

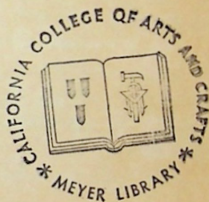
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Glenn Wessels - Painter



Lois Foster Rather

Glenn Wessels - Painter



RATHER PRESS ADDENDA

3200 Guido Street
Oakland California 94602

1988

*Compliments of
Lois Rather*



*Produced at the suggestion of two
of Glenn's friends and admirers,
Lois Stone and Renee Kennedy,
this study was handset in Bembo
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Twenty-seven copies.

Lois Foster Rather

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Glenn Wessels - Painter

GLENN WESSELS ACQUIRED SOME NOTE in his long career as teacher and painter in the school of Abstract Expressionism.

It is of interest that Glenn's adult life came to be intertwined with the lives of the Foster family over more than fifty years of increasing emotional dependence on his part, beginning with his contacts with the youngest Foster, Willis, in his college days at Berkeley in the early Thirties.

Glenn's rather exotic life story began with his birth in Cape Town, South Africa, on December 15, 1895. He occasionally reminisced as he aged, commenting on his Boer ancestry, and in an oral history record completed at the University of California's Bancroft Library in 1967 Glenn presented a lengthy and somewhat complicated history of his family's sojourn in Africa.

Glenn said that his father, John James Wessels, was a very wealthy man who became indoctrinated through teachings of his elders by the conviction that religion is and should be related to health. Wessels' ample fortune stemmed from early family involvement in the deBeers diamond mines. He devoted energies and time primarily to the extension of the theory and practice of dietary programs. As a young man he came to Battle Creek, Michigan, to work with the Kelloggs, and there met Glenn's mother Ruby Electa Wessels, a Canadian working in the sanitarium, whom he married and took back to Africa.

Father Wessels was a firm pacifist and espouser of the causes of health and Seventh Day Adventism (they believed the Sabbath was better observed on the seventh day of the week, Saturday) and for some time he and Ruby traveled as benevolent missionaries of this faith, taking their only son Glenn Anthony with them to France, England, Australia. Returning again to Africa to try to retrieve his property when the Boers began their fierce attempts to expel the British, Wessels found that his holdings had been confiscated. After brief semi-incarceration he

was released to bring his family to California, where some of Ruby's relatives lived.

Because two of Glenn's uncles lived in Napa County, Glenn's parents settled there and Glenn's first schooling was at the Crystal Springs School in Pratts Valley where his Uncle John Anthony was teaching. While his father went back again to South Africa to try unsuccessfully to salvage his fortune, Ruby gave birth to a daughter Jean, set up a boarding house and gave music lessons. When Father Wes-sels returned, he went into hospital management at various locations. Glenn studied at Glendale High School and St. Helena High School, and graduated from Berkeley High School in 1914, after his father, disputing with the SDA administration at St. Helena, bought an apartment house in Berkeley. Then, at his stern father's insistence, he entered the university in a pre-medical course.

Glenn later commented that he distinguished himself more for his anatomical drawings than for his Hippocratic devotion. His sister Jean was more amenable. She eventually earned her M. D., married a Seventh Day Adventist doctor and became a busy practitioner in Placerville, California.

Glenn had one considerable handicap. In his boyhood an accident in play deprived him of one eye, which had to be removed and replaced by an artificial orb. This sad fact has not, to my knowledge, been revealed in most biographical studies. Glenn said once that having only one eye, he just had to look harder. He also developed a technique of pivoting his head horizontally, so as to get three-dimensional sighting. He made little of his infirmity, rarely referring to it, lived a very active life, always wearing glasses and replacing the artificial eye at intervals as it roughened with wear.

A sketch in the California College of Arts and Crafts "CCAC," a student publication, romanticized Glenn's career as an artist. An anonymous story printed in December 1965:

This is the story of a boy who ran away from home and became an artist.

