

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

RM: Good afternoon Nita. Could you start out by giving us your birthdate?

NE: September 30, 1925.

RM: What I'd like to do is start off by talking about your origins and your family.

Where you're originally from.

NE: I was born in Marquette. Actually I was born in Negaunee. My mother went there because her doctor was there. But they lived in Marquette. My mother was born in Sweden. She was 7 years old when she came to this country.

RM: Could you give us her name?

NE: She was 7. She was born in 1893. Her name was Sally Sundeen. Her father took the family to Ishpeming. They came from Sweden and her father was a miner. They gravitate...the Scandinavians gravitated to the UP for logging and mining and everything. So her father came over here a couple times to check out where he wanted to bring his family. Back and forth to Sweden. Finally they lived here. Her father worked in the mines in Negaunee and the lived in Ishpeming.

RM: His name was...?

NE: Her father was Carl Sundeen. They had three girls. My mother Sally, her sisters were Stella and Ostrid. My grandfather walked three miles from Ishpeming to Negaunee every day to work 12 hours in the mine to save a nickel on the street car. This was 6 days a week. He had some kind of mine accident. I saw his leg once. He had to wrap his leg every day. It was black. He wrapped his leg up and went to work everyday.

RM: So he continued going to work after that.

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

NE: They were tough. At one point he was persuaded because he got a little ahead with the money. He was persuaded to invest it in the stock market. He made a thunder something. I don't know the details of the story, but I know he made a lot of money from it all of a sudden. When he went to cash it in, he was trying to sign his name and he finally looked at his family and said, "What is my name anyway?" He was so excited. Real thick accent. He started buying things. He didn't tell his wife or any of the kids. They lived on Park Street in Ishpeming. Things started to arrive and they were loaded on the lawn. Sacks of potatoes and flour, all kinds of things they bought. They were poor. The last thing that arrived and they couldn't believe what was happening was a piano. He bought a piano. He wanted his girls to learn to play. He was a real character. We have many stories about him.

RM: This is your...

NE: My mother's father, my grandfather. He lived long enough...I think I was about 10 when he died. He used to enlist my help in doing jigsaw puzzles.

RM: You said you had some stories about him.

NE: We all went to church of course. He loved to sing in church. But he was getting hard of hearing. One time he was singing away. We were only singing two of the verses and he didn't know. Then everybody sat down and he didn't know...he was singing all by himself. I remember he would babysit for me. He would put me to bed, but then he would get me up after everybody had left, to help him with the jigsaw puzzles. He had a good sense of humor.

RM: Can you tell us about your father's side?

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

NE: My father's side, he was from lower Michigan. He was in the First World War. He rode horses. He came back to lower Michigan. Some how or other he ended up, up here. I think it was because of the horses, he worked as a fireman. They had horse drawn hoses. He eventually went with the State Police. I have one story about when he proposed to my mother. He was pretty excited. He had been moving around different jobs and hadn't settled down with any one girl. She had been doing business in Negaunee. Both of them were 28 or 29. He decided he wanted to marry her. He had it all planned they would go to this picturesque place with a wishing well. He was so nervous and she was so nervous. I think she had an idea what was going to happen. The story they told me is when he got down on his knees to ask her, she was right by this well and she had been messing around with the bucket and got so excited she hit him on the head with the bucket and he almost fell in the well. This is when he got an idea what his life was going to be like with her. He always said your mother was born for ??? because something was always acting like it. He even said that a few months before he died. Just out of the blue they were having breakfast and he said you know I've never had a boring moment in my whole life with you.

RM: What was his name?

NE: Charles Engle.

RM: And he was from where in lower Michigan?

NE: A farm near Lakeview...near Grand Rapids, around there.

RM: He was an early member of the State Police.

