

DEAR FRIENDS: This took me three days to write and will probably take you six days to read, but you can set it aside (like a movie with intermissions) and get back to it. I just wanted to let everyone know what this Flying Santa trip meant to me . . . and I even could not really tell you for all the verbiage here. So, if you have the patience, go head and read through the 2003 story of an old lady elf that felt like a little girl again.

Love, Seamond

Santa And The Elf

By Seamond Ponsart Roberts

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Edward Rowe Snow, author, lecturer and historian, was born in Winthrop, Mass. and spent most of his life studying the lighthouses, islands, and legends of the New England coast. Mr. Snow has been credited with over 100 books and pamphlets as well as newspaper articles, lectures, and tours of the area. With his wife Anna-Myrle, Mr. Snow made hundreds of visits to light stations throughout New England.

The Snows considered the light keepers and their families to be extensions of their own family, and the feelings were mutual. Today, many consider Mr. Snow's interesting and readable accounts of life at these stations to have been the impetus launching an increase in lighthouse interest and preservation.

Shown is Mr. Snow, wife Anna and daughter Dorothy readying packages for their well known yearly Christmas airdrops to remote lighthouse and Coast Guard stations.

(From Various Places on the WWW)

My Story Begins

Once back in December 1945, a little lighthouse girl stood rosy-cheeked against the winds of western Cuttyhunk Island, which is the last island at the very end of the Elizabeth Islands, and she was just so happy to know that in a few minutes from that time, from the plane overhead there would be a package with a special doll from the Flying Santa for her. She knew this because her mother had told her this back some months and now the time had finally come. The packages came down and there were waves from Santa in the red plane and off it went. It was magic! Her parents and the Coast Guardsmen all ran for the shelter of the house where there was hot cocoa and coffee for all while they warmed up after the bitter December weather



Cuttyhunk Light Station Was Deactivated in 1947

(Picture courtesy of the author)

outside. Then the package opening began. Oh my, what treats. There were magazines and sewing kits and candy!!! and razor blades and cigarettes for the men and Mr. Snow's latest book in each package, but the keeper's daughter was waiting for the package to be opened that she knew (she hoped at least -- it was hard to stay being good for three whole months for this moment) would be her doll. OF course, it had to be in the last one opened and there it was smashed to pieces! It was the package that had landed on one of Cuttyhunk's huge boulders and the little girl was at first very disappointed, trying hard not to cry, but then the well broke and tears took over all her father's caring of saying he could fix the doll. She knew that he being a lighthouse keeper - and a very good one as his last efficiency rating had been excellent - that, yes, he could fix anything. However, right then, he couldn't fix the disappointment and she went to bed early that night with her broken (but fixed) doll right beside her. She did cry that her new doll looked worse than her three old dolls -- and they were very disreputable looking indeed.



Her mother wrote the Flying Santa and thanked him for his generosity and for his additional kindness in giving her a doll, because even though it was smashed he had meant well. The mother told Santa that, "Oh my, she cried herself to sleep that night." That was true enough.

At Santa's home when this little post card arrived - Santa (who was really the famed author and historian and at that time a high school teacher, Edward Rowe Snow) told his wife that "This will never do. And why, of all the packages, did this one get damaged?" He shook his head and thought ahead to the next year of package deliveries.

By the next year, the Cuttyhunk Lighthouse was torn down and the keeper, mother and daughter were transferred to a beautiful lighthouse on the BIG island of Martha's Vineyard, to West Chop Lighthouse. It was a wonderful lighthouse and the keeper was very happy. The little girl still played with her dolls and the broken one (wired together by the father lighthouse keeper who could fix anything) was always the sick doll, complete with band-aids and slings and head bandage. It really was her favorite doll because broken or not, it WAS special. After all it had come to her air mail delivered by a very special Santa.

