

PROFILE OF A TURNER

Toni Wilson

Toni writes, I was born in Midland, Western Australia on April 2nd. (Almost a fool but not quite) I was the last of four girls born to my parents who wanted a son, so they decided that whether I was a boy, or a girl I was going to be called Toni. Little did they know how well they named me as I grew up to be a bit of a "tom boy".

My father was in the RAAF and over the years was posted to Hong Kong on three occasions, therefore I was raised and educated between Australia and Hong Kong. I started school at four in Hong Kong and was educated by the British Army. I'm told I still carry the accent of my British education. As a child I was fascinated and obviously influenced by the Chinese craftsmen sitting in the streets making and hand carving Camphor Wood boxes and Rosewood statues.

We returned to Australia when I was seven where I found school extremely boring as I had already done the work and was left at the back of the class to fend for myself. That was fine until it was time to return to Hong Kong again at age nine where I had to work extremely hard to catch up to the other students. I started high school twice, once in Hong Kong aged eleven where I attended St Georges School and then again when I returned where I attended Hampton High School in Morley.

Those were the days where girls did Cooking, Sewing and Art and boys did Technical Drawing, Woodwork and Metal work. As my interest already lay in design woodwork and mechanics, I asked to do Technical Drawing Woodwork and Metal work.

I had to fight to be allowed to do the technical drawing but was definitely told a girl's place was not in the Metal work or Woodwork room. This probably contributes to my determination to do it as I don't like being told I can't do something. (Just for the record I kicked butt and beat all the boys with my results in Technical Drawing and failed Domestic Science miserably...I still can't cook but must admit that my sewing skills did improve, and I eventually taught sewing at Tafe in Exmouth).

I must add credit to my dad here who put up with me following behind him in his workshop using his tools and generally making a nuisance of myself. At no time did my parents ever tell me I couldn't do something because of my gender. I always loved working with wood and dreamed as a child of having my own tool kit...that dream has sure come true. When I finished High School, I wanted to study Cartography but once again was told that females were not suitable for that career. I would love to see them try to say that now I. So, my second choice was Architectural Drawing which I studied at Leederville Technical College. It was the first year females were accepted into the course. We were then posted back to Hong Kong again where I found it very difficult to find work in my field as they kept expecting a male Tony to show up at interviews. I eventually worked for Spang Robinson Architects where I was the only female again.

Upon my return to Perth WA, I continued with drafting, working for Fremantle Port Authority, State Electricity Commission Perth City Council and Camoorq Chisholm and Nichols

Fuchitectq while doing my Woodwork on the side. I then met my husband Ross who is a member of the WA Police Service and so I continued my life of constantly moving around.

We have lived in Bunbury, Southern Cross, Exmouth, Karratha and back to Bunbury. I put my career aside to raise our family of five children, three boys and two girls, one of whom is now a cabinet maker and one a horticulturist. We also took the children around Australia in a caravan during Ross' long service leave. On our third trip in 1988 whilst we were heading towards Expo in Queensland, we stopped off at a place called Gympie. They had a woodwork show where I came across my first demonstrator on a lathe. I was fascinated and obviously asked too many questions because the next thing I knew I was behind the lathe turning a piece of Camphor Laurel into a vase, which I still have today. The demonstrator was George Wroe of Maryborough, Queensland. His parting comment was "I'll see you turning in a few years' time". Unfortunately, it took me another ten years before I found time to touch a lathe again. I wish I hadn't had to wait so long.

I had my first real lesson with John Shinnick in October 1998, and he talked me into joining the Bunbury Group of the Woodturners Association and also joining his Woodturning Class at Bunbury Tafe, where I continued to do Woodturning 1, 2 and 3.

I give credit to my ease and speed of learning to John Shinnick and all the friends, demonstrators and turners of the Association who together, are still teaching me to turn. Indeed, WAWA has had a great influence on me and had enabled me to meet so many helpful and sharing friends. I also feel that the competitions at the weekend workshops were great learning experiences and I encourage everyone to enter then.

Some of my proudest moments apart from my children was wining "Best Item Turned" in 1999 as a novice.

Also being invited to demonstrate at the WA Wood Show representing "Women in Wood" in August 2000. With John's deteriorating health I assisted him with his teaching at Tafe and eventually took over when he could no longer do it. I find great joy and comfort in continuing with his lessons still. I am now treasurer of the Bunbury Group and look forward to many more years of turning.



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Observations Bunbury WEWS 2000

Toni Wilson chose to demonstrate her method of making perfume applicators.

Toni was quick to adjust to an unfamiliar lathe at the wrong height for her and kept a good rapport with her audience.

Toni's home-made mandrel appealed to me, as did her clear description of every stage of her demonstration. A good tip I took from Toni was to use the lathe instead of a vice for the compression assembly of the parts.