Rings True to Life- Presentation to MWA Oct. 5, 2019

I have two intertwined themes- one is technical about turning rings, with three ring projects of increasing difficulty. The other explores developing your style or voice in turning that is unique to you.

(I have a friend who is an excellent turner, much more skilled than I. But, when I look at his work, I see a Richard Raffan box, a John Jordan hollow vessel, a Michael Hosaluk teapot. He can do anyone's work flawlessly, but I don't know what his own voice sounds like. So my second theme today is developing your unique voice as a craftsperson/woodturner. I've been teaching woodturners for 35 years. I teach people to make a Holtan natural edged bowl, But I tell them, "I want to teach you the fundamentals so a year from now, when I see your work, it will be moving to something uniquely yours." In my clubs up north, and here too, turners develop specialties, articles that are uniquely theirs. That's the way turning becomes more than just technique, but a way to express yourself and better to know who you are as a person.

I feel fortunate that people do know what a Holtan bowl looks like, and my ring items too. Some of you are there too, and others are working on it. Just a few hints. Learn the whole repertoire of skills and ideas that you can use to express yourself. Read, watch videos in the club's library and not too many YouTubes. They often use bad technique. Listen to your audience and customers. I think benefit auctions are a great way to get started. Donate and then listen to what people say. It's a good way to get the work out and educate people about turning, and also find out what people like about your work.

So, rings. A Fine Woodworking article from the late 70's on a turned captive-ring rattle changed my life. I turned hundreds and now thousands. Then, at a Norwegian-American wedding reception, with those captive rings in my brain, I saw a wedding cake, called a Kransekake, as if for the first time, and said, "I can turn my rings on a cone and make that."

To find your woodturning voice, you need to know what you care about, what you think is beautiful and important. I grew up in a Norwegian American ghetto in Northern Iowa and my family has always revered its Scandinavian roots. I have made many trips to Scandinavia and am much influenced by the art and craft of Northern Europe's "wood culture." I'm also a Lutheran pastor.

First, a Celtic turned rattle. In May, and you can review this on the club website, Gary Mrozek did a great job in showing how to turn a baby rattle with captive rings. It's a great trick and very intriguing to people. I'm going to add just one little technique to the rattle that will be essential in my ringed trees project, using the skew to release the rings. It's much easier to learn and practice this on a rattle than on my ringed tree.

So, two unique tools I modify and use- A ring-cutting tool based on the skew chisel. The skew is a traditional ½" skew ground to be both narrower and thinner, with an oval cross section that can fit into the narrow space between rings. Second, these beading and parting tools are 3/8 and ¼ square, shop-made from extra-long metal turning bits, in HSS or cobalt steel. The traditional b and p tool has the cutting edge across the centerline, but I shift mine off to one edge so that when I rotate the tool, it moves me the right distance along the rest to make cutting beads easier. I use them with the short edge up. The main angle is 40 degrees. They specialize in a bead about their own width. By tipping the b-and-p tool upside down, I can also use the side edge as a scraper to clean up the curve. I'll show that in a minute. I also use a 1/8 parting tool, not 3/16, and a live center with the center point removed, so I can turn the point right to the top of the blank. Pass these tools and a rattle.

So, here we go, we cut grooves to create the rings, but then we must cut a clean shoulder with the skew. Remember, we line up the cut with the bevel, not with the handle. A stop grip is best, and then a little roll of

