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Lesson Fifteen: Do Some Research

Lesson Fifteen: Do some research. Find out what's happening in your area. Find out what's happening in your country. Find out what's happening in your region. Find out what's happening in your city. Find out what's happening in your neighborhood. Find out what's happening in your family. Find out what's happening in your life. Find out what's happening in your mind. Find out what's happening in your heart. Find out what's happening in your soul. Find out what's happening in your spirit. Find out what's happening in your body. Find out what's happening in your life. Find out what's happening in your world. Find out what's happening in your universe. Find out what's happening in your multiverse. Find out what's happening in your omniverse. Find out what's happening in your Universal Mind. Find out what's happening in your Universal Heart. Find out what's happening in your Universal Soul. Find out what's happening in your Universal Spirit. Find out what's happening in your Universal Body. Find out what's happening in your Universal Life. Find out what's happening in your Universal World. Find out what's happening in your Universal Universe. Find out what's happening in your Universal Multiverse. Find out what's happening in your Universal

Betty Hong: I remembered when you had combined in one wing?

Lorser Feitelson: No, we had our own press. We had a whole battery of these people, and they did an excellent job.

Betty Hong: I understand that some of the work that the artists did was to make serigraphs of the Indian rock paintings. Was that in our area or just on the Northern Project?

Lorser Feitelson: Of rock paintings?

Betty Hong: Done by prehistoric Indians.

Lorser Feitelson: That was not in our Project. I have an idea this Project probably would have been a little farther east, perhaps in Arizona. I can't remember who was head of that.

Betty Hong: They did it in California.

Lorser Feitelson: In California?

Betty Hong: Yes. Inland from Ojai, up towards Taft, that area.

Lorser Feitelson: Well, that would be under us, but I can't remember about it.

Betty Hong: Well, it may be that artists in the northern part of the state came down.

Lorser Feitelson: No, they couldn't come down. Ours went up as far north as Santa Maria, I think.

Betty Hong: Speaking of Indians, what about one of the Project workers, Willie Boel Cooper?

Lorser Feitelson: Oh, she was a Cherokee Indian, the sullest girl you've ever seen, and the sweetest human being! She was encouraged to make, in her own way, drawings that dealt with the folklore of her people.

Betty Hong: Was this for the Index?

Lorser Feitelson: It was for the Index of American Design. She was just marvelous, just marvelous! There were made in abundance. Some of them were lithographs and perhaps hand-colored. Oh, she was just wonderful!

Betty Hong: I think as a final work on the Projects someone should be sent around to all public buildings to look up such things because no one knows what has become of them. The City Hall, for instance, has many things, and all of the schools do.

Lorser Feitelson: And some of them have been lost or stolen and—

Betty Hong: It would be a wonderful project for someone's thesis in college.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes. And many office workers have taken them home although they didn't belong in them. All these things were government property. One hundred years, they'll be right at time. It was lent to them. But this is the history of art. The history of art is the history of lives.

Betty Hong: Well, I suppose so.

Lorser Feitelson: This is true.

Betty Hong: But it's also a history of trying to find them again.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes, that's true. It's wonderful! It's probably more fun to make a discovery than to make the work of art!

Betty Hong: I would love to hunt for them. It would be very interesting.

Lorser Feitelson: It is. It's like I feel right now. I just came back from New York where I bought some oil or eight drawings, old master drawings. I'm trying to identify them. I've had gems and gems of experience but some of these things are almost impossible to describe.

Betty Hong: Aren't you having fun?

Lorser Feitelson: Oh, they are lots of fun. How about a bit of coffee? We are ready for it. We are cold!

Betty Hong: No.

Lorser Feitelson: Of course we can close the window.

Betty Hong: In relation to the wood painting, did you have the International Business Machines man, I think it was Mr. Watson—

Lorser Feitelson: Watkins.

Betty Hong: —get paintings here?

Lorser Feitelson: No, no. No private collector or commercial concern could have had work that was made on the government funds. It had to be nonsectarian.

