



Educating The Heart Of An Artist - Seascapes

The ocean draws me. It seems as though it always has. I remember, as a child in Wisconsin, watching the clouds moving in from the West and wondering to myself if those clouds had been out over the ocean. I read tales of pirates and sailors, of castles at the edge of the sea. I longed to "go out west" where the land ends to see for myself the ocean that never sleeps. I fantasized about tropical islands where shipwrecked explorers found peace and contentment and food aplenty in the warm waters of the sea. On snow covered winter nights, my mom read aloud to me the exploits of Sinbad and Ulysses, of Robinson Crusoe and Christopher Columbus. My vivid imagination placed me in the scene of the action. As I grew older, I learned the facts of the water that covers so much of this earth. I learned the names of the oceans of the world. I learned statistics concerning shipping and exports. I found out about lighthouses and their role in the legends of the sea. My fascination grew along with my education. Someday I would see the sea. When my oldest brother joined the Navy, he would write home about his adventures. I made up my mind to join the Navy too, and see the Seven Seas. (My parents, however, had other plans for me, but that is another story.)



I did not join the Navy, but when the opportunity arose, I went West. I got as far as the desert. My oldest brother, now out of the Navy, was employed at Page, Arizona, as a construction worker building the Glen Canyon Dam. When that job was done, my brother and I moved on to Las Vegas, Nevada. We sent for the rest of the family who settled there with us. It was there I met and married Ed Thompson. His parents were living in Washington State. So, to make a long story short, when we visited

his parents, we took a quick trip to the ocean. At last! I saw the sea! I ran into the water up to my knees and dipped my hand into the surf. I tasted it to learn if it REALLY was salty. It is! Thus began the rest of my life long association with the ocean.



When I began my career as an artist, I wanted to paint everything I saw! This being rather daunting, not to mention a rather disjointed approach to a serious venture, my husband gave me some very good advice, "You love the ocean, why not start there?" He made it possible for me to take lessons from seascape artists living and teaching in the Northwest. I took the opportunity to visit the public library and read the books published by nationally known seascape painters. We visited the seaside whenever we could. Our two sons, also, enjoyed the



ocean. Ed would fish the surf, the boys would pick up driftwood and hunt for agates, and I would study the water. I used binoculars to bring the offshore action up close. One day, I would observe the way the rolling breaker would curve at the peak and what it looked like as the wave tumbled down upon itself. Another time I would watch the foam patterns for hours to lock the information into my memory. Sometimes I would spend all day observing the peaks and valleys of the rising swells. And so it went. From tree covered headland to misty offshore stack rocks, I learned my



subject. I filled sketch books with drawings of the ocean. I came home and painted what I had seen. Nearly all of my seascape paintings are from memory, a composite of the places I have been.

On a cold, windy, rain soaked winter day, it is a great thrill for me to be at the edge of the sea. Dressed warmly and slowly ambling along the sodden sand, I study the crashing waves that burst into rolling thunderous billows of white foam that dissolve into delicate tracings of finely etched lace on the surface of the rippling swells. I watch in wonder as the spreading foam eases onto the sand, and gusts of wind take chunks of foam and



send them bobbing along the beach like fluffy white pillows. In the chill of the winter air, the seagulls' shrill squawk is whisked away into the vast distance of the undulating sea. Only the completion of a thorough study of the scene before me, (or the warm refreshment waiting for me back at the motel room!) can tear me away from the terrible beauty before me. I have great respect for the fury of a stormy sea. On one trip to the Oregon coast, a storm arose as my husband and I

cruised up the coast highway. We stopped at a wayside overlook to watch the waves. Our vantage point was about 75 feet above the surface of the water. The churning dark water was fascinating and I photographed the scene just as fast as my shutter would allow. We were awed by the frothy spray as it flew over the top of the cliff before us. I wanted to stay, but Ed, in his wisdom, said "Let's go!" So, reluctantly, we left the park, and continued on our way. (We learned later that the waves had completely inundated that particular parking area, and caused considerable damage!)