Glenn Wessels didn't want to be a doctor, he wanted to paint. He didn't like the study of medicine and the strange smells that went with it. But the smell of paint --that was quite agreeable.

"You'll end up starving in a garret," said his father. But today Wessels lives in a substantial house in

Berkeley with his charming wife, and they are not starving. Over the years his paintings have won innumerable awards, and are in notable collections. He is in great demand as a lecturer, often serves as an advisor on art councils, as a consultant for museums and other important collectors. . . .

After fleeing his pre-medical classes, Glenn indeed set out to make his own way. He tried to enlist in the army but was of course rejected. He became a "tool dresser" in the Kettleman Hills oilfields, and then for a time he worked for the old San Francisco *Call-Bulletin*.

Finally, during a period as a well-paid strike-breaker on the San Francisco waterfront, he accumulated enough savings to embark on his chosen career. Another writer in December 1940 quoted him:

He'll never forget the day he combed his tooth-brush moustache, put on his best derby hat and walked in the Berkeley office of C. C. A. C. and announced he wanted to learn all the art they could teach in a year and a half. . . . He remained for five years.

During these years at various intervals Glenn was a billboard painter, a stage-set designer, and even a commercial artist, encouraged all the while by the

advice of the founder of the college, Frederick Meyer. His parents were reconciled somewhat reluctantly. After all, his mother Ruby had once been a zealous painter of flowers; and other members of the family had dabbled in art as a hobby. It was just that his father felt financial gain was the only acceptable pursuit.

After this period of study and student teaching, and enrollment at the University of California to earn an A. B. (in psychology, not art), Glenn decided that he should invade Europe to further his abilities and knowledge. There was a certain small trust fund in his name controlled by his father. Professors Stephen Pepper and Worth Ryder of the U.C. art department persuaded Mr. Wessels to release the money; he even offered to subsidize Glenn to the extent of thirty dollars a month.

The 1940 interviewer wrote:

His adventures in Europe might easily fill a book. They include experiences of studying art at the Lhote Academy at Paris, teaching ballroom dancing when funds were low, as well as playing a uke and singing jazz songs, traveling on a bicycle, sampling all the famous wines in their home towns, visiting many museums,



Glenn Anthony Wessels

making' an illegal entry into Germany, learning French and German, collecting material to teach painter's craft ... Most important were his excursions with the famous Hoffman [sic] group. ...

Glenn found in the renowned Hans Hofmann a firm friend and teacher. He studied German and became an assistant in Munich and St. Tropez. He traveled with Hofmann as interpreter then on a subsequent American lecture tour. The oral history dictated in 1957 to Suzanne Bassett Riess devotes many pages to Glenn's descriptions of Hofmann's lectures and teachings.

At the instigation of Worth Ryder, Hofmann accepted an invitation to lecture in summer school at the University of California in Berkeley, while Glenn went back to C.C.A.C. full of enthusiasm as Meyer's assistant.

All of this was before I met Glenn. On the same evening at a party in San Francisco's North Beach hosted by my brother Willis Foster, he met our sister Katheryn. It was, I think, in the fall of 1931. Glenn was thirty-six; Kay, newly divorced and recently arrived from Illinois, was twenty-nine.



GLENN WAS PRETTY WELL ESTRANGED from his parents still. In falling in love with Kay he precipitated himself into a lively family.

My father, an architect, had renounced a flourishing business in Streator, Illinois, to move to California in 1925, opting for a new life as his four children came of age. Kay after a short career as a professional pianist had then decided to marry her high school sweetheart and remain behind; Stanton was finishing four years at the University of Illinois, his father's *alma mater*; I was one year along in a teacher's training course; and the youngest, Willis, was ready to start college. The goal was Berkeley and the University of California.

By 1931 many things had changed. In the Great Depression Dad lost everything, having unwisely invested all his capital in small houses which suffered foreclosures. Stanton was unemployed after some experience in a ceramics firm; Willis had returned from a stay in Texas; I was occupied with practically unlucrative amateur theater work in San Francisco; Mother was fairly active in women's clubs. There was little money coming in. For a time we were all crowded into a small rented bungalow in Albany

near Berkeley, scraping to make ends meet.

