As I was a Sea Scout (branch of the Boy Scouts), many of our drills and lessons are already known by me. Our Company Commander (an older Chief Petty Officer) soon has me helping with some lessons. One morning we don life jackets and march down to the water to learn how to row. The harbor has **ice in it**. It is like 10 degrees out and we are going to learn to row! As I'm an experienced person, I get to be teacher and coxswain of a lifeboat with 6 or 8 dullards who don't know the bow from the stern. They all get in facing forward! Not a fun morning. Well, the episode came to the attention of someone higher up who had a brain and said; "No more rowing lessons in cold weather."

Swimming lessons were really nice. Olympic size pool. I'm also helping teach again. I get guys from Maine who can't swim because the water's too cold up there. They are terrified of being in the water.

One morning our CC asks during assembly if anyone knows how to run a 16mm movie projector. Everyone is whispering "Don't Volunteer!" But I'm thinking, what harm can there be in that? I stick my hand up and my fellow sailors say; "You'll be sorry." Yeah, sure. I get to show training films to the Petty Officer School. I don't have to wear leggings. I get out KP duty and going to a lot of dumb classes. On top of that, a friend of the family is a doctor at the nearby USN Submarine Base. Because of my status as a movie technician, I get liberty (an absolute no-no for apprentice seamen). He has me come to dinner a couple of times. His sends a chauffeur-driven car to pick me up at the gate and I earn the nickname of "Admiral;" although some mention a brown tint to my nose. To them I reply; "Were you the ones who said; 'Don't volunteer?'"

I didn't get out of doing guard duty but did get the job of Watch Commander (? don't recall the title). My replacement did not show up so I did eight hours. Then his replacement did not show up and I'm on duty for 12 hours! By this time, it is the next day and the lieutenant who comes in in the morning is livid. I don't know what happens to them but they go "On Report" - not a nice beginning to their naval career. I get time off to sleep upstairs in my barracks that has beds as it is quarters for the base's Navy Band. Sleep in the day time does not come easy, but I get some and then have to dash off to show some movies. I can nod off a little during the films.

I don't think I'm in the photo; I was off showing movies.



We are all asked which branch of the navy we'd like to go into. The lucky ones get to go into a petty officer school. Since I had a large collection of antique guns, I thought might be interesting, so as my first I chose Aviation Ordnance School. I got it.

Where do I go? From cold Newport to hot Memphis, Tennessee.

To be continued.

Love, Neal

January 18, 2009

Neal in Cuba, 1946

As you know Cuba has been off limits to most of us for many years. Sharing A New Song (SANS) has made the trip a couple of times, but it was as a choir, not as a private citizens.

In February of 1946, WWII was over, but I was still in the U.S. Navy and they had shipped me from a cold Martha's Vineyard to a nice warm Boca Chica, U.S. Naval Air Station in the Florida Keys. There were land crabs here who would grab your pants leg if you didn't watch out. Life was sort of easy. Liberty every other day or so. We'd hop a bus, go into Key West and to our favorite hangout, the Southernmost Beach.

On the way from the bus to the beach we'd usually find a rock and knock a coconut off a tree for something to drink at the beach (we were nuts ourselves). Anyway, we'd swim, walk looking for special shells, and try to strike up conversations with local gals.

Then came a chance to fly to Cuba for a weekend! It was before Castro, and Batista, who ruled the country, was a dictator. You had to sign up for it as they only took so many enlisted guys each week. We flew in a military DC-3. For you young folks, that was a main stay of transportation in the war. A Military DC-3 had seats facing inwards all the way down both sides with room in the middle for cargo.

On landing at the airport 8 miles outside Havana, we wondered how to get into Havana. Ahh, there taxis and they were cheap, but on top of that, there were limos you could hire for the weekend. Jack, my buddy and I hired a black Cadillac of pre-war vintage and a driver who spoke English and he promised to show us all the sights in and around Havana. We had him for 2 and a half days for what \$10? It might have been \$5, I don't remember. Anyway, a black Caddy has a certain preference at intersections or maybe our driver just had a lot of nerve. Jack and I would cringe, but our driver would sit on the horn and we'd go zipping through with nary a scratch.

We were shown all the tourist attractions, the houses of ill repute (there were several of very high quality), and the hotel that had been converted to three-storied giant ballroom where they held dances every Saturday night for the young people of Havana. Our driver told us to stay out of a small central park as it was dangerous and we'd be accosted by "ladies of the evening" every couple of feet. We **did not** go there. Coffee was served in places like ice cream shops as almost a syrup, abundant sugar with a huge pile of whipped cream on top. It was out of this world!

On Saturday night however, we did go to the dance ballroom. At first, we felt very uncomfortable as people stared at us. We were the only sailors in the place and there were hundreds of kids there **all** accompanied by one or more **parents!** No fooling around in there! Dancing OK, but watch it! Don't dance too close to your partner! As we walked up to the second floor a young man came up and said he was studying English and could he introduce us to his family? We said OK and that helped us a lot. We found there were four orchestras. Each one took turns playing on each floor and one was always on break. The first floor played American swing tunes and other US things. The second floor played only South American music. The third floor played only Pasodobles (sp?) a type of one-step dance that was great fun. I had difficulty walking the next day.

Our new-found friend invited us to his home the next day to show us his father's cigar-making operation conducted out of their garage. These kids, 15 and 16 I think, cold pick up 100 pound bags of tobacco with ease. Whew.

With the family. Jack has my camera and then we swapped places. Below with some local police who were very polite. Note my bell-bottomed pants. These were "custom-made" and not

usable at inspection. I can't remember why we wore our dress blue uniform, but I think it was required. We would have been much more comfortable in our whites.



El Moro with thumb and the cigar factory, I think.



Myself and Jack under somebody famous' statue with the dance hall to the far left. Looks like the one Saddam had in Iraq. Maybe he bought it after Batista was deposed.



We also purchased silk stockings for our girl friends and female members of our family as those things were still rationed at home. I got perfume for my mother as she liked a brand called Cassandra, I think, and of course, that was unavailable in the US during the war. Officers could bring booze back, but enlisted men could not. I hid perfume in my sleeves and silk stockings around my middle as we were afraid we'd have to pay duty taxes - we did not.

We had a great weekend in Cuba and I'll always remember the complete abandon our driver had approaching an intersection - horn blaring - complete confidence.

Love, Neal

April 7, 2009

This Is the Way It Was—Headed West, A Daily Journal in 1994

Dear Angel and Friend:

Introduction:

I kept a daily journal while traveling to and from the West Coast by train in first class.. My wife Amanda and I had planned to go together as I was to give away our niece in marriage, Amanda's sudden passing put a terrible sadness over me, but I decided to go alone and keep my promise to our niece.

Some of the photos may be a bit faded. So am I. Love, Neal

Parenthesis: () are in original document. Brackets: [] are 2009 additions

(Italics are quotes from the Lake Shore Limited Route Guide)

Late Afternoon, October 17, 1994:

Leaving Boston through familiar towns: Newton, Wellesley, Natick, Framingham, each one getting less familiar, when suddenly, the train's in Worcester. From there on, I'm lost. Autumn colors are especially bright and I photograph a couple of places and the train flies by.



[2009 Note: Consider what taking a photo from a speeding train is like. So second chance.]

The car conductor has given me a slip for a breast of chicken dinner. So after dark, I go four cars back to the diner (?) to eat. Good food, although it was in a tray like a frozen food dinner. I should mention that the train I am on is one section and we will pick up the main section from New York City in Albany. Therefore, there is no regular diner and I had my dinner in the Club Car. During dinner, I sat with an elderly couple who were returning to Chicago after visiting their daughter in Boston. They thought Boston was the most beautiful historic city to visit.

After dinner I noticed four of the conductors and car porters (two were women) were also having dinner. I said my ticket said there was entertainment in the evenings, so where were the dancing

girls? The super piped up and said; "Sally, you're on!" Then he explained that the Southwest Chief, my train out of Chicago, had TV's in the Club Car that they showed movies on, but unfortunately, dancing girls were only available on cruise ships. Since I couldn't take a ship across the country, I was stuck. Plus, at the time, we were doing 83 miles an hour and getting off with luggage was a bit tricky.

We stop in Springfield, but not long enough for me to call my daughter as she wants me to call her every chance I get. [Cell phones are not on this train. Thinking back, I don't think I owed one.] *"Springfield started as a trading post in the 1630's. As we cross the Connecticut River, notice the stone-arched Memorial Bridge on the right. Also you may see deer, bobcats and turkeys. [In the dark?] Next, near Pittsfield in the Berkshires, Herman Melville wrote **Moby Dick** and Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote **Tanglewood Tales**. Today, his estate hosts the famous Tanglewood. With the state line tunnel just ahead we pass through the settlements of Post Road Crossing, Van Hoesen, Brookview, and East Greenbush."* Boy, we are really out in the sticks now.

"The Albany-Rensselaer Station is actually on the East side of the Hudson River. It is also the site of the nation's oldest fort, Fort Crailo." [Note the word 'nation' as it means United States and not America. As most everyone knows, the oldest fort we have proof of, in the Northern Hemisphere, is in St. Augustine, Florida] Anyway, it was here that a British surgeon wrote our revolutionary marching song **Yankee Doodle**. (Aren't we just full of needless information?)

Here the train stops for 20 minutes to connect the section coming from New York City. I seems odd that that section of the train hasn't crossed the Hudson earlier to get on this side. However, it probably crossed the East River at Hell Gate and has come all the way up on the East side. My train is somewhat of a relic as some of the cars were manufactured in 1941. Thus, there is no telephone on the train. So after the train stops, I get off for as couple of minutes to call Mimi (my daughter). It is 9:30 PM. Luckily, it is Indian Summer; so without a coat, I hustle up the platform to the nearest phone which some intelligent person has installed **on** the platform just for me.

Now it is time to describe a Roomette

Comfortable and claustrophobic. The hopper is rudimentary. You fold DOWN the sink and there's the faucet! You fold UP the sink and Lord knows where the water and suds go. Probably down on the tracks! Talk about pollution! Closets and hatches for washing, drinking, shoes, coat, trash, toilet paper, etc. are all over the place. Where there isn't a hatch, there's a mirror. A shelf for my big bag is 6 feet up and good for weight lifters. My small bag goes under the seat. Sliding door and zippered drape over it provides privacy from passers-by in the corridor and a small pull-down shade on the window cuts down on roadside Peeping Toms. Window is pretty dirty, so tomorrow it will probably interfere with getting good pictures. WOW! WHEN THE BED FOLDS DOWN, YOU'RE EITHER IN BED OR OUT IN THE CORRIDOR! PLUS, THE HOPPER IS GONE!!! So, if you've drunk a can of Sprite after dinner, you must use the public toilet at the end of the car (did, four times that first night). Undressing is for contortionists! Also, I forgot to get my small bag out from under the seat before the bed came down; so must do more finagling to get that out (has toilet articles in it). When you're a dottering old man whose sense of balance is going fast and you're standing on a jiggling bed, putting on your pajamas becomes a bizarre ballet. You're awfully glad no one is nearby with a video camera. However, the bed IS comfortable and warm; two pillows, two blankets, night light (if wanted) and lots of jiggles to lull you to sleep. Judging from the clickety-clacks on the rails we must be doing 100 miles an hour!

Morning, October 18, 1994. [to be continued]

April 10, 2009

October 18, 1994

Arose at 6:21 AM, got dressed, had bacon and eggs in the now attached diner. But a fat lady squeezed in next to me, so I couldn't eat very much. She managed to pin my arms next to my sides making handling knife and fork very difficult. Incidentally, as I'm traveling first class, all my meals are included in my ticket. Thus you (I) have a tendency to order the best or most expensive thing on the menu every time you eat. Food on Amtrak is delicious. Not good for the waistline. Around 7:00 AM while I was attempting to eat, we stopped in Cleveland. You remember that contest where the first prize was a week in Cleveland and second prize was two weeks in Cleveland. Ugh!

While I slept we passed through some very interesting places including Schenectady (Indian for "through the open pines") where the Mohawks defeated the Mohicans and where Thomas Edison started his company. The tracks paralleled the Erie Canal for quite a ways along here as I found out on my return trip during daylight hours. We also passed Amsterdam where Cabbage Patch dolls are made. In Herkimer, people prospect for "diamonds" (quartz crystals). Utica is where King George II gave 23,184 acres to the colonial governor William Crosby. I wonder what he got for it when he sold it. Rome is where they started the Erie Canal on July 4, 1817. A big undertaking for a young nation. Rochester has Xerox and Eastman Kodak. Buffalo is where people shuffle off to (on snowshoes no doubt). Erie (named for the Eriez Indians) is where Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry in his flagship Niagara forced the British squadron to surrender saying; "We have met the enemy and they are ours." Or was it; "We have met the enemy and he is us." Anyway, since I missed all of that while I slept, I thought it was nice to read about it in my route guide (I have only skimmed over all the places in the route guide as it is much more detailed. This was quite surprising as I thought everything that ever happened that was important, happened around Boston and Scituate with the exception of a few places in California.



The land going by the windows is flat, flat, flat! The fields of corn are like a sea and small pockets of trees like islands. Old houses have shade trees and wind screen trees around them, while new houses a stark and bare. Barn red is a popular color. Betty, my sister, says they originally made barn red paint from the blood of slaughtered animals on each farm and whitewash. There are lots of boats in people's yards as the lakes are nearby. Many areas have old, decrepit buildings and tracks no longer used.



High tension wire towers are very frequent along the way. Called Mimi in Toledo, Ohio at 9:15 AM. Toledo has the world's largest grain elevator. The railroad station looks like the middle of Sarajevo right after an artillery barrage hit it. Several track beds with no tracks in them.



Very sad to see this marvelous mode of travelin such a poor state. Big Amtrak engine alongside with freight cars so I photograph the engine for JP [my grandson]. As we leave Toledo, there is a 68.5-mile level, straightaway ahead; so the engineer can easily see if anyone is stuck on the tracks. [As the train curves to start along this straight, we can see it out our dirty window.]

Several of the houses we passing farm area have large man-made ponds. They appear to be used for swimming (diving boards) as well as fire protection and cattle watering. FLAT, FLAT, FLAT! An Otter type airplane goes by down low; it must be landing nearby. Autumn colors re very nice.

In Indiana now and the land is gently rolling. 10:43 EDT and 9:43 CDT. Must remember each time changeas I don't want to reset my watch. Besides, I have to call Mimi every now and the snd don't want to wke her up by calling to late.



Passed a combine or whatever cutting down corn stalks. We have two engines pulling us as we are 15-18 cars long. Just now, one lost its power for some unexplained reason; our lights went dim and then out. Well, we stopped out here in the middle of nowhere on a crack train and the conductor and the engineer got off to fix the problem. They did, thank goodness, and away we went.

We are moving into a cloudy area. Had John, the car's porter, get me some tea, then took a nap for an hour and a half. Now, light rain at South Bend, Indiana and we are 20 minutes behind schedule. Power went out again west of South Bend, but fixed again. Seems it's a switch that won't stay closed; so it's easy to fix temporarily. Trains going by in the opposite direction startle the **bejeepers!!!** out you!

On to Chicago next time.

April 11, 2009

October 19, 1994

Just at dawn, we stopped at Dodge City, Kansas, but I guess it was too early for any gun fights. Not sure they are still having them. As we leave, I notice an important fact: if I thought Ohio was flat, I was somewhat in error. Southern Kansas and northern Colorado are very flat. Some areas are like prairie including deserted houses. Occasional wind-driven water pumps are showing up as well as oil pumps. Many houses have trees for wind breaks and a satellite dish for TV.

At breakfast, I sat with a professional golfer. He was probably disappointed that I didn't recognize his name, but I told him I didn't follow or play golf. I explained about my problem when I hit the ball. Something in my neck goes click or zzit or *something* and I black out! I end up flat on my back and don't know where the ball has gone. My friends are all laughing at me and they don't know where the ball went either. He said that *would* put a damper on my game.

The train is more or less following the old Santa Fe Trail that people took when they traveled West with their covered wagons. Careful observation reveals the double ruts left by the wagons. Near one small hamlet with its tall grain silo I saw an old dead police cruiser. Must have been left over from one of those movie chase scenes where they wreck a couple of dozen of them. Occasionally, we round a curve for no apparent reason and we can see the front of our train,



Tracks in this area are quite rough, but only for a short distance. Stopped at Lamar, CO to pick up passengers and see an old steam engine up on a pedestal. Dry stream beds are showing up. Must be wild and wooly when it rains hard. There are several kinds of fields: corn fields, soybean fields, cattle-filled fields, dead car & truck fields. Architecture is also varied: house trailers, Mexican adobes, modern ranches, cement block, tin-roofed shacks, you name it, they're here. We start to see some low hills south of Lamar.



With all this luxury in first class, it's time they did something about the rough railbed. What with my shake, and the train's shake, we're having a hell of a time trying to write!

Boy, now it really looks like prairie. We are passing the John Martin Reservoir. I hope it is not drinking water as it appears to be very salty with a prominent white rim around the edge. You folks have just got to take this trip once in your lifetime. It's GREAT! The railroad quite often divides the countryside.; prairie on the left side, fairly lush fields, trees, farms and streams, etc. on the right side. Now mainly prairie on both sides.



La Junta, CO next stop. Elevation 5,000 feet. Local time is 9:30 AM. We're stopped for twelve minutes, so I'm off to find a phone. Almost got there first, but one local is ahead of me and he can't figure out how to call long distance. After several tries, he gives up and it's my turn. By now there's quite a crowd behind me so I must be brief. There's only one phone in the whole place! Get through to Mimi on the first try and she's about to go out the door with the kids on the way to school. Being brief works for both of us. There's a bright sun, but it's fairly cool as the altitude plays a part in the temperature. Enjoy walking around the outside and taking pictures of our big train. Someone forgets the Cardinal rule about "passengers will please refrain..." and all around me act as though they didn't see it. Well, the porter and conductor see it and I'm sure someone will be spoken to **real** soon.



West of La Junta, we get a good view of Pike's Peak mountains all covered with snow. There actually is twin peaks and some smaller ones as well.



From flat, flat, flat, we hear into the mountains and Raton Pass and I head into the lounge/observation car for picture taking. In each mile that we travel the train is climbing 175 feet. The scenery is magnificent! Raton Pass is the highest point on our trip, being 7,588 feet above sea level. Soon I notice an important fact. The larger number of junk cars in a person's back yard, the higher he must be in social status of the community. Passed a windmill pumping water into an open drum about 10 feet in diameter from which cattle were drinking,



Somewhere before the top of the pass, we pass another train on the right. It is the East-bound Chief that has stopped on a siding waiting for us [it is too narrow in the pass for two sets of tracks]. Right at the highest point there's a half-mile tunnel and bingo, we've started downhill. In the distance I see more big hills, but out here they call them buttes. They're misspelled of course, as the should be called beauts. On the West side of Raton Pass we pass through Glorieta, elevation 7,400 feet. A Civil War battle was fought here. Although the battle was not of major size, it was of major importance as it brought the entire West over to the Union side.