NE: Yes, he was an early member. Several years ago a State Police historian got in touch with me. I gave him a lot of pictures and things. He was in the early history. But I

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

don't remember a lot of the details. He was stationed here. Then he became a trooper and then he was a sergeant. He was captain...I can't remember if he left or what, he was the commander here for a while. He was also the president of the UP Law Enforcement Association of Officers, whatever it is. He was behind a desk. But in his active years, he was in a lot of cases that people knew about. And he was a good friend of John Voelker. John was the D.A and my dad was the post commander. I've got a book from John, it says, "To my good friend Charlie Engle" People have told me lots about the early days. One story that really stuck in my mind is when he was still on horseback and he was given orders, he was a trooper, to pick up this minister and get a horse for him and go out to this place out in the woods where these two people, a man and a woman, were living in sin. Either arrest them or bring them back, or have the preacher marry them right there. That is what was going on then. The preacher married them. There was a story about the game warden that was blown up in Big Bay. He helped solve that case. After the game warden was blown up, he gathered up all the pieces and blew him up again because he didn't think he'd done a good enough job. He blew him up again with dynamite. My dad was at the scene. It looked like flesh cherry blossoms on every tree. There were some gruesome stories he used to tell. Somebody else, that case he was on, somebody killed his wife...something about a bathtub in south Marquette. If prisoners escaped we were scared a lot of times. He would say don't worry about a thing, most of them are city boys and after they've been in the woods for about 3 days they say take me back to Detroit. He used to tell us a lot of stories. I want to tell you one thing, he died in 1950, he was young, 57 years old. Years later, 1970s, I was living in New York working for Reader's Digest. I met another writer there who told me her father used to write for a detective. It

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

turned out he wrote the story about my father, the game warden and the whole thing.

That was her father and my father. It was really strange. Some of the cases were in the magazines.

RM: Let's focus on you growing up. You grew up in Negaunee.

NE: No, I was only born there. I grew up in Marquette. Went through the public school system. I went to Northern for a year. I was told...I majored in art that year and minored in psychology. My advisor told me...I want to tell you so you don't go in the wrong direction, you should think of some other career than art.

RM: Who was the advisor?

NE: Should I really say? Nadia Philip.

RM: This was what year?

NE: I graduated from Marquette in '43 so I went to Northern in '44. It could make you discouraged so you forget it, or mad enough so you show them different. The next year I didn't go back to Northern, I went to the Chicago Art Institute.

RM: Was that the reason why?

NE: No. I also really wanted to be at a college that was just art. I went for 4 years.

RM: What got you moving in the direction of art?

NE: Since I was about 4...I always feel that when people are good at something...the whole thing is what you're interested in. If it's the violin or whatever...and they do it all the time because they love it. If you do it all the time, naturally you get better at it. I drew my way through school. I drew cartoons of people once in a while. I could use it.

RM: Did your family encourage you?

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

NE: Oh God yes. My family couldn't have been more supportive. My Dad entered a...when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade I was in the County Fair. He didn't tell me about it til he came home with the first prize. He didn't tell me about it until he found I did take first. Then he came home all thrilled that I had won. At one point my mother asked me if I should be in music. They had this idea that everybody should play the piano or do something. I said no. They said if you wanted to do music, what instrument would you pick? I just wanted to get rid of them so I said if I did anything I'd want to do drums. The next day when I came home there was a drum set in my room. That's how supportive they were. They couldn't do enough. So I did play the drums. I was in the pit orchestra in high school, timpani...count 102 measures and beat twice. But those beats are important. Then we had a garage band for a couple months. Nobody was any good. But it was fun. My dad also used to give my brother and I lessons on how to disarm a fellow. He'd come back from classes and he taught us how to shoot with handguns too.

RM: Have you ever needed this knowledge?

NE: We each inherited a gun from him. A pearl handle...he had a more serious gun. He took both of them. I don't know what happened to mine. There's a lot of times I wished I had a gun. Somebody told me something the other day...if you have an intruder and he sees you have a gun, he'll take out his gun and shoot you. So maybe it's better not to have one.

RM: You said you decided in 1944 to begin art at the Art Institute of Chicago.

