

Neal Goss, Jr. Testimonial

(Note: Mr. Goss was interviewed at his home in Panama City, Florida, by Frank A. Shepherd. The interview took place January 3, 2010. Neal Goss' son, Neal Goss, III, also was present and provided additional information to the interview. Following the interview, Frank dictated the following document, which Mr. Goss has reviewed for accuracy. Mr. Goss has given his permission to have it posted here.)

Neal Goss, Jr., was born in Decatur, Georgia, on October 26, 1920. His parents were Lillian Brigman Goss and Neal Gordon Goss. He was delivered by his grandfather, Dr. John Goss. Dr. John Goss was a Confederate veteran, who had gone to medical school after the war ended. His father was a lawyer in Atlanta, Georgia, and a volunteer fireman.

As a child in Decatur, he did not remember having an allowance. For spare change, he collected bottles, coat hangers and scrap metal, which he sold to a junk yard. Once he bought a billy goat, harness and wagon, which he also sold for spare change after several months. Their house in Decatur had a big back yard. He remembers that in Decatur, bread was \$0.05 a loaf. A big ice cream cone also was \$0.05.

He remembers one night in downtown Decatur, when he was about ten-years old, stopping by a filling station while on a skate scooter, to admire a Cord automobile. As he was standing there, he saw a mail plane fly overhead. At that point, he knew he always would want to fly.

In the early 1930's, his mother and father divorced. In 1933, he, his mother and his brother, Bryan, moved to Panama City. His sister, Dorothy, stayed behind in Decatur because she had a scholarship to Agnes Scott College in Decatur. When Neal and his family arrived in Panama City, Neal entered Bay High School in the sophomore class. The high school still exists today and is the oldest high school in Panama City. His family lived in a house in Panama City, and his mother took in boarders when she could in order to make some extra money.

Neal worked his way through high school at the Wayside Nursery in Panama City. He worked in the afternoons, after school, on weekends, and during the summer. Neal completed his senior year in high school over two years with agreement of the school principal, Mr. Weaver. During those two years, he went to school in the morning and worked at Wayside Nursery in the afternoon and on weekends. Absent the agreement of the school principal, he would have had to drop out of school for financial reasons. He was on the boxing team sponsored by the Lions Club and coached by Paul Conrad. He graduated from Bay High School in 1938. He then got a job at the Panama City Paper Mill as an "extra" and worked there for about a year and a half.

During this time, he jumped freight trains as a hobo to visit his brother-in-law, Ralph, a dentist in Atlanta. He says the schedules posted for the freight trains were not very good, and that when he rode on top of the gravel in a freight train car (his usual way), he could feel every bump along the way. It was not very comfortable, but it got him to where he needed to be. Ralph encouraged him to go on to college during these visits.

Neal continued to box while working at the paper mill. He enjoyed the sport and wanted to pursue it. Neal learned that a Bay County High School student, who was a little older than him, was attending the University of Florida on a boxing "scholarship" which provided Young a dorm room in exchange for boxing for the University of Florida Boxing Team. Neal thought he also could box for a room and attend college. However, the scholarship was only available for the second, third and fourth years at the University. This led Neal to the CLO.

Neal believes he learned of the CLO from Bud Titus, another Panama City friend, who lived at the CLO. Neal decided that was where he wanted to live. Thus, in September 1941, he took the \$100 he managed to save working at the paper mill, travelled to Gainesville in a friend's car over what he

described were narrow, but paved, roads and registered to attend the University. After paying the registration fees, buying his books and paying his first month's rent from the \$100, he sent the rest of the money home to his mother. He got a job at the Kinney Shoe Store on Saturdays to pay his way.

CLO served two meals a day at the time. Peanut butter was part of the daily fare at all meals. His CLO detail was to wait tables at dinnertime about one week a month. His recollection is that the CLO consisted of three houses at the time, and his room was in the Brick House. He also boxed for the CLO boxing team. Because the University of Florida is a land grant college, all students – there were only male students at the time except for a few nuns who Neal recalled attended the University for some reason – were required to enroll in Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). Because he could not afford the boots for the artillery branch, he chose the infantry branch.