WOW A TREE! I go to lunch in the diner after Raton Pass. Have vegetable beef soup, broccoli pizza, apple pie a la mode and tea. Waddle back to my room as I'm so full,

Notice we are still in some large hills. If the scenery wasn't so great, I take a nap. I'd hate to be the one tootin' the whistle. It seems to be goin' a lot in this area. Those big hills in the distance turn out to be Apache Canyon. Spectacular!



In places the canyon is so narrow, there is only one foot on either side of the train. Consequently, we go quite slow and this is beneficial to us photographers. I'm trying to photograph rivers and streams 100 or so feet below our train as we cross trestles and/ or hug the canyon wall. The canyon is so deep, it blocks out a lot of the sun and cuts down our shooting to sun-lit spots.

Stopped in Lamy, got out for a moment, but no phone in sight.

Next: Albuquerque and beyond - stay tuned

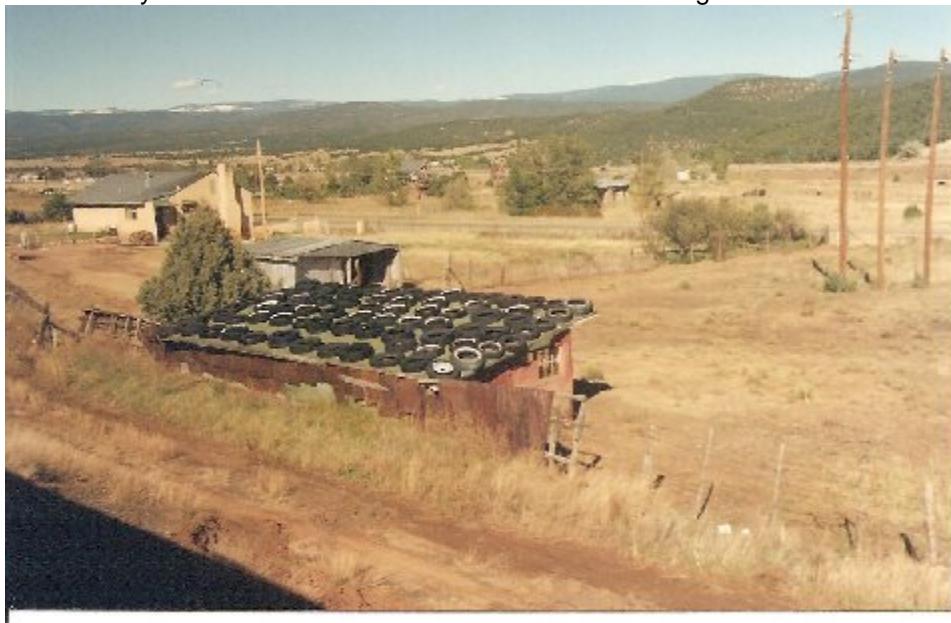
April 19, 2009

October 19, 1994 Afternoon

As we approach Albuquerque, we are told about the Ortiz Mountains on the left side of the train where gold was first mined in 1830. The grayish-white tailings (dirt and rock dug out of the mine) are plainly visible on the sides of the mountains.



Also, noticed an unusual roof. What are the tires for? To keep the roof in place in case of high winds? Maybe he sells second-hand tires and this is his sign.

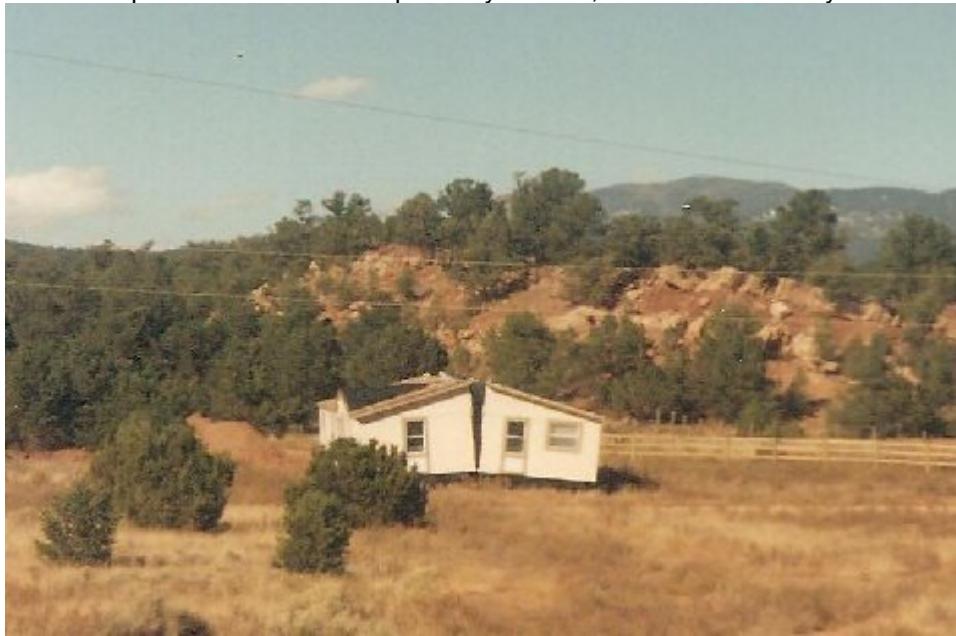


At Albuquerque, jump off the train quick as 3 or 4 phones are right across from my car. Get my son-in-law Joe on the horn and tell him everything's okay and how great the trip is. There are several Native Americans who have set up tables right on the station platform to display their handmade jewelry.



One man signs all his pieces and they are very good quality. Prices are reasonable compared to out East. Made several purchases for various members of the family. As we leave, we turn more to the West instead of South.

I've seen split-level houses and split-entry houses, but this is a new style as far as I know:.



There are beautiful mountains on both sides. The soil is reddish-orange and looks great against the blue sky. The color is heightened by the late afternoon sun and some buttes look as though they are on fire.



We pass a Native American village and their houses (hogans) are octagon in shape with the entrance facing to the East. They are painted bright colors.

I'm glad we are on tracks, otherwise we'd get lost. I think back and wonder who the so and so was who said; "Take along some books so you won't get bored." The only time I had a book open was in the waiting room in Chicago!

Tracks are better out here. Oops, spoke too soon. 6:40 PM local time (MST). Dinner time again? It seems all I do is eat, take pictures, eat, take pictures, eat and sleep. Got to get to be early tonight as breakfast is at 5:30 (that's in the morning) because the diner crew has to have time to clean up before LA arrival at 8:15 AM PST.

Love, Neal

Next, LA (known locally to some as Smell A, as I found out).

May 10, 2009

Dear Angel and Friend:

October 29, 1984:

Went to breakfast, but only had corn flakes due to overindulgence (pigging out) last night at dinner and on the rest of the trip. Boy, is this food good! or what?

At one point last night, I thought we were riding on the ties and not the rails. It is now 6:13 AM PST. I've finished breakfast. It's still dark outside, but we must be in California as cars on the nearby expressway are speeding along faster than us. Time table says we are in San Bernardino. Just stopped next to a magnificent train called METROLINK; a commuter train that goes to LA. It is double-decked, all coach, very plush, very new. MBTA should use cars like these as three of them would hold all of Greenbush's potential riders with room left over. [I 1994, there was no MBTA train service to Greenbush] As we start to move (I guess METROLINK went ahead of us), I see palm trees and note the sky is getting lighter.

Big mountain in the East. Just crossed one of those concrete flood channels. It was dry. "Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning." Or maybe it is the smog. Boy! Suddenly there are mountains all around. Have I slept past LA and we're headed back to the East? Passed a cemetery with no upright stones. More junk cars in people's back yards. Even here in a suburb! Passed school buses warming up; must have been 100 of 'em. Passed a beautiful tree-lined street. A DRIVE-IN THEATER! Two nice sofas beside the tracks??? What are they for? Maybe the senior citizens sit here to watch the trains go by when they're not busy hanging around in the local mall. Now seeing row after row of stucco houses with red tile roofs. Some at the bottom of a big hill and some right on the edge at the top. You see pictures of LA being flat, but it is not here, wherever we are. Another X-way. Passed a building with a full-sized locomotive painted on the side. A nice addition to an otherwise mundane roadbed.

More house; row after row, exactly the same. How does a drunk find his way home? Plus, they even seem to have the same cars in their driveways.



"Hi, Honey, I'm home." "**EEEEKKK!!!**" "Oops, wrong house."
Beautiful golf course, complete with golfers at 7:15 AM.



More houses. I wonder if the architect gets paid for each additional house or just for the first one? Passed oil pumps in an urban area. Sun is up and out.

In Fullerton, CA, we were due here at 7:15 AM, but it is now 7:31 Tsk, Tsk.

Saw a small airport with a DC-3 on the apron. Going fast now. Lots of freight trains in this area. Passing an oil cracking plant. Now it is flat, but see mountains way off to the North. Getting close; so will catch up on this journal later

October 23, 1994 - 2:24 PM local time - Thursday. Got so busy in LA (Long Beach) I forgot to write. I'm trying yo get things written down before it all goes away. So back we go:

Upon arrival in the LA train stations, I hopped on a passenger/luggage buggy (like an oversize golf cart) for a somewhat long trip into the station itself. In so doing, the driver crossed a couple of tracks to get to a platform not crowded with people. Consequently, Scott (the groom) who had walked out to the train, didn't see me for several anxious minutes. Finally he saw the SHYC cap I was wearing and off we went to a car rental place and then I followed him to our motel. He went off to work and I took in my surroundings. The Surf Motel in Long Beach had a nice view, but kind of run down and cheap and certainly NO surf.



The view from the motel includes the dome covering the "Spruce Goose" airplane built by Howard Hughes and the Queen Mary.

As I'm the only one (!) with a rental car I get to drive everyone to Disneyland. That includes my sister-in-law, Cynthia, Susy (her daughter & my niece) and her son Chase, Wendy (her daughter & my niece) and her daughter Jetley. Along the way we meet Emily (her daughter & my niece and the **bride to be**). She was supposed to meet us at a certain corner, but the groom, Scott, forgot to tell her the time and place. Luckily, Susy sees Emily going by and runs out into traffic to alert her. Susy in true Boston jay-walker style, practically climbs up on the hood to get Emily's attention. Emily said later she thought it was one of those deranged Californians for a second.

We finally get to Disneyland and the kids are off to wild and wonderous things while Cynthia and I take in more mundane things; we buy some souvenirs, get lunch, sit in the park for a spell and listen to a brass quintet playing Dixieland.



After the kids rejoin us we ride the old train.



By now it is almost closing time and I have forgotten to visit the replica of the ship Columbia, the first American built ship to sail around the world. The original was built at the Briggs Shipyard here in Scituate on the North River. Well, next time I'll do it.

As we leave we have a photo shoot with Mickey and the big blue Genie, and the wise baboon who was in the "Lion King". He has a great time ogling Wendy (as motherhood has turned her into an outstanding young lady, if you get my drift).

This was Thursday and girl's party night; so I caught a dinner in a nice restaurant in Belmont Shores. Back at the motel I unpack and try out the bed and the TV.

A little of the wedding and other attractions on the next day.

Love, Neal

January 23, 2008
Memories of February 6, 1978

Dear Angels and Friends:

I see TheBostonChannel.com is asking for our stories of the blizzard of '78.