your thumb is a precise micrometer adjustment to get the entrance just right. This cutting stance and angle needs to go deep into your muscle memory. Make a thin cut on maple, maybe two, to make sure we have no torn grain. Let's stop and look. Then back to shaping the top of the ring. I use my beading and parting tool, which specializes in a bead or ring of its own width. On a ring, in contrast to a bead, it's not easy to swing a good curve, so I tend to make several discrete cuts, then blend them with the b and p tool as a scraper, and then sandpaper. I agree with Gary from May, to use sandpaper is often just the quickest way, not a failure. Then, I separate the rings. Gary used a curved scraper, sometimes called a ring tool. I don't. I've made a decision I don't need round section rings. That would need a scraper. I'm more interested in a quick and clean cut on end grain. So, I use this narrower skew, and with each cut, swing further out, careful to be quick about the cut so it doesn't burn. **You will find you not only swing out the handle, but you also need to rotate the tool to keep the sharp edge out of harm's way.** You will want to be very aware of the line on both sides of the ring, to make sure your two cuts meet in the middle. I like the look of the higher ring in the middle, full diameter of your blank, as Gary did, but I also like the way it gives me easier access to that middle ring. That's a key factor with rings and how closely spaced the rings can be. Then I clean up what might be a ragged inside by sanding on the wood itself. No sandpaper on the inside of the ring. I don't stop for that. I'm doing production work of these rattles, 10-15 minutes each, and I think the clean cut skew finish, though not a round cross section, looks great. **So, a few new things I'm adding to Gary's great presentation about captive ring rattles: you <u>may</u> cut the shoulders with your skew chisel, use the b and p tool for rounding the shape and as a scraper upside down too, then the modified ½" skew to cut the rings loose. Sand the inside of the ring on the raw wood.** These learnings will all be useful on my next project, but it's easier to learn on the rattle. Definitely start and get good with rings on the rattle first. One last thing, I think it's great to make a lot of a few items. I like this rattle and tree partly because they are almost a sampler of all the different turning techniques. You get good when you repeat it again and again, and it enters your muscle memory.

So, any questions about this rattle before I move to the ringed tree?

"Kransekake" is the Norwegian name for "crown cake, or more specifically "wreath cake," a unique ringed Scandinavian wedding cake that was my inspiration to design this decorative tree. I have made thousands of them since about 1982. A young girl in her bunad shows off the Kransekake cake, a "tree of rings. This decorative tile by Suzanne Toftey shows the Kransekake cake in its setting in Scandinavian festivals, especially weddings. This historic cake and my tree-of-rings design have rich and ancient symbolism for marriage and loving relationships. The ring (think wedding ring) means forever, many rings more forever, and in Northern Europe the evergreen shape means eternal life, even more forever. So the shape wishes the recipients a relationship that lasts forever. A narrative, a good story, makes items easier to sell. Back to finding your own voice, if your products have a story, and better yet, a story that fits with your story, people love that. I'm going to pass around a framed photo, given me by a family I didn't know except as customers, but who found my rattle a very significant gift. Year after year, they saw me make the rattles, gave them as baptismal gifts to each of their grandkids, and one summer, even had a rattle reunion, and gave me this gift in thanks. Wow. I'm also going to pass one of my ringed trees. Don't drop it. It costs a hundred bucks.

On these more delicate rings, I again use a modified skew chisel, not a scraper. First because the skew works well on end grain. But also on the ringed tree, I need a zero loss of wood between the ring and the cone. That also excludes a scraper, which needs much more space.

Load a raw blank. Here's the process- take a block of 2 1/4 X 2 1/4 X 8 inch maple and first shape it into the cone, small end toward the tailstock. I never measure, but I list my dimensions on the MWA website. A little over 2" diameter, 8" long, with a taper starting 2" from the bottom to 3/8"inch at the top. (For more precise measurement: 5.5 inches of rings, with 17-18 rings, Thickness of rings- .15 inch in the thicker, larger rings, tapering to .065 for the smaller, thinner ones, Spacing of rings .35" total for the first row at

the bottom, .25" at the top row. Final thickness of the cone, ¼" for top of cone, 5/16" for the stem/trunk.

I use a roughing gouge for the basic shape and then a skew chisel for a final finish. I use my 2" roughing gouge as a guide to the bottom section, which is also the thickness of the blank. At the top, the diameter is just larger than my Oneway center.