It was Prohibition time. In our conservative Middle West existence, we had never had liquor in the house, though we of the younger generation learned privately to like California wine and even stronger stuff. Willis, married to a Texas girl, in October 1931 moved to North Beach in San Francisco, where wine flowed freely and happily in a "bohemian" atmosphere. Glenn, having long before renounced the strict teetotal tenets of his parents' SDA religion and become well indoctrinated by his years in Europe, arrived at Willis' party under strong alcoholic influence.

My first memory of Glenn is of a staggering drunk who reeled around in a less than joyous bemusement. He complained loudly of dizziness and a headache, and at one point took from his pocket a dollar bill, on which he blew his nose before discarding it into a wastebasket. I was horrified at this desecration, but Kay was sorry for him, helped him to stretch out on a sofa and talked soothingly until he was semi-recovered.

Kay was a beautiful woman. A columnist writing in the *Berkeley Gazette* soon after she arrived from

Illinois, had described her as "tall, ash-blonde . . . someone should nominate her for a leading place among the ten most decorative . . . tall, slim, graceful, with even features." She caught Glenn's eye and ardor. They were married on February 6, 1932, and moved to a small clapboard house on San Francisco's Telegraph Hill.

Willis, the youngest Foster, had, after graduation from the university traveled about, experimented with journalism, radio announcing, door-to-door salesmanship, and had at length returned to San Francisco to set up with a college friend Carlton Hyman a magazine called *The Fortnightly*. From the first issue, September 11, 1931, to the last, May 6, 1932, Glenn was listed as Art Editor, and he contributed articles about art as well as wood engravings for illustration.

When the magazine succumbed, Willis and his Texas bride and Kay and Glenn were for a time crammed into the small Peralta Street house—the garage was my bedroom, I recall vividly. I find in the first of my several albums a home-made Christmas card dated 1932 and a series of snapshots showing Willis and Christie, Stanton and his bride—

to-be Rusty, Glenn and Kay, with the Foster parents and a beloved fox terrier Trixie.

I remember also one December occasion when the Fosters celebrated four birthdays around a ping-pong table in the crowded livingroom at 1088 Peralta. Glenn had drawn huge cartoons of the four honorees. These were pinned to the walls. The birthdays: Willis, December 12; Stanton, December 13; Glenn, December 15; and a female relative of Rusty's, December 14. The occasion was hilarious—but as I recall it there was no alcoholic liquor, not at Mother's table.

After the demise of *The Fortnightly*, Glenn continued to write art criticism, serving as art columnist for several years on the staff of *The Argonaut*, a larger and prestigious San Francisco institution.

Willis later quoted from one of Glenn's letters:

It was during that black time (1934) that I got the call from Dr. Walter Heil (director of the De Young Museum and local supervisor of the Public Works of Art Project) ... to go out and find a blank wall somewhere that needed decorating. I found the entrance lobby of the Laguna Honda home, with five big recessed panels.

Glenn's first sketches were considered to be too "Abstract Expressionistic" by the authorities in Washington, so he revised them to suit, depicting the principal activities in California's economy: industry, shipping, agriculture and aviation. He rented a small empty store in Albany and painted in oil on canvas with the assistance of a student associate Ernst Stolz. The finished panels were at length transported to San Francisco and installed.

A year or two later the mammoth program of the Works Progress Administration went into action. Glenn served for several years as technical supervisor for the Central California WPA Federal Art Project. Glenn gave many details of this work in the Bancroft oral history. I should note that Willis also worked as supervisor in the Art and in the Writing projects, and that I was Research Supervisor of the WPA Federal Theater for some months. The sternly Republican background of the elder Fosters bowed reluctantly to the necessities of the times and the intermittent generosities of the Roosevelt administration.