I can't seem to enter my story on-line, so I'll have to mail it.

~~~~~  
I was one of several program managers for the Dynamion Society, a group at Stone & Webster that gave programs on engineering subjects after working hours. I had arranged for Don Kent to come and talk about Solar Energy and the latest information on that subject. I called on Monday, one week before the program date to make sure he had it on his schedule. His prophetic parting remark to this phone conversation was; "Don't worry, I'll be there unless we have a blizzard."

Next Monday the storm started, I called in mid-morning to make sure he was coming because if he wasn't, I would have to put cancellation notices on the lunch wagons that traveled throughout the company at lunch time. Don said; "I don't think I can get there even if I started out right now!" So I canceled the program.

Two weeks before the blizzard, Boston experienced an earlier heavy snow fall. Much public transportation was canceled and many people at Stone & Webster stayed at the company overnight ordering food to go from area restaurants and having it paid for by Stone & Webster.

This time many of those same people decided to stay over again. They were not so lucky this time as the power failed and restaurants closed up.

I guess I caught the next to last Plymouth & Brockton bus and there were standees present on the bus as the driver said no more buses were going south via Route 3 and 3-A to Greenbush. He drove his bus back to the North Shore P & B garage that night!

It took us about 2-1/2 hours to Cohasset where I had left my car. We passed an over-turned tractor trailer truck at Union St. in Weymouth and our driver was absolutely superb. My car was a three-cylinder Subaru that was about half the size of a Volkswagen Beetle. I was an air-breather and started right up when I turned the key.

I decided not to go via Cohasset Harbor for fear the tide was up over the road (it was). So I headed south on South Main St. to go into Scituate on Country Way and then Gannet Rd. to my house on Border St.. After about a quarter of a mile the car stalled. It would restart, but only go a short distance and stall again. Then dawn came to Marblehead; it was inhaling snow! I found two shirt cardboards in the back seat and I put those over the air intakes to deflect the snow. Worked great! Now I could go almost a half a mile before the car got so much snow in front of it, it couldn't push it any further. I'd get out, move the snow away from the front, and go again, eventually arriving at the top of my driveway. I left it in the parking place I kept up there so I could get out if I needed to.

Our wood stove saved the day for us. We used it to heat the house and it was very efficient as the snow provided extra insulation. We cooked our meals on it as well, I was concerned for my daughter who was in an apartment complex in Marshfield, but one tenant had a gas stove and he had everyone stay with him if they got cold or wanted to cook a meal.

Tuesday, in the middle of the storm, my neighbor two doors over and myself walked down to the Gannett Rd. end of our street. We went to see if the tide would come across the marshes and over the road. It did. A Wilder's Garage truck got marooned on our street along with a town

plow. On the Cohasset end of the street the water also had blocked the road. I got the town plow fellow to plow my driveway and we fed him in return.

I understand that another neighbor got out of his car waded into the icy water to push a woman in Saab out of the water on Gannett Rd. His driveway was also flooded and he waded through the water a second time to get to his house.

My canoe was cradled on two up-turned wooden lobster pots to keep it out of the snow and any **normal** storm tide. However, when looking down at where it was, I heard bubbling noises. Not knowing what it was, I put on my chest waders and started down the slope to look at the canoe. I got about 30 feet and the water was within two inches from the top of my waders. STOP! I peered through the heavy snow still coming down and saw the upside-down canoe almost afloat in the water and air bubbling out from underneath. I was glad I had tied it to a tree.

This tide had to be eighteen to twenty feet! It still had eight or more feet of vertical rise before it could get to the house; so that was nor a worry. Having enough food **was** a concern.

On Wednesday the storm ended, my neighbor got his four-wheel-drive truck out on the road, and he and I went picture taking. I with movies and he with stills. We had to go at a snails pace and I stood up in the back so I didn't have to get out so often.

The destruction along the shore was **unbelievable!** Entire sections of summer homes just **gone!** Just a shingle beach remaining! The roof of a station wagon appeared; the rest covered with stones. Three cast-iron bathtubs gathered together - each a different color on the outside. A telephone lying in the sand on the edge of a road with a dead fish nearby. A large house still in one piece, but now tipped at 45 degrees and leaning on the seawall. One house was entirely gone except for the cement foundation holding the first floor and the stub of what had been the chimney. Ah, but the toilet was still there - nothing else.

News media had found Scituate and so had the National Guard. Eventually we were stopped every few feet and our excuse of being news media was not working, so we headed home.

I got out my canoe and went out (dodging ice bergs) to see what the ocean had bought the marsh. The marsh stayed flooded for several days as the ice blocked the water from draining out into Cohasset Harbor. There was a pretty good bookcase sitting on an ice flow, so I brought that home. Still have it. Saw a washing machine on another ice flow. My float that I kept my canoe on in the summer was gone - never did find anything except one piece of floatation from it. Wood? You can't imagine the wood scattered all over the marsh. Pieces of houses, walls, furniture, lamps, chairs, doors, windows, people's belongings, everything! I made a new float out of some walls of a shed that was here and there on the marsh.

I would eventually assemble a sculpture made out of chair and table legs called....you've guessed it, "Storm's Legacy." No one seemed interested in buying it. Later it became firewood.

One home-owner sold postcards and he kept his supply in his garage. The marsh not only had the garage in pieces, but we had soggy postcards all year long - on the bottom, stuck in the grass, on low lying trees - everywhere!

Two large boats (25-30 feet) stored at their owner's houses at beach-front properties now rested (one was upside down) on the guard-rail of Hatherly Road as the tide wasn't quite high enough to float them over into the marsh. The ocean had breached the barrier beach at the end of Surfside Road and that's where we got all our water and ice from. It poured through the gap in the barrier beach, across Mushquashicut Pond, over Hatherly Road and Gannett Road and thus into the area where my house is that's called The Gulf. The ice flows had knocked the Stop sign at the end of Border St. flat. I have a photo of me next to a tree showing how high the water was as the snow is still on the tree above the high water mark.

On Friday, we are still not allowed out on the roads in our cars, (except for emergency groceries) but I had a doctor's appointment in Hingham and I thought I'd try to get to it. The roads were in abominable shape. Even Route 3-A was all big ruts. My little Subaru probably lost two or three years of its life that day. At **every** intersection there would be a National Guardsman who didn't bother you leaving Scituate, but would look at my license on my way home to be sure I wasn't an alien.

In the spring, the town hired school kids to collect all the wood objects on the marsh into large piles near the edge of the stream and they were burned in giant bonfires each day. The kids were called "The Ants.".

And so it was.

Love, Neal

**April 14, 2008**  
**Preston Gray Passes On**

Dear Angels and Friends:

As you can see from the subject line, my brother passed away this morning. From what I've heard, it was peaceful and without pain. He was 91. For those who heard me speak of him and who often enquired as to how he was doing, I thank you.

I've been busy this evening on his obituary for his daughter-in-law and, of course, many things run through your mind when you recall a life together with a brother who was My Best Man.



Taken a short time ago at Colonial Rehab in Weymouth

Pres was born in the family summer home on Allerton Hill in Hull on August 1, 1916.

Our father bought a summer house in Scituate the year I was born (1924), but we usually went to Allerton for Sunday dinner. The forts on the islands in Boston Harbor still had the great guns in those days and two or three times during the summer they would have target practice. Police cars would come around with loud speakers telling residents to open their windows; so the concussion wouldn't shatter the glass!!! Yes, it was **loud**. The guns on what is now Spinnaker Island fired directly over Allerton Hill and when the shell went over, it sounded just like a train going by. We'd all stand out on the lawn with telescopes or binoculars to see how close the shells came to the target being towed by a tug at least 8 miles or more off shore.

Pres was found to have a heart murmur early in life and the family spent two winters in San Diego, CA primarily for his health. I'm not sure, but I believe he and his sister (born 1915) received teaching there from a tutor.

Pres attended Rivers Country Day School (then in Brookline, MA) and was captain of both the football and hockey teams in his senior year.

He raced Class D (?) outboard shells (25 hp motors) for a couple of years in local waters. We kept the boat in the cellar of the Brookline house in the winter. We had a summer house in Scituate.

When I had my appendix out in 1936 (I was 12) hospital stays were a month! The incision was 3 1/2 inches long. They bought me down in a wheel chair to my father's car (I was still not allowed to walk) and Pres lifted me and put me in the car.

In the late 1930's he served a launchman at the Scituate Harbor Yacht Club and was active on the club's swimming and tennis teams.

He attended the University of Maine. He also attended New England Aircraft School and one day shook hands with a young pilot who was going to fly to the West Coast - nonstop. When he took off, he headed out over the ocean and went to France. He was remembered as "Wrong-Way Corrigan"

He married Louise Ordway of Cohasset (date?)

At the start of WWII, his heart murmur kept him out of all services including the Merchant Marine.

He went to work for Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Co. in Hartford, CT and became operator of a test house. His group eventually did secret development and testing of the R2800 aircraft engine fitted on planes near the end of the war. Howard Hughes' plane the "Spruce Goose" was equipped with these engines as was the Grumman Bearcat, F8F.

Somewhere in here he divorced Louise

For a while after the war he and his brother-in-law Russell P. Liscomb ran a sightseeing trip off of Nantasket Beach in a surplus DUKW (?), the same as those that are in Boston now!

Later, (1948) he worked for United Car Co. in Cambridge and at the time had a 1928 Springfield, MA (made) Rolls Royce roadster. The top was never up unless it rained! He made special louvers in the floor that allowed engine heat to come up over he and his passenger. The car was never allowed to get dirty, inside or out and that included the engine - many parts of which were polished. He and the Rolls won 2nd overall in the Watkins Glen Concours D'Elegance in 1950.

Shortly thereafter he became involved in racing sports cars starting with an Allard K2, then an Allard J2, Then an Allard J2X. This led to the Nash Healey that had placed fourth overall at Le Mans in France (before he owned it). He also acquired and raced the Ferrari Mexico roadster (a one-off car as the other 3 Mexico's were coupes).

My wife Amanda and I always kidded him about marrying again and he always answered; "I'm not to get married again."

During this time he started Gray Industries in North Scituate, selling and servicing MG and other sports cars. He was one of the few non-Mercedes dealers/mechanics allowed by Mercedes to work on their cars.

Suddenly, around this time he met and married Sherley \_\_\_\_? Sherley was an excellent and well-known portrait artist. She bore him two boys, Preston Jr. and Robert.

After the sports car era died down he went to work for Toyota in Weymouth and rapidly rose to Service Manager a position he held there and at Anderson Toyota in Middleboro for many years until he retired.

He lived in North Scituate on Country Way during the Gray Industries time; eventually moving to a house on Collier Rd. on Third Cliff in Scituate. It was at this house he built a three-story lighthouse of brick, each of the 1,000 plus bricks requiring a cut to make the lighthouse round... He then moved to a house on Centrall Ave. in Humerock and eventually to a house on Great Herring Pond in Plymouth. In Plymouth he owned at one time, a speed boat, the "River Witch" a Hobie catamaran and lastly an old, but comfortable cat boat.

I recall one day in Humerock when my nephew "Speed" and myself sailed the Hobie cat at what seemed like 20+ miles an hour through the various little steams and ditches surrounding the South River. I was on the bow calling out turns and Speed was at the tiller. He bet he was worried (I know I was) that we'd wreck the boat by heading full-tilt into a marsh banking.

While in Plymouth Sherley, a Christian Scientist, had a stroke and not long after died from a second one as she refused medical treatment. After his great sadness at losing her he returned to his Episcopalian faith.

His stroke was mis-diagnosed by Plymouth Hospital until it was too late for the special medicine, He did carry on for a while until he was unable to cook and care for himself and he moved in with his son Robert in Hingham, MA. His frequent bouts with pneumonia led to his staying at Colonial Rehab until he died.

Love, Neal

April 16: I thought of other things about him:

I forgot about Pres' interest in Hockey and his membership in the Old Timers League (don't remember what they called themselves) He appeared on Channel 5 one time as a part of a series called Good Sports = meaning him. Also, forgot to list that he when he was racing, he was a member of the Sports Car Club of America and served as NE Region Activities Chairman one year. He was in the top ten sports car drivers in the country for a couple of years and held the record for racing up Mt. Washington for a while.

He was on the Town of Scituate's Coastal Zone Committee for several years.

In his whole life, he never talked very much, and my father called him "Silent Sam" He called my father "Iron Pants" after a character in L'il Abner comic strip. These comic strip names also got into his car business and may have upset some of his customers. I remember one of his workers put the wrong oil in a customer's car and the motor had to be rebuilt. That worker from then on was called "Ten Weight" One of my friends who spent all his money on things for his car was called "Spend-a-million Barnes." A friend of his who wore glasses was "Cousin Weakeyes." On and on it went: "Hairless Joe" "Bertha Broadbeam", and his wife Sherey was "Fruitful."

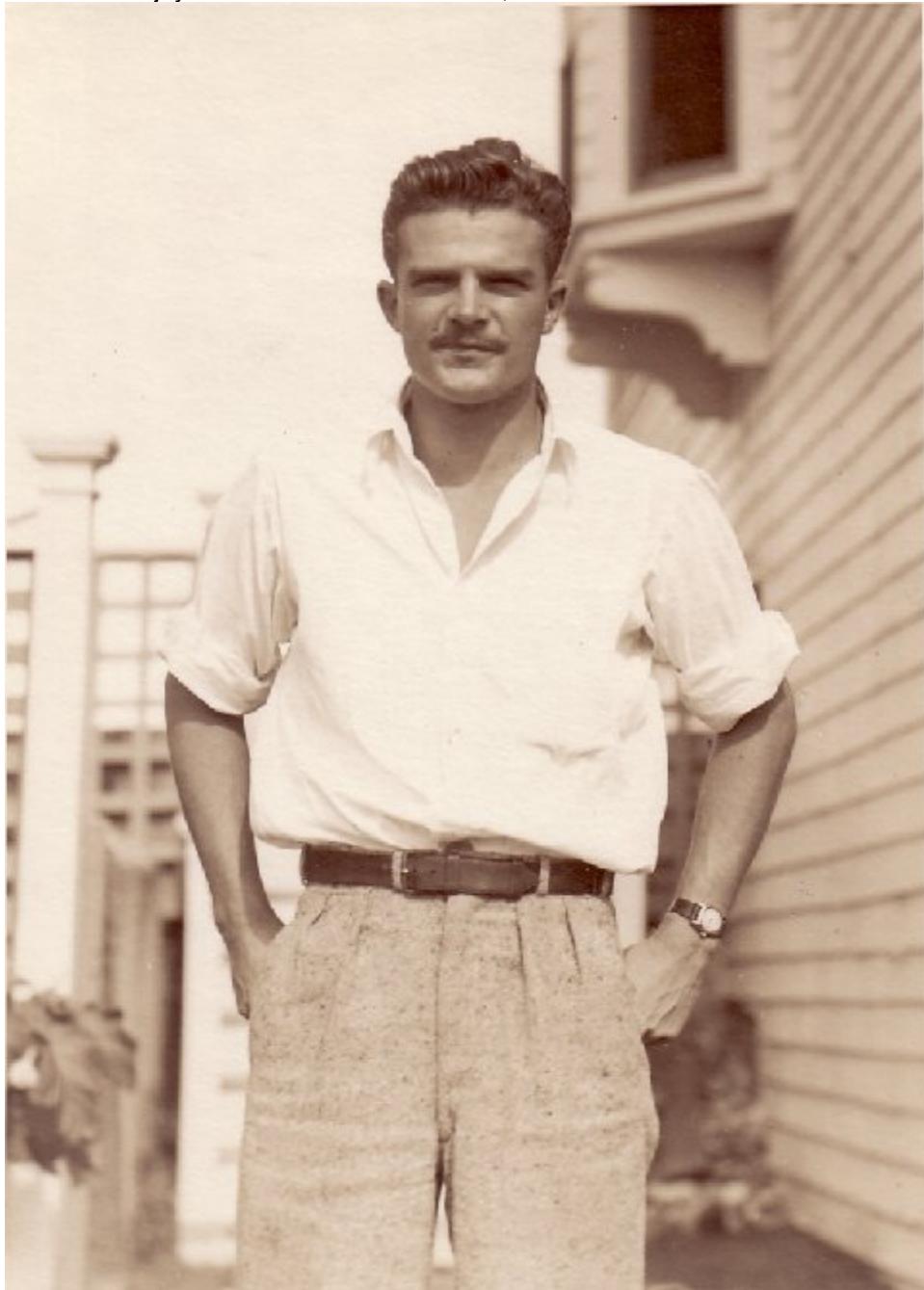
Yes, he was fun, taught me a lot about life; especially to put tools back after I used them or I'd get whacked.

*April 17, 2008*

**Preseton in his mid-20s**

Dear Angel and Friends:

No, it isn't Clark Gable, but my sister told some friends that he (Clack Gable) was in town and gave them my brother's car registration plate number. He was not too happy, as he was busy explaining he wasn't Clark Gable. If it was me, I would signed Gable's name and enjoyed the occasion. Love, Neal



Neal in the 1940s—In Uniform



**May 5, 2008  
Mother-in-Law**

Dear Angel and Friend:

First, let me say many people complain about their mother-in-law, but mine was the best there ever was!

On May 1st, without fail, there would be a knock on our door.

My wife and I knew who it was as she never rang the door bell. We also knew she (mother-in-law) couldn't move very fast; so we waited a minute or so before opening the door.

When we opened the door, no one was in sight, but there on the door step was a lovely basket of flowers and chocolates. We'd go through the same routine each year and exclaim; "I wonder who left this beautiful basket?" Out from behind the evergreen on the corner of the house (and not too well hidden) came my mother-in-law saying; "Surprise!"

We'd all go back in the house for tea and chocolates. She never tired of this little gift, even after she came to live with us.

Nor did we.

Love to Mom Chase and my wife Amanda up there in Heaven.

Love, Neal

**May 7, 2008**  
**Mother-in-Law**

Dear Angel Emmie and other Friends and Angels:

Your grandmother was the best. Funny that your sisters Connie, Sue and Wendy didn't see that, but then, your grandma was probably on their case a lot when they were growing up. You know how mad she was at your father, Steve, for him giving your mother you and your siblings. What the heck, your mother wanted a boy **and she kept trying!**

Yes, your grandma Edna loved her chocolates and after her husband Harry died, she loved her boyfriend!

After Harry died, the wife of their best friends, the Clapp's died and Edna and Bob Clapp became **very good** friends. Amanda and I thought they might get married. Bob Pratt took Edna out almost every day. He was in his **nineties!** They dined a lot at Milton Hill House, a local restaurant, that Amanda and I thought was the pits! They also went to Plymouth for lobster rolls which your grandma loved. Bob's life started to ebb when his drug store gave him the wrong prescription, he became drowsy driving his car and hit a bridge abutment. This didn't kill him, but was the start his health going downhill. He was 99 when he died!

When Bob was a young man, he worked out West in a frontier town when the telephone was first being installed (he worked all his life for the telephone company). One night, coming back to his hotel from a saloon (he was a salesman), a man attempted to hold him up under a dark railroad overpass.

Bob pulled out a gun and shot him!!!

It turned out, he didn't kill him and the man was the town's favorite old drunk and never harmed anyone.

So everyone was looking for the man who shot the town's favorite drunk. When Bob heard this, he holed up in his hotel room, got his meals from room service and said he was ill. After a few days he escaped the town on the midnight stagecoach.

After Bob died and Edna started to not get things done (food in her frig. got to be weeks old) and she had some medical problems, we took her into our home. On the holidays, I'd go over to the nursing home where Muriel (Edna's sister) was staying and bring to our house for dinner (Muriel had Alzheimer's). All the way over she say to me; "Are we on the way to the Cape, Percy?" (Percy was her annulled husband's name) I'd say; "No, Muriel, I'm Neal, your niece Amanda's husband." She say; "Oh yes, thank you." A minute later we would do the same exchange again. And again, all the way to and from our house. She seemed to be OK once she got to our house.

Her annulled marriage was to a man named Percy Slatts who owned a large shoe factory in Providence, RI. Their honeymoon consisted of a trip to California in his chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce, followed by **his** parents in their chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce. Not a pleasant experience!