NE: The last semester, senior year, there was a class offered in watercolor. I can't tell you enough how watercolor has been discriminated against all through history. So I took

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

the class. We really had no instruction, no critiques. We'd go out in the streets and the teacher was just as much a body guard as anything else. We'd go out and paint right on the street. I loved it immediately, more than any of the other things I'd done. Of course you can't make a living in the fine arts unless you're teaching it or something. But I didn't take that course, I took commercial art. I got an apprentice job, one after the other, and worked my way up so I could finally not have any job, and just freelance. One of the first jobs I had was with a wallpaper company. The merchant came out...when you see it and want it in a different color, we'd do swatches to show what it would look like in other colors. There was a paint room where the full time person there handled the paints. On the chart was 1300 colors. That's how many colors we had to choose from to make these swatches. Plus we had the primary colors at our desk to go from there. I was there about 2 years for basic color. Then I went on to work for a newspaper chain. There were hourly deadlines, not just monthly deadlines. I learned how to work under deadlines. Then I worked for an ad agency. I became the art director for 9 years. By that time I could get everything out in the morning and then go home and paint. Then I'd go back at about 4:00 to check it out and make sure it was all okay. We were painting on weekends and nights. I shared a studio in Chicago. We lived out in the middle of Old Town and had an art show. That's really what started it. We had a weekend long party, open house. You know what art shows are like. We figured we might as well be in since we lived right in the middle of it. We lived right on Lincoln Park. Right in the middle. So I started selling paintings and soon I was selling more. I made more money that way and I had more freedom. So I quit my job. It was no big decision. I took some clients with me. Then I worked for publishers like Readers Digest.

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

RM: Could you tell us how that happened?

NE: The whole thing came about by entering National shows. I entered a national show for watercolor in New York in Manhattan. The Reader's Digest people saw the painting. They didn't like people to come with portfolios. They liked to go out and find their own artists. They saw my painting at the show and got in touch with me and gave me my first assignment to illustrate a story. I went to New York and for about 8 or 10 years they sent me wherever they had a story. You go from being a struggling artist where only a couple hundred people have seen your work to...when I was published with Readers Digest, their circulation was 17 million people saw my work. I was getting letters from Japan and Australia, all over. I tell my students, enter shows. That's where you have opportunity.

RM: What was the first assignment?

NE: The first assignment was called The Fox and the Hound. It took place in Pennsylvania fox country. I can't think of the author's name now. He had a fox, it was a baby fox, orphaned when he found it. He raised it. He took me every place that fox had been and I took pictures. That was a true story. I did condensed books, but I also did covers for the magazine and stories inside.

RM: About how many did you do?

NE: I don't even know. It was 9 or 10 years. I think I did 3 or 4 covers. One cover I put Maggie and Ted, her husband, and one of their children on it in an illustration. I think they were fishing or something. I wanted to tell you about John Voelker and the experience of his fishing. He had this shack for years. When you'd be invited...Maggie and Ted by that time did all the cooking. They had kettles and stuff and they'd cook



**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

outside. John would be inside mixing up old fashions. Everybody would be out fishing.

I remember being around the bend fishing and there came up a boat and it was Maggie or Ted. In the back seat of this row boat was old fashions. He was delivering them. Just rowing around delivering old fashions. He had an altar. Every day he'd pick wild flowers to put on that altar. There was a big long picnic table. Everything was outside.

RM: So this shack...

NE: It had a kitchen and a loft. I think I remember some of the stories. Every night he went home, he just stayed there for the day. I don't know if you realize it but Ted Bogden and Maggie were married there at John Voelker's shack. Some time over the years he found his old bridge and he had it put over one of his ???. That was the high arch. It was ...I can't even describe it all. Beautiful fishing. The day came where they married on that bridge. The dress code was clean jeans, I remember that. I was trying to pick Maggie's bouquet, I was the maid of honor and John was best man. The wedding was wild roses, white water lilies...it was all wild stuff. Some things you could eat, like blueberries. It was very rustic. We all went to the bridge. The whole wedding party, everyone was a fisherman. In the middle of the ceremony there was a big splash under the bridge and everybody looked to see what it was. It was a big splash. Some big fish had been under there.

DK: What year was that?

NE: 1974. My brother had the first Chinese restaurant in Marquette. Tai Long.

RM: What was his first name/

NE: James. He graduated from Northern in the Phys Ed. You had a choice of being a coach...he went into city recreation. He was an apprentice to the city recreation director.