At length things had begun to look up. After the sojourn in the crowded house on Peralta, Dad

acquired a large lot in Kensington Park and began to build a family home there. In 1935 he designed and built a small studio-house for the Wessels' on one corner of the property, and Willis built a home for himself and Christie a few blocks above. Except for Stanton, who worked at various locations for the government in housing, we were all neighbors for some years during which Glenn was part of the frequent Foster family get-togethers and participated in other related activities. I had for years been taking dance classes in Betty Horst's studio, a spin-off in the Ruth St. Denis tradition, and Kay, an accomplished pianist, worked as the accompanist for Betty's classes and concerts. In the programs I saved Glenn was occasionally credited for costume design.

Glenn summarized in a letter dated March 11, 1981: "a time that is almost forgotten!"

Kay and I moved out of our honeymoon apartment on Telegraph Hill when the going got so bad that it seemed advisable! K. was still getting some money from accompanying Betty Horst and I had much reduced classes at CCAC and the \$40 per month from the Argonaut. But Dad Foster and Will, who then worked for him, found little building to do! Lois had a job with

Sam Hume. The total family income was at an all-time low and we thought by all moving into the same cottage in N. Berkeley [sic] we could save enough to see us thru as a group! The fact that we succeeded and all came out closer friends than ever says something good about the people involved!



AFTER THOSE "BLACK DAYS," GLENN moved into a period of increasing respect and even renown in the California art world. He was a masterful art teacher and built up a loyal following of thousands of students over the years. In an increasingly busy schedule, he found time at intervals to do some painting, but spread himself so thin that he finally collapsed from a "nervous breakdown." During his several weeks in hospital Kay used up all their own savings plus all of Dad's to pay for his care. Eventually he got back on his feet and returned to teaching at C.C.A.C.

In January 1942 Glenn accepted a position on the art faculty of Washington State University at Pullman, Washington. Kay and Glenn hosted a big

farewell party for fifty friends at their little Kensington home, which they later sold. Dad had died in 1940 on a nostalgic return to Illinois; his widow later sold the family home next door.

Glenn enjoyed his work at Pullman, as well as at other colleges during summer sessions, but his heart was in California. He brought some new paintings down for exhibition at Gump's San Francisco gallery in August 1942 and the noted art critic Alfred Frankenstein of the *Chronicle* reviewed the show:

In the old days ... his work ... was distinguished for its pugnacious forcefulness; it jumped out through the frame and connected with one's solar plexus.

The new show is no less forceful than the old ones were, but it is less directly aggressive. ... I do not remember, either, so rich and lyrical a palette in Wessels' former achievements. Anyhow, these are strikingly beautiful things, and one hopes Wessels will not hold off so long again before letting San Francisco see what he is doing.

After five years at Pullman, to Glenn's great satisfaction and again through the offices of Stephen Pepper, then chairman of the art department of the

University of California, Glenn was appointed associate professor of art at the Berkeley campus, where he was to teach for two decades. The Fosters? I was married to Clifton Rather and teaching kindergarten and primary classes in Oakland; Willis and Christie had three children; Stanton and Rusty were away and in 1956 moved with four children to Washington, D.C., where Stanton rose to the position of senior planner in the Federal Housing Administration.

Kay and Willis and I continued the Foster tradition of social exchanges, especially after Kay and Glenn moved into a charming house on a Berkeley hillside. Designed by architect Roger Lee, it won plaudits and pictorial treatment in a *Sunday Chronicle* of March 25, 1951. Clif, Glenn and Willis all liked to flourish cameras and my albums are gemmed with shots of family dinners, not only on Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays but at frequent intervals through the years.

