



## PROFILES

by Terry Scott

# Herman de Vries (Herm or Poppa Herm)



instilled in him the love of working with wood and music. He had a mother who taught him that working hard makes holding your head up a lot easier and that quitting was unacceptable.

Amongst his many talents inherited from his father was an exceptional singing voice. He had a lot of opportunities to pursue a professional singing career, however he knew that to

I've submitted many Profiles over the last seven or eight years. It hasn't been for a lack of trying that I have finally twisted Herm's arm to be my current subject. You could say that by Herm asking me to sign up with WoW (World of Woodturners website) 10 years ago has been the biggest influence on my journey as a woodturner. Being able to have your work critiqued by the masters and the mere mortals alike and being able to showcase my work in this way has been an incredible opportunity.

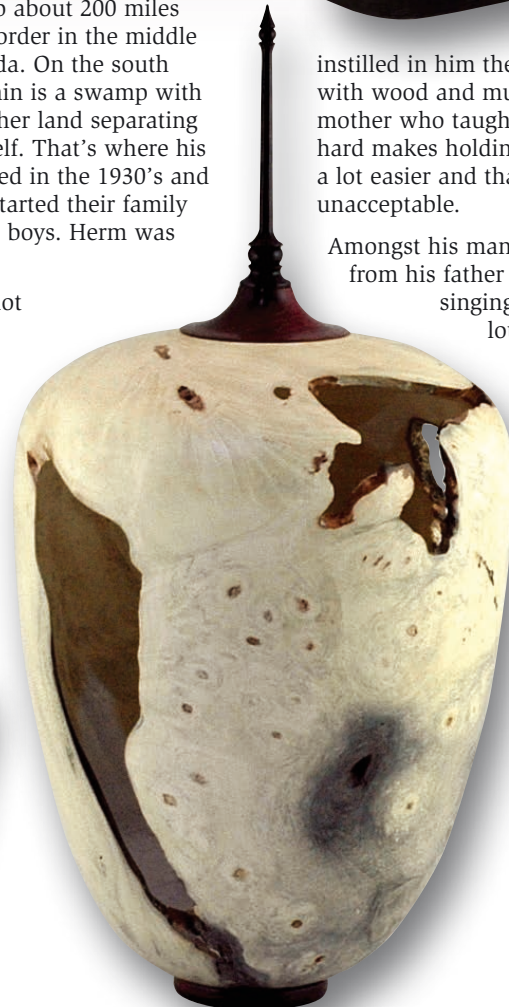
The metal of the man is amazing. Many would have seen WoW as a way to turn profit for themselves. Not Herm, he has given of his time and his own finances in the name of contributing to turning and keeping the craft alive. Originally the site was hosted by My Family dot com, however WoW soon outgrew the hosts capabilities. Herm went to work and upgraded WoW to its own website.

How WoW works. Anybody can see the pictures but you need an invitation from a member to join and be able to show your own pictures. You then add in a bio, set

up your gallery and post pictures of your work. Other members then offer critique if you invite comments. I've learnt a lot by looking at these pictures, commenting and receiving comment. When you have to think about form, finish and proportions, your own work improves tenfold.

Herman de Vries was born in a log cabin in the swamp about 200 miles north of the U.S. border in the middle of Manitoba, Canada. On the south side of Lake Dauphin is a swamp with a small strip of higher land separating it from the lake itself. That's where his mum and dad settled in the 1930's and that's where they started their family of six girls and five boys. Herm was number nine.

He was lucky in a lot of ways. He had a family that loved one another and weren't afraid to express it. He had a talented father who





be successful in the profession requires a single-mindedness and focus that was beyond someone with as many interests as he had, so Herm went for a degree in education. After college with his new wife, they travelled to western South Dakota and then to Iowa as teachers.

Along with his teaching he continued conducting numerous choirs in various places and sang at hundreds of concerts. Tiring of teaching he became involved with the credit union system, which was his career until he retired in 2004. He had several CEO positions and ended up with the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation as a regulator of credit unions.

Woodturning is a labour of love for Herm. For many years he worked with wood as an amateur furniture maker, making many

of the pieces in his home. Woodturning was something he always wanted to try and in 1995 he acquired his first lathe. Like most of us, immediately he was addicted.

The executive world is full of pressure, time-lines and stress. People are demanding and sometimes difficult to please. He found peace and contentment feeling the smooth cut of the chisel through the wood and satisfaction in making the shavings fly. At first Herm never considered this an art, however as time went on the wood itself began to "speak" to him and soon every piece of firewood was a fresh opportunity.

It came full circle when he went to the lonely spot where his parents homesteaded and where he was born. He saw the old Maple trees that his father and mother had planted in the early 1920s and saw that some of them were dying.



Taking the wood from those dying trees and turning it into a piece of turned art became a way of preserving something that represented his father and mother in their youth, the future. "I am their future and the tree was their future. If I am able to leave behind a legacy, it seemed only fair that the tree should be able to do the same. I only helped a little."

Herm likes to think that the work he does is what he is. If there is beauty in the piece, then that day there was beauty in him. If the piece turns out ugly, well, it was probably a "bad hair day" for him too. It is enough that people enjoy the work, that it brings them pleasure, peace and enjoyment. He wants people to feel like they can touch the work, feel the warmth of the wood and maybe, the warmth of the artist. That is what inspires him.