Christmas approached and Mr. Snow wanted to fix things for the little girl. Oh my, how he did this! He told her parents to bring her and meet him at Gay Head Lifesaving Station on such a date as there he would see to it that she got her new doll unbroken, no air drop and no rocks to imperil this special package.

And by golly it happened just like this. The generous man had taken his own precious money and spent dearly to charter a helicopter to land there to give the doll to the girl in person. It was a moment of enchantment in which Santa stepped out of a helicopter came

right over to her and placed a doll in her hands saying, "Santa's sorry your doll was broken last year. Here's a new one just for you."

She could not have ever felt more special in her life because this Flying Santa was kindness and love personified. And she knew it, even though she was only 6 years old.



Isn't that a great story? Well, it's a true one and I know it's true because the little girl was me, Seamond Ponsart, and though it was fantastic, it really happened. Yep, yep, yep. (I always sit and shake my head when I get to this point in the story thinking, wow, did this really happen . . . yep, yep, yep, it did. What a lucky kid! And the kid was ME!!! What a great man!) Seamond and her parents met the Flying Santa each year and exchanged greetings and little gifts. When the Santa died, they continued to write Mrs. Snow (such a wonderful lady) and when she died Seamond continued to write their little girl, Dolly. I watched Dolly grow up through their yearly family photo cards, and to me Christmas time meant the Snows . . . always. I know I am not the only

child that felt this way as the Snows delivered love from the sky to many, many lighthouse keeper's families, but then again, Mr. Snow as the Flying Santa made each child feel so special that when we talked to one another he was always referred to as MY FLYING SANTA (with an emphasis on the MY). That was just him.

Great man and Great Memories.

Now, it's er . . . many years later. (You can do the math.) It's been pretty hard on this old girl being good all this time and most of the time I haven't been that good, but maybe good enough because while my dear Flying Santa has been dead some years, he had yet another gift to give me and it was to happen on December 13, 2003. The gift was this - one of renewed memories because I had been asked to be the guest elf for the flight that day and I told the folks I would walk from Louisiana if I had to, to be able to do it.



I was so thrilled for the whole time just to know once again my Flying Santa experiences would be re-enacted for me to see the children in their awe and expectation with Santa, the excitement, the wonderment. I knew it would be there. I had been one of them. I was right. The magic of the Flying Santa

continues and is live and well. And these Coast Guard children, so lovely each one, they came to see Santa and brought their lists and told him of their secret wishes, sat on knees, cried, smiled, laughed, and all once more . . . believed. There it was! The magic of it all. I knew it would happen, but to be a part of it, handing Santa the toy from the bag and calling out the child's name . . . well, it was just a terrific experience for me.

Santa and the Elf

(Photo From The Vineyard Gazette)

I cannot ever thank the Friends of the Flying Santa enough for my trip. I'm doing it here public ally on paper, but if I could hug each and every one of them I'd do it. All the time, I kept thinking of back at Gay Head Lifesaving Station when a helicopter brought MY Flying Santa who brought me that special doll. (Was it that long ago? No, it couldn't have been because as the saying goes, it was yesterday to me and it was re-happening for me merged in with seeing these children come up for their little toys.) Yes, MY Flying Santa is what each one of them was thinking because this Santa Claus was special and made these little Coast Guard children special.

And so, we flew from Coast Guard Station Point Allerton to Scituate Light. (My first helicopter flight the only oh-oh part of which was the circling which on the tilting part I had to get used to the idea that it was o.k. to be in a yo-yo because you could tell this pilot was on the ball and nothing to be feared.) At Scituate, there were the parents and the kids and also I met George Morgan, the other Flying Santa, whom I had written for many years. We gave out candy canes and George gave me a big hug. I was equally thrilled as George has done many, many years of Santa for the Friends of the Flying Santa and I could tell right away he had the right Ho-Ho-Ho to do it too. Great man! It was wonderful seeing him. But before you knew it, we were off! Just up and away, ever so easily. What scenery! While we would talk to each other in the copter, there was so much to see, it was about speechless -- an unusual situation for me. Just spectacular. But there below us was Plymouth Light, the Gurnet, so pretty! Right inside an old

