In His Own Words and Pictures

A Life Well and Fully Lived
1924-2009
Part II: Neal, Renaissance Man
Photographer/GhostWriter

Compiled from Neal Gray’s Emails, 2009
By Sandra Waddock
May 23, 2006

Two Famous Authors Meet at Front Street Books for a Reunion

Dear Angel and Friend

Last Thursday evening I had the pleasure of seeing my old friend Catherine Goldhammer, author of "Still Life with Chickens" at her book signing at Front Street Book Store in Scituate Harbor. If you are divorced or just like a good story, this book is for you! Another Angel has already read the book and told me it is marvelous.

Catherine and I first met when we both sang tenor in the Milton Gospel Choir and I think she also sang at Gospel Night at the Pops the first year I did. Was it 1995 or 1996? Time flies when you’re having fun.

Love, Neal
May 7, 2006

A Cautious Move into Digital Photography

Dear Angel and Friend:

A cautious move into digital photography. First, part of my blue lawn:

Then, my Red Bud tree just past prime
The Andromeda (?) bush in flower (I know Dave will get me if I'm wrong)

Lunch at Cup 'O the Bay - with a folk song group for free - well almost - we gave them all the change we could scrouge up.
Today - Let's see. Get up, dress, go to church.

At the start of our service, our minister calls the kids up and does a little lesson with them each Sunday. Today it was about the shepherd whose worker didn't watch the sheep and the wolf came and scattered the herd. Each time he said "sheep", the kids were to go "Baaa"; and when he said wolf, they were to sort of scream "Eeeeeeaaahh". When he said the workers name, they were to say "Hmmm". When he said the owners name Dave, they were to say "Yaaay!" (like he was the hero).

Got that all set in your minds?

Well, us, the choir (ever helpful), joined the children with all these noises to make them more at ease and all went well.

However, the first time our minister said "sheep" in his sermon, a chorus of "Baaa" came from the choir. It took a while for us to settle down.

From this auspicious beginning, the day rolled on. Since it was so nice, I thought I'd drive to see Angel Sandra in her little place on the Cape. She hadn't had lunch; so we went to Cup 'O the Bay where we could sit outside and her dog Ella could come with us. Lunch was great along with the folk song group (above) who play there every Sunday.

Ella couldn't quite handle the music coming out of the speaker right near us and the music coming from the group itself. She was like she was watching a ping-pong game.

Suddenly, there was a fire somewhere and the fire horn that alerts the volunteers in town went off! It was like the Queen Mary had just come alongside BLAAAA, BLAAAA, BLAAAA, etc. for the location of the fire and fire trucks came blasting through town not 100 feet away.

Ella was in her Moma's lap in zero seconds, but a few pieces of our roast beef sandwiches quieted her.
After lunch, I started back to Scituate. Knowing Route 3 would be the blahs, I took some old familiar short (read: long) cuts around Great Herring Pond (dirt road), then Route 3-A to the Old Sandwich Road (also dirt) and finally through Plymouth Center on 3-A. Got onto Route 3 for one or two exits then off at Route 14 and over back roads to Scituate.

A snack on my deck was not very pleasant. The remnants of the skunk must be nearby or under the deck. I hesitate to go under the deck as I might come face to back end of the successor skunk. Now what?

Am open to your thoughts. Please note, a flame thrower is NOT an option - too many leaves under there. Is there something like Chanel No. 5 that can kill the skunk smell?

Love; Neal
September 11, 2007
You’re In For It Now—I Can Send You Photographs

Dear Angel and Friends:

New digital camera, new method of sending photos WA-LA - a sample

Kayaks at the yacht club with Scituate Light in background
The yacht club's waterfront garden

Praying Mantis on screen of yacht club office

Love, Neal
December 30, 2008  
Rainbows

Dear Angel and Friend:

An overseas Angel mentioned that very intense rainbows occur in the North part of the county of Nottinghamshire which I Googled, but only found a far-off rainbow. The explanation for such intense rainbows was that the local area was free of air pollution.