Betty Hong: He must have circulated his own private show for the WPA Art Project.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes, perhaps he did that, but I don't remember any exhibition that we had. We couldn't even expend the time of any worker. None of us had the right to do that.

Betty Hong: I wanted to ask you if you knew about one of the artists when I can't seem to fit him this. It's Conrad Buff.

Lorser Feitelson: He was not on the Project. I think he may have been, in the wing beginning, on an easel painter.

Betty Hong: He was an X, I believe, in 1934.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes, when they first invited the artists, that's how I got on.

Betty Hong: Oh, really?

Lorser Feitelson: Yes.

Betty Hong: Well, he'd done pictures of Boulder Dam and they were going to be used for the Santa Monica High School. Of course we knew that they are not there, and I wondered what happened.

Lorser Feitelson: Well, the chances are these were large paintings, what we call easel paintings, and they were probably given to the people who gave them. And he is one of our truly great artists, who in the beginning here, when there were very few artists of real merit, contributed a great deal. He was a very, very fine man. He was willing to put out a show, what we call a preview. We don't let the artists, but they really are memorial shows, because he's on in years.

Betty Hong: Oh, I see.

Lorser Feitelson: We believe an artist should be honored and attend his own memorial show.

Betty Hong: Yes. I think it's wonderful thing for you to do.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes.

Betty Hong: But he wasn't on the Project?

Lorser Feitelson: Just in the beginning when they didn't know how to organize this thing. He was having a rough time during the Depression. He everybody, like. The galleries were all closed. You couldn't sell anything.

Betty Hong: Why didn't he stay on then?

Lorser Feitelson: He is a very stubborn, humorless Swiss. His wife is a wonderful woman, and at one time, in the very beginning of the cultural renaissance here, she was the curator of the Museum. He made lithographs, and she would write, and he illustrated her stories. Their folios were sold. I think they have a son who is an architect.

Betty Hong: They do?

Lorser Feitelson: Yes, a modern architect. And they are grand people. But he is a man with definite ideals, uncompromising.

Betty Hong: I wanted to ask you about a mural I think you did, which we haven't talked about, for the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. Was that one of the Project things?

Lorser Feitelson: No, that was my own.

Betty Hong: Was this before the Project days?

Lorser Feitelson: No, I'm just trying to think when I painted it. It was done off the Project, but probably I was still on the project. I did it as a gift to them for some services rendered to my daughter. I can't remember when it was.

Betty Hong: I see. It didn't sound like Project work.

Lorser Feitelson: No, no. It was something I did on my own.

Betty Hong: Then of the ones that you did on the Project, I know we have the Thomas Edison Junior High School—that's at 4250 Hooper Avenue. You did that with Mrs. Feitelson (Helen Lundeberg Hard) in 1935.

Lorser Feitelson: Well yes. And we had quite a crew of people on that.

Betty Hong: That was three large murals?

Lorser Feitelson: Let's see, three, yes. Two large ones, and one was a square with Edison in the center. My God, I had forgotten about it.

Betty Hong: 360 square feet. Two at eighteen by seven feet and one at—

Lorser Feitelson: My God!

Betty Hong: I have the titles. I wanted to ask you about the research for them because that must have been very, very interesting.

Lorser Feitelson: We had a battery of people who did nothing else but research on the apparatus. We don't know anything about what the early modern scientists, Marconi, Maxwell, or O'Henry or Faraday looked like.

Betty Hong: Did they also suggest the subject for this?

Lorser Feitelson: Oh, yes. It had to be approved before we could paint.

Betty Hong: Then the roll of Records had ten murals by different artists, both you and Mrs. Feitelson had murals there, along with Bunting, Mac-Quarrie, and Charles Hubert Davis.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes, yes.

Betty Hong: Yours was called Case Issues Russian American Charter.

Lorser Feitelson: That's right. It shows Receiver obtaining the treaty for Czar Paul I, of Russia.

Betty Hong: In 1799.