Revolutionary War Fort, long since grass grown over, but sitting high and pretty so white! Santa and I hustled up to a house and the children all gathered inside and also who should be there for me? My own Dolly Snow, MY Flying Santa's daughter, the lady I've corresponded with for so, so many years, but never met. This was so wonderful for me. And Dolly had dug some pictures out of her attic of her Dad -- and even a few of her Dad and me -- along with his own Santa hat. I touched it and I swear I really felt 5 years old again. Magic!!! I always believed in Santa. This was reaffirmation. Alas, soon that part was over and off next to CG Station Cape Cod Canal. Landing was a bit difficult here, phone wires and all, and I had to marvel at the skill and gentle landings that our pilot gave us. Uh-huh! I was LIKING this helicopter stuff for sure. Boy, the kids here were lively and looked to me like they were all believers. Santa would tell them, "Kids, you have to help me out here. You have to keep a secret for me. You can't tell the reindeer about the helicopter! I left them at the North Pole to rest up, but if they find out about the helicopter, they would be all upset, especially that one with the red nose." At the end of the toys, he'd ask, "Now, what's the secret?" --and the kids would say, "Don't tell Rudolph about the helicopter." Yep, new Coast Guard kid believers. I could see that. Great!

The next stop was to be Nobska Lighthouse at Woods Hole, but first we had to do a special fly-by. The pilot, Even Wile, you see, lives in Buzzard's Bay and his mom is 90+ years old. She was so excited that her son was the driver of Rudolph's boss this year and so he wanted to have Santa say "hello" to mom on the way. Gladly! We buzzed the condo about three times and each time here is this precious little lady just waving her heart out at Santa -- along with a couple of workmen on a staging also waving. It was so heartwarming and I hope the pictures came out for her to see herself in a just freezing wind waving at her son in the helicopter! What a moment.

On to Nobska. This is the personal quarters of Commander, Group Woods Hole, who just happens to be a Captain May at this time. Once landed, he came a running and told us where the kids would be and we located quite quickly in a room he had totally removed any furniture from so as to have room for the hoard of children there. (Nobska is always the BIG stop.) I was starting to get the gist of this thing, though the deal of getting out of, bending low and which way to go from the helicopter was not too good with me and I thankfully each time had the assistance of Brian Tague, the official photographer and timekeeper in getting me in and out of the 'copter. (Thanks, Brian, being headless would not be very nice!) This was all new to me . . . and yet the feeling was an old one.

We called out the names and each child would come forward or the parents bearing babies would come forward and each would talk to Santa and get their pictures taken by Mom and Dad, pictures that I well knew would follow them as a special day the rest of their lives. If I hadn't been so happy, I would have cried from it all.

You see, I knew, I knew.

At Nobska, there was one little fellow and he was last to be called. He kept looking at his parents for reassurance and then at me the elf and Santa. I think he thought he was left

out. I think he thought maybe he hadn't been good. I think he was going to cry. He was about 4 years old and as dejected a little boy as could be when . . . there was one more present. And YES, it was for HIM! We all breathed a sign of relief and we knew he would be good for the next 12 days to Christmas for sure! A great stop.

And the next one for me was the pinnacle stop . . . I was going home. Yes, HOME to West Chop Lighthouse where I had lived for 11 years, where I had lived when Santa told my folks to meet him at Gay Head. It's not far from Nobska to West Chop and yet for me I was going back in time. West Chop is a beautiful and tall white tower with two keeper residences, an oil house and an engine room house, on nicely cleared grounds with a great beach that you get to down a cliff. It is most picturesque. That's the realtor's spiel (may they NEVER sell it). However, to me the main thing this is HOME. The children of the Coast Guard from Station Menemsha were there to greet us and we had a great toy giveaway sitting on the very back porch where I had played many years. There were a few minutes to spare and so I was allowed to go into our old house. The house is ever so beautified now as it is the guest house for the Coast Guard and certainly not the regulation type quarters we lived in, but still HOME. To see the real old HOME I lived in, I went into the cellar. Ah yes, there it was the same. (When you got HOME, you want some sameness.) I was satisfied. I had been back into the cellar where I spend many hours playing with my cats or watching Dad make ship models. It was home, indeed. Now, for a quick scramble up the tower.