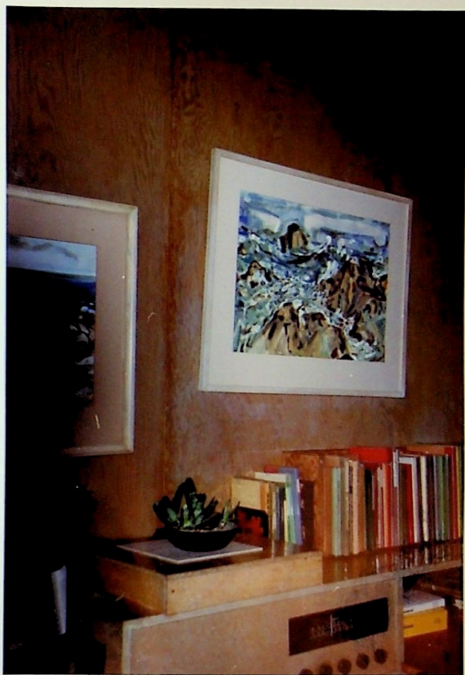
In March 1956 Glenn won an art prize at a San Francisco Art Association show. Then that October he displayed a collection of his work at the City of Paris, where, wrote Frankenstein, he brought in "the note of vigor, splash, and excitement before nature.

His watercolors of beaches and rocks involve a kind of concretized excitement." I bought a painting which Glenn called "Base of Rock."

Willis and Glenn in 1957 acquired a lot in the south woods of Lake Tahoe, and built a "lodge" to which Clif and I were invited for a couple of snowy Thanksgivings at Kay's sumptuous table, once taking our Siamese cat. There were other expeditions for fishing and touring together.

In June 1959 Glenn assembled an exhibit at the De Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco. The catalog of the show contains a biography of Glenn, listing of twenty-five works in the exhibit, and a quote from Hans Hofmann:

In writing this foreword for your first one-man show of large paintings, I feel as if I were giving the bride away! You had to travel a pretty difficult path to find your real self as a productive painter--the way so many artists must who must split their lives amongst a multiplicity of contrary aims and duties. An artist who is compelled to teach over a long period of his life can do this only on a creative basis, engaging his whole personality. ... A creative teacher is steadily confronted with psychological raw material which



"Base of Rock" by Glenn Wessels

is offered him in the talent of his students. Talent is common, as are the means for creation, but . . . only instinct and inner vision can awaken these into creative utterance. . . . This awareness has opened new vistas to you now and will unfold even more excitingly in the future. Of this your show gives plenty of promise.



In the spring of 1958, after a lengthy illness, Mother had died. Glenn had read the 23rd Psalm at her grave, though he and Kay were strongly opposed to religiosity and church rites. The Foster circle was dwindling, and the Wessels' horizons were widening. They embraced an opportunity to take off for Europe on a painting trip. The inevitable snapshot shows us sitting around the Rather dining table: Kay and Glenn, Willis and the girl who was to become his second wife, Maria d'Albuquerque. It was a *bon voyage* party, the date June 29, 1959.

This was the first of a series of Wessels excursions. It lasted for eight months under a grant of full salary from the university. Glenn lectured to the American Women's Association in Rome, sent us

postcards from various spots, returned in February 1960. The Foster Christmas party that year was at the Wessels' LaVereda house. Glenn had a portfolio of new paintings.

Another trip was less productive. Glenn suffered a stay in hospital for an appendix operation in 1961. Kay and Glenn then drove to Mexico, where Glenn fell ill of salmonella poisoning. Kay put him on a plane for San Francisco. Clif and I met him with a wheelchair and brought him home to our house. Kay meantime drove their car north to San Antonio where she hired a driver to pilot it to California and flew home. She was adept at the logistics of travel.

Between these interruptions the Wessels' maintained their happy lifestyle, marred only by Glenn's occasional bouts with alcohol addiction. Willis and Kay formed a new alliance to cope with incidents of Glenn's public overindulgence.

Glenn continued to teach at the university and at the College of Arts and Crafts, and assembled a succession of successful shows. In November 1961, at the time of an exhibition of his work at San José College, he was accorded a sort of eulogy by Professor Pepper:

For many years Glenn Wessels' pictures have been objects of pleasant expectation at all his major exhibitions in the Bay Region. His work has gone through numerous phases from a bold realism in his early things through a period of almost complete abstraction to his style now presented . . . in which representative elements are clearly incorporated into the dynamic encompassing pattern.