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

Then he found out through friends in Marquette that the guy was leaving. So he interviewed with a lot of other people, and got the job. He moved back to Marquette. His wife was from lower Michigan. One child. He was city parks recreation for quite a long time. He finally decided he wanted to be his own boss. He would always do the cooking, Chinese cooking for Maggie, because Maggie is half Chinese. They would cook Chinese food when they got together. He decided there wasn't a Chinese restaurant, so he started that one. Now he's retired from it.

RM: That was open for 4 or 5 years.

NE: Yes, then a couple other places moved in. One chain that came in...he saw a line of people out in the street waiting to be seated and he thought we're going to move in here, so they did. That's the one down on S. Front. They had a liquor license. Jim was not allowed to get one because they were too close to church on Third Street. That still applies. Last week I tried to...you couldn't get any beer on Sunday, it was too close to church. I don't know. But they guy told me we can't stock that because...

SIDE B

RM: Let's get back to your artwork. You worked for them full time?

NE: No, I worked for them, among others. Once you get exposed, you get all kinds of opportunities come along. I did a couple things for Playboy. The first one I did for Playboy, I figured it was the last issue published before the new rules went into effect. It was the raunchiest edition I'd ever seen. I couldn't show it to my mother. All of the art people here, the only place you could get Playboy at that time...it was never seen. They were all down there to get my illustration. It was funny. Once you get one door open, many other doors open. People see your work.

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

RM: After that, you might say, you were independent. You could spend more time directly on your art.

NE: You can't make a career up here sitting under a pine tree. You have to go where the action is. I lived in New York for about 8 years. I lived in San Francisco, England, Chicago for about 20 years. I lived in cities all the time. I finally came back here to regroup and see what I wanted to do next. It's too seductive here. It's too easy. I never left. I've been regrouping and just stayed.

DK: What year was that?

NE: '78. This place is just a part of me. A friend of mine had it rented for weekends. It was Ted and Maggie. They said you can stay here and figure out what you want to do. I never left.

RM: This must have been quite a...looking at the view and tranquility was a complete change.

NE: Yes. From the crowds and...

RM: Could you comment on the difference, the impact that New York had on your art and the impact that Lake Superior had on your art.

NE: New York was all marketing. It was all trying to find...to keep making enough money to get by. It was all business. There were a lot of opportunities. But the actual painting took place in various places. I'm a wilderness painter and a landscape painter. This is what they hired me for. I did a couple that were city scenes. I wasn't totally cut off, I used to come here a lot to visit. We did a three month painting trip, started in Chicago, went to the east coast, Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, the coast to Main and Canada, up to Nova Scotia. Down the St. Lawrence River, down to Montreal. Did

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

painting for 3 months and lived off the back of a station wagon with a Coleman stove and painted the scenes. When we saved enough money where we were at a really good place people...we would live it up. It was a good way to travel. Camp for 50 cents a night and really live it up. I painted all over this country. I want to tell you...when I moved back to Marquette, the first winter I was here, right on Lake Superior, the power went out for about 6 days. The roads were closed. It was a terrible storm. It was '77 when I came, not '78. This house had nothing. I had the fireplace, no water, no plumbing. The first thing I did was borrow a backup generator and find out what to do. The second thing I did is look at all my old letters that I'd get from people for a long time to come and teach workshops. I never did that because I was interested in painting, not teaching. But I looked up all the ones from California and Florida. Can you put together a workshop in a couple weeks and I'll come out there now. I started teaching workshops because of the weather and the power. It's been a fabulous thing to me teaching workshops. It's gotten me all over the world, get paid. I taught a workshop in Africa, Kenya, Tahiti, Bali, Italy, and all those places. All over the world. And I had a different agent for this country. The major cities usually. My agent would work everything out, get the hotel and everything. All I had to do is show up and teach. That went on all over this country. I did that for about 15 years. It was just too much traveling. The only workshops I do now is two at Negaunee, beginning techniques, and a wilderness workshop. We go on canoes down the Yellow Dog River and paddle away and get material for 2 days. We really paint, not just superficial things. Then we go back to the regular studio and have class for two more days. The class, they work from their own photos. They get their photos back. I'm still doing those, but I've cut out all of the traveling.