Lorser Feitelson: Granting the charter for California, I think it was. He died in California.

Betty Hong: Oh, did he? He seems to have been a scoundrel.

Lorser Feitelson: He had married the Spanish governor's daughter.

Betty Hong: Yes, the lovely Conception Arguello, daughter of Governor Arrillaga. After obtaining the supplies he wanted for his men on the "Juno," he sailed away on a May day of 1806, promising to return for her; she waited thirty six years but he never came back!

Lorser Feitelson: That's didn't know. He died on the way back.

Betty Hong: The Southgate Library murals you did with Albert King and Henry Allen Rest—is this correct?

Lorser Feitelson: Southgate?

Betty Hong: Because it sounds to me like those would have been massive and you wouldn't have been working on them.

Lorser Feitelson: No.

Betty Hong: Then it was just you were just in charge of the murals.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes.

Betty Hong: That's why your name was given in connection with them? The same would be true of the Long Beach Auditorium.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes. Well, that was before I took it over.

Betty Hong: I see.

Lorser Feitelson: There were no supervisors at that time. That's when the Depression and his gangs—old things with different artists. It was just a hodgepodge.

Betty Hong: What about the Hooper Avenue School?

Lorser Feitelson: No, I did the Hendrick Hudson and what was the other one? I can't remember.

Betty Hong: You had two of them. The other was Daniel Boone.

Lorser Feitelson: No.

Betty Hong: I'd have to get down to see them. I had trouble finding Hooper Avenue on the map. It must be near Jefferson the other side of the Coliseum some place.

Lorser Feitelson: It is down in the colored district.

Betty Hong: Jumping way back chronologically, which I shouldn't be doing, I'm sorry, I wanted to ask you about the Frank Lloyd Wright. I don't know where you and I mentioned it you gave a lecture and could tell me about them? One was the Glorification of the Unknown Soldier.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes. In fact that was reproduced. I had a little clipping of it but I don't know what has happened to it. That was in the very beginning, when I was just starting. I didn't know what I was going to have on the Project before it was organized. That's because we had a problem; it was really being run by someone—remember this fellow I mentioned? Cash—Rudberg, or something like that? I was around telling the artists how to paint. He was a politician.

Betty Hong: You told us about him on the other tape. And another painting about that time was Leaders of American Democracy. It must have been an historical thing. Do you know what it was?

Lorser Feitelson: No, a Lincoln and Washington. I did a lot of research on that, too.

Betty Hong: A third was The Minuteman.

Lorser Feitelson: No.

Betty Hong: It wasn't?

Lorser Feitelson: No.

Betty Hong: It wasn't?

Lorser Feitelson: No.

Betty Hong: It sounds so little like the rest of your work that I wondered.

Lorser Feitelson: It may have been something started on historical lines on very practical terms. These things were going to be in the schools. My God, we ought to have illustrations of history. If the children are going to be exposed to it, let them see these things illustrated by American artists. Well, I'm sorry that I don't remember what happened to that. It's a great region. People are proud of the poets from the mountains, the singers, their artists. Instead of presenting everything, even an American subject, painted by a Frenchman in his Impressionistic manner or by a New Yorker—

Betty Hong: As in the case of the German's Washington Crossing the Delaware.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes. Lots.

Betty Hong: It always seemed strange to me; and it was in all the grammar school rooms when I was a child.

Lorser Feitelson: Of course there had been very few painters in this country. Most of the American artists were living in England in early days for patronage of their portraits.

Betty Hong: Now we'll go back to where we started. How long were you with the Project approximately?

Lorser Feitelson: I think approximately until the end of the Project, just a few months before it actually closed. It had really ended before I left, because I was working on the Index of American Design and I was married and I was having some difficulties with my divorce. I finally decided I'd better go to Los Angeles. I was told at that time there was a test case, and no one could get a divorce by divorce. So that was the end, the beginning of another life.

Betty Hong: What about the rest of them? Did a lot of the people enlist in the Army? Is that how it petered out?

