

Larry Dubia

An Interview and Perspective upon Turning And the Santa Cruz Woodturners

Wells Shoemaker, June, 2020



Larry with a huge, thin wall Kauri bowl nearing completion, June, 2020

Larry Dubia had an idea while driving back from an evening meeting of the West Bay Woodturners in Los Altos. “The camaraderie is great, but this is just too far to drive. We could do this closer to home.”

Five years later, the Santa Cruz Woodturners started the year with its fourth president, over 30 members, a splendid meeting venue at the Mission Hill School woodshop, and formal non-profit status. The club has attracted members from Monterey and Santa Clara County, with professional backgrounds in education, law, rocket science (you bet!), geology, endocrinology, automotive racing, medicine, professional woodcraft,

general contracting, water system management, sales, blacksmithing, precision machining...and more...and a fair amount of grandparenting.

In June, 2020, I interviewed Larry about the club's early days, his background, and his hopes for the future of the craft that has enchanted people of so many diverse experiences.

WS: Larry, what were your biggest hurdles getting the club off the ground?

LD: We had no problem with enthusiasm...we had about 25 people interested in the idea right away. Sue, Raf, John, and Blair were really behind it. Initially, we started in Sue's shop with a copy of the bylaws I rewrote from the West Bay Woodturners. Then we met in other member shops, but we had trouble finding a regular place for the meeting. We finally settled into the School, and thanks to John Wells for that! Then we had to get formal bylaws, a bank account, and some basics done.

WS: Did you have allies in those formative days?

LD: West Bay Woodturners was really supportive, and with their experience, they saved us a lot of time learning how to work with members and deal with practical things. The AAW went out of its way to help us succeed, and they shared a lot of content that would have been hard to pull together otherwise.

WS: How did you get started turning?

LD: I went to a craft fair where a guy was turning pens. I watched him produce a pen with all sorts of custom features for a lady while she waited, and I was stoked. I bought some tools and a 9 inch lathe...my first of four...and started making pens. Then it was bottle stoppers, some bowls, and then hollow forms, and it just kept growing.

WS: Who taught you those techniques?

LD: You Tube, probably more than any other. I'd say I was self-taught, but it helps to watch somebody good do something, that's for sure.

WS: Your current lathe is a 22 inch monster, Larry. How did you settle on that one?

LD: It's an early Grizzly. I looked on Craig's List and other places...not so much for the brand but the size. Back then, a lot of manufacturers were fairly early in developing their larger lathes, and they all had a lot of equipment failures. I had to work through a lot of those, but the guys at the factory were easy to reach and helped a lot.

WS: We all look at catalogs now and then. Is there one that catches your eye, or is this your last lathe?

LD: I'm probably not finished yet! *The American Beauty* by Robust sure looks ready for anything.

WS: Speaking of big machines, you drove a tank for the US Army, didn't you?

LD: Actually it was an armored personnel carrier in Germany, but yeah, I do like big machines.

WS: Your BMW motorcycle has a bigger engine displacement than my first car.

LD: I bet it does! I take my bike on a long trip almost every month. It's a beast.

WS: You also have been doing lots of work with resins...it's almost becoming a trademark for you, especially burl and resin combinations. How did you learn about this dimension of turning?

LD: Same way, really. You Tube, articles, and trial and error. It's sort of a sky's the limit technique.



WS: You were also a huge proponent for improving our video capabilities for club demos. We can all see better now on a big screen, and we don't have to crowd around a running lathe, either. How did you get into that electronic gear?

LD: I had a lot of help from a friend in the Bay Area Woodturners, and I read a lot. What we have is a starter set up with a GoPro camera and a big screen TV. We have some recording capability, too, but we have room to improve, especially now.

WS: What do you see for opportunities for Santa Cruz Woodturners to grow?

LD: That's a long answer. We constantly need new members, of course, and we need to get out where people can see what turning is all about. We need to find ways to do more community teaching. We need to find ways to reach more kids, because they are our future...and we definitely need to attract more women to turning.

WS: Craft Fairs are not going to be too popular for a year or more, and COVID has put real crimps on our ability to demonstrate turning even to small groups. What do you see as traps for us as we try to make it through?

LD: As you know, we need to do more effective remote demos and somehow reproduce the friendship and humor we have with our members. Some of that is equipment, of course, and a lot of that will be to get slicker with our presentations. We may need some professional help here and there. You Tube continues to be a great teacher, and people can do that on their own time.

WS: Last question, Larry. One of the real marks of leadership is not just getting something launched against tall odds...but being able to turn it over to others as it matures. How has it felt for you after your early years as President, and seeing the club evolve? This is the first year you haven't served on the Board.

LD: I think we're doing pretty well, step by step, and of course, this year is different! We're just learning the Zoom techniques, and I think we can use that to work with interested people who want to get more involved in leadership.

WS: Thank you, Larry, for your time, your constant willingness to teach, and your example of boldly barging ahead with new challenges. Your work is exceptional, and your contribution to all of us through the club has brightened many a day.

LD: You're welcome. Go young Padawan. Calling to you wood is. May the Creativity be with you. (He really said that.)



Segmented fruit bowl, 2017



Segmented bowl with floating stone, 2017

Larry Dubia

© Santa Cruz Woodturners 2020

5 Larry Dubia Interview, June, 2020