



Back in 1937

When she talked about those tribulations back in 1937, her feeble voice crackled with both age and emotion. With over seventy years separating then from now, the grief still lingered but wisdom had covered it like moss on a riverbank.

In those days, the poor were really poor, their back bones hollow from lack of food and their brows heavy with the kind of worry that will drive a man to an early grave. Some did die, leaving behind poor, fragile widows and a passel of half-starved young'uns to cry mournfully over their raggedy remains. Around those hand-dug graves filled with rough hand-hewn pine boxes, folks gathered to pray and sing Amazing Grace as it rained. It always rained. Their lives, it seemed, were filled with rain.

"Lookin' back," she said softly, "The Lord knowed what he was doin'."

But back then, it didn't seem like that at all. She married young at 16, the handsome boy, Scotch-Irish just like her, that she would love till death put it asunder 75 years later. Those first years were hard not only in body but in spirit as they tried to form a life among the depression-smothered foothills of the Southern Appalachians.

In detail she recalled it all on that morning she telephoned early. "Somethin' just told me to call you," she said. "I hate to hinder you 'cause I know you're always so busy but I just wanted to talk to you."

Because I have sadly learned that time with loved ones can be fleetingly short, I, without hesitation, sat down on a step on the stairway with a cup of coffee and settled into an hour's long conversation. I shrugged off deadlines, project negotiations and business calls for something more urgent, more important. For she knows things about our family that if she doesn't tell me now, might be gone forever should God call for her before he does for me.

Aunt Ozelle is Mama's oldest sister who, at 93, has outlasted all those who knew her when she was a child or when she was dewy with youth. Through all her living, she has seen a lot of life, the good, the bad, the sad and the happy. Somehow for some reason, we started in on the sad that morning.

For over 60 years, she taught Sunday School and she lived where she taught. She's such a Bible scholar than even preachers, including my daddy, often sought her guidance on understanding a scripture. She will tell you, plain and simple, it is her faith that has undergirded her and taken her down through the sometimes roughed journey of life.

They struggled just to stay alive, she said, while living in a little rented house on someone else's farm. Foxes ate all their chickens, their beloved collie dog disappeared, a little heifer that Paw-paw had given them for milk and butter caught its head between a post and the floor and choked to death. The day before her first baby was born, in desperation, Aunt Ozelle dropped to her knees and prayed.

"I asked that God's will be done. Whatever that was."

Woodworking

GUILD LOOKING TO EXPAND public footprint



Terry Dickson/The Brunswick News photo

Paul Spiech with his chest that holds a lot of hand tools, some of which belonged to his father and grandfather. Among them are hand planes, gouges and saws.

By TAYLOR COOPER
tcooper@thebrunswicknews.com

Woodworking is a skill that finds expression in many ways, from the standard carpentry present in homes, apartments and businesses to breathtaking pieces of art produced by patient hands. The Golden Isles Woodworking Guild seeks to bring together practitioners from all disciplines and walks of life to learn from one another, and now, the guild wants to become more publicly active.

"We are a group of men and women who are interested in woodworking, both building flatwork items such as furniture, as well as woodturning," Steve Dmetruk, guild president, said. "I would like to get the group more visibility as we try to make people aware of what we do, increase our membership, develop a youth mentorship program, and provide services to our local community."

Currently, the group's monthly meetings on every second Saturday mostly revolve around learning new skills from other woodworkers. In the last few months, Dmetruk said the group has learned about retaining the natural wood texture on the edges of items like bowls and plates, embellishments and making hollowform pieces.

Paul Spiech has been a member of the guild since its founding, a few years after he moved to the Golden Isles from New York in 2006, but woodworking has been a hobby of his since childhood. His grandfather was a master carpenter in New England, and Spiech grew up around the craft.

"He would come home at night and sharpen his saws in the basement for the next day," Spiech recalled. "I would blow the sawdust off his arms."

He gave a talk at the guild's July meeting on making dovetail joints, a method for joining two pieces of wood at an angle.