As Percy didn't have to work, he hung around the house all day and that bothered Muriel. So she told him to go out and get some kind of a job so he wasn't under foot all the time. He bought the newsstand on the corner of Boylston and Arlington Streets in Boston, but kept the original owner and just stood by and "supervised." Somewhere along the line, as there were no children, she got her marriage annulled (that's what they called it in those days because "**divorce**" was a terrible thing to do).

Well, I've taken you far afield, but there was some interesting people in your family tree back in those days. Edna's half-brothers Cecil and Carl (Carl was a "closet" gay) Mayo were somewhat more normal. Cecil also worked for the phone company and after he retired became a passable primitive painter. 'Course anyone who painted anything and lived on the Cape, could get money for their work by just saying that.

It was too bad that Cecil's daughter, Florence, was injured when she was so young. It impacted her whole life with headaches and an inability to walk as a normal person. It was good she found a companion in Royce Barn...no, Royce Bars... (name escapes me). Well, anyway, his oyster fritters (stuffed oysters) kept them in groceries.

Your great grandma, Ethyl Baker Mayo Smith Putnam or was it Ethyl Mayo Smith Baker Putnam or was it....nevermind. Now there was a "Woman of the World!" She may not have gone far like women today, but she studied art in Paris, France. Had her own studio in P-Town when P-Town was not full of gays - only half full. She was the first woman on the Cape to have a license to drive a car and among other things was Postmistress of Orleans.

On the side, while delivering mail she'd also deliver groceries with the same government car. As noted above she was married a few times. Her last marriage, I think it was to Putnam, lasted only a day or so. Putnam owned prize roosters which awakened her much earlier than she liked. She asked her new husband to get rid of his roosters and he replied; "I ain't gettin' rid of my roosters!" So she left him.

She owned an early Half-Cape house, that actually was a salt box. Her refrigerator was a shelf outside a window on the North side of the house next to the chimney. In the winter, the shelf was inside the window.

Things kept there were always cool in the summer. I don't remember if there was a cellar under the main part of the house, but the part of the house that formed the salt box area had a dirt floor.

I think she died around 101 years of age.

There'll be a quiz on these facts in a day or so.

Love, Uncle Neal

**May 8, 2008**

Dear Angel & Friend:

Angel Dorothy M. sent the attached about Piper Cubs (they were small planes and had propellers, kids). Anyway, it brought to mind a similar happening on a Sunday morning in summer in Scituate when my folks lived on the ocean-front.

Somewhere in my old collection of movie films, is one of a Piper Cub on the beach one Sunday morning. My father had yelled me; "Neal! There a plane landing on the beach down beyond the end of the seawall! Get down there and see what the problem is."

I rushed down to see if I could help, but no one was in the plane! I looked to see if he had gone for a swim. Nope. Then looked in the cockpit and saw a note which read: "Have gone to get gas."

As I was reading this, I heard the sound of a motor and figured someone was coming down the beach in a truck.. Yikes! Another Piper Cub had seen his buddy on the beach and he landed nearby to see if he could help, too.

Now getting gas in Scituate on a summer Sunday morning **in those days** (late 1940's) with no stores open except those selling Sunday papers and ice cream cones must have been a challenge. Maybe not even an open gas station. And let's see...hmmm...there couldn't have been more than three or four in the whole town and most were three or four miles from where his plane was. Plus, he landed on a stretch of beach where there were no houses. I wonder where he did get gas?

A nearby house owner must have given him some gas as he wasn't gone long. Soon, he arrived back at his plane with a "Jerry" can (named after the WWII German gasoline can adopted by the Allies). He poured in the gas and he and his new buddy got both their Piper Cubs safely back into the air and were gone.

Our pond out back\*, the Mushquashicut (spellings very considerably), also got fairly frequent landings by float planes.

\*The "front" of the house was the part facing the ocean. The "back" was on the street.



Our house at just about high tide. The pond is beyond that arch in the background. I note the seawall is in bad shape. The things sticking out at right angles were called "groins" and were "supposed" to help break up the big waves in a storm.

My family were the first to live on the oceanfront on Surfside Road year-round. It got pretty exciting at times during storms. The waves crashing on the beach at high tide would shake the whole house.

I see I'm drifting (does this qualify as a pun?) away from my story. Maybe more another time.

Love, Neal

**June 14, 2008**

**Finally—The Kissel**

Dear Angel and Friend:

Here are photos of the Amelia Earhardt's Kissel that my brother and I restored around 1950 for a man named Fred Schreiter (sp?).



In the view from the front you can see the pull out seat panel (in front of the rear fender). I can't find the photo that shows the seat pulled out and the back and arm raised.

I'll tell you, not only was sitting out there exciting, but it scared the heck out of other drivers. It was truly "Up close and personal!" In these views, the folded down top has not been put in place.

In the view of the back of the car, my folk's house is the white one on the right.

Love, Neal

***June 14, 2008***

**Pres' Ferrari, Mexico and Other Yellow Cars**

Dear Angel and Friend:

This car is presently in California. It is a Ferrari Mexico built for the Mexico Gran Prix. It was the only roadster. The other Mexico models were coupes.

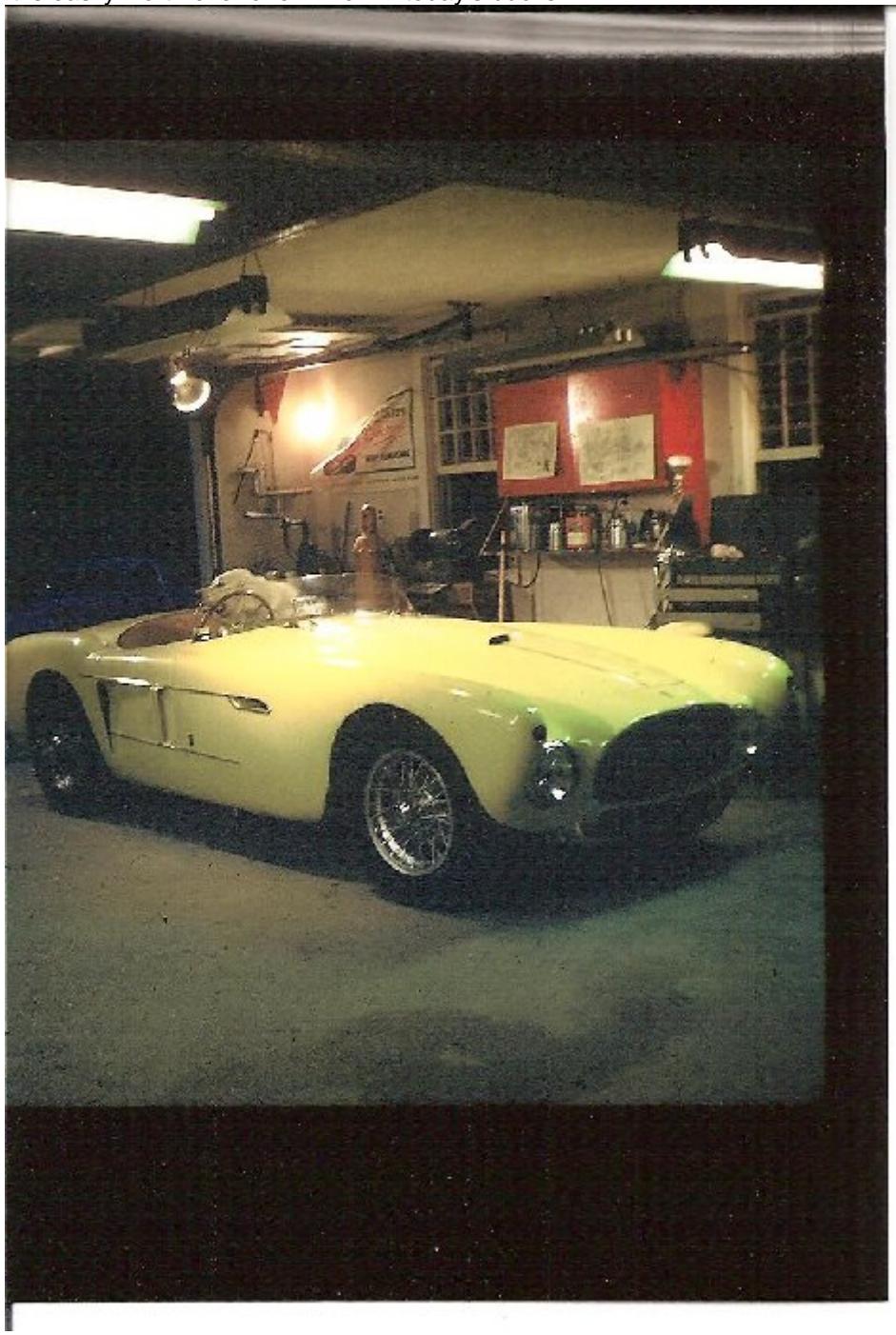
Lounging in the car and waiting for a ride is "Polar Bear", my brother's Great Pyrenees dog who had a great long pedigree name somewhere.

As the Ferrari was right-hand drive, people would think Polar Bear was driving and I think he knew this.

The car did not have a synchromesh transmission; i.e. (no clutch) you shifted gears by taking your foot off the gas at a certain RPM, moved the gear shift handle and hoped for the best! It had two rear end ratios. One gave a top speed of 158 and the other 178, that's miles per hour!.

My brother made a tapered aluminum headrest for it to hide a roll bar (not shown in this photo).

It is easily worth over one million in today's bucks



Left to right below:

Phil Bissel's ("Cousin Weakeyes") MGA, my brother Pres' Ferrari Mexico, and me in my Austin Healey 100 all painted the same yellow - racing color of Belgium (I think). My house appears to be being lived in although work is going on on an attic window (see ladder on left). So the date must be summer of 1957 or later as I had the Austin Healey when my daughter was born in March of that year.



Love, Neal

**June 15, 2008**

### **The Fun of Driving Jaguars**

Dear Angel, Friend and especially Angel Dorothy M:

My first real job after graduating from art school was with Farrington Mfg. Co, in JP (Jamaica Plain, a part of Boston). The president's son and I were both in the Sports Car Club of America and this led to some interesting sidelights to my job. When the son, Donald, took over the business and wanted to participate in a national rally or just have his car at Sea Island, GA, for vacation, I'd drive his Jaguar XK120 and later Jaguar XK140 to wherever he wanted it, and then fly home.

One time he and his wife Lee were going to participate in the Appalachian National Rally, a two/three-day event. It was to start and end in Hershey, PA, but a lot of the route was up on the Sky Line Highway. I drove the car down to Penn. and had the car prepped in Harrisburg at an old friend's Jag place. After that was done, my boss had asked me to run it back and forth 100 miles each way checking the odometer error at different speeds on the Penn. Turnpike. That done, I drove the car to Hershey to meet he and his wife.

I was staying overnight at the luxurious Hershey Hotel (?) where the rally was to start and flying back to Boston the next morning. The weather was atrocious and he and Lee arrived by **taxis** !!! from Reading (about 75 miles away) as the plane had to land there because Harrisburg's airport was closed.

Suddenly, I found the Lee Farrington's knee problem was going to prevent her from driving the rally. I get to drive my company President's car in this rally? Talk about nervous!!! Plus, I didn't have any warm clothing, so Lee loaned my her beautiful Alaskan fur jacket. Other rally members promptly started calling me Lee! I suggested to my boss that we have separate bedrooms lest people get the wrong idea about us. It was arranged. Next morning, off we went and all went like clock work until my boss gave me what turned out to be a wrong turn. I did a U-turn on a divided highway (he said he could pay the fine if we got caught). Then I put the hammer down and we went as fast as road conditions permitted to make up lost time.

I remember approaching a fork in the road at about 90 MPH and seeing a state trooper directing traffic. I figured, "Oh well, Don has the bucks to pay our way out of a ticket." But the trooper didn't blink an eye, and waved to the correct turn holding up all the other traffic. Shortly after that, we arrived at the control having made up most of our lost time. I slid the Jag through the control area as we almost overshot it.

We took third time prize and Don and Lee got an extra trophy for me to keep. I would have loved to keep that jacket!

Love, Neal

***June 18, 2008***

**Here's that man with the old cars again**

Dear Angel And Friend:

In case you think that all we did was to zip around having fun in our sports cars:

First is my Austin Healey 100 at the Southward Inn in Orleans at the end of a very snow-filled day at a Cape Codders Courageous Rally of which I was co-chairman, I remember we started in Hyannis and went as far as Wellfleet over a very circuitous route before returning to Orleans for dinner and bed.

Second is my very dirty MG-TC after a race up Mt. Washington. Seems there was a muddy spot just before the road started up the mountain. My brother Pres held the record up Mt. Washington for some time. He drove much faster cars.

Third is me and my MG-TC at speed on a dirt road in Landgrove, Vermont where we had time trials. There wasn't room for more than one car on the road at one time.



***June 19, 2008***

**One Last Set Till I Find Some More...**

Dear Angel and Friend:

First, we go back to 1947!!! Was your father around then? Anyway, outside my family's house (white one),

left to right are my father's Chrysler Windsor (dark green), my Sumac Red Chrysler convertible (the car everyone liked to hit), nearest the camera, Charles Innis' Packard dual-cowl Packard Phaeton, in the driveway, my brother Pres' 1928 Rolls-Royce roadster.

Next, and I'm not sure of the year, but it is brother Pres in his J2 Allard at Thompson Raceway, Thompson, CT. I'm not even sure there was a road course which was eventually added to the 1/2-mile and 1/4-mile ovals. Pres went on to get an J2X Allard which got to 100 MPH awful darn quick. Hmm maybe 1952

The last photo is me in my sailing canoe (about 1970) with all equipment installed and sail set for a day of sailing. Those two things that look like handles are called lee boards and the lower part of them is in the water to keep the canoe from slipping sideways when sailing. The sail is lateen rig and the mast goes through the bracket you see and down into a socket on the floor (inside bottom ? / deck ?) of the canoe. Behind my leg is the rudder control line used to steer this wild thing. I still have this canoe, but bees have found a home in the mast and it is not usable any more.

While sailing one day down in Orleans, MA on Meetinghouse Pond I was bouncing up and down on the rail of the canoe while hiking out in a strong wind. On coming ashore my back was very sore and a visit to the doctor showed I had cracked or broken my coccyx (sp is OK) (my tailbone) Had to lay flat for six weeks!!! It was really nice as the cat kept me company (and brought me her fleas too) and my poor wife had to bring me meals in bed.





*November 30, 20008*

**The Rest of My Cars including a Rolls-Royce some far-fetched, but true tales.**

Dear Angel and Friend

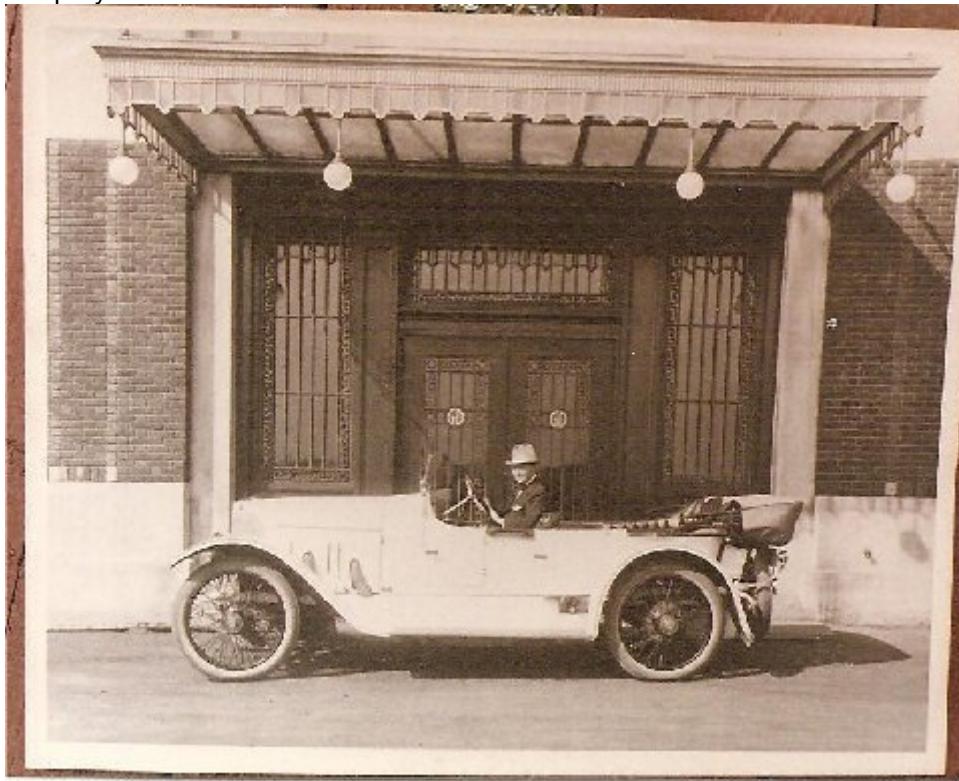
I wish I had the list my father made one time. Because of his business in making lamps, self-starters and electrical equipment for cars, he bought at least two cars for himself and two cars for his wife every year. He would turn in the ones he had to buy the next one. Too bad he didn't think to save all those cars!!!

He had owned altogether 90 to 100 cars. In one funny instance when he lived on Alton Place in Brookline, he bought a new Chrysler from C.E. Fay Company on Commonwealth Ave. (the original "Automile" area) which was about a mile from his house.

The house had a porte-cochere or covered driveway that allowed you to drive under it to unload your passengers or yourself so you didn't get wet. Anyway, Pop drove this shiny new Chrysler home and into the driveway and under the porte-cochere.

Unfortunately, the Chrysler was too tall and suddenly it became a roadster with the top lying in the drive behind the car. Pop picked it up, put it in the back seat and drove back to C. E. Fay Co. Charlie Fay couldn't believe his eyes! Pop had only been gone what ? 10 minutes. Pop said; "Charlie, I've got to return this car, it won't fit in my driveway." Well, he paid for repairs to the car and got something else. I don't know if he had the driveway altered. Later he moved to West Newton near Brae Burn Country Club.

My father in his 1913 Mercedes in front of his newly built plant on the Charles River in Cambridge. It later became the Jordan Marsh fur storage warehouse. After it was torn down, the "Step Pyramid" hotel was built here



Registering cars was voluntary at first and in 1912 my father went with a friend to get license plates for the family cars. He got 370, 1287, & 2748. The man told him there were no low numbers that day, but to come back as cars "were not catching on!" Dad's friend went back and got 46, 47, and 48!

Most cars in those days had a lot of ground clearance due to many roads being dirt and often very muddy. After the Boston (55 Lansdowne St, Boston and later, the one in Cambridge) plants opened, My father would commute to his Amesbury, MA plant once or twice a week to check on how things were going. On one sad occasion he ran over the local sheriff's dog. It was a St. Bernard. It did not kill him, but the hot exhaust burned all the hair off the dog's back. From then on, the sheriff tried to catch Pop every day for speeding and to pay for vet's bills for his dog. The best friend of the sheriff was also a good friend of my father and he would call my father (they had telephones in those days) and tell him where the sheriff was going to set up his trap.

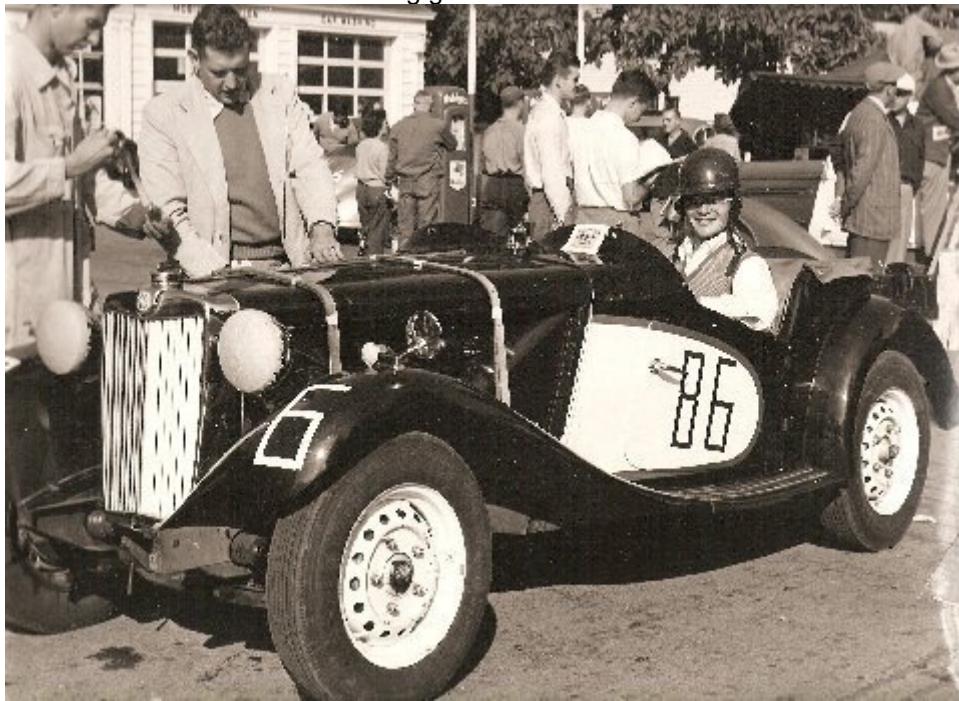
My father would come roaring up the Newburyport Turnpike at what ? 35-40 MPH (that was speeding in those days) and he'd get a block from the trap and take a side road around the trap. The sheriff eventually got wise and Pop did get caught one day and had to pay damages to the dog and a speeding ticket.

#### **Well, on with the MG Saga.**

After my love affair with the MG-TC, I bought an 1951 MG-TD. I kept the TC for quite a while to race as it now was in the modified class having had the head planed (raises compression), heavy valve springs (allows higher RPM), ports relieved (allows better intake of fuel and outflow of exhaust gases) and other little nuances to help the car go faster. The TC's original top speed was only 79 miles per hour.

Not much when nowadays you have family vans on Route 128 flying by at or above this speed. Those people haven't got a clue about how quick things happen at that speed.

Earlier (and I can't remember when), I sent photos of the 1951 TD that I raced in the 1952 Watkins Glen, NY Gran Prix. For the record, here it is again with my pit crew. We lightened the car and it went like "stink." Nothing goes faster than stink!



I sold this car to Dot & Fred White, my hosts who were putting us up in their house on weekends while we were converting our barn. Dot and Fred had a player piano and on weekends it got a lot of use. I brought down the rolls I had from my apartment and another friend, Pete Tolman, brought over his rolls. We marked them in different colors so we'd know whose was whose.

A very cold Christmas Eve comes to mind in that our friend Gil Wilder suggested loading the piano onto a stake bed truck and all of us going around to fire stations and nursing homes and singing Christmas Carols. The flat bed of the truck was the same height off the driveway as the top step of Dot & Fred's porch. We just rolled the piano out the door, across the porch, and onto the back of the truck and "Away we went!" The piano was securely tied to the side of the truck so we wouldn't be crushed. There must have been 8-10 in the back of the truck. Once in a while someone would go into the cab to warm up. I did most of the pumping of the piano as the others were too interested in the scotch. I was still drinking in those days; otherwise, I think I would have frozen to death. The scotch whisky we all consumed that night kept us all alive.

You saw the 1953 MG-TD in the e-mail about my house when it was loaded with the water pipe for our water supply. There was a lot of ledge going down to our house and in many places Amanda and I hand-dug the trench with a trowel and sometimes a big spoon. We covered those stretches with double boards to give better insulation. Also since we are on the South side of the hill and the water line is under a black top drive, I think it has helped not to have the water line freeze. I leave a faucet dripping on cold nights just the same.

The 1953 MG-TD in front of my apartment.



This 1953 MG was also the one that Beauregard chewed the top off of. Beyond that it had a quiet life. Below is a photo of Beauregard and my brother's dog ("Spooky") in Dot White's MG - my ex-1951 MG-TD:



Then came the Austin-Healey A-100. In the fall of 1955, when our barn was getting close to being lived in (not completed, mind you), my next-door neighbors, Mr & Mrs Bailey, offered to let us stay in their house over the winter RENT FREE if we would pay the utilities and take care of their cat, What a nice gesture! Mrs. Bailey ran an antique store and had lots of room for my stuff. So when they left for their winter home in Florida, we moved into 49 Border St.

Here's the Bailey's House and the Austin-Healey in the driveway on a snowy day:





On May 31, 1956, Amanda gave me a surprise birthday party in this house and in return, I...er...ah...um...well, she became pregnant. One surprise deserves another, right?

The Bailey's house originally was north on Border St. up near the town line. It originally was a Dutchland Farms Ice Cream stand and prior to World War 2, the Bailey's dropped that name and took a Howard Johnson's franchise. Shortly after that, they added the dining room. My family often went to dinner there during WWII and my mother would bring butter (maybe margarine) in her purse. During the war butter was rationed and my brother and myself (if he was up from his job at Pratt & Whitney ((aircraft engines)) in CT or I was home on leave) loved rolls and the restaurant would only serve one pat of butter.

