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PROFILE OF A TURNER

Jan Jurewicz was born on November 6th 1955 in a small English town of Redditch. His parents were refugees after the Second World War, who never got the opportunity to go home. Raised among a small Polish community in Redditch Jan learned about Polish culture and language. Always interested in practical things, Jan bought his first motorcycle at the age of eleven. The motorcycle cost the princely sum of two pounds and never ran, soon to be sold to another hopeful for two pounds! This modest beginning started an enduring love of motorcycles that lasted for thirty years. A competition career started at the age of thirteen riding Trials, and this was followed by Scrambles and Enduro as well as a string of road bikes. At school Jan endured woodwork for one term before escaping to the metalwork room where he was much more at home. To him it seemed that wood was a primitive, uncooperative material, unlike steel which did as it was told!

On leaving school, Jan started an apprenticeship with Maudsley Motors, a manufacturer of heavy truck axles. On completion of his training, Jan became a Production Engineer ending up at Herberts, the largest English manufacturer of machine tools. The engineering industry was in a bad way at the time and a friend convinced Jan to move to the electronics industry. This involved starting again with education and training, but it was all worth it in the end.

In 1982 Jan married Elenor and bought an old house in Redditch. After much renovation including totally inept attempts at woodwork Jan and Elenor hated the house so much that they moved to California! After two years in Sunnyvale, life back in England did not look very attractive but neither did life in Sunnyvale. The decision was made to return to England and see what happened next.

After the old house experience a new house was purchased in Locks Heath, just outside Southampton. Shortly after that daughter number one, Alice arrived to cheer the house up. The birth of their first granddaughte, prompted Elenor's parents to visit from Australia. Jan had never been to Australia, but on being told it was a hot desert waste land decided that migration was the only alternative.

In January 1992 the family of three arrived in Rockingham, where they have lived ever since. Now finally we get to the woodworking bit. Work was scarce in 1992 and a rather ordinary job meant that Jan had to become DIY practitioner again. This time the making of built-in wardrobes and the like was tackled with some investment in power tools and results improved a little. About then daughter number two arrived, Hannah and daddy decided to make some wooden toys. The toys went down well but making satisfactory wheels was always a problem. The answer to this was to buy a lathe. A Taiwanese WL37 was installed. You can probably guess that after the lathe was in, no more toys were made as the new turner tried to make "something round".

After a year of making very ordinary "round things" Jan had made very little progress with his turning so he decided that a new lathe would probably make him a better turner. In April 1995 a new Nova TL1200 arrived and turning started in earnest. A supply of green timber salvaged from the roadside helped things along and soon there were lots of bowls to give away.

Another year passed by before Jan joined the Wandie Group of WAWA and a few weeks later he attended his first weekend workshop. The workshop was being run at Wandie and Jan met Gerald Young and joined him for an hour's hands on bowl turning. This was the turning point in Jan's short career, to learn from another turner rather than from a book was a revelation and his confidence took a huge leap. Many workshops followed and much was learned by the generosity of all the turners willing to share their knowledge and experience.

November 1996 saw Jan consigning his first few pieces of work to a gallery and then being amazed someone bought them. Spurred on by this more work was consigned, and sales grew. With sales growing Jan saw a need to develop some kind of style and to specialize a little. Having read many turning books and magazines Jan found that the more modern designs held little appeal, many of them being different for its sake and not very attractive with it.

The hollow form of John Hunnax and the thin bowls of Bert Marsh were appealing and that was a start. To look for the source of these forms Jan spent a day in the Alexander Library looking at Pottery books and making lots of sketches which proved to be very enlightening. Further reading of books by Bernard Leach, David Pye and Soetsu Yandi convinced Jan that being innovative was not at all necessary at that most lovely forms had been around for several thousand years. Some might think this approach is not very progressive, but it could be argued that a lot of the modern forms are not progress either, merely different.

The end result of the research was that Jan now produced hollow form that he hopes look like ancient Pots and thin bowls that he hopes are reminiscent of porcelain.

In future, Jan hopes to increase his volume of sales of turned items, reducing the wall thickness of his bowls finding the perfect form, as well as devoting some time to making jewellery boxes. Not much to ask for, is it?