Now, I have to tell you I used to do just that. Up-down, a quick scramble - no problem. This time, however, it took me two rest stops, huffing and puffing in between. (Like those OLD people tourists I used to take up the stairs.) I like to think it was all the extra clothing and winter underwear, but I know it's age and I'm not (at least in body) the lighthouse kid I used to be. Once atop, however, I was really home. There was the beautiful lens and the view was every bit as wonderful as it used to be. Santa was following me. Santa used to be stationed at Annisquam and he puffed up while going up the stairs, too, saying, "Hey, this is a pretty tall lighthouse." (Yep, it had to be the extra clothing.) Ah, but it was wonderful to be HOME. Again, the gift from Mr. Snow because if all that happened previously to me with him as a kid hadn't happened, I'd never been back right that moment at home. This was all pretty heady thinking and before I knew it, it was time to leave. It was hard to leave, but too exciting to miss the rest of the trip. Good-bye West Chop. (I'll be back again sometime, I'm sure I will.)

Off to Nantucket. Coast Guard Station Brant Point. Very enthusiastic crowd here and the kids were terrific. Some of them knew the reindeer secret from last year and the little girl said she'd never tell. Santa said, "Why thank you, because if you tell, I'll be in hot trouble with that reindeer with the red nose. . . er, what's his name?" Yeah, these kids caught on fast. The station box got broken into right away and the guys (some of whom I think were still believers) were awed with all the stuff the Flying Santa had brought them. (A station box is left at each Coast Guard station and includes all kinds of food and goodies for the guys and is very well appreciated.) On leaving here, hand shakes were had from the entire crew to us. To me, this was better than being in the receiving line at the White House. Whooo! While at Brant Point, "Cabin Boy" Dan Kelliher came forward and

introduced himself. We'd been corresponding for some years and he promised me an island tour when I came over the next day. I told him I'd be delighted.

And then it was time to leave and up and away and way across the Atlantic Ocean to Chatham Coast Guard Station which is in the old Chatham Lighthouse quarters. It was a long way to get there and it looked very cold below. I was glad we had a wonderful pilot and a full tank of gas. Brrr. Going down out there. And I thought of the guys that man those Coast Guard search and rescue boats . . . I thought of them seriously. The whitecaps on the ocean below only emphasized that. Also before we left Nantucket, there on a great bend of sand was Great Point Lighthouse. This had been my parents first lighthouse back in the 1930s, so solitary out there, a place my mother loved because of its desolation. Oh my, it was that so desolate out there and from the air, clearly so. However, knowing my mother, I could see in her adventurous soul just why she would love it. She always enjoyed doing stuff other women would quail at. Great Point Lighthouse living was such a place for this.

This pointed out to me once again how lighthouse keepers and their families often were put into places that honestly were not fit to live, but they did it, and they did it with devotion to duty and a love and zeal that you only could understand if you had been part of it. I was again thinking how lucky I had been to have been a part of it. I go on and on about this very often, but I just want people who live now know that back then it was a hard, hard life, but mostly done with no complaints because lighthouse keepers and their families did it thinking of doing that as "the right thing to do." No other way to explain it really. It looked cold and lonely out at Great Point. My mother said it was her favorite lighthouse and she hated to leave. I wondered looking there below me if she felt like that when she arrived out there in nowhere.

