

RUDE OSOLNIK

Memories and Tributes

RUDE'S FRIENDS

Rude Osolnik, one of the world's master wood turners, died at his home on Poverty Ridge, in Berea, KY on Nov. 18, 2001. He was 86 and died of congestive heart failure. Funeral services were private, but the family is planning a memorial service for 11:30 a.m., April 17, 2002 at Union Church in Berea.

Donations in his memory may be made to the Rude and Daphne Osolnik Scholarship Fund, Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, 556 Parkway Drive, PO Box 567, Gatlinburg, TN 37738

— Del Stubbs:

Rude and I go back to the 70's in the George School Symposiums in Pennsylvania. Later, when I was teaching at Arrowmont, he would often come to pick me up and we would go off for adventures into the back country, meeting mountain craftspeople. He seemed to know interesting people everywhere. Wherever we went, he would bring his wonderful laughter and stories and out would come theirs. Nobody loved people more than Rude. One thing about him that I have never met in another human being, is the completeness of his listening. When you would be speaking to him, he was so focused on your words and thoughts, that unconsciously his mouth would be forming your words as you spoke. He listened with a capital "L".

I remember one infamous weekend at his place. A dozen woodturner friends of Rude's came for a gathering at his place. One of the adventures that Rude dreamed up for us was to dig out this huge ancient lathe and motor from a shed, and get the twelve of us all turning on a log at the same time. The lathe and motor, like Rude, was "older 'n dirt"!!! Somehow we got power hooked up to it, way in the back of another shed where there was a breaker. Once most of the crew got



Rude in his shop. Photo courtesy of Del and Mary Thouin-Stubbs.

the log started spinning by hand, a relay of yells would get to me in the far back shed. I would throw the breaker — the motor groaned, sparks would fly, and the log would slowly get up to speed. It wasn't long before a dozen turners and their gouges proved too much for the ancient tar-soaked motor. It would get so hot that the oil and tar would start to drip and then billow smoke so that sometimes you couldn't see the log! Rude was more than happy to sacrifice an old motor for a good time!

Later that evening this wild and boisterous crew was gathered in his living room, filling it to overflowing - it was getting late and Rude needed to go to bed (he woke up with the roosters). So ... out comes a jug of Rude's famous North Carolina moonshine. It was incredible — in five minutes you could have heard a mouse.

He knew how to get some sleep. Rude was still laughing about that years later.

One time when I was visiting, I asked him, "Rude, how in the world do you turn those birch plywood bowls — everyone knows plywood is cussed abrasive stuff, you must have a secret?" He said "Sure, I've got one glued up — let's do it." Well, in classic Rude style, he picks out what must have been the biggest block of birch plywood he ever glued up. With my eyes bulging, I carried this in to the far back shed where his biggest lathe was. While he was mounting this thing, he handed me a dozen of his bowl gouges and said "Stubbs — go sharpen 'em." Now my mouth is hanging open too! A dozen gouges!? The grinder, of course, was away in a different shed. When I got them tuned up and ran all

the way back to where Rude was, he had the bowl blank mounted. He took the first gouge and dove in. Sure enough, that edge didn't last long. In 10 minutes he handed me six dull gouges, and with that Rude twinkle in his eye, said "Stubbs — I thought you sharpened these?!!" It took most of the day — as fast as I could sharpen six gouges and run them back to Rude (5 or 10 minutes), he would have six more dull gouges waiting! We laughed our way through that entire bowl. It turned out beautiful, of course. I learned Rude's secret. Pure undiluted tenacity.

— Mary Thouin-Stubbs

As much as Rude loved woodturning, he equally loved people, loved to tell stories, and loved to laugh. One of Rude's favorite stories was about a time after he was on his own. Del came for a visit and woke up earlier than anyone. He thought he would treat this house of bachelors to biscuits and gravy. Del found sausage in the freezer for the sausage gravy part, but after digging through cupboards for a half hour looking for a biscuit recipe, Del gave up and had to rely on memory. Del also couldn't find any baking powder, but he did find baking soda. Figuring that baking soda must be weaker than baking powder, Del doubled what he figured was the right proportion of the baking soda. So — biscuits were happily mixed and baked — and the household of bachelors was im-

— David Ellsworth

Throughout the turning world, we often hear the names; Bob, Ed, Mark, Mel, Dale, Stephen, Michael, Richard, Ken, Liam...to name only a few...and everyone pretty much knows who you mean. But mention the name Rude, and suddenly people seem to light up, almost as if they knew him personally, even though he may have been just part of some distant conversation. The term 'affection' comes to mind.

