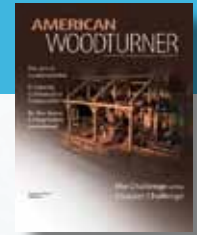
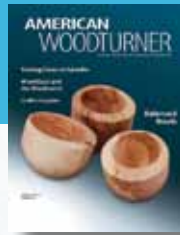


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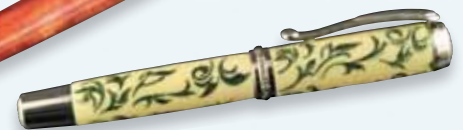
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# TURNING DISASTER

*Even the best at risk without a face shield*

KEN KEOUGHAN

**I**N OCTOBER DAVID LANCASTER, a professional turner of consummate skills, was hit in the face with a bowl. At the time the bowl came off the lathe, he wasn't touching it.

After the ambulance got him to the emergency room it took 28 stitches to pull his nose back together and otherwise repair the damage done to his face. Fortunately his eyes were only blackened. At the time of the accident he was not wearing a face shield or safety glasses. Now the Weeks Mills, ME, turner wears a hockey player's helmet, which is designed to protect players from high speed projectiles and other dangers of the game.

On April 28, 2000 Al Stirt of Enosburg falls, VT, an AAW Lifetime Award Member and a professional turner par excellence, was hit in the face by a salad bowl. At the time he was truing up the back of a 12-in.-dia. salad bowl mounted between centers ... doing final cuts after drying the piece, which had been green-turned. He was not cutting aggressively. There wasn't a "catch". The bowl just split in two. One half of the bowl hit Al in the lip and nostril. He was not wearing a face shield or safety glasses at the time.

## The plate broke loose

In August of 1997 I was in my shop in Friendship, ME, taking a last cut on an 8-in.-dia. plate, cleaning up the foot. I was alone at the time; my wife was out running errands. I was reverse turning, using a homemade disc with three toggles to hold the piece in place. The plate broke loose and hit me on the left side of my face. The ambulance dispatcher told me to take my hand away from my eye and put a compress on it to stanch the bleeding. I told him that I couldn't do that. "Why not?" he asked. "Because I'm afraid my eye will be in it and I don't

want to see that."

It took 28 stitches under and across my eyebrow to close up the wound. The orbital bone below the eye and in the cheek area was broken. The nerve bundle which passes through that area was damaged, numbing a portion of the left side of my face. It remains numb today and probably will remain so for the rest of my life. I was not wearing a face shield or safety glasses at the time. However, I was wearing glasses with polycarbonate lenses, the type that bespectacled Little Leaguers are urged to wear. They probably saved my eye. Wal-Mart replaced them free of charge as they were still under warranty.

In the Fall 2000 issue of this magazine, Tom Albrecht of Wilmette, IL, chronicled the



Dave Lancaster, above, following a trip to the emergency room. The stitches and black eyes indicate the force with which he was hit when a bowl came apart. The bowl itself was not that large, as you can see by comparing it to the smashed glasses Dave was wearing at the time of the accident.



explosion of a glued-up red oak cylinder 44-in.-long by 12-in. in diam-

eter. He had completed three of four columns he was making and was in the final "sanding" phase of the fourth. The dangerous work had already been completed

### Jagged shards of red oak

"...I decided a little more speed would help get through this tedious sanding process. So I set the speed up to 900 RPM, reversed the motor, grabbed my sanding block and hit the green button. That's when all hell broke loose ... I'm not sure what I noticed first - the explosion, the sudden darkness, or the void under my sanding block where the column should have been .... I was amazed nothing BIG hit me. All the lights in a 20-ft. radius were shattered, my tool cabinet and its contents were smashed, and there were 3-ft. jagged shards of torn apart red oak all round me." Tom was wearing a face shield at the time. He was not hurt.

Bill Wohlfart, President of the Central Florida Woodturners Chapter of AAW, described another adventure with a 22-in.-dia. bowl with a large bark inclusion coming apart. A chunk tore out while he was turning the piece. He knew he was in trouble.

