

2006 AAW Symposium

Keynote Speech

(Andrew Glasgow of the [Furniture Society](#))

The American Association of Woodturners is twenty - now that's an amazing milestone. Congratulations! In those 20 years, you have become a major force in the craft field; amassed more than 12,000 members and annually attracted hundreds and then thousands to your conference. In short, you guys are almost grown!

With renewed passion, commitment and responsibility, what will the next twenty look like? How do you find that renewed passion? Where does the deep breath and sense of more commitment come from? How in the world, at the ripe old age of twenty will you find a renewed sense of responsibility to the greater craft world?

We can find this renewal by simply remembering...and acting on the information gleaned from this look back at our collective history and the examples I'm going to highlight. First a bit about how I became so involved in the craft field.

I moved to Asheville in 1988 to become the curator of the Southern Highland Craft Guild. I had been a decorative arts historian at the Birmingham Museum of Art and I really just wanted to break into the living wage category and found myself living in Asheville, and working for this extraordinary sixty-year-old organization I knew nothing about. And, as I did more and more research about why the Guild was there and why the Guild did what it did, I began to make friends with a group of older movers and shakers, and in that group was a gentleman many of you knew, the great turner, Rude Osolnik.

As I spent more and more time with these members, Rude became a confidant (for those of you not from the south, it's a nice word for gossip partner) and we spent a lot of time telling tales to each other...and I became more interested in his life, turning and the American craft movement. In the early 90s I curated his retrospective exhibition that traveled around the country. It was an interesting time to be sure...for those of you who knew Rude, imagine walking in his house at Poverty Ridge and telling him which objects were going to represent him and his fifty year career! That was me...youth and naiveté can sometimes be worth its weight in gold.

But it was also during this time that I began to develop a work related illness...I began to truly love what I was doing and began to establish what have become life-long friendships and relationships with makers and other professionals in the field...a true passion. Rude was passionate. About the Guild, about his work, about Berea College, about Daphne, about the wood stored in his sheds, about other craftspeople and their work...the list goes on. So really, it could not be

more fitting that I am here this morning because it is a wood-turner's fault that I even have this career!

Let's continue this brief look back - I became surrounded by people who shared a similar passion for makers and the history, for education through the arts and the commerce surrounding the field. People like Martha Connell, Stoney Lamar, Albert LeCoff, Robyn Horn, and the list goes on. These are people who drop what they are doing and put every ounce of energy toward realizing their goals because they know it changes lives. It not only changes the lives of students, of makers, of educators of the museum-going public but it has changed their life as well...not one of those folks I mentioned could have foretold what lay ahead.

Let's use Stoney's story as an example, I'm close enough to him to talk about him to his face!...back in 1988 when I first met Stoney, he was making turned vessels, raising kids, working in the Southern Highland Guild and was enjoying the fruits of his success nationally with his career. But inside him, there was almost an entire different being waiting to get out...one concerned with governance, organizational growth, one not afraid of the conflict and discord that comes with that growth and a sense of what he had to offer to craftspeople and organizations in our region down in Asheville...he became very involved with the Guild, serving as it's President for multiple years. For the past several years, he has been committed to the work of the Center for Craft Creativity and Design at the University of North Carolina that is concerned with making sure craft education is in the nation's colleges and universities. I know he hates it, but there are entire days that go by when he doesn't make sculpture or touch a lathe...but he is making a truly significant difference in our world...one person, one hour, at a time.

Similarly, when I get to tell a student that he or she has just been juried into a major national traveling show, it can cement a career choice. When I get to sign a check for a scholarship to Penland School, it can focus a life in a direction that will serve that individual well for years to come. When I publish an article in our Studio Furniture series and distribute 5000 copies, and it is read by students and makers and they began to understand that what they do has a historical precedent and they don't just live and work in a contextual vacuum, it changes lives.

The [Furniture Society](#) is an organization of 1500 makers, students, educators, collectors, historians and interested parties (read: family supporters) who truly believe that advancing the art of furniture making is an education based endeavor. Our commitment to publications of quality, exhibitions with jurors of international renown, conferences with sixty plus presenters from all over the world, a website of over 500 pages that includes interactive areas for members and a historical archive section all relate to what we think is important.

We have a small staff of two full time and three part time people who work with our board, and yes, our board works...they are probably not unlike the AAW board with tasks and assignments and deadlines.

When I think of the American Association of Woodturners I have numbers envy. I think of the possibilities that are apparent with 12000 plus members and my mind nearly explodes. If Rude Osolnik could spend 10 minutes with each of you, and endow you with his passion for the field...not just the technical part, but the historical part, the educational part, the writing part. Rude would also have championed programs for younger folk...we need young collectors, young makers, young writers, young thinkers and it is up to us to find them, nurture them and support them.

The passion that clearly struck me like a bolt of lightening, is a requirement. Yes, my job pays my bills, but quite honestly, I could list a thousand ways I could pay my bills. I don't have a job, I have a life. (At time it might be a little overfull, but always at my choosing!) Albert LeCoff doesn't just have a place to go keep him off the Philly streets, he has a life; Stoney doesn't just make sculpture and attend meetings, he has a life. And they are part of organizations that are powerful and vibrant...organizations like the AAW.

I challenge you to collectively take a page from the Osolnik book of living and find it within yourself to work harder for the AAW and support your organization more...dig deeper. This is your organization, at the end of the year, do you and the AAW a favor - make a financial donation. You should commit to involvement in committee or project work by August 1st, so that the work you do affects an ever-larger circle of people. Do ever more important things...a great place to start is with a project; projects change lives. You have unique opportunities, unique talents, unique staff and a membership that is the absolute envy of us all.

The next twenty years will be interesting...we'll all be watching and expecting astonishing things. You are on the cusp of reaching out and bringing in new audiences and truly expanding the world of the woodturning, and changing more lives than ever in the process...it's a very exciting time.

Thanks for allowing me to come and share my own beliefs about our world. I truly appreciate the opportunity.