I met Rude in the late '70's in Philadelphia when we juried the Gallery of Turned Objects show for Albert LeCoff. We commented later that neither of us had had such an easy time jurying a show, because we both instantly agreed on everything we saw on the screen — yeah or nay. It was a wonderful way to connect with this man who was old enough to be my father, but didn't act like one; who had forgotten more about turning than I would probably ever learn; and who, in my mind,

pressed, at first, with Del's culinary efforts. When they dove into their breakfast, a collective "crunch" was heard — teeth wouldn't penetrate the surface of the rock hard biscuits. Del had baked something akin to those baking soda 3-D maps we used to make as kids. In uproarious laughter, with everyone practically on the floor they were laughing so hard, Rude's son Joe shouted "you're trying to kill my father!.. And when Joe's dog

helped set the stage for both the foundation and the future of this field with two simple words: honesty and integrity.

And for those who are not aware, Rude was a pioneer in the designs of the objects he made, and his works greatly helped advance the field of woodturning from a craft into a legitimate art form. He spent a lifetime helping to educate the next generation of turners, and he gave his free time to help organize and nourish craft organizations like the Southern Highlands Guild and the AAW.

Like many of his era, Rude was also a pretty good storyteller. He also had a pocket full of one-liners that he used to rattle off, and here are two of my favorites: "You'll never hear me say a bad word about anybody, unless I mean it." And my favorite (that has been published before), "I like to treat people with the same respect I give a piece of wood, and I especially like the ones that have cracks in them."

wouldn't eat them....."AND MY DOG, TOO!!" Somehow they all recuperated, but all was not forgotten. A few days later, Rude received a package from Del. It was a woodturned biscuit out of madrone burl which dried and shrunk to be quite like a biscuit - complete with bite marks carved into it — and a pad of butter done in osage orange that dripped down the edges. From that day on — every time I visited Rude — he would bring out the wood biscuit and re-tell the story, laughing harder each time it was told. Rude's bright laughter will always ring in my ears.

— Ray Key

I first met Rude at Arrowmont in 1985 at the Visions and Concept Symposium (where the AAW was spawned) and an instant rapport was struck.

— Stephen F. Caudill: I first became aware of Rude's work through my father, Forrester. He and I were fortunate enough to attend several seminars taught by Rude at Highland Hardware in Atlanta, GA. We also attended a "hands-on" seminar at Rude's shop on Poverty Ridge.

I feel fortunate to have a couple of pieces that he made. I have one of his signature candlesticks that was included with his book "A Lifetime Turning Wood" as well as one of his weed pots that my father bought for me at a gallery in Berea.

Rude was a positive influence on me as well as the untold thousands of others he has taught.

We became firm friends from that first meeting and I have some wonderful memories of times and experiences spent in his company.

Teaching up at Poverty Ridge was always an experience, something I did on three occasions.

The first time in 1988 my wife Liz and son Darren were with me. We arrived a day early in Lexington and checked into a motel, planning a leisurely look round the next morning before going to Berea. I phoned Rude that night to tell him our plan. "Heck," he said, "there will be ten students here at eight o'clock in the morning. You had better be here for then."

Next year I came by myself, arriving in Lexington late at night — they closed the airport behind me — but no Rude to pick me up as arranged. So I waited and waited, no sign of Rude. When I phoned him, he was in bed: "You're not supposed to be here until tomorrow." He jumped out bed got half dressed and came to pick me up.

So one year I was a day late, the next a day early. Something fishy there, as my diary was correct each time. I reckon Rude's diary came from some bargain sale — he loved sales. I guess they were for the wrong year.

— Jamie Donaldson Arrowmont, October 1994

"A Tribute to Osolnik"

During a morning question/answer session, someone asked the panel of John Jordan, Stoney Lamar, Michael Peterson, Todd Hoyer, Al Stirt and David Ellsworth "how they would like to be remembered?" Trained as a social philosopher, I flashed back to the events of the previous evening, the roast and toast of Rude Osolnik. Regardless of Judeo-Christian ethics or karma quest, most of us will not leave timeless monuments of our earthly passage, but live after our mortal moment only in the memories of those we knew. Over the years I have concluded that these collective memories measure the man — the value of a life is judged by affecting those we touch. I consider myself blessed to have traveled and worked with Rude — he was a full professor of the philosophy of turning. My times on "Poverty Ridge" were all good, even when I tried to best him trading wood! Woodturners everywhere, professional or amateur, young or old, Rude touched us all, and we are richer for his legacy. Thanks Rude, we will always remember you.

I got Rude mad on two occasions, once in the workshop and once at the Boone Tavern.

When I walked in the workshop prior to the class, he had a piece of work in some stage of development on each of the ten lathes. We agreed we had to free up those lathes. He had a pigeonhole display unit in the workshop, so I put a piece of his work in each hole and a Malt Whisky container in one hole also. I told him I would take a photo and send it up to Dale Nish telling him Rude did his best work when he had sampled what was in the container.

Now that got him mad, 'Don't you dare,' he protested, I took the

photo without the whisky container.

Staying with Rude was something else in those days. At night he would sit in front of the television with the sound way up, fast asleep in front of it. If you turned it down, he was awake in an instant and channel hopping ensued. So to bed at midnight, TV still loud, Rude in the chair. Around 2 am he wakes and goes to bed, peace and quiet and sleep at last.