After they moved their house to 49 Border Street, the dining room became their living room. As this room was all windows on both sides it was hard to heat. So they took out two sets of casement windows on the south side to enlarge the kitchen, and I got to take the best set and it became my bathroom window. After a while it got rotted and I couldn't find a replacement of the right size; so I had to fit a single window on hinges. It is now covered permanently by a storm window.

Well, after moving into our house in the summer of 1956, Amanda's friend, Carol Plaice, offered to give us the old crib she used when her children were young. It was in Brewster on Cape Cod. You can see from the photos of the Austin-Healey, it was not much of a cargo carrier, but down to the Cape I went to get this free crib. Some pieces went in behind the seats, a couple of pieces in the passenger seat and a big piece tied on the back with a blanket underneath to keep it from scratching the car. I got lots of smiles and attention on the road coming back.

It so happened that evening that there was a forest fire in Plymouth and Route 3 was closed and we were detoured onto Route 3-A. Part way up a big hill, all cars were stopped and cars with single males in them were pulled over and the occupants ordered to fight the fire (this was a law at the time). The cop who came up to my car took a look and said; "You go ahead home, you've got troubles enough."

Here's the Healey in front of my house. On the left is "Cousin Weakeyes" (I don't remember his real name) in his MGA; then my brother in his one-off 1953 Ferrari Mexico roadster (it did not have a top!!!); and me in my Austin-Healey. We all liked that beautiful yellow. I note the driveway

was still dirt and there's some long poles up against the house (I was thinking they were a ladder, but I don't see rungs).



I have not mentioned it much before, but from the time I first got into sports cars, we did rallies, races, and gymkhanas (a gymkhana is like an obstacle race). I was originator with my friend, the late Charlie Dean we were co-chairmen of the Cape Codders Courageous Rally for 10 years. We did this rally regardless of the weather. It was always the 3rd weekend in March. Sometimes we had warm Spring weather and sometimes we had SNOW!



Note the MG to the left of my Healey. All participants received a front number plate (masonite and silk-screened) with their car number on it. It helped control personnel to identify the car as it arrived at a control.

The first year of the rally there were 18 entrants. In my tenth year there were 125 entrants plus control personnel. In later years, we used inns in Falmouth and Provincetown. On Sunday morning we would have a concours (a judging of the best looking cars), followed by a gymkhana in the town's or the inn's main parking lot.

One time, officials in Orleans let us run time trials on a new road that had no houses on it.

This rally was primarily a "gimmick" rally rather than a strict time/distance technical rally. We'd take contestants to historic places for a control and ask them questions about the previous site at the next control. On several occasions we'd start more than one car at once and after a short distance they would have turns that were different and after a bit they'd pass each other going in different directions! You couldn't trust following the guy ahead, no sir!

I remember starting four cars at once on the mainland side of the Bourne Bridge (a State Trooper assisted by stopping traffic so cars could get out of the parking lot on time without a waiting). The present exalted interchange did not exist in those days. On the other side of the bridge, two cars went to the right and two went left. Then shortly after that those two on the right (or left) would have different turns. Nasty little devils weren't we?

More on rallies later and the people - oh yes, the people - no names will be given. Rallies led to several divorces. If you thought your marriage was secure, doing a couple of rallies would prove or disprove it. It required close communication between the driver and his/her navigator. I remember.....well, another time.

My daughter was born shortly before the 1957 Cape Codder's Courageous Rally. On Saturday evening, during the awards, I announced that a **new MG** had been created. I held up an enlarged MG octagon (the car's insignia) and everyone thought it was a car until I said it was my daughter Michelle Gray!

As a child adds to a man's responsibility, costs and *space requirements*, we sold the **2-seater** Healey and got a Volkswagen Bug. I drove that till it rusted away at about 170,000 miles; got another and did the same.

About that time Amanda learned to drive and I got the New York Auto Show Hillman Minx, an automatic, for her. A nice car, but a little weird if the automatic had problems **and it often** did. You opened the hood took out a fitting turned it over and plugged it in again. This put the car in gear so when you turned the key to start the car, **it started to move!!!** You had to be ready! If you wanted to back up you had to shut it off, put the shift in reverse, restart and you'd be moving. Go easy on the accelerator. .

One time coming home on Route 128, the VW died just before the Route 24 interchange. I got out to assess the situation and an 18-wheeler pulled up to help! We determined that the fuel pump had gone kaput. He offered to give me a lift, but I decided to fix it. I got a can and a Coke bottle out of the woods. I punched a nice round hole in the can and put it on the inlet tube for the carburetor. Then I sucked gas out of the tank and into the Coke bottle. Poured the gas into the can, jumped in the car and drove it until it died again. Then repeated the process. This eventually got me to a gas station outside the Braintree Mall. I called my wife, she went to the Volkswagen dealer in Weymouth, got a fuel pump, and brought to the gas station. I installed it and we went home for a late dinner. I wouldn't have a clue of what to do with today's high-tech cars.

Around 1964 the Volvo P-1800 came out. My aunt in New York passed away a couple of years later, and we were left some money in 1967. I bought a 1967 Mustang hard top for Amanda. A man bought it for his mother and she died and the car had only 1500 miles on it. Then I found an almost new Volvo P1800 for myself. The former owner got it for a wedding present and had done his own servicing. He managed to connect the spark plugs wires in the **wrong** order. This ruined the engine (for some reason it managed to run, but not too well) and made the car very cheap for me. A sports car friend on the North Shore had a Volvo dealership and had a brand new Volvo totaled in a rear end collision. I bought the engine out of that car and that engine ran perfect for the 21 years I owned the Volvo P1800 (a total of 260,000+ miles). Oh yes, I restored it twice as it turned out to be one of the Volvos that had suffered partial immersion in salt water on a shipping dock in Europe (Rotterdam, I think).

P-1800 photo - redone (enhanced blue) color on my brother's lawn when he lived in Humerock (south part of Scituate).



The P-1800 was a nice shade of medium metallic blue and I always wanted a more striking blue. Somewhere along the line, maybe during one of its restorations, it got an above blue. My P-1800 was one of the last to have the curved chrome strip on the door. Later models had the strip run straight back.

I note in the latest Classic & Sports Car Magazine (British), they have a story about a P1800 in the US that was made into a convertible. The job was well done, but it lost some of its unique good looks,

When it came time to restore the Volvo the third time I said "Whoa! Enough's enough." I bought a 1980 Datsun 200SX from Peter Capazolli at Cohasset Imports. Amanda immediately desired this car as her Mustang was also on its last legs having had the underpan replaced at least once with the sides of an old refrigerator (any port in a storm). So she got the Datsum.

1980 Datsun 200 SX:



I bought the first of two Toyota Tercel wagons from Peter. Great cars! Why they stopped making them, I'll never understand. Along the way there was also a Toyota pickup truck, but Amanda thought it was giving me fumes, so we traded that in and I got the first of an unending line of Subaru's. My 300-foot driveway caused the change to Subaru's with their all-wheel drive.

I still have the Datsun as you can see above. Most of them rusted very quickly, but we had had ours rust-proofed and it has held together all these years. It won't run at present as there's a problem with the computer that controls the fuel injection (I think).

One of the two Toyota Tercel Wagons I owned. In the distance is my mother-in-law's Pontiac under a winter cover.



A year or so after Amanda died, a friend mentioned there was a Rolls-Royce in Kingston for sale at only \$10,000! Wow, a Rolls-Royce! I looked at it and thought; "Hey what fun I could have with

this! Neal's Angel's would love to ride in that!" Got it home and noticed a smell inside that was like cleaning solution used on the leather. After a couple of days, I was getting ill with this **unGodly** smell. Plus, my brother called it "an old man's car". **That did it!** I took it back to the dealer and got my money back as he had someone else who wanted it. Glad I didn't have it during this last siege of high gas prices. I think it got about 8 MPG!

The Rolls-Royce in front the yacht club steward's work shack:



About this time, Peter at Cohasset Imports decided he would part with a very special car. I had asked him about once a week for six years if he would sell me this car. He always replied that he wanted to have it as **his** "fun" car.

Now Peter thought that I could buy this outrageous car with my Rolls-Royce money. I became the deliriously happy owner of a silver 1980 TVR 280i sports car. With a V-6 German-made Ford Zytec engine, Targa roof and capable of 140 MPH! The car was made in Blackpool, UK and there was probably only two other 280i's in Massachusetts. I joined the TVR Renegades (TVR Club of America - New England Region) for a while and we'd show our cars at British Car Day at Larz Anderson Automobile Museum in Brookline, MA in July. I won the "Best TVR Award" once.



I remember going up to an event in Stow, Vermont called the "British Invasion" where 600 or so British cars came and seeing many TVR's. I bought a couple accessories there; one a T-shirt with a hand painted picture of my car on it and stainless strips to go on the entrys to the car that had "TVR 280i" on them. The trip back home included a horrendous downpour in the Dover, NH area and I found the TVR got a lot of water inside the car on the floor, but outside of that, I didn't get wet. People ask; "What do you do for parts?" I call a dealer in Canada and get anything I need even though the production of this model stopped around 1987. There is one problem I wish I could solve, however. It does not have power steering and turning those big tires and the weight on them when the car is standing still is a tough job.

I sang with the Berkshire Choral Festival for several years after Amanda died and the TVR took me out there often. It gets a lot of attention on the road. Its handling and acceleration are superb. Before the speedometer had a seizure, I did take it very briefly (two or three seconds) to over 100 MPH and because of its front end shape, it felt solid and secure. Also, on another occasion, I locked up and smoked the tires when a kid ran a stop sign. The TVR stopped in time.

Current Subaru:



Cars I wish I could buy again: 1949 MG-TC, 1955 Austin-Healey A100, 1965 Volvo P 1800.  
Cars I did not own, but wish I did: My brother's 1953 Ferrari Mexico and a Maserati Khasim (1965?) which looks a lot like the TVR

Well that takes care of my cars; now what'll we do?

Love, Neal

**December 2, 2008**  
**Photos of My Wife, Amanda**

Dear Angel and Friend:  
As a result of all my stories, several of you have asked what Amanda looked like. Here's a few photos.

Taken by my father when we were dating



Eight years of ballet lessons gave her nice legs



After our daughter was born, she developed...er...ah...topside!

Around age 60 I think.



Love, Neal

*December 12, 2008*

In 1908...

## Show this to your children and grandchildren

Neal's addition: The lamps on the vehicle are Gray & Davis lamps - solid brass of course - they don't rust. the oil side lamps are # 934's and the gas headlamps are # 67's. I have a pair of # 934's (there are left and right ones) and a # 67 headlamp. The car appears to be a Ford, Model K. G & D was only on the K model



**June 25, 2008**

**This Old House Is Mine**

Dear Angel and Friend:

So you like old photos? Look and read on:



It is summer 1954 and you are viewing my wife Amanda and me working on our house-to-be. I think Amanda is pulling splinter out of her foot and I (flat stomach and all) am about to move the ladder.

This is the day we found the bottle!

Look three rungs down from the top of the ladder. There are boards removed from the side of the house. There was a sill here and I was checking for rot. Here we found a whiskey bottle and it could only have gotten there when the barn was built. My architect's father collected old bottles and he guessed the barn was built around 1850. I did know it was built in South Scituate (now Norwell) and moved to Scituate by an oxen team round 1885 and made into a fire house.

The roof is back on (it was taken off in two pieces for the move to my land) and new shingles have been put on by myself and friends. The addition on the front (making it into a salt box) is taking shape at left. Amanda and I are on what will become our kitchen and dining area. The door to the right of the ladder is now relocated to my back door onto the deck.

Lots of additional wood we used for the addition we are working on, came from barracks at the Squantum Naval Air Station in Quincy. I bought a truck load of it from a company in RI. No nails in it, but lots of staples that evidently held the insulation in place.

To the right of the top of the ladder is where a window was and just to the right of that are three rows of new shingles. These sealed the space where the roof was removed for the move from Scituate Center to Border Street. One side of the barn still bears gouges caused by limbs scraping it as it passed by on the road.

Love, Neal

**June 25, 2008**  
**My Father at Age 10?**

Dear Angel and Friend:

I am amazed how much I look like my father!

Pop was born in 1869 (a year of Halley's comet). So this photo was taken in about 1879.

He was 55 when I was born.



Love; Neal

**July 11, 2008**

**Tonight's Crusin'**

Dear Angel and Friend:

Went cruisin' in the TVR, but local friends were off somewhere.

On the way home I thought I'd drive along Glades Road. Glades Road is in what is known as the "Irish Riviera" part of Scituate. Another name for it is "Beyond the Lights." Years ago, all the Irish politicians had houses here and Glades Road was oceanfront and the creme de la creme. There used to be a large hotel called The Cliff Hotel that fronted on the ocean. Somerset Maugham (sp?) stayed there during WWII and wrote one of his books while there. The hotel burned years ago when my daughter was around ten. Anyway, there wasn't room for more than about 8 to 10 houses on this stretch of land and then the road went into the tiny village of Minot named after Minot light that is out in the ocean close by . Minot also has a post office and in the old days several lovely guesthouses. Those have been replaced by expensive condos.

Continuing on Glades Road north of the village, was a large group of multi-bedroom typical summer homes; now all raised to keep them from being washed away in Nor'easters. The seawall here has been also raised and rip-rap placed in front of it to cut down on the ferocity of winter waves. There are houses behind these houses and many have been improved and winterized.

Just before the end of the public part of Glades Road is a rock formation on the ocean side called "The Old Man"



At the end of this stretch (maybe 1/4 of a mile), there's a gate and a sign firmly stating "Residents Only." Beyond this point, you are in "The Glades"

The land (many, many acres) has been owned by the Adams Family (decendents of Charles Francis Adams) since the late 1800's). Two immediate land parcels have been sold in recent years for magnificent houses, but after that you are on a one-lane, rough, barely tarred, road. In my childhood, I'd often walk up here to a spot where granite was cut from the rock cliffs (now

called Pulpit Rock) and loaded on barges brought alongside (on the ocean)! Also, there's a spring near there that the Native Americans must have enjoyed for years.

Tonight, I thought I'd drive to the **end** of Glades Road. Then I thought I'd drive the Private Road and call on the Adams' people (Family? Hah-hah) at the northern end and ask their permission to use the story of the lighthouse keeper ghost that appeared in their private publication "The Glades Book".

On arrival at the end, some children were playing in the circle where one of several large houses stand. I stopped and asked if an adult was nearby that I could speak to. An older woman came down to see "Who the Hell was driving into their private enclave!" At least that was the look in her eye. Of course, the TVR is a singular machine and generates a certain "presence" regardless of where it goes. She became quite formal and mentioned they don't often get a car of such magnitude to drive all the way in on such a rough road (with speed bumps no less). I asked my question about the book stating several facts to show that I had read the book (the author, an Adams person, died of cancer prior to publication, and other information that I knew).

She realized I was serious and set off to find someone in authority with the firm statement for me to "**Stay there!**" Maybe I should have said; "Arf, arf!"

During the time she was gone, I photographed a **hotel** leaving Boston - might have been the Prudential Tower (see below) Minot's Light is at left.



Then a bare-chested man arrived, half grown beard, not like the Adams person I had in mind (if his great, great grandfather could see him, he'd probably wonder if he **was** an Adams). Anyway, I explained my mission and after some small talk, he grasped the meaning of my request and gave me verbal permission to use the story as long as I gave credit. I assured him I would do so.

The ride back out that long, rough road to civilization was with great pleasure as I'd longed to get that permission for our ghost book's coming revision.

Love, Neal P.S. For an aerial view see:

<http://maps.google.com/maps?q=Minot,+MA&ie=UTF8&ll=42.251663,-70.769033&spn=0.006623,0.009656&t=h&z=16>

The white-ish square is tennis courts. There was a military 5-story tower built in the woods in WWII to watch for any enemy activity..

*September 24, 2008*

## **First Family to Live on the Ocean Side of Surfside Road Year Round**

Dear Angel and Friend:

Yep, it was my folks. In March of 1942, we sold our home in Brookline and settled down in our summer home at 71 Surfside Road in Scituate. (my father always called it 73 as he didn't like 71. The people at 73 never complained, they knew an eccentric when they saw one). I stayed at a friend's house during the week in Brookline and went to Scituate on weekends. I graduated that spring from Brookline High School.

