

# A Day in the Life of the Neighborhood: Signs, People and Places

By Jay Chatzkel

## What this project is about and why I chose it:

This project is the culmination of a 52 week journey through many subject areas, perspectives and technologies. I have learned a great deal over the course of the year and much of what I learned comes into play in Assignment #52 below.

It is telling that one of the lessons learned in the first assignment reappears in this final assignment: Photographing a Stranger. Included in the images of this last assignment - #52, are environmental portraits of two individuals who were strangers to me when I made those shots in their in their workplaces.

The centrally defining lesson of the Project was to consciously move from “taking pictures” to “making pictures”. To paraphrase Gregory Heisler, “anyone can do a good photograph. What makes a great photograph is that you found a way to perceive the subject, create the perspective and lighting, etc., and make an image that no one else could have done.” While I still have a great distance to travel on this road, I believe I did this to an extent I would not have been able to achieve when I started Project 52. To me, the images that make up this series are visually interesting, have a touch of drama and a uniqueness that give readers with something they would not get elsewhere.

While I have seen most of the locales photographed for this assignment a number of times before, I worked to portray the subject matter in a different light, angle and relationship. All of that came together to make this assignment a significant personal project for me. Particular challenges were to create a theme for the series, have that theme be manifest in each of the images, and synchronize them into a whole, related story. My goal was that a person looking at them could see that each image told a different part of the whole story, linked by a continuity of look and feel threading through the entire collection.

The images of signs, people and places reflect New River’s past but also how many earlier things live into its present. This theme is an outcome of on my One-On-One sessions with Don, who somehow seems to know me in some important ways better than I know myself. In the course of our first One-On-One conversation, Don said that my interests come together in “travel photography” - which encompasses the people, places, food, etc., that give a place its special nature. This made sense to me. From that point onwards I looked at the remaining Pro 52 assignments as opportunities to develop an eye for that kind of photography and to accumulate a body of work to include in my portfolio.

Assignment #52 brought together many of the elements of the skill set I needed to achieve that. The assignment was easy to accomplish in the sense that I knew most of what I wanted to be part of it. At

the same time, it presented the marked challenge in that each image had to stand on its own while also contributing to the whole story on a more or less an equal basis.

From a key technical perspective I used just about every slider in Lightroom, a number of adjustment layers in Photoshop and a range of NIK presets. I experimented in hues, saturation and luminance, split toning and different kelvin temperatures. I explored selective color, solid color and adding textures to create a vintage appearance. I feel that a vintage feeling tone that resulted conveys a special living history to these places that differentiate New River to the point that readers would want to visit them on their own.

### **And now, on to the “Project”:**

I live at the eastern edge of New River in unincorporated Maricopa County and next door the Town of Cave Creek, just north of Phoenix AZ. New River is considered rural if not semi-rural, and there is truth to that. With a little looking around you can see many parts of how New River and Cave Creek’s ranching, farming and eclectic past that continue into the present. This photo essay brings out that way of life that continues to exist here.

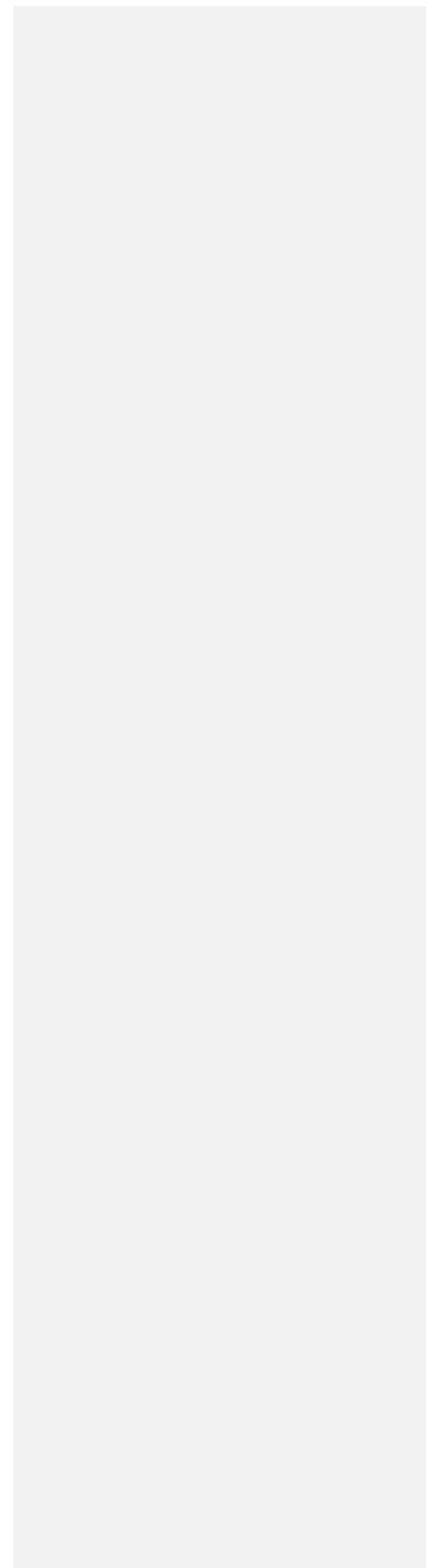
Prior to the upgrading of all-weather roads starting in the 1960’s, New River consisted of larger acreage holdings. Many of those parcels were used for cattle grazing and small time farming. During times of heavy rains, the roads were impassible and a person could not get in or out for days at a time. That simpler way of life is reflected in the images contained in this series. The signs on New River roads and buildings are serve as guideposts to glimpse those earlier eras but also ways of life that carry on today.