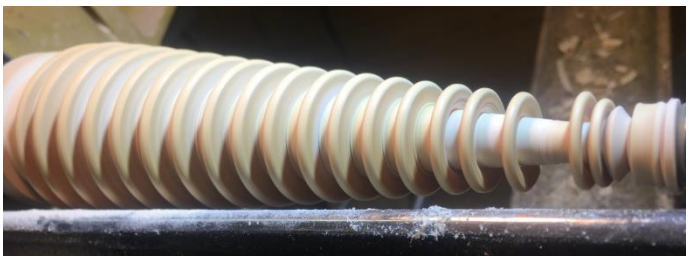
Next I cut grooves to shape my rings. I do that by eye, starting at the beginning of the angled section. I use a 1/8" parting tool, not the more common 3/16, and everything tapers. 2 thicknesses of 1/8 parting tool at the thickest section, to 1 thickness at the top, and tapering between. Thicker rings in the big diameters, tapering to quite thin. Also, I need to leave enough wood to cut a shoulder on every edge. Especially if I get some chatter, the parting tool cut will be rough. I've tried other parting tools which cut cleaner, but they don't leave a flat bottom, which is essential for me. Tool pressure is what we call the resistance to our cut with particular tools. I prefer to cut, not scrape, with the parting tool, because it causes less tool pressure. If I do get chatter, I prefer to put that chatter on the lower, less visible side of a ring, not the top. That means less chance of visible, torn grain. **I can also use the bevel of the tool to provide some steady rest, but pushing down just a bit.** This becomes a huge issue on my bigger trees, which I have made up to 36" height. I usually have in stock 12" and 16" trees and chatter is a much bigger issue with these and I am finessing those all I can to lessen it. I've broken a cardinal rule of spindle turning on these trees, which is "don't cut the ends too thin until you've finished the middle." As in card playing, "Don't cheat until you know the game better than anyone else."

A second issue when cutting the grooves is **keeping the inside line, the bottom of the grooves, straight and even.** When I started making this tree, I made 6 rings, big thick ones like the rattle, and no thin stem at the base. But as I made it, I decided I had a different audience for the tree than the rattle. Not babies, hard on their toys, but adults. So, I made thinner and thinner rings, as the years went by, and guess what, when I didn't need to undercut so far, I could space them much closer. And, I found they didn't need to be round in cross section to be strong enough; they could be 2-3 times wider than thick. That gives a good look from many more rings, still keeps them quite strong, and makes them much easier to undercut. A thick ring I need to undercut deeply and need lots of space alongside to do it. These, not so much.

I don't measure, I use a 1/8 parting tool, with a double thickness between the biggest rings, a single thickness between the smallest rings. Then I make a series of cuts. First, to clean up the end grain edges of the rings, I need to cut a super clean cut shoulder. Then a series of cuts with b and p tool to round the top. Then sand with 120, 180, 240, oil, and then with 400 wetordry.

My next step, round, sand and oil the still attached rings, before I cut them loose. I use the ¼ beading and parting tool to round the rings, not getting too fussy because I can scrape and sand quickly. Sanding is a bit of a problem, because the sanding grit I leave on the rings will dull my skew chisel a bit. I use 120 grit, 150 and 220, then I oil with Watco Teak Oil and sand with 400 wet-or-dry sandpaper. This is wonderful paper I use on all my articles I oil. I use it after my first coat of oil. In this situation, either production or demonstrating, that wetordry sandpaper also dries out the rings enough so I can move right to cutting the rings and don't have to wait for the oil to dry. Otherwise, lots of dust in my oil finish.

(It's a bit frustrating for people to watch me turn these trees because easily half the time is making these rings, even before I cut them loose. I need to make the rings very well. By the way, I love to turn these trees with a crowd. I was just at the Hostfest in Minot, and I turned about 5 trees every day, and more rattles, often with 40-50 people watching. It's a great demo because there is disbelief that the rings all come from the same piece, then suspense as I cut them, and then, they want to see it done. Many people have never seen woodturning. Most people watch till it's done, 35 to 40 minutes, which is amazing.)