Now the one below in Cohasset Harbor, MA (a mile from my house) is about as intense as I ever want to be near. It is almost threatening!

Below is a lovely, politely intense rainbow that almost cost my life was obtained on River Street in Norwell, MA. I stopped the car halfway up on a person's lawn. Take the photo quick as rainbows are not known to hang around very long. Here's what I saw at first.
So I get out and find I have to go into the middle of the road and capture it in three photos. As for almost costing my life, I had to stand in the road and drivers did not appreciate the situation. Once they saw what I saw, they almost ran into each other in trying to get a good look at it.

I must admit, however, that this was three crazy photos and Angle Alice at Bay State Color in Hanover, MA. put them together for me.

Oh, them glorious rainbows! Wish I lived on the Ring of Kerry in Ireland. On my trip there two years ago with my daughter, we saw eight rainbows in one day!!! Unfortunately, I couldn't get the bus to stop every time I saw one.

Love, Neal
January 12, 2009

With nothing to write, a few photos to enlighten your day

Beauty is everywhere; you just have to see it:

Intersection of Route 3-A and Mann Lot Road
Surfside Road (North Scituate Beach)

Orchard on the Gulf River in Cohasset (taken from my kayak)
A beach in Truro on Cape Cod
The "Old Man" in a storm (on Glades Road near the entrance to the Glades)

From Shaw's Supermarket parking lot in Cohasset. Yes, it was!

Love, Neal
January 21, 2009

Today was a glorious day! On top of that, it snowed here in Scituate!

I watched the inauguration and while they were having lunch, I went out and got wood for the stove. The snow was light and made the day more perfect. I'm almost done with one long stack and will move to one that has had a chance to season more.

Saturday I had the colly-wobbles or something and spent the day trying to feel better without much success.

Sunday's storm came in two parts; the first, did not give us much snow as there was some rain that came in the middle. This rain did an odd thing to the earlier snow. I made little holes all over the snow that then froze and made walking very easy. It was almost like a grating board for cheese. The second part of the storm did give us eight inches, but my house is closer to the ocean and I got less than my daughter did.

In talking with my daughter about our days when we used to go sliding on the hill next door, she said we never had a toboggan. Then I remembered it was my neighbor's. I guess I've mentioned that on one or more snow storms, we'd go down my driveway, across my lawn, down into my neighbor's, and if we had enough speed, out onto the marsh. The tall grasses were not there in those days.

Well, hope the rest of the week goes well for you.

We might even get in a Millennium rehearsal this Sunday. Two have been canceled so far.

Before we had a river of ice.
Then came the snow

How it looked at night:

Pleas excuse my getting the storm door in the way.

Love, Neal
April 14, 1009

Dear Angel and Friend:

Here's a photo I took years ago of J-24's racing off Scituate.

There's Lawson's Tower sticking up in the distance. Love, Neal
May 14, 2009

Dear Angel and Friend:

You know I'm not a morning person, but today I did get up early and saw some nice shots:

Taken from the bridge over the lower basin of the Gulf River

Looking at Cohasset Harbor from the other side of the bridge. Now is not the time to be here in a kayak

Love, Neal
December 30, 2007
Dear Angels and Friends:

Mother nature was at her very best today. Well, OK it wasn't 70 degrees, but rain to start, sun, beautiful clouds, a Sun Dog, layers of fog on the North River along with a nice sunset.

That bright spot (with some rainbow colors in it) in the middle is the Sun Dog - olden days warning of an approaching storm. Note the fan clouds. they went all across the sky.
Then the sunset at the haabaa.

The fog rolls in and we see clouds acomin’ in as a preamble for the storm.

I couldn't stop to catch the sunset at the North River as I was on a pickup mission for my boss and doing 50 miles per hour over the bridge headed back to the club.

Once again, it is something I’ll have to hold in my mind as the camera would fail me.

Have a Happy New Year. Do not shovel if you don't have to. It might rain on Tuesday.........