Lorser Feitelson: Many of them were of ages to do so. Also there were jobs all over for these people who had skills.

Betty Hong: I see. Because of the war. I hadn't thought of that as happening at the end.

Lorser Feitelson: Because in the building of planes and ships we needed craftsmen. So these boys were doing much better working there. And some of them went into the services. In the last year or so we were on the defense program mostly, doing work for the Army and Navy. We made posters and things of that sort. Some of the people who were in the beginning boys could learn. It took them, say, six months to learn how to work a gadget, with the help of the mechanical brains of the service. They were very good at that. So that was a wonderful experiment and went good on. That kind of business. So they would learn it in six weeks.

Betty Hong: I know. I worked for Boeing in Production Illustration, as it was called. And what about schools for the public? Did you have those set up, too, on the Project here?

Lorser Feitelson: Yes, yes. We had a good man by the name of Francis— I don't remember his last name. I haven't seen him for years, and I ran into him a few months ago.

Betty Hong: Do you remember how it was spelled?

Lorser Feitelson: F-r-a-n-c-i-s.

Betty Hong: I wonder if he is still teaching.

Lorser Feitelson: No.

Betty Hong: They were very, many centers?

Lorser Feitelson: Yes.

Betty Hong: They were very popular in the Northwest area. There must have been many in a city this size!

Lorser Feitelson: Well, ours was channeled. We narrowed it down just to one kind of activity, and I look known it was big enough.

Betty Hong: What was their—for instance, Spokane?

Lorser Feitelson: Yes, teaching youngsters in the underprivileged areas, the settlement houses. Francis was just in charge and we gave him a crew of people. He did a wonderful job. It was wonderful job.

Betty Hong: Have you ever heard of any of the children coming out of there and going on to be artists?

Lorser Feitelson: I wouldn't even know who they were.

Betty Hong: It would be interesting to know.

Lorser Feitelson: They were really wonderful.

Betty Hong: Frank Stevens was telling me about how much work the Montana Project did at Warm Springs with mentally disturbed people. That was near the end of the Project and he never heard what happened to any of those cases.

Lorser Feitelson: You'll find that there is a percentage which are strongly helped. And you'll find the start there.

Betty Hong: I've often thought that a lot of the pottery that is done today was probably started there.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes.

Betty Hong: We were living in Spokane, and practically every housewife was learning how to "throw a pot," and now you see ceramics in all the gift shops.

Lorser Feitelson: But ours was really just for underprivileged kids. We had quite a number of teachers, because there were no many settlement houses in the area, you know.

Betty Hong: About how many, do you remember?

Lorser Feitelson: Good, I haven't the remotest idea, but I know that we must have had a crew of about ten dozen teachers. And the stories that they told us about those kids would really break your heart. There was one downtown, I think, where maybe there were one or two lightbulbs hanging from the ceiling and nothing else in the place. And the kids, if they had, say, were in 3rd. The teachers got those kids together in class and first thing you know they were fighting. That's imagination was wild. God knows how many ethnic groups were represented in them.

Betty Hong: They couldn't afford the materials; did the Project supply them?

Lorser Feitelson: The Project, yes.

Betty Hong: That would be a large financing in itself!

Lorser Feitelson: Yes, yes, yes. It was a beautiful, divine job because this man believed in it. This man believed in it.

Betty Hong: Were their works ever shown?

Lorser Feitelson: Yes. They were exhibited right along. And those kids were terrific.

Betty Hong: Children usually do do good art work.

Lorser Feitelson: Yes, great big drawings.

Betty Hong: Have you thought about anything more that we should talk about on the tape?

Lorser Feitelson: I don't know. This thing is so vast that any area to me is interesting. It's just a matter of what area. Many things I have just completely forgotten. I can't recall at all until something is brought up, and then all of a sudden the book is opened. All these experiences.

Betty Hong: Should we turn it off for a few minutes?

Lorser Feitelson: Yes, well.

Betty Hong: If you think of something we can come back.

END OF INTERVIEW

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