There has in all his work been a robustness and dash of brushwork, a love of materials and pigment, and a consistency of emotional expression. These elements have been coalescing more and more organically as he has matured. . . . There is nothing static about this man or his work.

In 1962 Kay and Glenn again flew to Europe, as they did also in June 1964. And in July 1966 they flew to Scandinavia, where they bought and toured in a Volvo. Kay was an excellent driver, even on left-sided roads, and an efficient courier. (Glenn had been advised to refrain from driving after a few early episodes attributable to his one-eyed vision.) While abroad they each time bought and used different locally manufactured automobiles, rented, entertained and lived in private dwellings.

Each time on return from months in Europe there was a showing of Glenn's paintings. Of the exhibition at the University of California's Davis campus in February 1964, James McCray, then chairman of the art department on the Berkeley campus, wrote:

For more than half a century he has been involved in the world of art. A great teacher and critic, his was a seminal role in bringing the ideas of modern art to the Coast in the difficult years 1929-30. Endowed with superb vitality of body and mind, he dedicated himself to the pursuit of theoretical concepts of pictorial structure and to broader ideas of philosophies of aesthetics. . . . These paintings, clear, cogent, luminous, complex statements about the world around us, are like diamonds lifted out of the rubbled moraine of human experience. They cannot have been the paintings of a young man. It is important to understand this in order to receive the fullest profundity of their beauty and their truth.

Then of a show on the Berkeley campus in October 1965, following the Italian and Greek journeys, Frankenstein commented:

Not since John Marin has there been so exuberant, vigorous, and effervescent an explosion over landscape

as the one Glenn Wessels provides ... a most extraordinary effect of controlled spontaneity, and a magnificently wide range of pictorial achievement. ...

These paintings were all done last year and this on an appointment from the University's Institute of Creative Arts. The Institute will have to go a long way before one of its grantees comes up with any more solidly accomplished and more brilliantly worthwhile.

On December 23, 1966, the usual Christmas dinner was held at the Rather house. The company included Willis and his Brazilian wife Maria, Kay and Glenn, and ourselves, of course. However, Kay was ailing, and in February began a lengthy and agonizing illness with episodic stays in hospital. Kay was brave; Glenn was devastated by her long ordeal.

Their hospital, Kaiser-Permanente, was fairly near our home in Oakland, and Glenn came often for dinner and consolation during the recurring periods of Kay's hospitalization. Stanton and Rusty flew from the East to lend support. Finally in July an operation revealed a malignant brain tumor. Kay died in September 1967. She and Glenn had been married for thirty-five years.

Glenn's friends rallied round after Kay's death. Many of them volunteered to drive him about and entertained him in their homes. In 1968 he and his sister Jean toured in Africa. In August 1969 he went with my brother Willis to visit South America.

Perhaps the climax of Glenn's career at the University of California came when, on November 6, 1970, as professor emeritus he was honored by the Berkeley Citation "for long years of loyal and enlightened service" to the university.



FROM 1971 MY CONTACTS WITH GLENN were primarily by correspondence. I have in my file some 120 pages of single-spaced typewritten letters, from which I excerpt his subsequent history.

In May of 1971 there was a letter from Glenn, who was still teaching at the College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland and had been commuting to the college by bus from his Berkeley home. It seemed that one of his students, Rita Jensen, had become his confidante, chauffeur and cook. "She appeared," he wrote, "as an older student in my classes at Arts

and Crafts, did amazingly well. ... Well, she has been cooking for me for four or five nights a week for about three months. ... I got feeling sorry for myself and got a bit alcoholic about it. Rita was patient and understanding. ... I could go on and on. ... You know how it is when you discover someone. ..."