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

RM: When you'd go on these workshops and traveling, were you able to continue with your work?

NE: It cut a lot of it. There was a big disruption to my painting. My agent wanted me to paint, I wanted to paint more, so that's what I do. From all my travel, I've got about 2,000 slides and photos and things that I took myself. Every one you take you think you'll make a painting of it some day. When is that going to happen? I started not taking anymore because I've got to start doing some of this stuff. Every one you take you get excited about that you're going to do something with it. So now, I don't need to get out in the winter because I've got a generator. A magic generator that turns itself on and off, it senses when the power goes out. Then it senses when the power goes back on. You don't have to be here to push any buttons or anything. But also, for the past lot of winters, I've been spending the winter in Florida and California. This last winter I decided to stay here. The worst winter in 11 years.

RM: Can you comment on, was there always a struggle through your life of wanting to paint and having to live and eat?

NE: That's a good question. People I've had interviews with think there's some reason or motivation to paint. The motivation is keeping a roof over your head. This is, the only money I've got is from painting. When I went to art school my parents paid for the first semester, that's it. Then I had to find a lot of jobs and a place to live. Think of what tuition is now. No kid could make enough money to do it.

RM: At that time, were you able to do any painting for hire?

NE: At that time I was just going to school. I had all kinds of odd jobs. I worked every summer at Blaney Park to help with my tuition.

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

DK: What did you do there?

NE: I was a waitress. Then I started drawing cartoons for the other waitresses and they'd wait on my tables for me. I also got a job, I don't know why, but I was able to stop being a waitress and be a bartender. The head bartender, one week you'd be on with him in the evenings. Then the next week you'd have it to yourself in the daytime. So I learned how to get back...

RM: Could you talk about Blaney Park?

NE: It's a resort, 43,000 acres. It's a town, a little village. It's very strange because vacationing habits changed. They don't go to resorts like they used to. That corner...there's a golf course. They had tennis courts, everything. We had more fun than the guests. There were riding stables, free golf lessons. The only thing they charged for was the driving. On my days off I would drive people. It was all college people and one big party.

RM: So at the time there were a lot of big city people coming up to this resort.

NE: Right. The whole business went down and they had to sell it.

RM: What did they do, just comment on...I'm sort of interested in this...did they have special food at the lodge or restaurant?

NE: They had a beautiful restaurant. People would come locally too, not just vacationers. The restaurant served everybody. It was owned by a lumber company. The whole thing was beautiful wood. A lounge and fire places.

RM: The buildings that are there, are they the original buildings?

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

NE: The restaurant is still there. I drive by it when I'm going to the Straights or something. There's a hotel and guest houses, about 3 lakes, a resident ornithologist. I still remember the advertising, 33,000 acres.

RM: So it went to the south, down to Lake Michigan. And you were working there about what year?

NE: When I was going to Chicago, about 4 years after I went to Northern.

RM: So about '48.

NE: One summer I worked at Bay Cliff, but there wasn't enough money in it for school.

RM: At what point in your life/career, did you start to become self sufficient in your artwork?

NE: About...it's going to be a big pause while I think. 1967 was my first job for Readers Digest. It was 2 years after that, that things started building up and I got more jobs and I quit at the agency. It was an ad agency called Kirkland Advertising in Chicago. I took some of my clients with me so I had a backup. But I was doing illustrations.

RM: So after that it was like contract work, piecework. You could concentrate on your art.

NE: Right. I was an illustrator, not painting so I could have a show. I was showing work and winning prizes in New York. There was one show, this was in 1976, it was the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. They had a show in New York called 200 Years of American Illustrators. I was in that. There were a lot of people there. They were doing some contemporary people's stuff. I was never painting for shows. Publishing is the way to go

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

because there are a lot of art students trying to make a living painting. It's very hard doing that.

RM: You have to have a backup. When did you reach a point when you didn't have to worry about these outside jobs, contracts, and whatnot, and could make a decision on your own, where you could sell your paintings and survive.