Flying over Monomoy Lighthouse out in the middle of nowhere again pointed this out to me. If Mom had "loved" Great Point, I bet she would have been ecstatic at being posted to Monomoy. On a sandspit that reaches toward Nantucket (and probably once connected), there is old Monomoy Lighthouse, long, long abandoned. Another outpost, by itself, its people (back when there were people) totally isolated from the real world. So solitary. Such a hard life the keepers would have endured . . . gladly.

Well, by golly, there was Chatham with the very noted treacherous approaches to the town harbor. You could see it from the air and I thought of my friend Bernie Webber and the miraculous lifesaving event he accomplished many years ago there when he and his crew brought back "more than the boat should hold" men saved from a sinking tanker in the middle of a horrible Nor'easter. To me, Chatham's name mentioned is always liked with Bernie Webber. It is a great part of the history of the Coast Guard and an illustration of the will and endurance that Coast Guard men have faced over the years. Seeing Chatham from the air, I could only shake my head and recall my father remarking, "That Bernie Webber! That was real seamanship." Well, we were on the ground and the kids were waiting.

So was the station dog who did not like Santa at all and we thought he was going to bite

that stranger in the funny red outfit! Horrors! The kids were all saying, "OH NO, OH NO." (Coal in their stockings because of the Station Dog biting Santa!!!!) However, we were well welcomed aboard, and the children came forward on their names being called and were a happy little crew with their special toys. (The station dog got over Santa and joined in the festivities.) All the toys matched all the kids (phew!) and we knew we had to leave very soon because it was starting to get to be late. On leaving the station, there was a plaque to Bernie Webber and his crew and that made me feel good. I've written him for years, and he never mentioned it. Great guy, amazing and miraculous lifesaver.

Up and away and off to Highland Light. We first passed over Nauset Light and I guess things have gone pretty commercial because I thought "Cape Cod Potato Chips." Even in a helicopter, it's a long way from Chatham to Highland and the sun was going down fast. However, on landing it was a postcard picture with strikingly white Highland against the sunset backdrop and even I had to breathe in deeply and realize it was a picture moment. I am sure Brian captured it well as he's such a good photographer. The children! Oh my! I guess they had been waiting all day because these kids were beyond themselves. So enthusiastic. There was one little girl who wanted to leave with us! We were so well received and it was the last stop, and it was hard to leave for us. Pictures all around. Many waves and "come back next year Santa." (I was kind of hoping Brian had another lighthouse stashed away somewhere that he'd say, "Oh I forgot, we have to go to . . . ") That was because I was so revved up on this whole thing. I, myself, was so excited. Indeed! That's when I "met" my Santa boss, who is real life (the other 364 days of the year) is CWO(BOSN) Tom Guthlein, a very youngish man who made me really think in costume he was an old Santa and he was such a good Santa he even fooled his elf.

Aladdin may have had a magical carpet, but I had just had the ride of my lifetime, and the privilege and honor of riding with Brian Tague of the Friends of the Flying Santa, with "Santa" Tom Guthlein, and with the "bestest" 'copter pilot ever, Even Wile. What a day!!!!

And so, like a great sled driver that our helicopter pilot was, he delivered me to the Norwood Airport where my dear, dear friends Barbara Januse and Doug Bingham were waiting to pick me up. Up and away went Santa and "sled" and that leg of the 2003 flight was over. For me, the fairy tale had a dream ending. I got to re-live the thrill that was glowing in every child's eyes. It was well worth being "good" (or relatively so) for 50+ years. Thank YOU, Friends of the Flying Santa. (Thank you, Edward Rowe Snow also.)

And then I had so many other people to thank along the way aside from the Santa folks. I arrived in Providence in a driving rain and 40 mph and I was quite thankful to God and the Delta pilot that we didn't end up in Narragansett Bay instead of T. F. Green. Rough, rough weather. It's amazing those big birds can tolerate stuff like that. At least I didn't get down and kiss the ground, but for an instant I was thinking of it. There was Doug Bingham, old friend now of mine, who said, "Seamond, if you want to do the Santa thing, you come stay with us, we will be glad to have you." (This mind you in the middle of a Christmas holiday when things are hectic enough.) Good to see him and the first thing he said I must see was the Fall River Museum en route to his girlfriend's house in Taunton.

