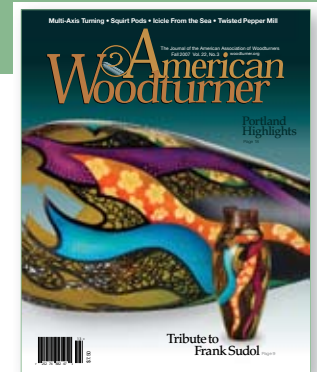
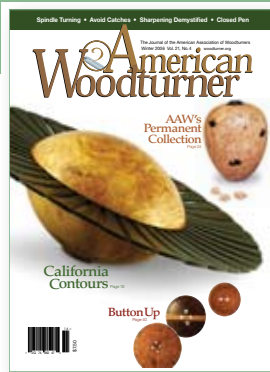


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Madeleine Sabo

Overcoming Challenges

Dennis DeVendra

We all face obstacles in life. By critically analyzing the various methods for overcoming those obstacles, we can learn new approaches and solutions, as well as learn about ourselves and, in Madeleine Sabo's case, understand a little more about woodturning. Madeleine became blind later in her life. Until 2002, she lived in Ohio, where she owned her own permanent cosmetics and camouflage tattooing business. In this business Madeleine used her artistic talents to help hide scars and other blemishes on a person's body. She also has been an artist for thirty years, painting portraits of animals and exploring wood burning and glass engraving.

After retiring from her business in 2002, Madeleine and her husband Steve moved to New Mexico where they both took up woodturning. Madeleine was the president of her local woodturning chapter, the Mountaintop Turners, from 2005 to 2009.

Getting started with turning

Before Madeleine and Steve moved to New Mexico, they purchased a small lathe and a set of spindle-turning tools. They did not do much turning until Madeleine saw an ad for woodturning lessons, four months after their move. They both took the lessons and less than a year later, they started selling their work.

For Madeleine, woodturning was an extension of her artistic talents. She says, "I can take a hunk of wood and end up with something beautiful." Her desire to continue turning resulted from the many compliments she was receiving. "Doing these art shows, people admire my work and it is such a rush to have someone say, 'that is a beautiful piece of artwork.'" She



Madeleine Sabo in her shop.

has been featured in *Country* and *New Mexico* magazines for her turning skills.

Madeleine attributes most of her early woodturning skills to a lot of practice and attending woodturning symposiums like the Utah Symposium, the Desert Roundup in Mesa, and S.W.A.T. in Texas.

Obstacles to overcome

In 2008, Madeleine experienced a dramatic change in her life. She contracted MRSA, a type of bacterium that is resistant to antibiotics. The result was a blood staph infection that left her with detached retinas and the loss of hearing in her right ear. After many surgeries and drug therapy, Madeleine's eyesight is limited to only slight black and white vision with some color perception in the periphery of her left eye. Fortunately, hearing in her left ear is intact.

For many, this kind of setback would mean a life of sitting back and doing

little. For Madeleine, "There isn't a word in my vocabulary that says I can't do something. I can do anything I want. Maybe it will take me twice as long, but at least I can do it." She admits, though, that for woodturning it was like starting over again at the lathe.

New tools and techniques

After about eight months of recovery, Madeleine decided it was time to start turning again. She had Steve mount a piece of wood and she turned a 6" tall vase. This first turning went reasonably well. The startup process had some frustrations, but Madeleine's determination kept her coming back, not giving up.

Madeleine uses only three tools for all of her work: a bowl gouge, a skew chisel, and a parting tool. She uses the bowl gouge for spindle and faceplate work. When a scraper is needed, she



1 Madeleine's modified skew chisel has a mark on its handle to allow her to line up the tool in its proper position.



2 The modified toolrest has stops on each end.



3 The stand Madeleine uses has a black border to help her see the edges.



4 The tool caddy has receptacles for various tools and supplies. The holes for the tools have a black border, making it easier for Madeleine to see where to place the tool.



One of Madeleine's turned vases

turns the bowl gouge on its side.

Madeleine's vision in one eye causes everything to look like it is tilting. To compensate for this phenomenon when turning a tenon for a bowl, Steve made a mark on the skew chisel's handle so Madeleine can line up the tool in its proper position (Photo 1).

Sharpening was a challenge. To overcome the difficulties with using a high-speed conventional grinder (a 1"-wide wheel and high speed), Madeleine purchased a Tormek sharpening system. The Tormek, with its slow speed and wide wheel, allows her to more easily sharpen tools.

For centering the wood on the lathe, Madeleine uses the trial-and-error method. Most of the wood she uses

is rough pieces, so she will continue to adjust the wood between centers, rotating it by hand until she gets the correct balance.

Introducing the tool to the turning wood can be challenging, but Madeleine has learned through experimentation she can accomplish this safely and effectively. The key is to carefully position the toolrest as close as possible to the wood, then with her left hand resting against the toolrest, she slowly touches the wood with the tool, finding the best position to ride the bevel. Everything must be done in slower motion, so it takes several times longer for Madeleine to finish projects than it did prior to her loss of sight. It may take longer, but for Madeleine it is worth the effort!

New practices

To compensate for her loss of vision, Madeleine and Steve sweep the shop and put away all the tools after each turning session. (This sounds like a good practice for all turners.) They had a friend machine a screw hole in each end of their toolrest and install metal stops,

which prevents turning tools from inadvertently slipping off the ends (Photo 2). They purchased a set of plastic drawers to organize the various grits of sandpaper to make them easier to find. Through use, Madeleine can now distinguish the different grits of abrasive paper by feel.

Madeleine uses her limited vision to help her in the shop. She stands on a platform to bring her up to the correct height for their lathe, and the platform is bordered with black paint, to help her avoid falling off the edge (Photo 3). They installed additional lights in their shop to provide as much light as possible. Steve drilled holes in the tool caddy and outlined them with black paint (Photo 4), allowing Madeleine to easily pick tools out of the caddy and replace them into their respective holes. To see the wood while turning, a contrasting-colored board is mounted on the back side of the lathe.

Today

Madeleine currently promotes and sells her woodturnings at local shows and art tours. In 2010 she won first place at the New Mexico District GFWC (General Federation of Women's Clubs) Convention. Madeleine enjoys speaking to other AAW clubs about overcoming obstacles. In addition, she created a local limited-sight support group. Her primary message is one of encouragement and perseverance.

Madeleine's new motto for life is:
A *Accepting* the loss of my eyesight and continuing to enjoy life!
P Learning to be *patient* because things now take twice as long to complete.
S Is for *stubborn*, "I will do everything again if need be!" ■

Dennis DeVendra is blind and does woodturning. After his first article appeared in AW (vol 24, no 1), he has heard from many AAW members who have shared their own inspiring stories of overcoming challenges. He invites others to send him their stories. Please contact Dennis through his website, blindwoodturner.com.