

Mary Lacer's Letter to the Membership (as posted on the AAW Forum on July 16, 2010)

I want to begin by thanking the AAW membership for the tremendous outpouring of support through phone calls, emails, postings, and letters from around the world. After Tom Wirsing's letter was emailed to the AAW chapter presidents, I have been inundated with messages from so many of you. It has been wonderful to hear from those in our community, friends and members alike, who I have been privileged to know over my 20+ years working for AAW. I cannot thank each of you enough for coming forward with your words of support and encouragement.

I want you to know that my first concern is the health of the organization. My second concern is clearing my name. I have not responded until now because I was looking into legal options.

Below is a list of the events as I remember them on Monday, June 21<sup>st</sup>:

- After a closed session, I was called by Dale Larson to come back to the board meeting at 11:25 a.m. I was at the bank making a final deposit for the symposium and told Dale I would be back as soon as I was done.
- Upon returning I walked into the board meeting sometime before noon and waiting for me on the table was an "Agreement and Release" and another short document. Tom Wirsing read a statement about my termination.
- I asked why? There was one response and Dale Larson said something about nothing further would be said.
- I picked up the document and started to leave. Cassandra Speier asked for the computer and I responded that it was already going back to the office with the staff.
- Cassandra Speier then asked for the credit card and any other AAW property. I said it is in my room. Cassandra Speier and Dale Larson then escorted me to get the credit card. I gave Sandi the credit card and the banking information from Hartford.

My termination is unjustified and the separation document presented at termination conveys malice and is grossly unfair. This document allows the board to use defamation against me and I will be unable to defend myself against their false slander. Signing the separation document will prevent even my family from being able to speak freely within our woodturning community. One such clause in the agreement stated:

**"No Future Employment with American Association of Woodturners, Inc.**

*Lacer agrees that she will never seek or accept or remain employed by American Association of Woodturners, Inc. and/or any chapters, any related entities or any entity owned or controlled by American Association of Woodturners, Inc."*

One legal take on this is that I could not be a presenter at next year's 25th anniversary symposium where I have been invited to demonstrate, I could not demonstrate in chapters, assist with regional symposiums, or even participate in any volunteer work. This is intended to be a lifetime ban from any and all involvement within the woodturning community, in effect terminating not just this position, but all my future involvement with this organization.

This document serves as a representation of malicious and unethical behavior by the board

on many levels. Its existence is proof of several by-law and ethics violations that have occurred resulting in my termination.

Let me be clear: I have no intention of signing the separation document presented by the board to terminate my employment. I walked away from six months severance pay and benefits because it was meant to hush me up so I could not explain my charges and prevent me from working with chapters and any related entities. I do not agree that my job performance warranted this action. It is my plan to clear my good name and continue to be a viable part of the woodturning community.

As to my performance:

I received a satisfactory job performance review in February 2010. There were several items highlighted for improvement, which is expected in order to grow in any position. I have been working toward these standards for improvement. In addition, consider the time frame from February 2010 until June 21st, 2010, is that reasonable to show improvement and advancement with no reviews prior to that one? Since my performance review I have had almost no contact in regard to these matters with the six board members who ultimately voted for termination. The executive committee has always been involved in performance reviews, but six board members have taken matters into their own hands, bypassing the executive committee, ignoring our by-laws, and disregarding the guidelines as presented in the Board Director's Handbook.

A board policy stating that employees are to receive two weeks notice prior to termination has been violated. I received three minutes notice. There has never been anything directly or indirectly indicating I had to be concerned about my employment. If my duties were falling behind to the point of needing termination, where is the action plan for improvement that indicates the seriousness of this situation? I was never presented with one. Where are the board meeting minutes showing all of this?

I have heard the board has charged me for suggesting to cancel a face-to-face board meeting last fall.

Fact: Board expenses were, again, high last year. I suggested a telephone conference call rather than a face-to-face meeting. It was my goal to reduce travel expenses for that meeting, in which all board members and the journal editor would travel to Chicago, with travel and accommodations covered by AAW. Our board expenses had doubled in the past few years and my only intent was to save money. For this suggestion, which I saw as good financial management, I was criticized heavily. Several board members supported my suggestion, but others opted to spend the money.

I would like to give a little background for those of you that do not know me. Prior to working for AAW, I had a woodturning business from 1982 – 1990. Upon being hired by AAW I was handed a bankrupt organization. In 1990, working from my living room and kitchen table, I brought this organization out of the red and into the black. Our association had to procure a loan to cover expenses. My pay was routinely delayed because we had to cover other bills to keep the organization afloat. Over the years, I have watched board's waste large sums of money. After working so hard to save money, this has been very difficult to watch. I have always been diligent in keeping an eye on the finances. A previous treasurer, whom I was honored to serve with, once commented, "Any time you think about spending AAW funds, figure out how many memberships it would take to cover that expense and then re-consider if it is worth it."

The address and administrator for AAW had changed 3 times prior to my taking over in 1990. Since then it has been a stable organization in the St. Paul area.

For many years, I have worked endless hours for the good of our association. The demands on my time have been extensive. I've had the challenge of working with many different boards, throughout which my job performance demands and the various boards' expectations have frequently changed. I have been successful at doing my job and growing AAW. I have always received high reviews and the latest membership survey indicated a high level of satisfaction among the membership.

I would like to continue to promote woodturning in any way that I can, this is and will continue to be a lifelong passion and commitment for me. I am aware that many members are working on numerous fronts to clear my name and to bring the association back to you, the members. Unfortunately, many friends are being divided and our AAW is being damaged. I regret that very much, but I will not be chased away after being so unjustly mistreated.

As the longest standing employee of our family and community, I must say that I am astounded and offended by the manner in which these events have transpired. An atmosphere that allows this kind of behavior should not be tolerated, it never has been present in our past nor should it be in our future.

The AAW is an organization that has prided itself on the knowledge and advancement of woodturning. I personally have been able to experience these advancements firsthand for the last 20+ years and I hope to continue to be involved in the future. The American Association of Woodturners is more than an organization. We are a community and family that must work together to reunite and re-establish the health and vitality of our organization.

I would like to thank everyone for your support and commitment to bring us back together as one family of woodturners.

Sincerely,  
Mary Lacer