I recall another day, when the ocean was as calm as glass with deep fog enveloping the whole world. In the distance, the plaintive sound of a lighthouse fog horn, harmonized with the call of the gulls. Walking the beach, I had the opportunity to observe the way the wavelets pulse onto the sand and sink quickly into obscurity. Here was a feather dropped by a moulting gull, and there a distinctively shaped piece of driftwood deposited by the waves on a stormy day just passed. And always the constant rumble of the breakers, now completely out of sight in the pressing dampness of the fog. Moving closer to the water's edge, I saw the colors of the sea that only occur on a densely foggy day. There was an intense deep green-turquoise in the rising swell that I have seen only here in the Pacific Northwest. As I strolled on, the looming offshore rocks would suddenly appear as if dropped at that instant from the depth of the shroud. Almost everything was grey. (My favorite color!) Only the

foam was white. But, such an intense blue-white as to almost hurt your eyes. The early morning adventure locked itself deeply into my heart. Before long, the sun rose higher in the sky, and the fog lifted to reveal the entire presence of the ocean and the long stretch of sandy beach. As the fog melted away, the colors and mood of the ocean changed.

The sun breaking through clouds or fog at the edge

of the sea presented an incredible contrast in color. One moment all the water appeared grey-green in a soft silvery light. Then, suddenly the surface of the sea was alive with blues, purples, rainbow colored mists, and sparkling vivid white. As the sun rose toward the zenith the translucencies flashed nearly lime-green, and the



deep undulating swells seemed to be the most intense dark green you can imagine. Sky blue reflected on the surface troughs, and the yellow of the sunlight sparkled everywhere from foam to wave tips. Then I noticed the shadow formed by the waves and rolling foam. It lay like a palpable force on the front and sides of the rising water. It influenced the colors of the foam patterns tucked beneath the curving breaker. I noticed that even small swells can cast a shadow. The rocks, too, cause the water and foam in its shadow to be different in color than the sunlit areas. All these details become vastly important when I paint the ocean. It has to be true. It must be realistic. I want the viewer to feel as though that wave will break and be gone before their very eyes, as they watch.

Finally, I want to tell you about the sunsets. Ah, the sunsets! There are some who will try to convince you that the sunsets on the Pacific coast of Washington and Oregon are grey, dark or non-existent. I have seen glorious sunsets, that took my breath away! In the early days of my career, I was taking a workshop in Lincoln City, Oregon. After the class, two other classmates and I decided to drive south to some of the lesser known waysides, to study the water and take research photographs. As our day, and our adventure was nearing a close, we stopped to walk out on a rocky headland, just as the sun was setting. We snapped pictures of the gold and purple, the orange and bronze. Two of us ran out of film. The third member of our group was having difficulty with her camera, so she fussed with her equipment while we watched the sunset getting more and more glorious at each passing



second. As if on cue, she suddenly "fixed" the problem and as she looked up to film the last rays of the setting sun, the sky burst forth in an awesome display of glowing red. The spray, the foam, the breakers gave forth a pink iridescent shimmer. She was the fortunate one to have captured it in pictures. But I held onto the glory of the scene in my mind. I have since been on the coast to see sunsets in gold, sunsets with deep violet tinged with scarlet, softly mellow pastel colors, and some when the sun just sank into the sea as a molten ball of brass. Still, the "day of the pink surf" sticks in my memory. You will see evidence of that day in some of my oil paintings. "Last Splash", and "Quiet Time" are two of them.

I never get tired of painting the sea. The children are grown and off to live exciting lives apart from me, with families of their own. Yet, my husband and I still roam the shorelines and coves of the Pacific Northwest. Upon these occasions, I continue that learning experience the ocean provides at every twist and turn of the coastal highway. Now, as often as not, the paths lead to other climes. California, Hawaii, Florida, have been wonderful sites to explore. Alaska, Panama, and the East coast of Virginia and beyond are in the planning stages. Yes, the sea draws me, and as you have learned, I draw the sea.