(Take the tree out of the lathe and pass it. Load the blank with rings sanded and oiled.) This photo shows the grooves made between the rings and the first 3 rings at the top released. I use my modified skew chisel to undercut the rings from each

side. It is very delicate work and if I cut too deep, the rings will not stay high and even on the cone. The first cut is the most difficult because there is not much space alongside. If I cut the hole too big, or cut too deep into the cone, that ring will hang low and I can't do anything about it. So, go slow at first.

I have a way I cut these, usually 3 cuts from the top, each cut swinging further over to undercut the ring and rotating slightly to keep the edge out of the ring. Then 3 cuts from below, in the more confined space under the ring. I often get an indication of the thickness by light shining through and the pitch going up. I want the two cuts to exactly meet each other, so keeping that inner cone line consistent is very helpful. Once I have the first couple rings cut, they slide out of my way, so I can lean the tool over for the top cut. That's the main reason to start with the small rings. If I started with the big ones, they would be in my business, bigtime. Before each cut I clean up the surface with my skew chisel, so I can keep the line of the cone very consistent and then cut just to that line.

In both my rattles and ringed trees, I am greedy to use all my wood so I end up with the point of the tailstock leaving its mark on the ends. So, I took out the point of the live center and can use the wood right to the tip.

(Load the loose rings blank.) Once I release my last ring, leaving the last for a "gate," I use my skew chisel to clean up the surface. I've learned to do that in two steps, first taking most of the extra but leaving the deepest cuts. Then I line up the rings and if some are too close together, I can push the ring down the inner surface of the cone till it smokes, and burns off a bit of material so it drops lower on the cone. When I have finished that with 3-6 of the rings, usually, I make another trip to clean off all marks to a pristine surface.

Next, I use the parting tool to make three cuts, to the left of the still-attached bottom ring and above and below the base. The outside of those cuts go as deep as the 1' driving center and the middle one is halfway from that diameter to the outside diameter of the base. I use the 3/8 spindle gouge take six runs across the base to make it smaller than the rings, then rough out the slender "trunk" of the tree.. Over the years I learned to add fillets to the cove from base to rings. My woodturning students love to make a single continuous curve from their beads into their coves, but traditional turners most often put a fillet, a short flat reveal, at the transition from bead to cove. It makes a more interesting, complex and shadow-producing shape. I like the trunk thin, maybe ¼". I think fine woodworking must not look "clunky," but should be as light as its strength allows. I like the look of an elegant ballerina, weightless,.

I cut 3 shoulders with the skew, then use the 3/8 b and p for the beads and fillets, and the small 3/8 gouge to clean up and further thin the cove. On a vertical spindle like this, I always put the center of the cove off-center, 2/3 high, as if defying gravity. Rule of thirds for good design.

There is a sequence to spindle work to avoid chatter. I worked on the middle of my turning first while it was well supported by the ends, but now I finish the ends. I cut a three false-ring finial at the top to continue the look of rings to the point. Now sand and oil, wetordry 400 grit, oil again and cut it loose by cutting both ends to be very thin and then take it out of the lathe. Carve off the extra. I oil the tree by anointing it with oil, pouring it so it runs down and I work it into every ring, especially those sections not ever oiled. Let it stand 15-20 minutes and then wipe off the excess, let stand overnight and do more coats, usually 3 total. At shows I have a dilemma, I'm running out of trees, they want they one they saw me make. I can hurry these coats along if I use my light as a kiln, and wait 3 hours between coats. Please pick up at the end of the day. Most people are willing. **I sell my eight inch size for $115, which includes shipping. The larger sizes are $225 for the 12 inch and $375 for the 16 inch.**

Pass a completed tree, also a crooked tree and my cards. About the story. Researchers these days, like Daniel Pink, among others, say people want to buy a product… and the maker of the product. They want your story

too. So any way you can tell your story, and match it to your product, helps you sell it, and helps you more carefully define yourself and your unique style. People will help you. My son-in-law is a brand designer in Scotland, and decided I needed my own font. This is called “Holtan” and it’s based on Norwegian runic designs and some carvings my dad did years ago. I love it, and I like to send it along with my sold products.

I wish you well with your discovery of your unique style.

Questions?