We had spent summers in this house since 1924, the year I was born. So there many fond memories through all those years. My earliest memory was failing off the piano stool in 1929 and it must have been partly responsible for the 1929 stock market crash. Also, I have not been able to play the piano since!

In 1942, there was only one other year-round family on Surfside Road and they lived on the opposite side of the road up near Surfside's junction with Gannett Road (a very safe location).

Our house was what? Maybe 15 feet from the seawall and at high tide another 30 feet from the ocean on calm days!



Ahh, the joy of a house by the sea. In summer, a swim was only a few feet away. Sunbathing all day.

In the winter- now there's a whole different story! When we lived in Brookline in the winter, the front of the beach house was boarded up to keep the windows from being broken by rocks brought over the wall in North-east storms.

Note in the photo above that a section of the sea wall is missing from in front of the house next door. It is a jagged break and not a seam, but the ocean has tremendous power. It lifted that

whole section off. God knows where it went as it is not in front of the wall. That piece you see is called a "groin" and was placed at right angles to the wall to break up waves that approached the wall at an angle. The front of the wall has a curved lip that the designer hoped would curl the wave back on itself and not come over the wall. It did not, because the wind from the storm blew them over once the wave got above the wall.



A neighbor, a few houses down the road, had a cement deck **in front** of the sea wall. This is a winter photo as there is a wooden box over the light fixture on the cement post. The other post is hidden

We found after a few years not to have shingles on the front of the house because the waves coming down on the cement deck would rush towards the house and rip the shingle off. So we clapboarded the front. Worked perfect. The man who bought the house after we sold it, put the shingle back - go figure.

Behind that clapboarded front wall was an 8-inch thick re-enforced concrete wall to further reduce damage to the house from ocean storms. The lowest floor, what you would call the cellar, was a walk out on the street side.

Incidentally, the street side was called "the back" of the house - the front being on the ocean. Part of our lower floor was a large bedroom and bath, an entry with stairs up to the first floor, a laundry with an ice chest (yes, ice) next to the door and a garage. There was also a playroom for the kids on rainy days and two showers to remove salt water after a swim. In the 1930's a refrigerator at a summer home was not a must. An ice man with a horse and wagon came down the street every day and he would bring in ice to our two ice boxes (the other being a double-door one up in the pantry between the kitchen and the dining room). These ice boxes had wooden doors. Late at night when my older brother and sister would come home with friends, they would gather in the pantry and take turns throwing the ice pick at the door. The "thunk!" noise of the ice pick hitting the door would wake my father and he'd yell down for them to stop. I think the damage to the doors was the reason we eventually got a gas refrigerator.



The "back" of the house - in winter and in summer.

If ice cream was to be kept for a party, you went out and bought "dry" ice from the drug store, or other supplier.

I recall a problem with my MGTC (1948/9) in that the fuel pump would get too hot and not work on a hot day; so I'd stop at a drug store, get a chunk of dry ice and tie it to the pump and everything worked fine.

This is the location in our young lives where we scraped tar off the roads and chewed it. "You did what?" Yes, we all thought it was something interesting to do. Toxic? We didn't know the word or what it could do to ourselves. However, I've disliked the smell of diesel smoke since my days in the USN on an aircraft carrier where my battle station was downwind of the exhaust stacks.

But to return to the "Home by the Ocean"; As the house had five bedrooms on the second floor, we kids were always doubling up somewhere in the summer because the folks had weekend

guests. There was only one bath; so a great deal of yelling would go on in the morning to find out what the use of the bathroom was at any particular moment.

Overnight guests would always ask; "How do you sleep with all that noise of the waves?" In the morning they would say: "I had the most wonderful sleep. I dropped right off to the sound of the ocean."

In the winter at high tide with a storm going on, you would hear the ocean pulling the water back over the shingle beach (see photo - small rocks, are called a "shingle" beach) after a wave broke. It was sort of a rough sucking noise. When the next wave broke and crashed on the beach with a **WHUMP!!!**, the house would shake! You worried for a while and just got used to it. It happened every storm during high tide. The real support of the house, besides a skimpy foundation was a lot big cedar logs throughout the cellar area.

Certain waves would come in, hit the wall, and run back out to meet the next wave coming in with spectacular results:



The photo was taken a few houses north of my family's house.

During a storm in 1945 while I was still in the US Navy, enough rocks came over the wall and piled up between the wall of our neighbor's and the south side (left in the photo) of the house that they pushed the side wall off the foundation (the sill was not bolted to the foundation like houses built today). This contained the side sun porch, part of the dining room and the garage underneath. A call went to Percy Merritt (local man who did heavy construction).

As the tide went down he and his crew came and shoveled the rocks back over the wall. He jacked up the house just enough to put the side back on the foundation, and placed braces in the garage to withstand the next high tide. My mother, always the perfect hostess, supplied food and drink to all participants. The next high tide around midnight found them sitting in the playroom area with rubber boots on as there was a few inches of water on the floor due to the shower drains acting like small fountains. They opened the door into the garage a crack to let the water run into the garage and thence down into the street. My father, who did not drink alcohol, said my mother had the work crew so plastered they couldn't have saved the house if they tried. But they enjoyed the evening!

After any of these storms, the road was always cluttered with stones bought over the wall and down between the houses into the street. A town snowplow had to come and plow the stones off the road. Each spring they were picked up and dumped down at the dead end of Surfside Road where the barrier beach began.

Sight-seers would always come after a storm to ask about how we did and if we had any damage. Surf usually lasted a couple of days. In-landers would come and stand too near the wall and get drenched or hit off the head by a rock even though we'd warn them of the danger. There was always one or two who never learned.

One woman in particular, a Mrs. Williams, owned a real castle/chateau in the woods in Cohasset. She had one of those broad "A" accents. My father put her in her place when she told him about her house. He said; "Yes, we looked at your house when we were thinking of living here year-round, but it is too far from the ocean." And yes, we did look at that house. You could walk into the fireplace without bending over. The living room had to be 40 X 80 feet. Everything was stone **and cold**. There was a tiny window in the master bedroom that looked down on the living room so you could keep track of the kids or the party. Up above the servant's rooms was a pool table that could only have gotten there when the house was built. It is still there (2007) with Jags parked outside.

As I mentioned early we used to cover the windows on the front of the house with shutters to shield against the rocks. Even the second floor windows would get a small stone hit. We bought heavy 1/4" screening for those upper windows. After the first winter my father missed looking out at the ocean; so we left the shutter on the front door and the windows beside it off and took a chance on every storm. At night, we'd put flood lights in those windows to watch the waves at night. If a window got broken we'd dash out between waves and put a piece of plywood on. Since it was raining and blowing a gale, we wore oilskins (we didn't have plastics in those days), we'd never quite finish the job, and we'd get soaked. A few minutes in front of the stove in the cellar usually warmed and dried us out.

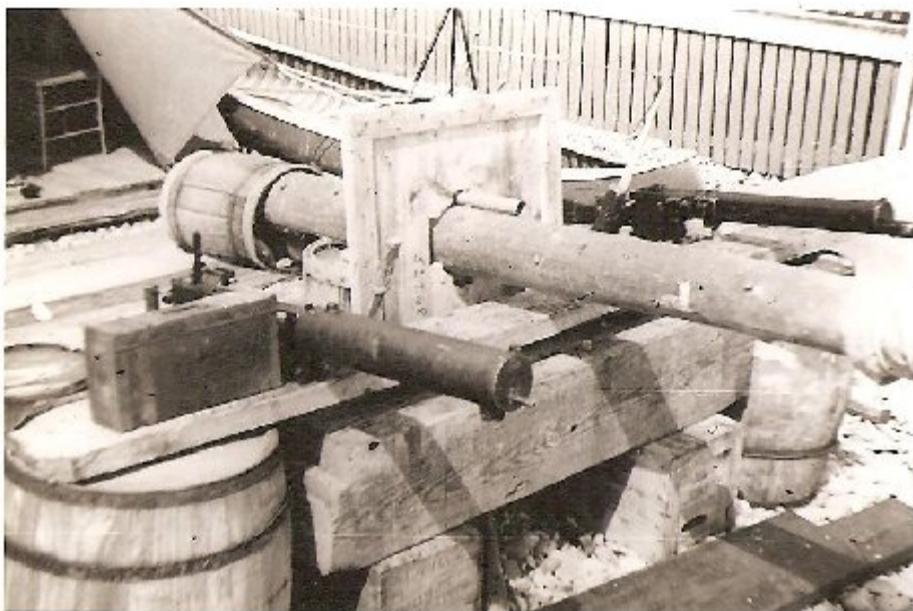
Oh yes, heat. We had insulation blown in from holes made in the outside to insulate the house. As most construction was done with studs 16" on center, once you found a stud you just went over about 8" and cut a hole and blew in the insulation. Not much by today's standards, but that was how it was "retrofitted" in those days. For the first few winters, my father bought a **big** old-fashioned pot-bellied coal stove. It was placed in the middle of the cellar playroom (under the living room) and one of the showers was used as a coal bin. He'd come down around midnight to stoke it for the night. It often glowed cheery red from the heat. The floor above had no ceiling and was one board thick. In the winter the boards would shrink and heat would rise up through those cracks. My mother only used small scatter rugs in the winter. In the living room, kitchen and dining room there were vents in the ceiling that let heat rise up to the bedrooms and bath.



The living room and Pop is reading his current mystery book. The fireplace is to the right. the windows open onto the enclosed side sun porch and my mother's card table is set up where she played solitaire or did jig-saw puzzles. The cabinet under the large painting is the primitive TV - I think it was a 10" screen and included a record player as well.

They loved that house and so did I. Later, we got a gas stove and Pop got to sleep all night. We had a fireplace in the living room and almost every night in the winter it would have a fire containing some driftwood in it. The colors from the minerals and old nails, etc. in the wood were a bonus. With no chain saws, we cut wood with a saw or an axe.

When the war came on Dec. 7, 1941, new conditions were added - **blackout curtains!** Not the tiniest light could leak out of our house. We also limited the lights inside the house so we'd have less chance of showing a light. Not only that, the top half of our car headlights (they were round in those days) had to be painted black.



From my gun collection and a large piece of drift wood, I set up this mock fort to keep the enemy from landing at our house. The machine guns are real, but the insides had nothing in them - no firing parts. At the time I had a large antique gun collection and they were on display all over the house.

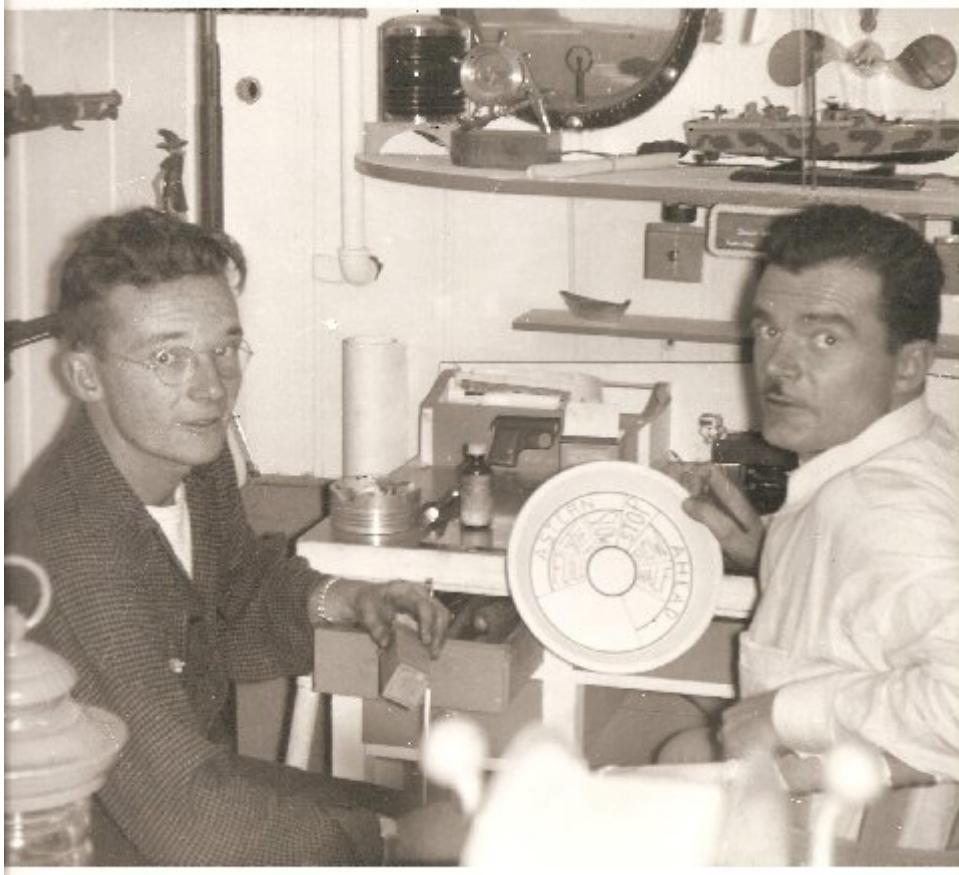
Between North Scituate and the intersection of Gannett and Hatherly Roads you had to drive on parking lights only! From there to Surfside Road and home - **NO lights!!!** You drove real slow! Plus, at the Hatherly and Gannett intersection, there was a soldier with a gun and a fire glowing in an old 55-gal drum to keep him warm. You had to show him your license (to prove where you lived) and others in the car also had to have ID's as well. Not going to let any Germans come ashore in Scituate!

When I came home on leave, I'd often walk the beach as I did when I was younger. In that war, you had to be in uniform any time you left the house. So I'd be walking along and be stopped by a US Coast Guard Reserve man on foot and sometimes on horseback! They performed this duty two or three times a day. There was also watch towers all along the coast. I can't recall whether Minot's Light was darkened during that time. Often there would be large clods of crude oil on the beach from some unfortunate ship that had gotten torpedoed. An occasional gull would be dead in the oil. All kinds of things came ashore. From South Weymouth Naval Air Base blimps patrolled far out to sea looking for subs. I wonder how many whales were reported as subs.

My father not being a drinking man loved Coke-a-Cola. In the late 1940's after the war, my brother and I rigged an intercom between my father's chair in the living room and the playroom in the cellar. Pop read mystery stories day in and day out. To save himself from getting up and going down to the ice box on the lower floor where the Coke's were kept, he'd call down to "Silent Sam" (my brother's nickname) or "Itchy" (my name, from a long-gone bout with poison ivy) and we'd bring one up to him. My mother used it to announce dinner.

My brother Pres, with occasional help from me, converted the playroom to a room you'd find on a ship. There was a view ahead of the ships wheel and in that view (a shadow box) was a scene showing the ocean with a spit of land to Starboard (right) with a flashing lighthouse on it. The light flashed 1-4-3 just like Minot's Light. Pres made it by electrifying a clock face so that the second hand would pass over the raised points of solder and make contact for the light to flash!

The ship's wheel stood on a section of grating that Pres



built.

The pilot house with myself and Pres. You are looking "aft", so the wheel and ocean view are not in sight.

In 1948, my brother had bought a 1928 Rolls-Royce roadster from an estate in Hingham with only 1800 miles on it. He had it serviced at a dealer in Brookline where he saw the first MG sent over from England. I went up to look at it and I was hooked! I traded in my 1947 Chrysler (it was red and people were always running into it) and got what my girl friend called this "ittsy-bitsy" car.



Shown above is my father's (green), my car (red) my brother Pres' Rolls-Royce in driveway and a friend's Packard phaeton.  
(Early Spring 1948)



My 1948 MG-Tc shown at Linden, NJ airport where the first post-war Gran Prix was held. On the folded windshield are the trophies I won that day - second overall and first in class. This car would evolve through many paint jobs.

When my folks died in 1950 - mother 9/1/50 (lung cancer) and father 10/15/50 (missed his wife and faded away), none of us could afford to keep the house. My brother was single as I was and my sister had her own house in Cohasset. We sold the house the following year. I got married and moved to JP (Jamaica Plain, a part of Boston) until I found land and a barn in Scituate. My brother opened a foreign-car business in North Scituate and lived upstairs in an apartment over his garage.

Our house would eventually be so badly damaged by the Blizzard of 1978 that it had to be torn down. A similar house was rebuilt on the lot. My friend George Wattemdorf, whose summer house was the one to the right in the first photo, lost most of it to a fire (1963?) that began in the house north (right) of his. As I was temporarily unemployed, I designed his new house in ten furious days. He liked the circular stairway in my barn; so I designed a two-story one for his new house. The iron works place in Dorchester had not done a circular stairway in many years and

he and I had a great time working out the design. George's wife wanted a "cage" around it; so her young children wouldn't fall down stairs. The cage became a holder of potted plants.



After the fire. The first house to burn is in the foreground with George's house beyond. Our house was saved by a curtain of water set up by the fire fighters. Still, in places, the paint on our house blistered.

When I came to see my old house after the blizzard, I didn't have the heart to take a photograph. Seeing it with both the front and side sun porches gone, it looked like a doll house where one side had no walls. I was so sad.

I miss living close to the ocean. Yet, on stormy nights when the wind is Nor'east, I can hear the surf very plainly. I don't miss the expense of upkeep or taxes on such a house. My present house is named "Gray's Galley" after our house on Surfside and my wife Amanda's good cooking. It is safe from the highest of tides. During the '78 Blizzard's highest tides, the water was still eight vertical feet from the lowest part of my house.

Hope you enjoyed the trip back.

Love, Neal

*September 28, 2008*

## What's In a Car?

Dear Angel and Friend:

Yes, what's in a car? If you live X-number of miles from work and **drive** to and from that job, you spend a big part of your life in a car. I have over a million miles on Route 128\* alone. 200,000 of those in just **one** car. My P1800 Volvo coupe. I sold it after 260,000 miles and it was running great, but I didn't want to restore the body again; I had already done that twice.

\* Route 128 in the Boston, MA area is a circumferential highway around the city and many high-tech companies are located on or near this road.

But, to get back to the subject. I thought after my success with the "Winter on Surfside Road story, I write about some of my cars. When you've lived this long, you've sat in a lot of cars. So how to begin? Well, I thought for the fun of it I'd list each car in the order that I owned it. Phooey! I got lost in the middle between a Toyota and a Subaru somewhere in the 1980's or 90's.

Well, I'll do one or two cars at a time and ask my car dealer what the lost cars were. I have found a good used car dealer to do business with and he'll know.

First though, in 1940 I got my first car for my 16th birthday! A Chrysler Highlander with Tartan upholstery and I bought a horn that played "The Campbells are Coming" The playboy started young.

I had one problem, I didn't know how to drive. Driving schools were almost non-existent. We finally found one and I was able to take some lessons. The instructor said since I was so young and had such a fancy car, I'd better take the driving test in his mundane car. Also, he said I should really study the book the registry gave so I'd know the rules of the road. I got worried I wouldn't pass and be stuck with a car and no license; so I memorized the whole book. When the registry officer asked me the first question I replied; "The answer is on Page 24 and reads....." After the second question he said; "You memorized the whole book?" I said; "Yes." He said; "You have passed the test."

A week later, I got pinched on the Worcester Turnpike doing 35 in a 25 zone. Live and learn.

Outside of being very popular at school with this car one or two other events of note should be given. In the fall of 1941, I became head cheerleader for Brookline High School. All the other cheerleaders had graduated. I became the head by default as it were. I had no cheerleaders to lead. So the school advertised that there would be a training session of one week and after that ten cheerleaders would be chosen - nine to spell out B R O O K L I N E on their jerseys and one alternate. Fortunately, two ex-cheerleaders had come back to take post-graduate courses and they helped with the judging. There were 100 applicants! The post-grad kids and I trained them for that week after school and we chose ten - all were girls. Our previous cheerleading squad had several boys on it including me. The school was a little worried about this as a girl had gotten hit with a bottle a few years back and they had gone to all men. But they went with what we'd chosen.

So how did this relate to the 1940 Chrysler? Wes Baker, the football team Captain and a good friend, would announce when the Chrysler arrived at a game; "Here's Neal with his harem!" The playboy started young.