Our photo tour starts with a posted sign on a sizeable vacant acre parcel that was once grazing land, advising anyone and everyone that dumping and/or trespassing is something you do not even want to think about.

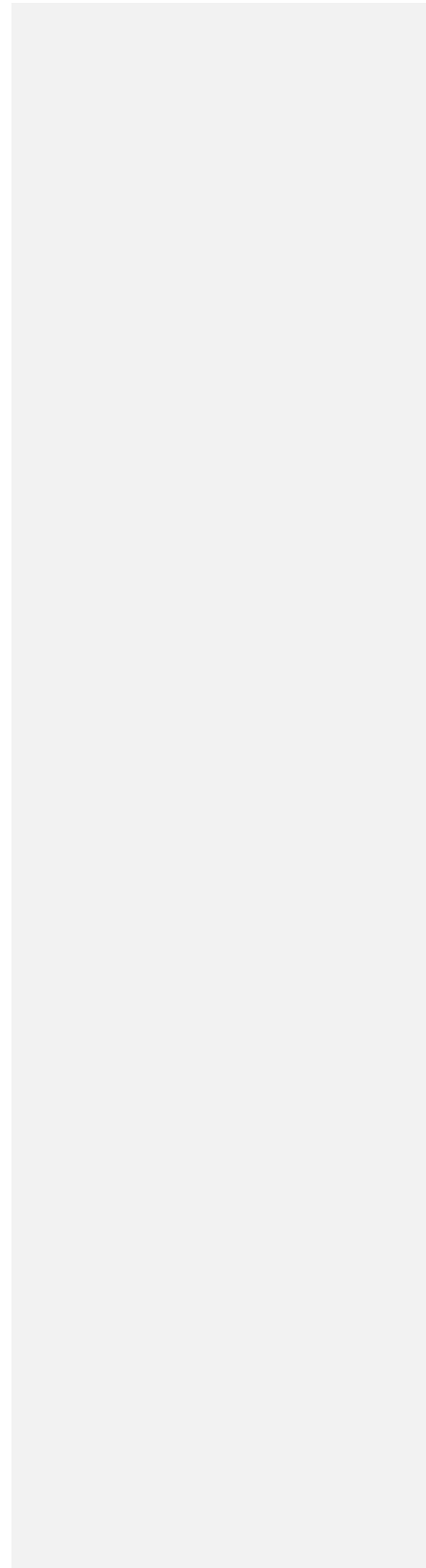
If that is not sufficient to give you pause, the second sign below WARNS you risk a close encounter with rattlesnakes. Normally they hibernate in the winter, but not always. They can come out of their dens at any time of the year and give you a nasty bite that will not make your day. Respect them and remember that they were here first.

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**Comment [1]:** See my original comments



Traveling further, another sign shows that New River was once a place that people came to so they could get away to live their lives the way they wanted to. This sign invites you to Shangri-La Ranch, a naturist resort settlement that is founded before there was any significant development in the area. New River had and still has enough open spaces that fostered a live and let live attitude where you can live the under-the-radar lifestyle you want.