NE: When I could quit illustrating...that was a definite point in my life too. That was...my work was published by the Fine Arts Prints. ??? Press started publishing my work. Before, you'd make a painting and sell a painting. I was a struggling artist like anyone else. When you get published by a major publisher, there are only two in the country at that point. When you get published you make a painting and they make 950 of them. They sell them and market them. They do everything. You get the painting back too, to sell. This was huge. It was a big turning point in my career where I didn't have to really worry as long as they kept printing my things. It started in 1980... '79 or '80.

Also, I want to mention, I tell my students this...the thought went out of my head.

Because I was living in New York, this happened to me. There was no other possible way I could see it happening. I had a lunch date with one of the art directors for Reader's Digest. I went up to the building where they worked and I got there early. I had made a lot of friends by then. I walked down the hall and ran into Don Hedin. I owe him a lot. He said I got hooked up with this marvelous person and they're publishing some of my paintings. He kept raving about it. He was describing how wonderful they were to work with. I said why don't you tell them about me. He wrote a letter to them on my behalf and a guy called me up, Bob Lewin, the owner, and said send some paintings down. He had some of his big men artists look at my work and all of a sudden they started printing.



**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

I can't even tell you how many different paintings they've got of mine, but 40 of them have been sold out. Usually it's 950 each. First they tried it with a couple and they sold well enough. They continued. I still paint to this day. They're still printing my work.

RM: New things or...

NE: New things. They're no re-prints. When they sell out, they're sold out. 950 signed and numbered. They fly me down there to sign them. It's serious business. Now it's a machine. But we still hand sign them. I go to a hotel and sign prints over and over in a day. They used to have their own pilot. I'd take American Air to Tampa and they'd send a pilot over to meet you. This was Northwest one time and the announcement came over the thing would a passenger meet your pilot. They would go all out for the artist. They were a tremendous help. It changed from being the struggling artist to not having to worry. Well you always have to worry. They might go out of business, who knows.

Business has been very bad lately.

DK: Can you talk about your philosophy, the light you use in your images?

NE: Light is what makes me paint. There are two things, I paint in watercolor because it moves on the paper. It's not boring. The watercolor paints itself. But the other thing that makes me paint is the light on things. This is what catches people's attention in real life when all of a sudden there's a different lighting effect. I always say if it's something that makes you want to say come over here and look at this. If it's some ordinary scene, I don't paint it. You have to be in love with it to paint it. Usually it's some kind of light. With watercolor you can do that so well with light. Light paper shines through. I only use paints that allow the light paper to shine through. I've learned how to use it to it's best advantage. Light is what makes the painting alive. Oil is much more serene. You

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

put the paint on the canvas and you have to think of what to do with it. With watercolor you introduce the paint and water and it does things all by itself. Beautiful things happen with watercolor. No matter if it gets out of hand and does things I hadn't intended, it doesn't matter. The second half of the painting is getting rid of all the things, to make a painting out of the happenings. Needless to say, I'm many beginnings, and not many finishes because it's hard and takes a long time to finish it. Some people stop there and that's abstract watercolor. But something keeps me going and making it a real tree or light on the water or whatever.

DK: Are your paintings ever done?

NE: I finally figured that out the other day. I really did put it in words. It's because you want them to be perfect and they never can be perfect. From what I know with watercolor, there's no place on it that irritates me. If you see it a year later, you want to snatch it down and do something to it that wasn't done. I know stories where I wanted to snatch the paintings away from them. I'm thinking of Maggie.

DK: How many books have you published?

NE: I've done...many many books. But I have one, it's called, *How to Make a Watercolor Painting Paint Itself*. It's a New York publisher, Watson Dovetail. Do you have one?

DK: I think I have Mary Ann's? Or Kathleen? Which one wrote the book?

NE: I'm talking about my book that I wrote.

DK: No. The last time I was here you were working on it.

NE: I thought I'd give you a copy.

DK: Oh thank you.

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

NE: I told you the name of it and publisher. The last royalty check I got on it, they always tell you how many have been sold. It's been out about two years now and I was thrilled to see that it's 34,000. It's kind of mind blowing to think that 34,000 people have bought your book. It's going along okay.