My 10-gauge saluting cannon arrived some time in this period. At a Thanksgiving game with Newton when Brookline got its first touchdown, the cannon was fired. A fairly nice police officer

asked that I not fire it again. I thought since he was so polite and didn't confiscate the cannon that I would not fire it again.

The other big event was that the United States (War) Bond Committee decided to have a big US Bond Drive in Boston and a show at the Boston Garden in the summer of 1942. They advertised in the paper for people with late-model convertibles to enter their name, and if chosen, would drive in a parade through the city. Each car would carry a Hollywood star sitting up on the top of the back seat.

I didn't read this, but one of my high school friends did. He entered my name. I got chosen to drive the SECOND car. My father was not happy. We were not a public sort of family he said. He relented and I drove. My friend insisted on going as it was he who entered my name, so the committee finally let him ride in my car.

My "star" was Arlene Dahl (sp?) who was 17 or so at the time and only a starlet. Us drivers got to sit on the floor in front of the first row at the show and our cars were parked downstairs under the Garden, I think. After the show we were to take a star (whoever wanted to ride with us) to the South Station to catch their special train. I got down to the car with my friend and he went looking for a star. We got Eleanor Parker (a dancer), her maid, her mother, her piano player, her dog and at the exit of the garage, a soldier! Seven! I forget who sat on my friend's lap.

As we exited the garage and got the soldier in, he said; "You have to stay with the soldier on the motorcycle as he knows the way!" Yes, in front of me was a soldier on a motorcycle - rarin' to go!

In those days, Boston had many streets that were still cobblestones. I'll never forget that high-speed ride as long as I live. Nor will the people in the car. Even though it was late, I don't know how the motorcycle guy got us there, but he did. I let everyone out of the car at South Station, went to leave and my friend was gone! Went across the street to a gas station (yes, a gas station across the street from South Station!) got the owner's OK to stay a few minutes and went in search of my friend. He was out on the special train platform begging autographs. On the way back to the car he was elated; "I got a button off of Gary Cooper's coat!"

I decided our friendship had gone far enough.

So there's the first car in my life.

Love, Neal

***September 29, 2008***

**A Fire-Engine Red 1947 Chrysler and a 1948 MG-TC, Part 1**

Dear Angel and Friend:

Well, actually it was called Sumac Red. Perhaps a better name would have been Bullfighter's Cape Red.

Everybody charged into it. I had 20 accident in 18 months.

In 10 of those, I wasn't in the car. In five of the remaining 10, I was in the car, but it wasn't moving.

In the last 5 accidents, 3 were my fault and they all happened in the same snowy morning when I hit the same car ahead of me 3 times and did not manage to damage his car. However, each time I did take out a piece of **my** grill.

In the 2 where my car was moving and I was in it, one was being broad-sided at an intersection at night by a drunk who didn't have his lights on and didn't stop for the stop sign. In the other, I was pulling out of a gas station when a car backed out of the repair bay and broad-sided the other side. The body shop was sorry to have me trade in that car.

And here it is:



It was about this time that my brother Pres got his Rolls-Royce and told me about the MG-TC

Now the MG-TC was a phenomenal car. It was right-hand drive (steering wheel on the right side). It was half the size of the Chrysler, but a lot more fun. We (those of us who bought them) would wave to each other as we passed and often would stop and talk about the car after introducing ourselves. I made several life-long friends that way.

The photo below is another from the same day as the one in my story about my house on Surfside. My wife-to-be, Amanda, is sitting in the passenger seat. It is one of the earliest photos I have of the car. The windshield folded down to give you the breeze, but it was a good idea to wear goggles so an insect wouldn't hit you in the eye. Later I bought Brooklands Racing Screens which were small individual windshields that were used during a race (the regular windshield could slow you down as it took so much space). We later taped the headlights to keep stones and dirt from chipping or breaking the glass.



A friend in art school put the black arrow decoration on the side.

Eventually it became just a panel and many MG-TC owners got the same idea and it went national. Ford even copied it for their Sunliner model in 1949 or 50. It also appears (unbeknownst to us) on many early cars.

Ahh, but this car was the only MG-TC equipped with a **cannon!**

As the car was half the size of an American car, many drivers took little notice of me and sometimes would ignore you when you wanted to pass. The little "BEEP" horn had **no** effect on them. My first alternative to that was to install a surplus small boat air horn operated by a air cylinder and stirrup next to the clutch. This gave a blast that other drivers thought was a trailer truck!!! If that didn't work, I'd get almost alongside and fire **the cannon!** That worked, as they thought they had a blowout.

The cannon was installed by a blacksmith in Cohasset who made the necessary brackets. Then it was attached to the frame under the driver's seat firing aft and sighted so the blast hit the road right under the gas tank. This was to avoid any cannon flame igniting gas that might have spilled after refueling. A lanyard ran from the firing lever to a pulley forward of the cannon and then up to a knob on the dash board. The cannon could be reloaded without my having to get out of the car. I could do it at a stop light. Sneaky little devil, wasn't I?

If you have been to the yacht club at sunset, you know how loud a 10-gauge shell can be.

Initially, I also had some leftover 10-gauge shells from USN practice bombs that not only had the black powder, but a couple of inches of magnesium powder. These sent out a flame behind the

car about twenty-five feet. If someone was riding your rear bumper, I'd pull ahead and let 'em have it! **WHAM!** It was wonderful how it gave me the whole road - no one would come near me.

Yes, the cannon was a very special device. At the Watkins Glen (NY) Concours d'Elegance, all the entered cars came out of the show area for a parade down the main street. As I turned onto the street, a friend shouted "Hello" over on the left sidewalk. I reached for the Bermuda bell whose knob was next to the cannon and since I had not looked, pulled the cannon knob. We went in our Emergency Plan A. This was a preselected thing to do in case I fired the cannon at the wrong time.

Remember the car is right-hand drive. I attempted to get out, but a pair of blue trousers and oddly **dusty blue shoes** blocked my way. I politely said; "Excuse me officer", but he appeared to be in shock. I wiggled out of the car somehow and continued with Plan A. I went around to the left side of the car and opened that side of the engine hood. I looked in intently as possible because the crown on the sidewalk was laughing and yelling; "You did that on purpose!" Well, I fiddled and diddled a bit, shook my head and went back to get in the car. The state trooper with the **dusty blue shoes** was still in shock, so I squeezed by him, got in and drove off.

That was not the last laugh of the event. The fellow I was waving at was standing next to a pair of MG mechanics from England and one exclaimed; "**By Jove,...I've never heard an MG do that before!**"

To be continued.

Love, Neal

***October 3, 2008***

**Continued...**

Dear Angel and Friend:

The episode in Watkins Glen, NY that I reported earlier, preceded the MG-TC winning of Fourth Place Overall in the Concours d'Elegance. My wife and I wore matching Black Stewart Glen Gary hats, she had a kilt and I had a shirt in the same tartan. Of course, the car had the tonneau cover in the same tartan. I think I've previously reported how we received our awards. We were on the highway returning home from the event when one *THE* duPonts caught up with us in his antique Alfa-Romeo to give us our awards. My brother Pres' Rolls-Royce won Second Overall.

The first thirty days I owned the MG-TC, it rained at least once during the day. I think God wanted me to get experience in putting the top up and down. I did.

As you saw last night the car came in a pale yellow with red leather upholstery, but it was like every one else's yellow MG-TC. But, of more interest than that, your ignition key would fit in any other yellow MG-TC. If you had a red MG-TC, your ignition key would fit any other red MG-TC; and so on. We had a lot of fun moving other people's cars with that knowledge.

So, my brother and I painted mine.



From silver wire wheels to white wire wheels, red under the fenders and red brake drums, the body black with the white panel.

Here we are on a rally being checked in at a control. Two locals are looking on. Photo was taken by a news reporter. Note our matching hats and extreme cold weather gear\*. My wife Amanda has wolf-skin mittens on. The four little squares forward of the windshield on the hood are hand-painted signal flags that spell "Gray"

\* In rallies in those days, you received extra points if you ran the rally with the top (in England, it is "hood") down. Most sports cars in those days were convertibles or roadsters.



Later it would acquire a Black Stewart tonneau cover (a cover over the cockpit when the top was down). Even went really nuts with a tartan dash, a custom speedometer ("Made for Excalibur") (Brooks Stevens stole the name for his custom cars) and "horror of horrors" a white steering wheel. I even had a song about the car:

"Excalibur, thy bright blade gleaming,  
As bright as sunbeam seeming;  
Sword of King Arthur's fame,  
Now is this MG's name.  
Hurrah, Hurrah, Hurrah!"

(Sorry, Photo did not show in original)

That brown thing down under the dash is the heater. Note also that the windshield wiper motor is in front of the passenger (the windshield is folded down in this photo) and very dangerous in case of a quick stop. Later models moved it to the center. I installed the rear view mirror you see to the right as the other rear view mirrors were out on the front fenders! I also removed the front fender mirrors.

Well to get on with the exploits of the cannon:

The cannon was installed before I went to the Gran Prix in NJ where the car was still yellow (last night's photo). On one lap of the **fifty**-lap race, I thought I'd salute my pit crew who wildly waving me on. Yet, occasionally sleeping on the side lines as we kept going round and round and never

even stopped. So as I came by the start/finish line I fired the cannon. **BARROOM!** The gang said the chief flag-man, who just happened to be beside the car as I went by, went at least four feet straight up!

On the way back from this race, we took the Wilbur Cross Parkway as it was the only "super" highway in those days. I-XX highways hadn't been built. Even the tunnel in New Haven (West Haven?) didn't exist. Along the way on the Wilbur Cross, there is an overpass that carried a four-lane road. It made a great sound for the cannon. I went to the back of the pack as we approached the bridge (there were four or five MG-TC's and my brother traveling together; he in his Rolls-Royce as leader), not wanting to blow gravel at them when the cannon went off. I looked in the rear-view mirror and no one was in sight, then pulled the lanyard at the proper instant under the bridge. I wish we had portable tape recorders in those days. You'd have thought the battleship Missouri had fired a gun.

Other notable firings:

The cannon was fired outside my place of work one morning and residents in double-decker houses across the street came running out (some in their nightgowns) thinking the boiler had blown up.

Fired the cannon in the Sumner Tunnel (it was two-way in those days - one lane north and one lane south) coming back from time trials in Maine.

Fired it during a parade of old cars and sport cars in Winchendon, MA when my brother delivered the Kissel to its owner. As the sound proceeded down the street, you could see a "wave effect" as people jumped when they heard the sound.

It was fired in downtown Boston on Commonwealth Ave. one Sunday afternoon during an impromptu run (eight cars) from Lime Street up Comm. Ave. to Hereford St., back down Comm. Ave, and around the Public Garden and back to Lime Street. We actually didn't go fast. It was sort of a soiree in force.

Let's see, one other event of note was coming up the long, **long** hill out of Wilkes-Barre, PA, I had to use it to clear the path for 10-15 sports cars who were stuck behind a slow-poke.

Yes, the cannon had many hilarious moments.

In summer at the yacht club, the kids call on me to do a Tarzan Yell. In my days with the TC, it was; "Fire the cannon!" But I always had to look around to be sure it would be safe to do so.

The MG-TC eventually went through another paint job and had its running boards removed. We called it "bat-winged".

(Photo did not show in original)

Note now it has a custom dash board with 23 coats of varnish/lacquer, and Stewart-Warner instruments and red wire wheels. Steering wheel is once again black. The over-riders on the rear bumper were a necessity as most car bumpers were higher than the MG. The windshield has been removed and Brooklands racing screens are in place. The radiator and gas tank caps were quick release racing style. I can't remember if we could carry the windshield in the luggage space behind the seats, because we sure as heck couldn't put the top up without the windshield. For races, I had snap-on wire grills to put over the headlights.

Note: Dave Coffin's number plate on the left G R R R.

Purists who read this (in these days of restoration to original condition) will probably rise up in revolt. However, you purists will be interested to know I still have the original Owner's Certificate with the car's Serial Number on it. Around 1952, I sold it to Russ Sceli (a dealer) in Hartford, CT

I really miss that car and note they go for big bucks these days. As most body pieces are backed with wood frames !!!, restoration is costly. Love,

Love, Neal

## More Cars

**October 3, 2008**

Dear Angel and Friend:

You remember about Amelia Earhart's car that my brother and I restored? Well, I've found the photos showing the outside rumble seat:

First photo the seat is closed. In the second photo it is open: An exciting place to sit!!!



Next, another wave hitting the extended wall at my neighbor's:



**And you want a car with muscle?** Here's my brother in his J2X Allard lined up for the start of a race at the Beverly Nationals at Beverly, MA in what??? 1953 or thereabouts. I did not race, but was on the Safety Committee and got to drive the very first Volvo's that came to the US. They were kind of ugly, but had very strong engines. This is half of a stereo photo.



Will try to continue the automobile series in a few days.

Love, Neal

*October 14, 2008*  
**The Continuing Story of my Automobiles**

We had sold the family's beach house (February 1951) as my parents died six weeks apart between Sept 1st (my mother) and Oct 15th (my father) in 1950. By then, I had a REAL job and had gotten Amanda's father's OK to marry his daughter.

I married Amanda in March, 1951 and bought a new MG-TD. I kept the TC just for racing.

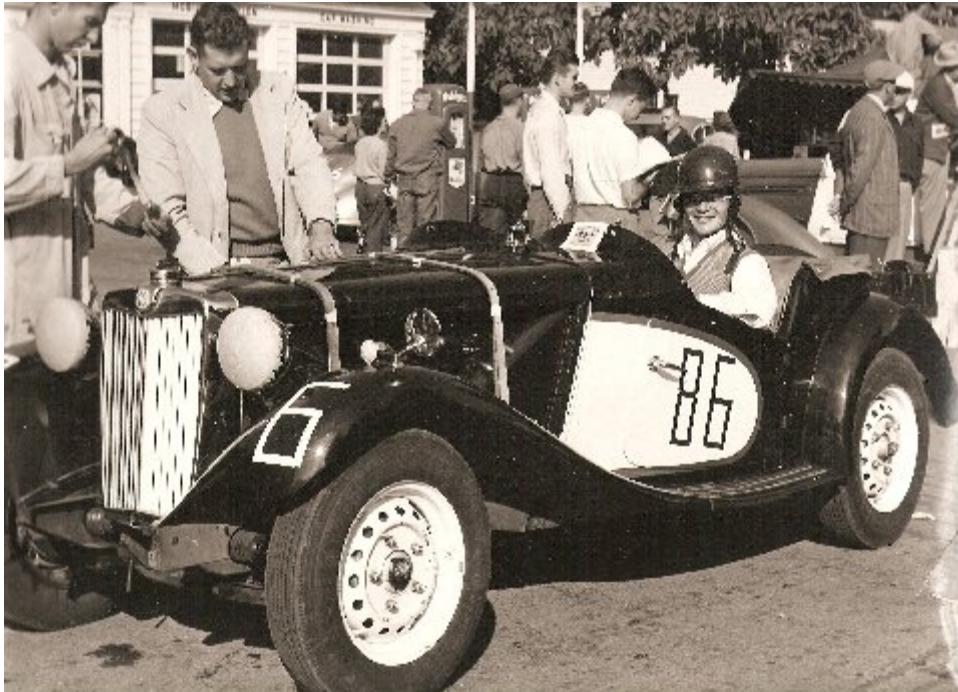
At the wedding reception there was a nice garage in part of the restaurant and someone spilled the beans to my attendants as to the car's location. It had gravel in the hub caps and sounded like Santa's sleigh when I left the reception. Plus, it had the usual tin cans tied on the back with the "Just Married" sign on the rear bumper (I found those when I stopped up the road to remove the gravel) and cat prints made with face powder all over the car!



Well, I got the windshield clear of cat prints, cans and sign off the back and the gravel out of the hub caps, but it still sounded like Santa's sleigh. There were bells somewhere! We didn't need the radio, we were making our own music! Later, after I got back from our honeymoon in Canada, I put the car up on the lift and found **three dozen round jingle bells** fastened all over the underside of the car.

Plus, I had the car painted dark blue with a white panel.

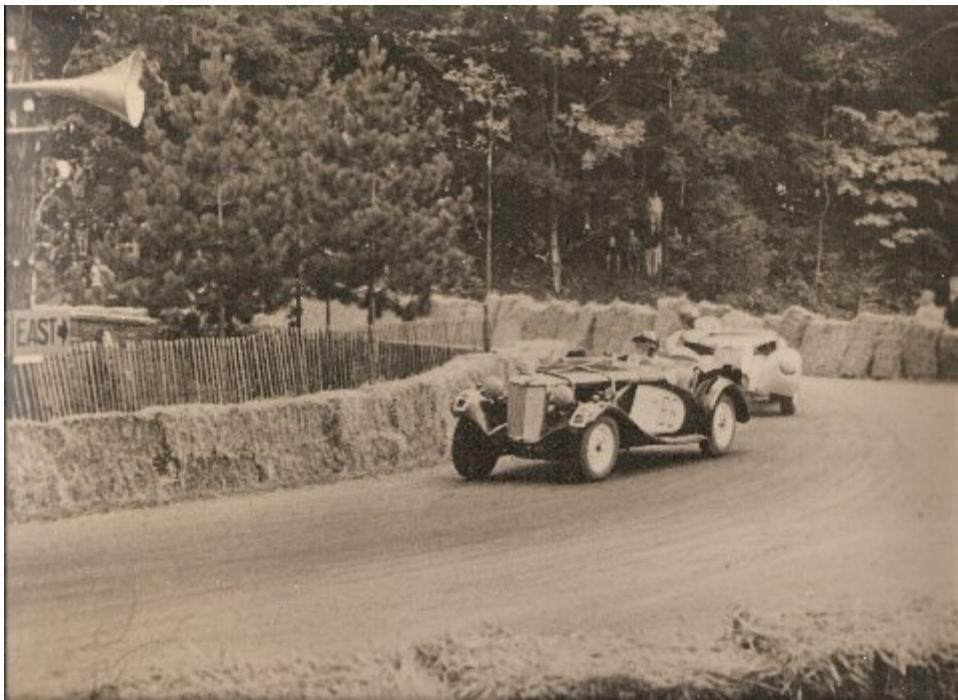
A year later, I raced this car in the 1952 Gran Prix of the US in Watkins Glen, NY. I had to enter the Unrestricted Class race as the Stock MG Class was full. In this category, you can modify the engine and the body as long as you didn't go outside the rules set up by the committee. To save weight and thus make the car go faster, we took off the sides of the hood, windshield, floor mats, top, fan, muffler, bumpers, front and rear pans (behind the bumpers), hub caps, false sides of the gas tank, and a wooden piece in the storage area. There may have been more that I don't remember.



There were three practice laps. On a sweeping right curve coming down the hill back onto the main street, I'd start into the curve hugging the right edge of the road, but would end up almost off the road on the left.

I tried different tire pressures and different speeds - same problem. Well, I said to myself; "I'll just have to pray." Shell gasoline gave us special gasoline (if we wanted it and who didn't) for the race. It smelled odd, but what the heck, it was free. One of my crew re-adjusted the carbs for this gas and the car ran fine.

On my worrisome curve, during the race, I happened to glance at the speedometer as most of my attention was the tachometer so I didn't over-rev. the engine. For some reason the speedometer read **100 miles an hour!** MG-TD's top speed was 79 miles an hour, but then I had taken all the gear off and had this funny smelling gas. **WHEEEOOOO!!!!** On the straightaways I must have been close to 125. I got a little scare and decided not to look at the speedometer any more. Here I am during the race, having just crossed Stone Bridge and driving on dirt. The car behind appears to be in a larger class and is waiting for a chance to pass me.



At one point, turning right off the main street to go back out into the country again (the course was 8.6 miles around) the car ahead of me spun out. I had to force a spin so I wouldn't run into him. His car stalled so I was able to slowly pass him on one side.

Before coming to my worry-curve and still out in the country, there's a good, slightly down-hill straight section, but in the middle there was a railroad crossing (they stopped the trains while the race was on - **yes!**, you think I'm kidding?). The crossing itself was flat, but with the road sloping down-hill, the car became airborne after crossing the tracks. You had to cross the tracks **exactly** straight; 'cause if you were crooked, the car would land uneven and it usually left the road and you found yourself rolling over and over in the soft earth of freshly plowed field! I saw it happen right in front of me during a practice run.

After that and to slow cars down as you approached the tracks, they put hay bales in a zig-zag pattern (called a "chicane") and then hopefully you'd make it across the tracks.

At the end of my worry curve, there was a short straight and then a sharp left and 100 feet further a sharp right that put you onto the main street. If you had any doubts about making the sharp left, there was an escape road that you could go in, come to a stop, back out and continue the race. In a previous race, famous sports car driver, Miles Collier had this feeling, but decided to take the **stairway** that was part of the sidewalk instead of the escape road. That must have shook his molars loose!