### 800-lb lathe on the move

"Why is my 800 -lb. Nichols lathe jumping up and down and walking out of my garage? And can I reach the off switch without getting killed." The chunk that broke loose first hit one of the steel tracks on which the garage door travels, bending it about 3-in. and knocking it out of its bracket. It then hit the track the chain runs in and knocked the cover off the light. Next it dropped on the car and made three dents in the top and a dent in the door. His wife was standing next to the car at the time. Bill was not wearing a face shield. Fortunately he was not hurt.

If we accept as a definition of a "Professional Turner" as one who



After his accident, Dave Lancaster started wearing a hockey player's helmet when he was turning in his shop. The pile of shavings behind him gives you an idea of how much Dave turns as a full-time professional. Photos: Courtesy of Dave Lancaster

sells most or part of what he turns, all of the above are professional turners. Stirt and Lancaster are at the top of the profession. Yet they both got hurt. I got hurt. The other two did not, although they could have. Any one of these accidents could have been horribly disastrous, if not fatal. We're talking about seeing, breathing, thinking apparatus ... eyes, noses, heads. Head trauma is not to be taken lightly.

I will admit that deep down I al-

ways knew that the "Big Kids" didn't really wear face shields. Yeah, sure ... when they were teaching or demonstrating they did, because they had to. Every turner to whom I have put that proposition has agreed with me. Therefore if I am to be one of the "Big Kids," I don't always have to observe all the safety rules all the time ... I should observe most of the rules most of the time .... But gimme a break, a face shield when I am sanding a bowl, a pen, a wine stopper? When I'm just

standing there getting ready to do the next step? C'mon!

That is the undercurrent. Why? I don't know. I just know that we are all human and that is a pretty human kind of feeling.

Last January Lancaster underwent surgery to open the breathing passages damaged in his accident. I'm lucky I did not lose an eye or worse. Stirt could have had those five stitches in an eye. Albrecht could have been killed by something SMALL, say a 5-in. x 1-in. x 1-in. piece of red oak in the throat or forehead. Wohlfart or his wife or both could have been very badly hurt or worse.

It is interesting that these all, except for Wohlfart's, happened under what could be considered rather harmless situations, not during

*The plate broke loose and hit me on the left side of my face. The ambulance dispatcher told me to take my hand away from my eye and put a compress on it to stanch the bleeding. I told him that I couldn't do that. "Why not?" he asked. "Because I'm afraid my eye will be in it and I don't want to see that." — Ken Keoughan*

roughing, working with a massive-out-of-balance piece or aggressively hogging out wood. Glue joints did not fail, face plate screws didn't pull out. These are cautious, prudent people. It is very rare that Al Stirt does not wear a face mask. David Lancaster wasn't even working on the piece, but the lathe was running. All have analyzed what happened and

have theories as to why the pieces came off the lathe. But these are only theories and there are only four of them out of the thousands of ways in which accidents of these types could happen.

The point here is that many, if not most of us, are not heeding the danger. The rim speed of Albrecht's piece was 47.1 ft. per second. Wohlfart's was 52.8 ft. per second. In the time it takes to say "One thousand one" shards, chunks, pieces of wood have traveled 40-to-50-ft. That isn't "faster than a speeding bullet", but ....

I could go on, but my purpose here is not to beat a dead horse. It is to prevent a dead turner.

*Ken Keoughan is a writer and turner in Friendship, ME., and a contributing editor at American Woodturner.*

## **Help Us Teach Turners To Work Safely**

There is very limited data available about accidents involving wood lathes. Perhaps I don't know where to look, but I didn't turn up much information. Governmental agencies that compile these data apparently are not tracking independent woodturners or non-industrial woodturning accidents, so far as we know. Nor apparently are any of the major trade associations. Let us hear from you — Not safety tips, but accident scenarios. If we can gather enough info on accidents, we can warn others, and help other turners avoid what you experienced. And perhaps manufacturers can learn what they need to know to come up with better protective equipment. The face shields we now have may not always be adequate, but they are all most of us have now. Make sure you wear yours until something better is available. The hockey helmet that Dave Lancaster is now using may be a good start. — Ken Keoughan