He remembers the CLO as being a group of fifty or sixty very serious students. They encouraged him to study and to go to the library (the "old library," not the present Smathers Library). At the University of Florida, he took all of the "C courses," which were the comprehensive courses all students, except for science-related students, took up through the mid to late '60s. These included C5, a humanities course; C3, an English course, and C4, a mathematics and logic course, numbered then as they were until they were no longer required. Although he says he was not a great student at Bay High School, he was very proud to make the Dean's List as a freshman. He also made the intramural boxing team in his weight class and became the intramural boxing champ during his freshman year. In addition to the "old library," the buildings he recalls being on the campus were the University auditorium, including what were either then or probably later called Anderson Hall, Peabody Hall, and the Law School Building. The main person he remembers at the CLO is Woodrow Wilson Glenn, who was known as "Coon-Bottom." The legend of "Coon Bottom" Glenn's days at the CLO has been passed down at least through the early 1970's. Neal says he is very grateful to the CLO because not only did it encourage him academically, it also provided the only way by which he was able to begin his college education. When he moved from the CLO house to the dorm at the start of the sophomore year he needed to be free on the weekends to travel with the boxing team. Dean Little got him a part time job at the Seagle Building. There, he met his wife's mother, who worked at another office in the same building. She said she had a daughter, Helen, coming home one weekend from the Florida State College for Women (now Florida State University) and said he could meet her if he went to church. He did and they kept in touch and married when he went back to the University of Florida after the war. He completed his pre-dental requirements and they moved to Atlanta for him to go to dental school.

The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and that, of course, changed his life. He joined the Army Air Corps in February 1942 and they did not have a flying class open at that time. He was able to finish the first semester of the sophomore year. He lived in the dorms that semester and was on the boxing and track teams. He represented the CLO and won the intramural title in his weight class early in the semester. He was sent to bombardier school when he got on active duty where he flew with Lt Jimmy Stewart a couple of times. He has a page hanging on the wall taken from his flight book of the day to prove it. He then completed navigation school too. His story of war service appears on the internet and is told in the Fantasy of Flight Museum in Florida. In March of 1943, he was sent to North Africa and stationed in Rebat, North Africa, as a replacement bombardier or navigator on B-17's. He flew fifty missions in B-17's over Sicily, Italy, Austria, and Greece during the war. When he returned from overseas he went to pilot school and earned a license as a twin engine pilot flying B-25's and B-26's.

In June 1945, he was discharged from the Army Air Corps and returned to the University. Because he now was a sophomore, his boxing talent allowed him to get a dorm room in exchange for boxing. He also joined the Phi Delta Theta fraternity. However, he still proudly represented the CLO in his boxing matches. He proudly displays the letters he received for his boxing in his living room.

By this point, he also decided he wanted to be a dentist, like his brother-in-law, Ralph, in Atlanta. Thus, he finished his second and third year at the University of Florida (all that was required for the learned professions at the time was either two years for law school or three years to get into dental school (and probably medical school), and then went to Emory Dental School.

He and Helen had three children while he was in dental school. They lived in a trailer. To support the family, he worked at the Big Star grocery store and had other part-time jobs while in dental school as well. After graduating from dental school, the family moved back to Panama City, where he established a dental practice which he operated for fifty-two years, retiring at the age of eighty-two. His fourth child, Neal Goss, III, was born in Panama City and presently works for the State of Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Neal Goss always has had a strong interest in flying, even after the war. Up until about ten years ago, he usually owned an airplane, such as a Champ 7AC or Cessna 120 or 150. He also has very much enjoyed hang gliding since 1974, and has many stories to tell about the subject. He still hang glides once a month at the Wallaby Ranch, about a 6 hours' drive from Panama City. He drives himself there and back. His latest achievement is having been honored by the Guinness Book of World Records as the oldest active hang glider in the world. That certificate also hangs in his living room, along with the letters he received for boxing at the University of Florida..

In 2006, when the University was threatening to take over the CLO property for its own purposes, he went to the Fall alumni gathering at the age of eighty-five years, to show his support. He continues to live in the house where he raised his family in the Cove area of Panama City. He has lived there more than 55 years. His wife, Helen, passed away in 2005.

Copyright © 2010 CLO Alumni Foundation, Inc. All rights reserved.

In addition to the information contained in this interview, readers may also wish to see these newspaper accounts of Neal Goss' hang gliding activities:

- [*Tuscaloosa \(AL\) News, November 13, 2005*](#)
- [*Panama City \(FL\) News Herald, November 1, 2009*](#)