We invited Glenn and Rita with Willis and Maria and Glenn's friends the John Grovers, who were buying the LaVerada house, to come to dine with us on May 26: another "family dinner."

On July 2 Glenn wrote describing the difficult move to Placerville in the rain. Rita and Eric Cheney and several helpers moved Glenn's goods into Jean Babcock's home (which Dad had built for her years before) and into a projected studio in her barn. Glenn wrote in a later letter: "I think of your father a great deal here, because there is an air of unassuming quiet comfort about [Jean's] place that was so characteristic of him."

Part of the freight to Placerville was photographic equipment. Glenn had become an enthusiastic photographer and indeed was to assist Ansel Adams in a series of photo workshops in Yosemite Valley

and elsewhere in succeeding years, until his physical frailties interfered.

On October 15 he wrote: "I live a very simple, almost monastic life, working continuously to get the new studio in order and adapting to the very different circumstances here. Painting has begun, but it is a stiff up-hill climb to 'get going' after such a long period of disinterest."

By the fall of 1972 Rita and Glenn moved into a small cottage near Jean's home, where his friends and former pupils came to see them at intervals. He also occasionally accepted duty on art juries about the state, sent a few pictures to shows. Rita or friends drove him to various events.

In September 1972 he wrote: "Ever since Kate died my life has been sort of schizophrenic (on purpose!), made of segments which will not reconcile. But nevertheless, I found it impossible at 1601 La-Verada, to keep alive the rich life that Kay and I shared there. I found myself ... drinking too much and feeling very much as tho all I cared about was falling apart. ... Now all that is reversed."



IN FEBRUARY 1962 MY HUSBAND CLIF had suffered a heart attack and stroke which resulted in a paralyzed left hand and arm. He was determined to continue usual activities, and actually then taught himself to set type and operate a printing press with one hand. We then proceeded to issue books as The Rather Press, eventually settling on historical studies of famous visitors and residents in California.

Glenn was delighted to contribute his own reminiscences of Gertrude Stein and Beniamino Bufano when these books were under preparation. He wrote after receiving a copy of our *Bohemians to Hippies*:

"My hat is off to Clif for turning out a beautiful book and to you for writing it so eruditely! And for your kind treatment of my limited contribution." He signed the letter "Once a brother-in-law always a brother-in-law."

Again and again Glenn stressed the importance to him of the Foster connection: "I never realized before to what extent I became part of your whole family... I still feel very close to all of you." (9-8-74)

He and Rita escaped what Glenn considered the "diminished culture" of Placerville by travel: to Nova Scotia; to Guaymas, Mexico, once so Glenn



Glenn's "Foster Crowd," 1940

Front row: Stanton Foster, Glenn Wessels (with Egbert the duck), DeForest Rodecape, William Grant Foster, Willis Foster; back row: Marguerite ("Christie") Foster, Lois Foster Rodecape, Carrie Jackson, Sue Jackson Foster, Kathryn Foster Wessels, Helen ("Rusty") Foster

Photo by Willis Foster

could teach at an art workshop, and then to take Rita's parents and her son by a previous marriage; on a Caribbean cruise, and so on.

Glenn had repeatedly urged Clif and me to visit him, but Clif's health made it difficult to do so. However, in December 1975, on Glenn's eightieth birthday Willis drove Clif and me to Placerville. An enthusiastic assembly of former pupils and fellow artists had been invited by Rita to honor him. Glenn was crippled, used a walker cane or a wheelchair, but was still painting: "I wish I could say that my central activity, painting, was producing masterpieces," he had written earlier. "From a surf painter I have become a painter of lichen-covered rocks and shady lanes, but this new *milieu* still does not come easily to me. The canvases look stilted."

Glenn was reinvigorated when in the *Chronicle* of Septembet 12, 1976, his long-time admirer Frankenstein declared that Glenn "was the influence behind the influence and one of the best California painters of his era." Then the next year he wrote in delight that the New York Metropolitan Museum had phoned to ask him to send them "typical work" he had done while with Hofmann, as well as biographical data.