RM: Usually for something like that, for scholarly work, about 1,000 or 2,000.

NE: I think the first one was 5. Then they kept printing more. You never make any money...no matter what the contract says, you get about 5%. They discount it down so they can sell more. Amazon.com, you can get books cheaper there than I can get them myself, that I wrote. When you buy quantities you get a better price. I don't care about making money, that's not why I write. But it took a couple years to write.

RM: Earlier you said that when you started out you went to the Chicago Art Institute and watercolor was ignored. How has that changed today? Do you think you had something to do with it?

NE: I really...there's a whole range of people out there today painting watercolor.

**TAPE 2**

NE: I don't know if it's well received. It's kind of ignored by the so-called art world. They still think of watercolor as a sketch before you do it. My hero was John W. Turner, an English landscape painter. Not very big oils, just watercolors, and they're wonderful. If he had been an oil painter as well, I don't think he'd have the reputation he has. In Italy I heard a lecture, I can't remember when this was. When they started painting, there was no landscape. Landscape was just like watercolor. It was all portraits of kings and nobles. Then they'd put a landscape behind them. Maybe a window or something. Finally landscape got to be a little more accepted, but it was incidental. Finally through

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

all the different schools of painting. If you're a woman for one thing, painting watercolors second, and painting landscapes third, that's the very bottom. That's why I started out selling just my initial N instead of my name because there was a prejudice that existed. Today I think we've got over that. You just don't see it in museums unless it's a special gallery. It's still poor relation. At one point...you don't have at Northern a watercolor. I would like to help if I could...of course now with the budgets the way they are, how they are cutting out television and sports. It's not the time to try to establish one, but I really do think that universities should have watercolor people and not just incidental.

DK: Can you talk a little bit about how you gain access to the Michigan Watercolor Society and the National Watercolor Society?

NE: The American Watercolor Society is the only one I was interested in because it's the hardest and they only have like 300-400 members. They have thousands of entries, people trying to get in. I got in, in 1969. It's like getting a Ph.D. It was another high point in my career, getting membership. At that time you had to be in three shows. They didn't have to be in a row, but you had to be accepted in three shows. The fourth one you had to be voted on by the members. You can get in one year and be rejected one year. It took me about 5 years to get in. Even at a show they would have thousands of entries and it took me a few years to get in. It's worth it. Keep struggling and entering. You get better and better and you get in. That was the requirements for that. Michigan, I judged their show...not Michigan. I judged shows all over the country. I do that a lot too. Judge and jury. Michigan, they can't have you live in Michigan and judge their show. You get out of state people. So I don't know what their requirements are. I just judged a

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

show last year in national combined with Philadelphia. It's the first time they went

together and had a major exhibit. There were 900 something entries and I had to get it down to 90. I had to cut hundreds and hundreds of people. It was terrible. Some were even friends.

RM: You were talking about the state of watercolor painting, who would be some big names in the field today?

NE: That's a good question. It seems there's no connection between the east coast and west coast. There's major artists in Seattle, San Francisco what have you, and we've never heard of them. There's artists here and they've never heard of us. I've noticed that traveling around. East people I know, and these names probably won't mean anything to you because watercolor doesn't mean anything to people. Some working teachers that work at major art schools in New York City, one is Barbara Nichi, another is Frank Webb. I can't think of them off the top of my head. There's a whole lot of people that are good. But I always mention those when somebody needs a judge for a show.

They're prize winners and beautiful work. I should look at my books to tell you some more names. Another one is Don Andrews. He does finger painting. All the paint runs down. I'm sure you've never heard these names because they're famous in watercolor circuits and that's it. There's a lot of pastel artists. There's a lot of artists in their own particular fields. You'd never know their names.

RM: Do people view watercolors, because it's so delicate, when I look at something I'm amazed that you can do this with water and paints, do people think it's transitory, that it's not going to last, that it's more important to go with oil paints that are in style?

