

## Tools Use On Prairie Creek

Scientists now believe that our ancestors made stone cutting tools at least 2.0 million years ago. It is still a wonder how the Great Pyramids were built 4,500 years ago given the size and weight of the limestone blocks, some weighing 70 tons. Of course, humans are not the only tool users, many animals also use tools, but humans are particularly adept at it. Currently the greatest tool ever developed is the James Webb Telescope allowing us to look back in time (to just 100 million years after the Big Bang) and view thousands of unknown galaxies. I have spent my life as a woodworker using tools and got my start working with my hands on a farm and ranch near Prairie Creek.

There was a point in the late 1950's when my Dad decided to move away from baled hay and go back to loose hay. We had an old buck rake with 2 x 4 x 8' wooden teeth. This was a time some of our fields still had ditches. Certain teenagers would often ram the teeth into the ditch berm and break off a tooth. When two teeth were broken it was time to go back to the shop and using a draw knife, shape a new 2 x 4 into a tooth that was pointed and had a long, smooth under arc up to the point. Unknown to me at the time, using that drawknife to rhythmically shape wood would later set me on a path as a furniture maker.

From a woodworker's point of view my father's farm shop was kind of a mess. Dull tools randomly tossed together in an oily drawer to bang against each other, earthen floor, unheated, drafty sliding door, and so on. Farmers back then were not renowned for their well-appointed shops. One year my parents visited me at my furniture shop in Portland and saw how we carefully organized our sharp tools for function and care. Next time I visited the ranch changes were afoot. Tools were now in separate places on a peg board (still dull). Now there was a concrete floor with a wood stove and a passage door to block the wind. Tools and workspaces had been elevated in respect.

Ranch and farm life require one to be proficient with tools to repair your equipment. You will go bankrupt taking every broken item to the Grain Growers to be repaired by the baldheaded mechanic with the black eye patch and big grin. An acetylene torch and welder are particularly useful, as well as a large vice, anvil, and several types of hammers. Kids are lucky when their parents are proficient tool users, they learn a life-long skill that many young people don't get exposed to, especially since many vocational programs have been done away with in favor of science and computers.

Computers, however, are also tools. I use computer assisted design (CAD) before I start cutting up boards. It is a very bad idea to step into the woodshop before you know what you are going to make and its dimensions. You can do it with pencil and paper and I still have my 49 x 72" fold down drafting board, T-square, drafting tools and my sketch pad, but CAD is more powerful in refining and exploring options before you start cutting. I create a complete 3D colored rendering and cut list before I grab the first board. However, once I'm in the shop I frequently will make spur of the moment changes to the drawing based on experience and instinct. I still

believe that it is very important for young kids to lay hands on manual tools and develop the rhythm between mind and hands that electronics and software does not give. There is something wonderful that happens when you have put a keen, razor sharp edge on a tool and put it to use making beautiful shavings.

At my age I have concluded that many of the problems in our society that end up as criminal or self-destructive behavior results from young people not being taught how to productively use tools with their minds and hands, and then be able to find employment in the use of that skill. They are missing out on the rewards and satisfaction from learning how to use skills that have been the foundation of human civilization for thousands of years. For urban teenagers, where I live, learning how to use a Glock handgun is not the right tool use that leads to a long, rewarding life.

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