.........or something.

Love, Neal
June 26, 2008
A Nasty Bit Yesterday

Dear Angel and Friend:

Those of you who get The Patriot Ledger (newspaper on the South Shore of Boston) got an excellent photo of this line squall when it was over Hull and Nantasket, MA.

I was in a restaurant in Duxbury, MA when my friends opposite me said; “Oh-oh, that does not look friendly!”

I turned and took this through the window. The bottom two rolls are going faster than the top roll and in a moment they overtook the top one so it was just one roll passing over the restaurant.

I was afraid to step outside for fear I’d end up on a yellow-brick road looking for the Wizard of Oz.

WHEEEEEW!

Love, Neal
June 28, 2008
Tonight’s Photos
Dear Angel and Friend:

Lot's of action in the skies today, but my main job was fixing a leak in the yacht club's front garden (the one facing the haabaa) underground watering system. Have to lie in damp mulch and fit in patching connector. Anyway, got rained on and made a mad dash for the office before the big stuff came - hail and all.

At the end of the day, I had to put a plastic wrap on the seat of my car so as not to transfer the dirt to my upholstery.

Photos of the day/clouds not too impressive.

Thought you'd like to see the "Old Man of the Glades" because at low tide he wears a beard and looks a lot like Abe Lincoln.
Then again, the kayaks brightened up the rainy scene:

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........or something.

Love, Neal
July 30, 2008
Last Weekend

Dear Angel and Friend:

Last weekend I went to Sheffield, MA to hear the Berkshire Choral Festival choir perform Handel's "Solomon." Years ago, I sang with BCF for six years doing two weeks each summer (tenors are always in demand).

This year, I stayed at the Race Brook Lodge where Angel Allegra is in charge of the dining room. Sheffield is always charming, but not the center of town, although there was a big yard sale at one of the churches and I bought an antique candle mold with a couple of dents in it for $12.00 and a reproduction spittoon for $10.00. Both good buys.

Sheffield to me is dirt back roads to wonderful scenic spots and views. When out there I always take in a trip to Umpacheenee Falls named after a Native American chief.

On leaving the falls I continued up hill and there's a house right on the upper part of the falls and the owner was out doing some raking. I stopped to tell him he had the best house in the world. He said he'd been in it for 10 years and did a lot of work on it, yet loved going sleep hearing the running water of the falls. During our conversation I found he had a brother in Scituate! "Small world"

Some dirt roads had suffered from all the rain and were quite difficult to travel on i.e. you had to go real slow and stay away from the edges. I got to an intersection, looked at my detailed map and said "Ahh, here's where I turn right." Wrong. Several/many miles later I found I was in Connecticut. A local who was moving his estate stopped and gave me directions to get me back to Mass. and The Buggy Whip Factory Antique Store.

All went well. I got a little concerned when I came to a small bridge my director hadn't mentioned. A lady was there enjoying the view. I asked her if I was on the right road. She didn't have a clue. In a few moments her husband came over from the house and gave me further directions. People are so friendly and helpful. Also, when I left the antique store I stopped to check my map and a man pulled up and asked if I needed help. I said if I got to Mill Village, I'd be fine. He said; "Follow me." Hot diggity!
Climbed Mt Everett in the car (ends about 200 vertical feet from the top) and looked at the trail No Amp (Dave's daughter) will be coming over in a couple of weeks. Mt. Everett is like 2600+ feet and at the 2026-foot level is a lovely lake:

It is at least a half a mile long - pretty spot.

Went past Bash Bish Falls and Copake Falls in New York State, but didn't have time to walk in to the falls themselves. Have to do it another time.

Did walk in to Bear Mt. Falls just south of where I was staying,. Had fun finding how to get to the access point including driving in to a wedding reception as I thought all the cars were where climbers were parked. A slightly drunk host asked me if I wanted to stay!!! On the trail were fallen logs to climb over and around, but the falls themselves were not very interesting. On the way out saw these colorful toadstools.
Saw this old barn on the outskirts of Sheffield on Salisbury Road and almost walked in to peek in to see if it had old beams. The thought of ticks kept me from going in. Plus a big "No Trespassing" sign further ebbed my enthusiasm.

