

PROFILE OF A TURNER

Bob Webb was born in Perth in 1937, spending his early childhood in Southern Cross, where his dad worked for the Bank of NSW, moving to Northam when he was eight. Bob attended West Northam primary school then Northam High escaping with what he describes as "a few tattered bits of a junior certificate" and moved to Perth with his parents where he went to work for Elder Smith as a junior clerk. At their suggestion he took a job on a shearing team, to get experience in the industry, becoming a "learner shearer" because many of the qualified shearers had cleared out after a prolonged bout of wet weather.

Back in Perth not cut out to be a clerk or to wrestle with north-west merinos, many of which were bigger than him, Bob joined the RAAF as a trainee telegraphist. When he enlisted, he did not actually understand that he was to be trained as a morse code specialist, he just knew that the pay was fairly good and after completing his training at Richmond and Ballarat was transferred to 3 Telu near Pearce.

In 1956 at a dance at Canterbury Court Ballroom Bob made the smartest decision of his life. He saw this beautiful girl on the other side of the dance floor and asked her for a dance. The rest is history. Bob and Christine were married two years later after he returned from a six-month stint in Singapore. They have three children Michelle, Clinton and Stephen and have five grandchildren, Gabriela, Daniel, Timothy, Jeremy, and Christopher.

Two years after leaving the RAAF, Bob joined DCA as communications officer, progressing to flight service officer in the routine way.

The family was transferred to Kalgoorlie in 1964 and while there helped start the Kalgoorlie Baptist Church. Bob was the founding secretary.

In 1968 they transferred to Wyndham, where they lived on the airport. It was an experience they still remember very fondly. The airport was built on a partially reclaimed swamp and bird life and wildlife were incredible, especially in the "wet."

In 1970 they returned to Perth, restored their house after tenant neglect, and were transferred to Port Hedland, an experience they remember less fondly. Concerned about the effects moving was having on the kid's education, Bob opted to take demotion so they could stay in Perth for a while.

In 1980 with the kids' education completed, they moved to Canberra where Bob had accepted a position in Head Office. Over the years Bob had developed an interest in industrial relations and for several years during the mid-seventies ran the WA Division, the Professional Radio and Electronics Institute of Australia, as honorary secretary.

Shortly after arriving in Canberra Bob accepted nomination as a union vice President. For somebody in management it was not a move calculated to improve his promotional prospects, but he did it anyway.

Several years later Bob was elected Federal President, a position he held during the mid-eighties. Life had become interesting, complicated and frantically busy and he became very familiar with airline food. In the mid-eighties the government decided that the CAA should become a self-funding corporation, a move supported by its staff. Changes to air space management were essential because technological development and the communications revolution were making existing systems, structures and procedures obsolete. They were all pretty excited about this.

By now air traffic control and flight service management had been integrated into single ATS (Air Traffic Service) management structure and during this process all management positions were declared vacant. Bob was one of about ten people selected to fill the senior ATS positions and became the division's Human Resources Manager. His first task was to chair the selection committee to fill the rest of the management positions throughout Australia. Bob says he has had more enjoyable jobs. CAA was faced with a choice. Change was inevitable, as technology was upgraded and many staff faced retraining, redeployment, or redundancy but it could be done gradually, taking their staff with them or via the technique known as slash and burn. The organisation now being run like a personality cult, opted to slash, and burn.

In December 1991 unable to live with a management philosophy that reduced people to numbers, Bob retired. Determined to change the pattern of life completely he decided that the most productive thing that he could do was to get his golf handicap down and joined the Wanneroo Golf Club.

Then Chris brought him a Sontax lathe. Because Bob's knowledge of woodturning would have fitted comfortably on the point of a pin, he did nothing with it. Some time later Bob built a bench and bolted the lathe on and then... Bob describes himself as a fully paid-up member of the "when all else fails read the direction" fraternity. Stephen had actually bought Bob a book on woodturning several years before for his birthday but there was far too much detail there for him.

Bob then mounted a thinnish piece of pine about eighty cms long between centres, turned it on and attacked with what he now knows to be a scraper. Wow. Bob found out about WAWA by accident and decided to join, which is when you became a woodturner. For a time, he continued to play golf but found that he was jealous of the time which could have been spent in his workshop. So, golf had to go.

Bob has since upgraded his lathe to a Woodfast 910 and proceeded to become completely immersed in our art. Bob has especially appreciated the sharing spirit of WAWA members and remembers in particular the help given him by Viv Paust and Gordon Ward.

Recently Bob has started to do some carving which, like woodturning was something he had never done or expected to do. He now describes himself as a "woody" "It is what I do" he says, and I consider myself to be a fortunate person indeed.