So, we stopped. It didn't look like much from the outside, but, oh on the inside what a treasure house this is. If you folks in New England have not made it there, you must. Featured in here are many artifacts and history of the Andrea Doria, the Old Fall River Line, and even the Titanic. Most spectacular of all is a model of the Titanic that lights up that is I guess about 25 feet long and SO CONVINCING you almost get seasick. I just hollered WOW, and I know in a museum you are NOT supposed to holler. I couldn't help myself. There is also a very, VERY large model of an English ship carved entirely out of whalebone. Just beautiful. There are Old Fall River Line liners in model. Just gorgeous. But Doug had brought me there for another specific reason. It was to see three things related to the Vineyard Lightship, and these things I needed to see as for me it was another point of closure for me. First of all, was the very accurate and beautiful model made by the last lightship man from the Vineyard Lightship, Mr. Harold Flagg. Sitting there and all gorgeous in its case, Doug told me Harold took 10 years in doing it. My Daddy made models so I could appreciate it, but I marveled that it took Harold ONLY 10 years to do it to such perfection. It's a must see for any modeler and for any lightship person. The second thing was a halyard that Harold had made and which was on the lightship when it was lost with all hands during the 1944 hurricane, an event that my father and I were the last to witness while we hung on for dear life at the lighthouse at Cuttyhunk - all my lightship "uncles" gone. Harold made this and when there was a question later of identification of the lightship hull, he said, "Go look for the halyard, I made it." Well, there it was. Finally, the lantern. Yes, from the lightship and brought up and retrieved after years by Doug to be in the museum. I touched it and the feeling was electric. I wasn't really standing in Fall River then . . . I was back in the tower at Cuttyhunk . . . and I'm sure Doug knew it. So, what a way to start out my grand trip. If you get a chance to go to the Museum, please do it. It's very wonderful. Next on to Taunton, to meet with his fiancée (my hostess) at her lovely home and also her most wonderful mother. (Barbara, can I steal your Mom?) We all had a talk fest and then it was time to sleep for lots of exciting things to come. The next day indeed was exciting. Tom and Arlene Pregman of the NELL (New England Lighthouse Lovers) drove all the way from the other side of Connecticut to come see me. I was so honored to finally meet this bubbly lighthouse-enthusiastic couple I had been corresponding with for sometime. Lunchtime found us down in New Bedford at Davey's Locker. (Good seafood, reasonable prices, look for it, in the South End with a great view of Butler Flats Lighthouse on one side and Palmers Island the other way). More conversation and fun dining and desert was

going to
see Arthur
Motta, the
Director of
Tourism
for New
Bedford
and
generally
all-around-
good guy
who with

the Mayor has done so much for the lighthouses there. I can't praise this man enough.



Through it all, he's kind of "oh-gosh" all just modest and just a guy you have to admire. A pleasure to see him and I was glad for the visit. Next, we went to THE bell. The Lightship

Memorial. This is my third trip and each time I hear in my head Harold Flagg reading off his shipmate's names and each trip I hit the bell with my hand and remember that that was how we heard it there at Cuttyhunk Lighthouse, especially in the fog, when the visibility was hampered, when they were out there doing their duty . . . the reason they all died, doing their duty. Thought men, the likes of which I'm sure are few of now. My uncles. God Bless them.

Doug Bingham and Jack Eckert at the Bell – October 2003

(Photo By Joana Eckert)

Then back to the house where Tom and Arlene regaled us with Tom's travels to the West Coast Lights with pictures from his albums. Tom is a totally expert photographer and each picture is a treasure in itself and an eye feast. Just WOW on looking through these books for sure. Off to bed, the next day was to be the Flying Santa flight ----- and without Doug and Barbara I never could have made that. My hat is off to them forever for their generosity in letting me interrupt their lives for four days and for their kindness in saying, "Oh yes, you stay with us and we will see to it that you get to where you need to, anywhere in New England." (Now, that's a pretty nice set of people I'd say and I'm telling you, they are that, pretty nice outstanding set of people.)