I guess I mentioned somewhere along the way I was going to hear the concert at BCF and that four Angels were singing in it. The 209-voice choir during performance of Handel's "Solomon." A spectacular sound!
Closest Angel this weekend was (Countess) Didi who I hadn't seen in several years. We e-mail each other, but it was great to see her again!

I finally got to give her a laminated poster she asked for many years ago and she loved it. It was through a rippled glass window in Canterbury showing the old houses around the Cathedral Gate.

Got most of my meals for free at the school since I had sung and contributed money to BCF over the years. Gave Angel Trudy, the Executive Director, a copy of my book. At the office, I noted two of my photos still hanging on the walls.

The trip out the Mass Pike seems to go by faster each time I do it although this year I noted that most people are going between 75 and 80. Scary! I stayed in the "Granny" lane a lot.

Well, back to the old grind at the yacht club - the best job in the world!

Love, Neal
August 3, 2008
Dear Angel and Friend:

I forgot to mention last night, but that waterfall coming down into the sea has a cave behind it. Our 70-foot X 25-foot catamaran went inside that cave! Us camera folks had to duck into the cabin to avoid a shower, but once inside the cave I got out on deck and I tried some photos looking up at the roof of the cave which I could see, but the camera could not. The skipper only goes in this spot on days when the seas are not too rough.

As we arrived back at our starting point just after a gorgeous sunset, I wondered if our skipper had ever seen the fabled “Green Flash.” He said only twice and it lasts only part of a second. This is from a man who makes two or three of these same trips per week (they’re limited much like airline pilots in their number of hours they can work). And he’s done it for six years!

But, guess who has seen a “Green Flash”? Angel Barb R. and she said it was the thrill of a lifetime. I’d be interested to know if anyone else has seen it. Tell me about it.

The canyon in yesterday’s photo is similar to the Grand Canyon on the mainland, but nowhere as big or deep. However, you can drive your car to the top and stop and take photos along that way as I did. There are mountain goats here and it’s amazing how they can get around without falling off. The top is Mt. Waialea and is recorded as the wettest place on earth.
In photos below we are still on Kauai, and first we look down from Mt. Waialea towards the ocean that we traveled on the next day and saw all the waterfalls. Then two photos taped together of a lush valley. Then a view from near the timeshare we stayed in on Kauai. Note how the tree branch mimics the shape of the distant cliffs.

I'm having difficulty picking one or two photos to show you of this beautiful island. You'll just have to go there yourself!

Maybe tomorrow we'll go to Maui where my niece Angel Surfer Sue (a registered Hawaiian Tour Guide) showed me all the best and secret spots. Places most tourists never see. Angel Zanna will remember one of those photos I'm sure.

Love, Neal
August 4, 2008
Maui

Dear Angel and Friend:

On the beautiful island of Maui, the back way to Hana (going around on the dry side) is a sharp contrast to the rest of the island. That's where George (the man who built my sister-in-law's house) lives - out a long grass and lava bumped road into a shady grove. His outside toilet was, well, primitive. His neighbors didn't have any clothes on as we approached their house ("house" should be qualified to "place where they lived")

The whitish splotch in the middle of the first photo is a sea gull's well-aimed dropping on the windshield.

Note the blind corner in the middle photo where we tooted the horn and went slow.
In the bottom photo is the secret 80-foot waterfall with my niece about to dive in. There was a nude couple here when we walked in (it is off the road and about a 15-minute walk/climb/jump over rocks/cross a stream thing).
September 2, 2008
Dear Angel and Friend:

Stitches came out on the 22nd and seven butterfly types were put on instead. These were to stay on until they fell off. The fifth one fell off tonight. The middle area of the cut has almost no scar at all which is heartening.