What motivates him the most is to see a piece of wood and recognise within it a possibility, a potential for a piece of art. He is also motivated by the work of others and the beautiful forms and shapes he sees around the world: an apple, an onion, a bell, a Grecian urn, a woman.

Herm wishes he didn't have to sell his pieces. Each one is a part of him and he would sooner give them away. However,

although the raw material grows on trees, it is not usually free. The equipment and accessories are also not free. He would not need to be paid to do this. "The real payment is when I know that someone, somewhere may be looking at or even better, holding one of my pieces and it is bringing them a moment of pleasure."

I will let Herm tell the story of the WoW website: "When I first started woodturning there was no such thing as an interactive website devoted to woodturning. But there were newsgroups for every topic under the sun including one called rec.crafts.woodturning. This was a place where you could supposedly discuss woodturning ideas and issues and even post a

photo. However the photo was visible only temporarily and with no opportunities for discussion about it.

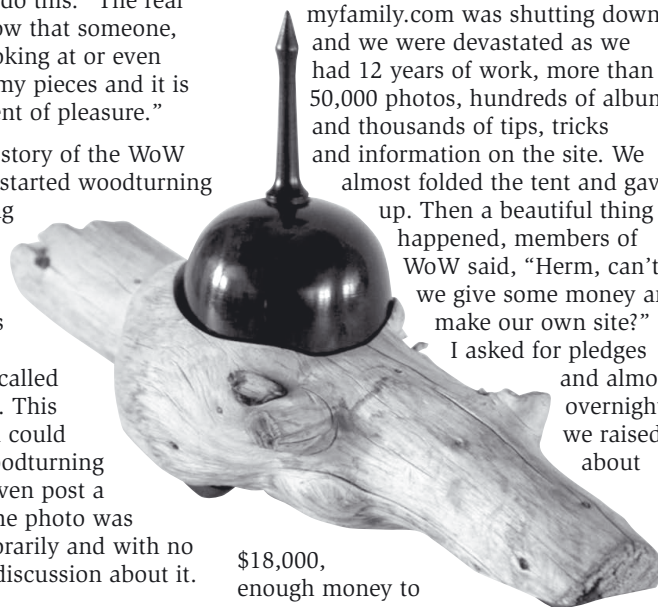
Much worse was the behaviour of people who used their anonymity to start flame wars, to insult others and to swiftly degenerate every good topic of discussion into a war of name-calling and bad behaviour. Sick of it, I wrote a thread in the newsgroup asking if I can start a site where anonymity is not allowed, where you can keep an album, where you can comment on each others photos, where you can keep files and where you can have discussion threads that you can always go back and read, would you be interested?

In an hour I had 35 emails so I contacted myfamily.com and asked them if a "family of common interests" qualified to use their web facility. They agreed, and that started World of Woodturners. I did not even realise at the time that the acronym was WoW.

I started up the free site in November of 2001. More than 10,000 members have joined in at some time or another and as of the end of 2015 we have about 2,000 regular contributing members. The site is at [www.thewows.com](http://www.thewows.com) and if you go there as a member of the public you will see a sample from the "Artist of the Month" (chosen by a team of fine woodturners from around the world) and have an opportunity to browse through an album of sample works from all of our members of the kind of work you will find within the site. Any member can have a permanent photo album on the site and as members post their work others comment, congratulate and make suggestions on the piece. There are hundreds of tips and tricks and thousands of photos in the albums of woodturners,

beginners to professionals from around the world.

In 2013 we were suddenly advised that myfamily.com was shutting down and we were devastated as we had 12 years of work, more than 50,000 photos, hundreds of albums and thousands of tips, tricks and information on the site. We almost folded the tent and gave up. Then a beautiful thing happened, members of WoW said, "Herm, can't we give some money and make our own site?" I asked for pledges and almost overnight we raised about



\$18,000, enough money to start.

I took a fistful of drawings to a number of site developers and no one wanted to touch us. Then I met Kyle Molotkin and his start-up company said, "Sure, we can do it. You need it in six weeks? Sure, we can do that". So the new site as it exists today was built. I formed a non-profit corporation called World of Woodturners Inc. to own the application so that we were no longer captives to anyone else's whims. A team of people helped me archive almost all the information from the old site and they faithfully kept it on their own computers around the world until the new site opened and the archived material could be placed on the new site.

It was a little like a miracle. We even opened the new site a few days early and it has gone through three revisions. Since the new site opened in September of 2014 about 4,500 new photos have been posted and about 1,000 separate discussion threads opened.

The power of the web continues to amaze me. It only goes to show that turners are the most caring of any group I have been involved with."

You are invited to contact Herm if you would like to see more of the WoW site Herman de Vries <[herm@hdv.net](mailto:herm@hdv.net)>



### What's Happening to Woodturning Around the World

*A segment of Creative Wood that profiles a turner/artist who has come to my attention in my travels and on the internet, and who I think will be of interest to other turners.*

*My own woodturning journey is one of learning and extending myself, so I never miss the opportunity to watch and learn from others.*

*Terry Scott*