The next thing you hear at 5.30 am is Rude outside your bedroom window, cutting wood with a chainsaw for the class.

Another time I got him mad was in the Boone Tavern. I picked up the bill and was going to pay, as he had treated us wonderfully. But Joe told me to let him pay as this was Rude's special treat for Liz and me and he was getting very upset about it.

In March of 1994 he came down especially to Arrowmont while I was teaching there. It wasn't long before Rude was demonstrating, teaching and selling raffle tickets. He made that day special for all of us privileged to be there. What a man.

He said if I came over for the symposium, he would arrange a workshop to help defray some of our costs. (There were no fees for demonstrators).

— Ken Sager: Rude was one of the world's finest gentlemen. Our friendship goes back about 15 years when Del Stubbs introduced us and what a wonderful 15 years it has been for me. Although we kept in touch and I knew of his failing health, it was a sad day when I heard of his death.

In 1990 I invited Rude to come to New Zealand and, although his health was not good even then, he said "I will be there Ken." The night he arrived his caregiver, Zenobia, was on the phone. "You take care of this man. He is a very special person. He is under doctor's orders — no fats, etc., etc." My wife Connie, a registered nurse, took over and contacted the clubs he was to visit and when he left he said "I feel like a new man."

We in New Zealand feel very privileged to have had Rude with us and I know that I speak for all of us when I say Thank you Rude, rest in peace and our sincere condolences to his family.

We ran a three-day workshop afterwards., Joe acted as assistant and Rude came in and did a demo or two, and one was of his trademark candleholders. His eyes were giving him trouble then but his hands hadn't lost their sureness of touch. The neck of the candleholder was a bit thicker than normal but with a little coaxing from me, 'a bit more off Rude' the candleholder emerged a classic, as good as ever.

He was legend in his own lifetime. I have nothing but fond memories of a man who inspired thousands, taught hundreds. We will never see his like again. He pushed boundaries as one of the trail blazers of the modern turning movement.

He signed a book for me once with the words "To a person I wish I had known sooner."

I can only reciprocate those sentiments.

— Dick Burrows — I first drove up to Poverty Ridge to meet Rude about 20 years ago. Rude said we'd start early, so I pulled in about 6:30 a.m. He was covered with shavings when he leaned out the open shop door and yelled, "Hell fire, boy, you said early."

The "Hell Fire" would hit me many times. Sometimes it was almost affectionate. Other times it was clear Rude didn't think I was living up to my potential that day. Rude, not being a believer in political correctness, usually added a blunter term to make sure I understood.

I learned turning by copying Rude's pieces displayed in Southern galleries. People said he was making turning pay, so I knew he was the one to imitate. A cheap lathe, two scrapers and I was in business. Good thing I didn't give up the day job.

He laughed off the copying, but was upset that I'd done such a poor job of stealing. Anyone who has done a Rude candlestick and had

— Chris Ramsey

I met Rude three years ago in Berea, when Johannes Michelsen and I had gone up to Poverty Ridge to visit and talk with the living legend. Since that time, and living just 25 minutes from Rude, I visited him regularly and we became good friends. Just two weeks prior to his death, Rude continued to come out to his shop to watch me turn and give me some pointers. We talked



Ramsey believes this 23-in. diameter Snakewood platter was the last piece Rude turned.

about turning, Rude's travels and life experiences. We also did a lot of laughing.

Saturday, the day before Rude passed away, he had given me a scholarship to Arrowmont and had called a few of his students and made the recommendation to them that they take some private

lessons from me. I had no knowledge of Rude doing these things for me. It wasn't until after his death that I learned what he had done. I wish I could thank him for all he did for me.

The turning world, as well as the art world, has lost an icon and many of us have lost a good friend.

him critique it knows what I mean.

Rude sensed anything I knew came from books. I might be long on knowledge, but I was pitifully short on skill. He set out to rectify that.

Eventually, years later, I could pass for his shop assistant, but he never listed me as a triumph of his teaching career. The important thing was that along the way we became friends, through good times and bad, fire and ice. We always worked things out, and that is one of the most precious parts of friendship.

When health problems derailed my career, Rude was one of the few who stuck by me. He knew how hard it was to lose what you cared about. "The boys in hell want ice

water, but they can't have it either. That's the way it goes sometimes."

"That's the way it goes sometimes." Not the warm fuzzy I thought I deserved, but just what I needed. No matter how you feel, you drag yourself out to the shop and go to work -- that's where the joy is, at least if you believe Rude.

Rude helped me to see, to think, to improvise, and, most important, to express myself. There is something beautiful in a chunk of wood. There is a unique creative force inside every person. Mix the two elements and, if you work hard and are a little lucky, something magnificent can happen. Hell Fire, Rude! Wish I had been a better pupil