I feel fine, although there are occasional twinges in my armpit and in my arm as things heal inside. Sometimes these twinges wake me up at night, like last night. They only last a couple of minutes, so its no worry.

Have been out stacking firewood the last couple of days as my woodsman is splitting some of the wood and this activity has brought my old enemy, cramps. I've been putting away a lot of water to counter them.

I also do not have the energy back yet that I had before the operation, but my boss says that's normal given my age and having been put under anesthesia. Also there was the drop in blood pressure after the operation when I was in the recovery area and they had to rush me back into Urgent Care.

Improving every day is how I look at it.

Love, Neal
October 20, 2008
Today’s Howling Gale

Dear Angel and Friend:

I must apologize if a few of you get this twice - hit the wrong group the first time.

Today was no different than any other day in that the newly seeded area at the yacht club had to be watered twice. Once around Noon and the other after 4:00 PM. There was a big difference today, however.

The stream from the hose wouldn't go where you pointed it - not even close! At one place close to the dining room, I was about three feet from where I wanted the water to go, but the wind said "No way!" And don't stand downwind of me as the hose spray went on and on.

Even after I watered the whole area by one means or another, the wind died out spots almost instantly.

In the interim between waterings, I went hunting for wave photos:
This is the "Old Man" in Minot and then - WHAM!

He gets it right in the chops. Below, the house on the left is for sale - great views!
Below is taken from the end of their driveway looking back to where the Old Man lies.

In none of the above photos did I get out of my car. What do you think I am, nuts? Ah, but the end of the day shows that tomorrow will be better.
Below: Maybe not as great as this day from a couple of years back:

Love, Neal
January 4, 2009

The Situate Yacht Club Where Neal Worked

Yes, it is just a flagpole and it belongs to the yacht club. Not only that, but it is a handsome flagpole.

But, it is also **MY** flagpole.

I (as a worker at the club) have charge of that flagpole. When it needs flags raised at 8:00 AM, certain people must raise the national colors first and then the club's burgee (flag). Precisely at sunset each day in the summer, the night watchman signals the hostess in the dining room. She rings a bell and the guests rise until the cannon is fired and the US flag lowered for the night. All other flags are lowered ten minutes before the US flag ceremony. The rules go on and on.

Every third or fourth year my flagpole comes out of the ground and is laid on saw horses for sanding, painting, new lines, blocks (pulleys), and gold leaf is applied to the ball at the top if needed. It is removed from the ground by a magnificent crane supplied by a member's crane company. When I've finished my work, back comes the crane
Here it is all dolled up and ready to go back in the ground.

The crane comes and jacks itself up off the driveway so it is a secure platform.

Lines are attached over towels wrapped around the pole to protect my new paint job.
Up it goes and you can see from the Steward and his helper the size of my flagpole.
It goes about four feet into a sleeve in the ground and is held vertical by wedges. The yardarm must face the harbor mouth so flags can be readily seen. When all is just right sand is poured in the hole between the sleeve and the pole and tamped down. The cleats for securing the flag hoists are about four and a half feet above the ground so youngsters can't cause problems.
When all is done, we get a chance to operate the crane.
And my flag pole is ready for duty again.

Thought you'd like to know. In this photo is the US flag, the club burgee at the top, and on the
yardarm at left, the past commodore's flag (indicating one is on the property) and the Vice
Commodore's flag (red) (indicating he is on the property).

The gaff is where the national colors are always flown as that is the place of honor on this type of
flagpole.

Love, Neal
February 9, 2009

Today, I went out and reveled in the beautiful snow (didn't eat any yellow or blue snow). Did my snowblower work in the driveway as Joe (son-in-law) can't do it all with his backhoe, and then went around taking some photos.

During the storm:

Cold ducks. You stop the car and they come right up to the car expecting food.
The "Old Man" rock in shadow in the middle

My house through the snow-covered branches
Looking down to my neighbor's and the kayaks. Plowed path goes left to bird-feeding area.