"I never in my wildest dreams thought of showing in the 'Met.' I am no end set up to be asked. . . . It all builds courage just when I need it to overcome the drawbacks of old age." (November 1977)

On January 10, 1979, Glenn's letter began: "Your letters have a very fortunate effect on me! They take away my loneliness and I feel once more surrounded and stimulated by my beloved 'Foster crowd.'"

The "Foster crowd" had known changes. Stanton, the older son, had died, and Rusty had returned to build a "solar" home in the California redwoods. Willis' wife Maria, for years employed by the Brazilian consular service, was fulfilling an assignment in Saudi Arabia. Clif was in bad shape and in a wheelchair himself, the printing mostly in abeyance.

In the summer of 1980 Rita and Glenn moved to a beautiful site on Orcas Island in Puget Sound. The house was still unfinished, but besides Rita and her mother Glenn had the company of a black cat Pyewacker and an old dog Pokey. He complained that he was getting forgetful, but was hoping soon to begin painting the "wooded landscape and wide water views and an ever-changing sky." In every letter he sent loving greetings to all Fosters.

GLENN HAD ENJOYED MANY HONORS during his long life, but there were to be more. It all started in March 1981 when workmen repainting the corridors at the Laguna Honda Hospital in San Francisco uncovered the murals Glenn had produced in the Thirties. There were news stories and pictures and the five panels were hailed as "a historic rediscovery." Hidden behind painted plywood, they had been well preserved (Glenn said it was because even then he knew all about pigments, which were to be his subject in many later art lectures). A conservator from DeYoung Museum examined the finds and confirmed their importance as "classic examples of the art movement known as Social Realism." The hospital administrator declared that he would like to arrange a reception for Wessels "if the artist can be located."

I telephoned to Leo Walsh, the administrator, on reading the story, and gave him Glenn's address on Orcas Island. I also referred him to Willis, who immediately became involved in plans for the assembling and exhibition of Glenn's available work and a luncheon, which were held at Laguna Honda on April 30th.

The *Chronicle* reported on May 1:

A frail 85-year-old artist, hobbling on crutches, came out of creative seclusion yesterday for the dedication of his recently rediscovered murals. . . . Glenn Anthony Wessels, who resembles Harry Truman in looks and feisty manner, . . . took in the five "social realist" murals, the occasion for yesterday's hoopla, and pronounced them "adequate for the situation" and a helpful commission for a Depression artist.

Inspired by reports in the news, the College of Arts and Crafts had also arranged to honor Glenn, along with Earl "Fatha" Hines, at the annual commencement exercises on May 2nd in the Scottish Rite Temple in Oakland. They were awarded degrees as Doctors of Fine Arts. Glenn made a rather lengthy speech, dissolving in tears at some points.

Then, returning with Rita to Orcas Island, he commented on their visit to the Bay Area: "It was heartwarming to see both of you! In fact seeing 'the family' was more important to me during the May 1-5 adventure than were any of the official ceremonies in our honor! . . . I want to emphasize my feeling of oneness with you Fosters! Perhaps because we survived the Depression together! . . ."

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The last letter I received from Glenn was dated January 31, 1982, and consists of three close-typed single-spaced pages. In it he writes: "I doubt if I get around these days much better than Clif does! ... I am completely dependent on crutches and it ... cuts me off from carrying a view camera around, so I am out of the photo business entirely now! All I can do is paint, and that in a very restricted way. ... I work much more from recollection and imagination. ... That and keeping up with my mail are my chief amusements." He signed the letter "Your Brother, Glenn."

Glenn Wessels died on July 23, 1982. Rita wrote informing us that he was in hospital for two days, had had a series of three heart attacks. She summed up: "He lived a long and fruitful life so I feel that he has come to rest." He, like most of the Fosters of whom he was so fond, had ended a busy career. Only his pictures survive -- and a thick folder of his letters.