You know I had a great flight as I've told you above and there they were to fetch me at the Norwood Airport, just promptly as it could be. Next, a great fish dinner and then a surprise. Doug is "into" folk music and though I had not heard it (except on my records) for years, I like that stuff too. So, he took us to a "venue" at a church coffee house where we were very well entertained by a local group called the Burns Sisters. I loved it. We

went home and just were all pooped out and so to bed.

The next morning got us up early and Doug drove me to Hyannis (thank you very much, Doug for everything in the way of transportation and entertainment and to Barbara for your hostess generosity and remember I still want to steal your Mom) and then I was off on the Hy-Line boat to Nantucket. A treat. I had lived 11 years on Martha's Vineyard and never gone to Nantucket. This was with a purpose in mind though and not just a winter tourist -- though I was that too and did a fair amount of gawking to qualify, only in winter nobody notices. The purpose in mind was to meet four special sets of people: 1) Claire Bettencourt, my dear, dear childhood friend as her father was keeper at Gay Head when we were at West Chop. She had a big family and boy, did I love to go to Gay Head and visit her family. She was my little sister and I had written but not seen here in years. 2) Billy and Ruth Grieder. When Mom and Dad were at Great Point, so was Billy with his parents, Frank and Elsie Grieder. Dad was the assistant keeper there. Mom loved it out there and a lot of loving it was not only the isolation (something like 10 miles over the sand dunes to down) but Elsie, Billy's mother, and Billy and his brother, Jr. This was before I was born, but all my life I've heard of "Billy Grieder," and so Billy and I have written over the years. This would be my first time seeing him. 3) "Cabin Boy" Dan Kelliher. A salty, knowledgeable Nantucket historian who used to be a high school teacher and who is part of the landscape. We'd been corresponding by e-mail for some years and meeting this man would also be a treat. 4) Finally, Maurice Gibbs. The head of the Nantucket Lifesaving Service Museum. Maurice and I had written for some time and I knew meeting him would also be special. My father had been a substitute in the USLSS at Cuttyhunk Station in the 20's and I knew Maurice had not only the Great Point lens over at his place but also a Life Saving Service boat tucked away. Yep, this would be very special.

So, there was Claire to meet me. Freezing cold with wind blowing and all the little gray shingled houses and cobblestone streets I'd come to imagine in Nantucket. There they all were. Mostly deserted that cold morning. Food for the imagination -- I could even now easily see ladies and men of long ago whaling times passing on the streets. Wow, Nantucket was just what I thought it would be.

Just beautiful.

We made it back to the house and met Claire's husband, Henry, who is a real Nantucketer of many generations. Sizing me up, he was. And I had to laugh when I thought of that expression, but that's what it was. And, Henry is o.k., just a great guy, enjoyed many a laugh with him while I was there. Claire, you've got a keeper. Keep him! As for Cocoa, the Lab dog, what a sweetie. He stole my mitten right away to prove he liked me. Just great people! Made me very comfortable while I was there and treated me so well. Thank so much, you two. You are just the sweet little girl I remembered and all these years made no difference. I'm proud to have her as a friend for life.

Claire next took me out to see the Grieders. There they were and it seemed to me that years and years passed from our first hello to our conversation back to the 1930's of my

mother's stories and Billy's stories back there too. Ruth, his wife, and wonderful Tuckernuck Islander herself, was so gracious at our visit. She showed me pictures of her little home on Tuckernuck and also other photos and mementoes that they have decorating the walls of her home. Incredible. These people are living Nantucket history and should be treasured citizens. The time passed too quickly and it was back home. A storm that night and Claire asked me, "Are you ready to be stuck on the island?" Of course, I was! The hell with Providence and the plane. This was like old home week. Stranded on Nantucket?