In my race, I won third place in my class.

I'll have to look back and see if I can find the story about one place we stayed one year. It was an old Victorian mansion named Magee's Manor. Mr. Magee was afraid of fire and had a special fire escape like a enclosed circular children's slide. A bridge went out from the second and third stories. You pushed open the door and slid down feet first. The marble bathtubs were three feet deep and you had to have a step stool to get into them. Mice loved the place. I put some kind of bowls (might have used my hub caps) on the bottom of each bed leg filled with water to keep the mice from coming into the bed.

My racing days were on the wane as married life gives one a different take on life. I had already rolled the MG-TC in a race practice in Laconia, NH and didn't want leave Amanda as a widow. Besides racing was expensive unless you had a sponsor who paid your expenses. Sports Car Club of America was supposedly "amateur" but a lot of big names were getting into it and "times they were a-changin'."

In 1953, my friends Dot (grammar school chum) and Fred White wanted to buy the 1951 MG. So I sold to them and bought a 1953 MG-TD. My brother Pres had opened a sports car repair garage and dealership, so I was buying cars fairly cheap.

To be continued.

Love, Neal

*November 10, 2008i*

## **My Apartment When I Was First Married**

Dear Angel and Friend:

When Amanda and I set a wedding date we started to look for a place to live. No moving in with her folks and my folk's house had been sold.

We researched apartments in Scituate. There weren't any! All of the ones over stores were occupied and there were no apartment *buildings* as such in Scituate. We looked at a place in a person's home. It was in the cellar and had a dirt floor! It also felt quite damp in there. Headroom was about 5 feet. Thumbs **down** on that one.

I asked my friend George Wattendorf, who owned a lot of houses in Dorchester and Jamaica Plain if he had anything available. Yes, there was one in Jamaica Plain that had just become empty. It was in an old mansion and we'd have part of the second floor and a private entrance. Yippee!

I had worked at this house before I got my REAL job (I had done maintenance work for George). At this house, the water pipe from the street had to be replaced and due to its location, the hole had to be hand dug - 100 feet long. It was six feet down!!! The old pipe was lead!

The place needed a lot of TLC. The newspapers under the linoleum in the kitchen were dated 1927! The ceilings were ten and a half feet high. The walls still had working gas fixtures in each room (these were for lighting in the old days before electricity). The living room and bedroom had white marble fireplaces and grates for burning coal.

Remember when I mentioned the old water pipe? It was probably what killed the former occupant - lead poisoning! Now we had a new pipe and I was not worried.

Besides the bedroom and living room, there was the kitchen and a den which could double as a dining room. Storage was available on the back stair landing and in my downstairs hall. Painting and wall-papering were done by myself and Amanda. The rent: \$27.00 a month!!! Later it went up to \$32.00 a month. Because I did all my own work on the place, I got a low rent. One wall of the living room abutted another apartment and because we'd have noisy friends come over I put white sound absorbing tiles on that wall. The other three walls we did navy blue - looked great with the white marble fireplace.



The sword on the left (above the fireplace) is my grandfather's Knight Templar sword.

When we moved in, I had a humongous load of old 78 RPM records that I no longer wanted. My friend Charlie Dean took a lot of the swing records, but I still had two heavy stacks of 78's. They were too heavy to carry downstairs to the trash. So I moved a trash barrel at the walk-out cellar level to the right position under the window closest to these piles. At the exact moment I dropped the first stack of records, Miss Ball who lived down stairs, opened her window (directly below mine) to let her cat out. I think the records passed a very startled cat as there was a shriek (not sure whether it was Miss Ball or the cat). Anyway I misjudged the barrel's position by a matter of a couple of inches and the stack hit the edge of the galvanized barrel.

To get any idea of how much **NOISE** this kind of thing generates I can only estimate. It sounded like New Year's in Times Square, NY. Afterwards, there was a sustained absolute moment of quiet. Then a whisper that said; "M-M-M-Mr Gr-Gr-Gray, wa-wa-was that you?" I answered as politely and apologetically as possible; "Yes, Miss Ball, and another bunch is coming. Out went the cat, SLAM! went her window, and things did not improve for the rest of our three years there. She liked to go to bed at 8:30 PM - I did not. The cops would come every time I had a party if it went past the "complaining time" which in JP was 10:00 PM. You couldn't complain about the noise a neighbor was making until 10:00 PM. Besides my low number plate on my car, two of my friends also had low number plates. Whenever the police came to the house to inform me of a noise complaint, they were always very polite as they probably thought we were all big-wig politicians in Boston.

I did redeem myself one night when a drunk tried to break in to Miss Ball's apartment and I chased him away with a loaded and firing (in the air) shotgun. I believe my shouted words were: "Don't worry Miss Ball, I'll get him with my shot gun!" As I came out my private entrance and

headed for the main entrance, this guy came flying out and I got off a couple of blasts which had an instant effect on his speed of departure.

Well, of course, the cops came and we had to make out a report, but Miss Ball and others in the apartment were very thankful for my assistance.

My folks had left me a piano which Amanda played quite well. During our JP stay, we received a player piano from someone who wanted to get rid of it and I thought I could restore it. After looking into it I just let it sit in the downstairs hall, as it was way more than I could handle in my current busy life.

On our last night before leaving JP, we had a big party. The **big** cast-brass ship's bell I bought at the end of WWII (with one of my discharge checks that Massachusetts gave all her veterans) was rung many times that evening and someone unplugged the phone so Miss Ball's complaints went unheard. Both pianos got played that night. The cops arrived right on schedule (10:01 PM) and when they found that I was leaving the apartment the next day, they even stayed a while (to be sure we quieted down). I seem to remember they also accepted nourishment of one form or another. It was a lovely night.

Amanda's friend from where she worked, Pat Popp, was moving in after we left

We had many good times there, but living away from Scituate was not my idea of a home.

Cars came and went a couple of times in those three years. I sold my 1951 MG-TD to Dot White in Scituate (more about them later) and bought a 1953 MG-TD. I kept the MG-TC for a while for racing. As Amanda didn't drive, it was kind of ridiculous to have two cars at once; so I eventually sold the TC.

Then a friend in Scituate got an Austin-Healey A-100. **ZOWEE!** I said to him that if he didn't like it, I'll buy it from you. Turns out, he didn't like it and I bought it from him and sold the 1953 MG-TD.

The Austin-Healey was **RED**. You know what I've told you about me and **RED** cars, right? About a week or so later, it snowed the first time that year. I was cautiously driving on a part of The Jamaica Way when I saw a car to my left was **sliding** downhill towards the intersection ahead of me. I was doing maybe 20 and pressed the brake repeatedly and came to a gentle stop.

No so, the man behind me. He hit me doing about 20 or so. It broke my seat loose from the floor and my head went back and **dented** the aluminum behind the seat. I was knocked out for about 30-40 seconds and awoke to people saying; "How do you get in?" "How do you get in?" "**How do you get in?**" (The latch was inside the side curtain flap.). They were about to pry it open when I decided I better open it for them.

The man who hit me in his new Cadillac kept saying; "I don't know why I didn't stop, I have power brakes."

(A long Bronx cheer can be used here.)

I had whiplash for a long time after that. My Austin-Healey was repaired and painted yellow (more on that later).

One last little note on the JP apartment. There was a lovely decorated lavatory sink in a corner of the cellar. I asked George (my landlord) if he wanted it and he said; "No, take it." **Fifty-four years later**, I had it installed in my new first-floor bathroom.





In 2007 I found it was made in England by sink-makers to the King!!! And worth about 600 bucks!

There's an overlap in my story between getting into our remodeled barn in Scituate and still living in JP.

So that is continued in the next e-mail.

Love, Neal

*November 11, 2008*

## **My Ex-Firehouse, Blacksmith Shop, Clothes Cleaning Place, and Summer House**

Dear Angel and Friend:

As I mentioned in my last e-mail of my married life, Amanda and myself wanted to find something in Scituate for a more permanent home.

About this time, my mother-in-law or my wife (I was never able to determine which), suggested we restore a barn - it was sort of "in fashion" thing to do at the time. We started looking at barns/buildings. There were some real dogs that people tried to sell us, but then we heard about an old firehouse that was up for sale and had to be moved. We found that this firehouse had been built as a barn in Norwell (also called South Scituate in the early days). It was hauled by oxen over the roads to the corner of Country Way and First Parish Road where we looked at it. Several occupants had business in it during its life in Scituate besides being a firehouse. It was a blacksmith's shop, a dry cleaning business and a summer home as well. But its "claim to fame" was as Scituate's No. 5 Firehouse. These guys were famous for coming to a fire totally drunk and fighting with the other fire companies on the scene for the "right" to put out the fire. They never lost a foundation. The foregoing was told to me by a resident who is now deceased and I claim no responsibility for its accuracy.



1951 MG-TD in photo. Following photos are taken from the same angle except the two early construction ones.

Now I needed some land to put it on.

I'd always admired the views on Border St. and remembered that Mrs. Ormo owned a many acres of land there. She was Hugo Ormo's widow (Hugo's Lighthouse Restaurant on Cohasset Harbor in addition to Hugo's on Border St.). I asked her if she'd sell me a piece and she said she had never thought much about it, but would ask her lawyer to see what it was worth. I got two prices - one for the island on the marsh and one for upland. Now the island would have been glorious, but clearing snow from a 700-foot driveway was not in my power or pocketbook, so we took the upland piece for \$2,000. You can't imagine what the town now thinks it is worth.

Neal and Amanda's big acre!

We engaged a mover and also asked him to put in the foundation. All went well until I looked at it. He'd taken the top soil off and put big rocks in. Building code said "below frost level." I said he'd have to go lower. He went down a maximum of 20 inches and rocks went back in and he said he was going to pour some cement the next day. Friend George came to the rescue and got a court order to stop any work by this guy..

The judge took the case into his chamber. He said; "Percy (my mover and contractor), how many times have you moved a building without a permit?" Percy hemmed and hawed - then the judge said; "Why are you trying to cheat these young folks? You know the building codes. Do it right or I'll hold you in contempt." So we got our cement block footings down 36" and cement blocks above that - no rocks. We had a lot to learn.



The barn was transported about two and a half miles to my land. To avoid hitting the many wires across the road, the roof was removed in two pieces. You can see one half of the roof on the left on the ground with roof brackets on it as I removed the old shingles. The roof didn't get back on for a couple of weeks and rain water collected in the plasterboard ceilings of the first floor. When we took those down later we took a bath! Also, behind the garage door in the first photo we found a two-inch thick cement slab that we broke out with sledgehammers to get down to the original floor which was a full two inches thick.

We did a lot of do-it-yourself work on our barn and it included buying our water pipe from Sears - all 300 feet of it. It was 1 and 1/8th inch in diameter and we saved delivery charges by bringing it to our lot on the MG. It was heavy and had shifted back a little by the time we got to our land. Thus, the front wheels lifted off the ground when we got out of the car in Scituate.

In the photo, Amanda is **actually** holding the front down



I bought a whole load of re-used lumber from a place in Rhode Island. This lumber came barracks that had been at Quantum Navel Air Station in Quincy. It was seasoned and nail-free. I wish I'd bought two loads.

This wood lasted until we had the second floor of the addition in place, but no walls. Then I bought wood from a friend of Amanda's family who managed a lumber company in Neponset. He gave us a cut on the price which helped us, the struggling building neophytes

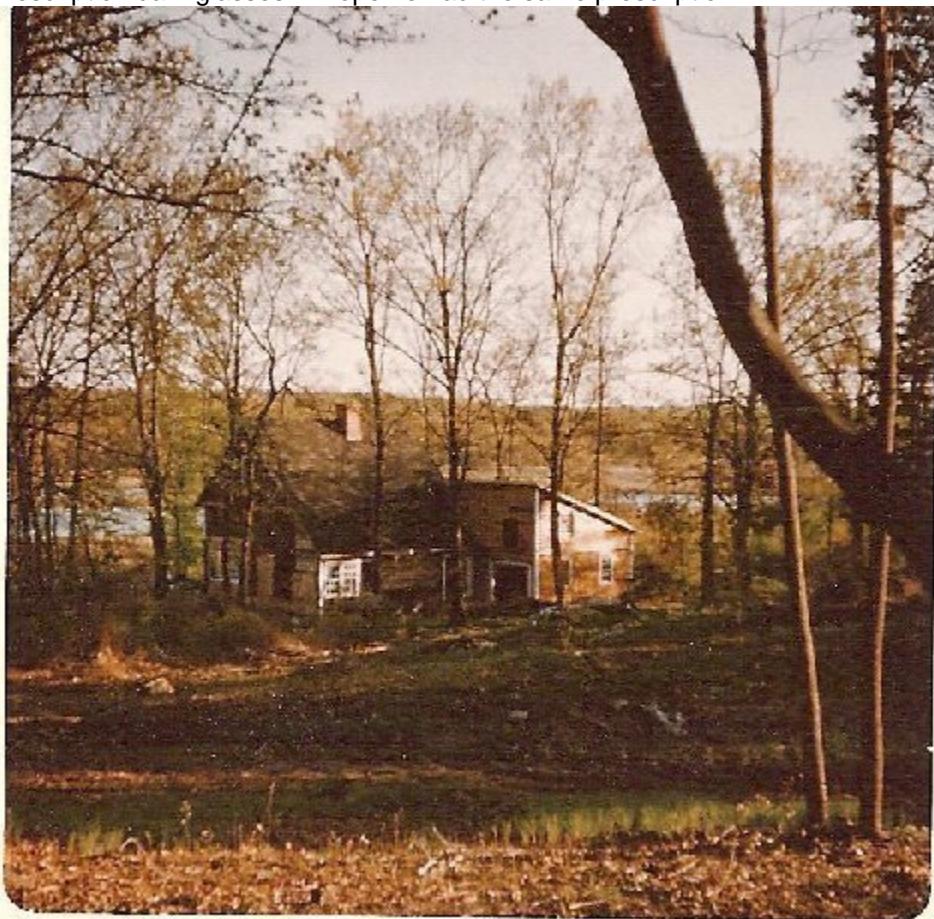
We had friends come to help in the conversion and gave them one beer per hour as pay. Many brought their own beer and some details such as window installation ended up weird. There was a group of three double-hung windows joined together on the front and they were tilted three inches from left to right. We fixed that.



On the left you can see we extended the roof to make the barn into a saltbox style. This was the day I found an empty whiskey bottle in behind a beam. It could only have gotten there during construction. My friend Charlie Deane's father was an old bottle collector and we were able to date the age of the barn from this bottle - 1850. Also, the beams in the barn bore axe-cut Roman numerals on them that denoted their original length (also a common practice at the time).

While we converted our barn, we often stayed with Fred & Dot White (Dot bought my '51 MG) on Saturday nights on their sofa bed in the living room. They had a bloodhound named Beauregard who would awaken you with a big lick on your face. After a couple of those, we were able to close the living room door. One Sunday morning I awoke to ripping noises, I looked around the living room - all was OK, On looking out the window, however, there was Beauregard ripping the top off my MG!!! He evidently did not like the smell of the cat repellent I had put on the top to keep Miss Ball's cat from sleeping on it.

Well, Fred was very upset, but my insurance covered it. Also in that time frame, someone attempted to rob stuff from the MG while it was parked in our driveway in JP. All they got was my prescription dark glasses. I hope he had the same prescription.



Roof and new roof shingles are on and wall shingling and window installation is being done.

Note in the foreground there are no trees. Mrs. Ormo had a woodsman who kept her land free of briars and underbrush. He said he found several Indian graves here and there on her property. Later we would find evidence of earlier inhabitants - the Vikings!!! (More on the Vikings later.) At the time, however, I was too busy building and eventually briars and trees blocked the view of the road. That was fine as we had our view of the marsh.



Shingling is done and it looks like we're painting the windows. Concrete for the front step has not been poured yet. The trees in the foreground (two on the right and one in the center) are now gone. The one on the left near the corner of the house is now a giant as are several behind the house.

We bought the land in 1953 and moved in the early summer of 1956. The heat didn't get installed until late September and as it was a cold September, pregnant Amanda stayed a couple of weeks with her folks. I slept in the living room with the fireplace going and the foot of the bed as close as I dared to the fireplace.

I always wanted a circular iron stairway and I found one at Duane's Steel Yard in Quincy (Duane's is now long gone). I found a hand rail in a different location in the yard, but no stanchions (balusters?) I made them out of iron rod that I had threaded on one end and bent and drilled on the top to screw on the hand rail.

Amanda was due in March of 1957 and a few weeks before that, the stairway had not been put in place. We had a visit from Amanda's parents and their family friend, Bob Pratt. My mother-in-law, noting the stairway was not in place asked how Amanda would get the baby up to the bathroom to wash her. It was our intention to use the living room as the nursery for the first few weeks as the heating system worked best in that room.

For the fun of it I rigged a picnic basket and a block and tackle to one side of the ladder we were using at the time to get upstairs. I told my mother-in-law that Amanda would put the baby in the picnic basket and hoist it upstairs, tie off the rope and then go up the ladder to carry the baby into the bathroom. It was the only time I ever got my mother-in-law angry! Did she ever!!!

The stairway was installed the next week.

Each tread weighed 60 pounds and had to be lifted up to the top of the center post and then slid down into position. A concrete block pier under the floor supported this 800+- pounds. The

stairway went through several colors to its now mundane beige and brown. It was fire-engine red, turquoise blue, and black at various times. I eventually cut linoleum pieces to go on the treads as the grooved treads seemed to collect lots of dirt. My daughter, Mimi, loved to slide down the hand rail with one hand in front of her as a brake and the other hand on the center post for balance.

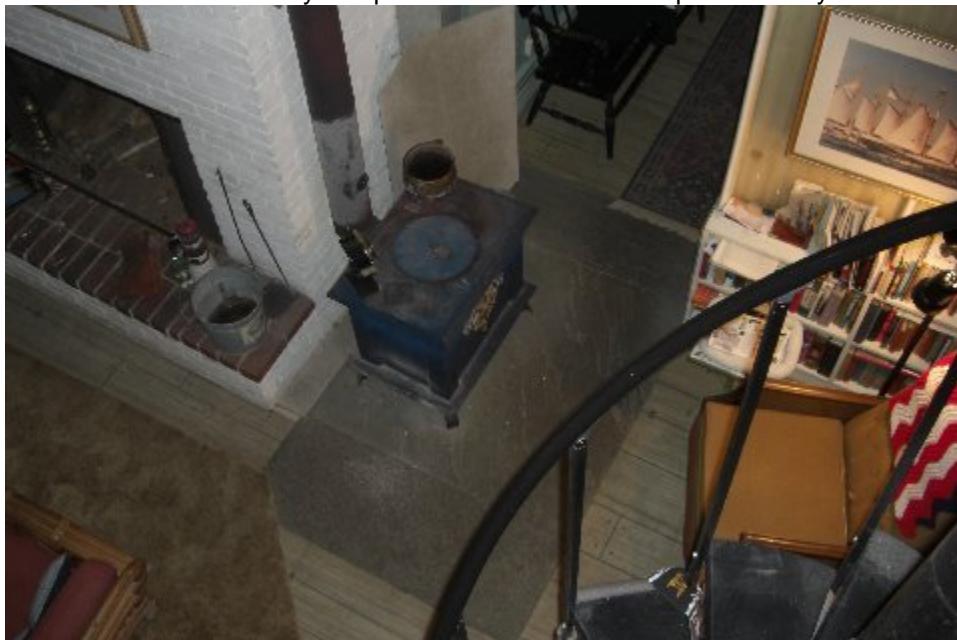


Tucked under the stairway is a rack holding one day's supply of wood for my wood stove. I'm leaning over the stove to take this photo. The wood is about four feet away from the stove. The Great Blue plywood Heron goes out on the deck in the summer and has caused some guests to

freak out when they first look out the kitchen windows: "OMG....Shhhh...Do you know you have a Great Blue Heron on your deck?"

The lamp on the post is one of a pair from a 1908 Cadillac made by my father's company, Gray & Davis. White oval is one of several kayak paddles.

I now have two circular stairways. The newer one goes up to a deck in one corner of my living room. This deck holds my computer mess and more lamps from Gray & Davis.



Looking down from the deck at my wood stove and "favorite" chair. Wood pile is on the other side of the bookcase and divider. Fireplace is to the left. This is the other spiral stairway in this view.



Here I am dozing off watching the dancing of the flames in the fireplace. The rattan chairs are from my family's beach house and must be 80 years old by now.

(Photo not available)

At the front door is the big ship's bell mentioned in my last e-mail. It weighs 56 pounds and people are supposed to ring it instead of as normal door bell.

So after 50 years it is a home in Scituate complete with whirligig!

Love, Neal