Spiech is mostly involved in flatwork — "I like to call it case work," he elaborated — but dabbles in woodturning. He's used both to make furniture for his home. A small table and a wall-mounted mirror in his entryway, a writing desk and flowerpot stand in a dining room nearby, his primary dinner table and chairs and a standing mirror in his bedroom are all his original work.

He's in the middle of a couple of projects as well, like finishing up a chair and doing some more intricate work on



Carved detail into the back of a chair he made.



Paul Spiech holds a handsaw from a collection that keeps clean and that he sharpens himself.

a bookshelf he plans to put on top of his writing desk.

As for the hardware for all these items, he tends to pick them up at various places; sometimes at hardware stores, secondhand or thrift shops and online. For the standing mirror, which was a gift to his wife for their 30th anniversary, he acquired the decorative castor wheels from an antique store that once occupied a building on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

He's got a wide variety of both electric and hand carpentry tools. He prefers to use the hand tools, but sometimes a big project calls for a powered one. He's got several interesting items in his collection, like a hand saw made by a company called Atkins, which was known for its silver steel saws. Another is a wood plane, which is a relatively inexpensive item despite its age.

"They used to burn them for firewood because everyone wanted metal ones," he said.

He says the club started out of a desire among workworkers in the Isles to trade stories and skills. Sometimes the members will lead talks and trade tips, sometimes they'll bring in an outside expert to talk.

Spiech learns as much from the other club members as he teaches them. Woodturning is a newer part of his repertoire, and that's where he's learned the most from other club members.

For Dmetruk, it's a similar

story. Woodworking was a hobby, but not one picked up from a family member.

"A lot of us are the same way. We worked and had stressful jobs. I had a second home in the mountains, and I wanted to start making things for my second home, and all of a sudden, I had a lot of tools and a shop, and it took away the stress of work," Dmetruk said. "Women, typically, are doing woodturning, and a lot of men are doing both flatwork — making furniture and such — as well as turning bowls and different items. Our goal is to advance our woodworking skills and advance the hobby and the trade throughout the community."

Another longtime member, guild Secretary Karen Grogan, is among the more skilled woodturners in the group. She joined around 2009, a couple of years after the group was founded, and served as its first secretary.

"But I've held all the positions," she said, rising from secretary to vice president, president, and then back to secretary before taking over as the treasurer for a while. She later served as the secretary and treasurer, and is now back to just being the secretary.

She's always had an affinity for woodturning, much more so than flatwork. She got her start in carpentry by refinishing furniture as a side hobby, and picked up woodturning around the time she joined the guild.

Working with wood is one of her passions.

"I love the texture, I love the smell, and I love the way it looks when it's finished and it's all sanded down and you see the beautiful grain under whatever surface you started out with," she said.

She says the guild wants to go more public because woodworking as a form of art is declining locally, and it would be a great shame if it disappeared in the Golden Isles. One of the ways the guild once stayed in the public eye was by taking on community projects.

"People would bring us suggestions of things that were needed for the community, and we've gotten away from that because, one, our members are a bit older, and we're looking for newer, younger members to continue the beautiful art of woodworking. It's a dying art, like so many others," she said.

One of the projects the board did in the past was to construct a commemorative bench for a girl with Down syndrome who was active in GVA. Club members embedded one of her paintings into the bench.

Grogan also helped out on a project at the Brunswick Glynn County Library, reinforcing an old playhouse in the building.

Guild members also used to participate in fundraising, making chairs and selling them for the board's operating budget.

She recognizes that younger people tend not to have the money or the time, between their own jobs and families, to commit much to what can be a very expensive hobby, but club members are willing to help where they can for those who want to pursue it.

There's little that beats the satisfaction of making a beautiful piece for someone else, knowing that it can be used in practical applications and will likely outlast its creator, potentially becoming beloved heirlooms.

"I'm just amazed I could make so many beautiful things people could enjoy," Grogan said. "I think it's a shame so many of our members' families don't learn from their parents who are woodworkers. We have such talented, talented members who can create beautiful things from nothing, from a log or a flat board, and it seems like the younger generation hasn't realized how incredible of an art form it is."

For more information on the guild, visit giww.org. It meets on the second Saturday of every month from 10 a.m. to noon at Brunswick First Presbyterian Church, 1105 Union St.