Down the road are some of the farms and ranches that were much more common but are still working operations. And yes, you can get farm fresh eggs that were laid only a few hundred feet away that morning for your breakfast.



Before there were cars people traveled by horse and stage coaches... And, there were several stage coach stops in New River. As time changed they were replaced by roadhouses - often with entertainment – and lots of varieties of it.

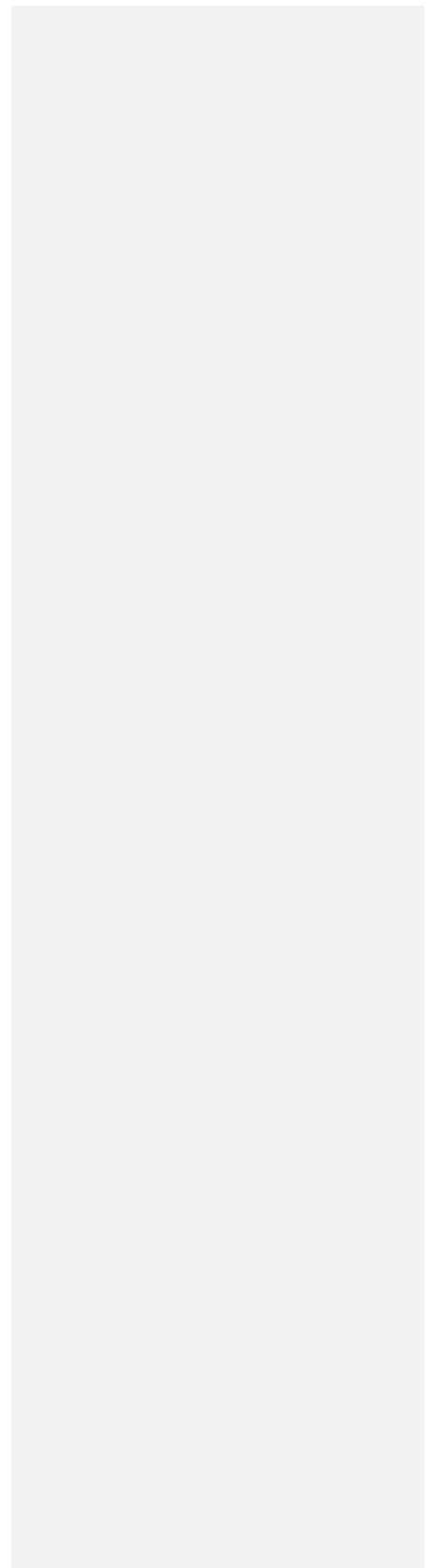
The Roadrunner Restaurant and Café is one on them, featuring a patio bar, bull riding for adults and kids, midget wrestling and discount Sunday beers for motorcycle riders. For bigger event cars, motorcycles and horse trailers overflow from the parking lot and park on the adjacent bridge that goes over the, most of the year dry, New River. It is an easy place to be, especially if you are not in a rush to go anywhere.





Turn the corner and go down a ways and you come to the Last Dollar Feed & Supply, stocked with hay bales, horse shoeing and pet food supplies. Back your truck in and stock up on as many bales of hay as your flatbed will hold. You will find that the Last Dollar store is run by some of the nicest people you will ever meet. Well worth a visit even if you don't have any horses.







Heading in the opposite direction on the frontage road is the Willow Hill Ranch, home of one of the most beautifully preserved barns in the region, built decades ago and treasure to behold. Its barn carries a sign that it is the home of a Cowboy Christian Association church.



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**Comment [2]:** photos are misaligned

Crossing east into neighboring Cave Creek is Cave Creek Trail Rides. During the winter and spring the Trail Rides company that takes visitors and locals out into the hills of the northern edge of the Sonoran desert to have a hands on experience of places they would otherwise never see. The horses are wrangled by a group of enthusiastic young cowboys and cowgirls who feed, groom and lead them several times a day on the rides.

When the heat sets in at the beginning of May the horses go back to the cooler climes of Idaho. Sometimes horses (and their owners) have more sense than people.



Our journey ends with a return to our home in New River. We are fortunate to live next to what I like to say are about 10,000 acres of state owned land, lying between our residence and the Cave Creek Recreation Area to the east. We built a hillside contemporary house looking out on an uninterrupted view of the Sonoran desert and populated with the full array of desert creatures, as well as about forty head of grazing cattle. Think about coming out for a visit....