Just fine with me. I'll wash dishes or scrub floors.

The next day, Cabin Boy Dan Kelliher came on over to tour guide me the rest of the day and what treats this dear man showed me on the island. First, we went to meet Maurice Gibbs at the Lifesaving Service Museum. Oh my God! There was, encased in glass, outside the museum THE Great Point Lighthouse lens. Just a terrific sight and so beautiful. I knew this was the lens my father helped care for. There are times in your life when you draw in a breath and realize this is a sacred moment. Thank you, Dan! Next, was the inside of the museum which I had the privilege of having a private tour conducted in winter when it is C-L-O-S-E-D to the public by none other than Mr. Maurice Gibbs himself. If he minded, he did not give an inkling of it and I knew I was again an honored guest, and I so appreciate it. There I touched a real lifesaving boat, the kind people were really saved from hauled out of the sea like from those awful waters I had just seen from the helicopter the day before, cold and helpless, and the guys who did it did it the HARD way using oars, superb seamanship, and God's guidance. Well, you have to live around the sea to appreciate I was in tears by then. This was all the real stuff I'd heard about for years, faking boxes, and Lyle guns, and surf boats and shots. It's all there. It's also a place everyone interesting in maritime history should see. A huge hats off to you, Maurice, and thank you for your time last week. A cold fog had set in and we were off again, to Dan's home which is very lovely but also beautified by his artist-wife's wonderful paintings. I didn't get a chance to meet her (she was off doing a mural), but her works are awesome and something they can be very proud of. I could tell that Dan was. Of course, he has HIS thing also. It's his hat museum. Now, what you ask, is a hat museum. Well, this man has a large utility trailer in which he has every imaginable Coast Guard-related unit hat there is. It got another loud and enthusiastic WOW on my part because I didn't even begin to imagine there could or would be so many. I think he has over 700 and still growing! I'm sure there has to be a Guinness Book some kind of category for this. If so, he has to have THE most! Now, it was snowing.

Wow, I'm going to be snowed in on Nantucket. Great thought! Maybe the boat will NOT run the next day. While my plane ticket thing would be a problem, I was ready for it. (I'll wash dogs at the vets. I'll dig quahogs.)

We were off to Sankaty Head Lighthouse. Oh, I was hoping he'd do this. My mother always remarked that she thought the most beautiful lighthouse she had seen ever was Sankaty and that she and Dad would visit the Haskins family there. She said when you first see it from afar, it just makes you take in a deep breath.

Again (drat), my mother was right. So, there we were snowing and blowing and solitary, I just had to run up and touch it and look up it from below. Just perfectly beautiful. I bet the Haskins family loved living there . . . and all the other lighthouse keepers too. I only wished the house had been there. When I see lighthouses without the family homes, I feel sad because it looks like it only had a tower, when I know better that there had to be people who lived there to care and love the lights. I am very protective of my lighthouse houses and I know progress is progress and all, but without the houses it seems to me the memories of the people who tended them are gone and it, of course, makes me sad.

Back home and a warm hearty lunch and visiting with Claire and picture albums to fill in the years. Cocoa coming over with his duck and Henry in his Laz-Y-Boy relaxing after a long day's work, this was very comfy. A night with a hard blow all night, but guess what, come morning sunny skies and I was off to head back home. The passage on the Gray Lady was a rough one and I found out we probably would be the only boat to run that day. So, I slipped away from Nantucket, got a bus to Providence on to the airport, and two planes later, I was back home here in New Orleans.

This time, it was not the distance that awed me. It was the slippage of time of having traveled back in years to the present in all these memories swirling around in my head in just a matter of six days.

I could not but help to think "if I died tomorrow, it was all worth it."

It was. Oh, definitely it was.

Thank you EVERYONE. This is the biggest, (kid word) bestest Christmas present ever.

Seamond

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