

# Tom Walden

## *About Me...For Those Who Cannot Sleep*

### **Biography:**

I am a military (US Air Force) brat, so I've moved around somewhat, but I was born in Tampa, Florida in the middle of a hurricane. (Does that explain anything about me?). Then later I also lived in Puerto Rico, Germany, Florida again, and Fort Bragg, NC.

I have now rooted myself and lived in the Melbourne/Palm Bay, Florida area since I started college here in 1969. It took me a while, but I finally got my B.S. in Computer Science from Florida Tech. As such, my real job is Sr. Application Developer (aka computer programmer) for a company in Fort Worth, Texas (I obviously telecommute to work). There are many pros and cons to working at home like this, but it obviously requires good discipline, self-motivation, and a high level skill set to be able to work independently. And since computer programs need to be as perfect as possible, that trait has undoubtedly transitioned to my miniature furniture craftsmanship.

July of this year (2007) I will have been married for 30 years – to the same woman even. So miracles do happen - if a woman can live with me for that long...<Grin>. We have 4 boys ranging in ages from 12 to 28, and a very special 6 year old daughter that we adopted from China at 10 months old. We also have two grandchildren, of which our granddaughter is a month older than her aunt (our daughter). As such, our oldest son coaches both his sister and his daughter on the same soccer team. Hardly anybody else can make that same claim...

I have been fortunate enough to have traveled to more countries (21 on 5 continents) than I have US states. Fortunately they were all paid-for except the adoption trip to China (which was well worth it). Either my job, being a military brat, or speaking at computer conferences, paid for all of my international trips.

I do not, however, have one of those "A" type personalities, I'm actually a wallflower, soft-spoken, and reserved – but will speak my mind when necessary. I was really terrified when speaking in front of a technical audience. My most unusual speaking engagement was to 400 Italians in Milan, Italy - all listening through headsets via 2 interpreters. I learned one thing real quick – never try to tell a joke through an interpreter. You just get a lot of blank stares. Plus, as it turned out, the interpreters could not understand my Florida "southern" accent very well (yet Floridians really don't have true southern accents). They could understand the British accent of one of my associates a lot better. Go figure...

## How I got into miniatures:

I got into miniatures by accident around 1998. I was at a doll shop in the French Quarter of New Orleans and saw a completed Greenleaf Beacon Hill dollhouse. Seeing that dollhouse was a challenge to me and I wanted to build one for my wife. So I bought a kit there and had it shipped to Florida. It was a couple years before I got the guts (and time) to start building it. Mind you, at this point I had never even seen miniature furniture/dollhouses up to this point, so all I had was a bunch of pictures I took of the dollhouse in that store. Thus I had no idea that I had actually bought one of the most difficult dollhouse kits available. Not having any real miniature tools and/or experience, it took me 2 years of learning (from my mistakes) to get this house built. But through lots of perseverance and patience, it actually turned out quite nice. Nothing like trying to wallpaper, carpet, wire, put in real doors, etc., after the house was completely built. ☹ Big, big learning curves, for sure! I have since built the Dura-Craft Heritage kit, and have 6 more big kits in the garage awaiting my newly skilled hands whenever I get the room to work on them and display them (gotta start kicking kids out I guess).

But I definitely got the mini-bug by then. So next I wanted to furnish the Beacon Hill of course as it looked bare inside. I started gathering various sets of furniture locally and off eBay, but then came across kits that I could build and finish to my own liking. However, after 2 years of building furniture kits, I felt that I just wasn't challenged enough.

## Building furniture from scratch:

I discovered that the kit's wood thicknesses were very seldom to scale, nor was the quality there either. Plus the kit furniture was not "100% mine" – I wanted to build something that I could put my name on. So I decided at this point (early 2005) that I wanted to try building my own furniture from scratch.

I went to online bookstores and eBay to purchase a dozen or so full-scaled books on antique furniture – all of which had measured drawings in them. I then made a copy of all the possible furniture pages that I felt that I might make from scratch some day. I would make 2 copies of the measured drawings themselves. Next I would white-out the measurements on one set of drawings. I would make a copy of that also as it's much easier to write new scaled-down measurements on a copy than overtop white-out itself. I haven't scaled-down all sets of furniture yet – figure I'll do that on an as-needed basis. In several 3-ring binders/dividers are about 8 inches of copied drawings to last the rest of my lifetime now. Can't wait – wish I could retire early and do nothing but make miniature furniture. It is just so relaxing, challenging, and satisfying (most of the time...<G>).

When I make furniture from a drawing, I always look for ways to make it different from what people are used to seeing, and also unique enough to help identify it as a "Tom Walden" original. Thus mastering 1/32" finger joint corners and 1/16"

finger joint hinges is working out great for me. And even though I like to use contrasting wood, such as mahogany and maple or cherry and maple, I get ding-ed about that from the experts. Thus I also make all cherry, mahogany, maple, or walnut pieces of furniture too. And every now and then I'll blend in some zebra, bloodwood, holly, or purpleheart.

First I bought the Preac table saw from Smaller Than Life and attended their workshop at the National NAME conference in Pittsburgh July of 2005. I had already made my first Shaker table by then, but that is all just "straight line" stuff. I have since acquired a Carba-Tec lathe and turn my own spindles/legs/knobs now. Wow was that another (painful) learning curve. I'm also very careful not to have a TV in full view when working on one of my machines for distraction and safety purposes. Those are lessons I can live without...<g>.

My next project was a small portable Shaker writing desk. For being only my second "from scratch" project, they came out exceptionally well. The editor of (full-scale) WoodCraft magazine saw a picture of one of these desks, and was so impressed with the 1/32" finger joints that he published a picture of it in their January 2006 issue. The editor was even more impressed when I told him there were artisans a lot better than me out there – as I was just an advanced beginner. Since then I have published a 5-page article in their September 2006 issue about the IGMA Guild School I attended in June of 2006. I've also been asked to write a follow-up article when I attend the Guild School again in June 2007. Also, in July 2007 I will be an instructor at the NAME National conference in Orlando, Florida. I will be teaching what you can really do with the drillpress that you never knew you could.

My third project was a Davenport pedestal desk with both 1/16" and 1/32" finger joints, mortise and tenon or inlay lids (every one is different), turned front legs, and a very unique custom-designed hinge for the lid (nope, no brass hinges on these guys) – see the pictures on the web site.

Wanting some new and unique, I then researched the possibility of making miniature antique console radios because a friend of mine at work collected them. While studying them I discovered they had quite a bit of detail that could not (easily) be replicated at the miniature level. Thus for my first radio, I selected the 1930 Philco model 77 console radio. This one was unique in that its speaker was in the bottom, thus it had to be built up higher for the sound to be heard efficiently. And what's unique about this little radio is that I also include a very small speaker in it that you can plug in to any CD/tape player with a headphone jack. Needless to say, these have received all sorts of kudos and rave reviews.

What's next? Very shortly I should have a table top cathedra style antique radio available. It will also have a working speaker in it. Next on my agenda? How does a working 1930 grandfather clock/radio sound. Well, the speaker will work,

not too sure about the clock itself...still researching that. Got any suggestions or special requests? Please feel free to contact me directly.

My wife can't believe how obsessed I am with miniatures now, but she doesn't really mind as it keeps me home more (well, at least when I'm not going to shows and workshops), out of trouble, and off the streets!