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

NE: That's interesting. For a long time I think this is partly why watercolor wasn't taught. I think it wasn't permanent. There were a lot of viewers in history, just what you said. It didn't last so long. But now all the colors are permanent. They put them out in the rain even and they last. They're all permanent. It says on the tubes of paint if they're permanent. Some are fugitive. You can avoid those colors. Some are permanent. Now they have ways that they are printing things that they don't even have to have glass on them. There are various varnishes. They're doing many things. That was another thing that held it down is it always had to be behind glass. Oil was right there in your face, brush strokes and everything.

RM: In the old days, would watercolor react to humidity?

NE: A lot of things happen to oil paintings too. They crack and have to be cleaned and everything. You can't clean watercolor. It was behind glass. If it was in direct sun for years it would fade. The painting I was talking about earlier, Turner, his things are still fine, 18 something. It's still with us. I don't think people had faith in it. You were talking about delicacy, that's what I like about it. My paintings are an expression. You make a couple brush strokes and I'm saying it's a tree. Even if it doesn't look like a tree. You can do that better with oil. You can do that with a pallet knife. I use a pallet knife even with watercolor. Put some color on and scrape it with a pallet knife. You work at it every day. There's all kinds of things you can do. There's one thing I just discovered, I went to the beach and got some gravel and sand and put it on a smooth piece of watercolor paper and dropped some beach colors in it and went away for a few days. When I came back and it was all dried up I knocked everything off and it was gravel and sand. A total painting of gravel and sand. Anything that will make a mark or take off a

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

**Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi**

**Marquette, MI**

mark you can use. I love watercolor so much I'll never quit talking about it. I think now it's beginning to be more accepted because there's more of them around. I don't have any illusions, at the top of watercolor circles was my career. Nobody ever heard of me in the art world for posterity in the art world. Where we make our mark is people buying things for their homes. They love to buy watercolor. People are buying them all over the country and putting them in their homes.

RM: Do you have any of your art in a large museum? *Traveling shows. I*

NE: I've had them in traveling shows. *who isn't a painter. Anybody who's a painter*

RM: But a permanent...

NE: Nothing permanent. Who knows, I sell things all over the country and Alaska, people might donate them. I have no idea. Once the gallery sells them I have no idea where they are. *know that just get there.*

RM: But say the Metropolitan... *think. I have to say one more thing. I have to tell you*

NE: God no. It's a whole different circle. You can be at the top of the watercolor circle, but not in the art world. *is The 22 Best Landscape Artists in the World. They invited me*

DK: Eric Carl made a museum for illustrators of children's books. He builds from his...the Hungry Caterpillar, it's a very popular children's book. He built a museum and all known illustrators which he's collected are in this museum. It's more status and institutional approval. Do you think that the watercolor folks would think about building a museum for just watercolor? Or the United States of America? *is a book. But*

NE: I don't know. That would be something. The American Watercolor Society has a show in New York and it's the most prestigious one in the country. Sometimes they'll write a review about it. That takes place in a respected museum.

**Interview with Nita Engle**

**June 27, 2003**

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DK: I guess the reason I'm having this discussion with you is because women artists have been put down for a long time. The Women's Museum in Washington DC gained status because someone had this idea. Now the illustrators have theirs. I was wondering if the American Watercolor Society has ever entertained the idea of having one. A permanent museum and a permanent collection. That gives institutional approval which then raises the level higher up.

NE: That's right. There's nothing to compare it with. Traveling shows. I found... somebody would have to do it who isn't a painter. Anybody who's a painter doesn't have time.

DK: Does it have some kind of board?

NE: Yes, they have a president.

DK: You could throw that out next time.

NE: I'll let you know what they think. I have to say one more thing. I have to tell you what's coming up next. I had a call from some people inviting me to be in a hardcover book. The working title is The 22 Best Landscape Artists in the World. They invited me to be in it. I said yes. I thought that was great. They're an international company. I don't know what they're going to call it, that was just a working title. There's 22 artists and they each will have 6 pages. One of the requirements is to start a painting from a drawing all the way through. I sent them a whole lot of stuff and they picked it out. But nothing that had been in my book, nothing that was published. So it was a hassle. But it's coming out in the fall. It's 22 artists, but I don't know what the name will be. I think they should call it the 22 Best Artists. That's a good title don't you think?