



About Russ Gooding, Peak Founder

This is important. It's also a little uncomfortable. I was going to skip this subject, but Matt insisted that I need to let those of you who don't know me, learn who I am. *Blink*. Self-aggrandizement isn't my cup of tea – you won't see pictures of me all over the website; I usually don't attend gatherings (there is an exception coming up in September); you won't find me out pontificating on the internet, unless you count our business websites; until very recently when Kirk Brumels urged me to write for *The Planing Form*, I'd stepped back from writing for public consumption for over a decade, excepting the little rambles I post on the Golden Witch website.

I've fished since I could hold a carp rod baited with worms or Jolly Green Giant corn. I've been around the bamboo industry almost my entire adult life and I'm in my late forties now. Excepting my college years, I have always lived alongside a creek, a river, or a trout stream. By no means have I found enough time to fish, but I'll be working on that as my kids graduate from high school and move on with their lives.

My undergraduate degree is in Philosophy and, due to an interest in science, it's a BS not a BA, a small fact which provided nearly endless amusement to my parents after I graduated. While taking graduate classes, I built graphite rods and restored bamboo rods before landing an apprenticeship with Daryll Whitehead, an absolute Master of the craft. During my prime rodmaking years I had a several year backlog, but, to Daryll's chagrin, I opted to pursue the component supply business rather than continuing to make rods. If you're unsure of my ability to craft rods talk to Daryll if you bump into him. Golden Witch Rods originated in Washington State as a sole proprietorship, then was incorporated in Pennsylvania in 1998 when I moved back east, pretty close to where I was born. This means I have earned my living in the fishing industry, without interruption, for over two decades. That's not full time, it's all the time. Those who know me recognize that I'm in the office or the shop nearly every single day of the year unless the family hauls me off for a week of vacation.

Over the years I've written for numerous magazines and journals, including *Rodcrafters*, *Rodmaker*, *Hunting & Fishing Collectibles*, and *The Planing Form*. I've written, narrated, and worked on-screen in three detailed instructional DVDs, two of which focus on making bamboo blanks and finishing bamboo rods, respectively.

What you may not know is that when folks talk about buying high-graded bamboo, I'm the fellow who started

rod makers down that path. Golden Witch bought baled cane from Andy Royer for years and then I sorted that bamboo and resold it through the shop. Thousands of culms, individually graded. Very few rod makers have handled more individual culms of bamboo than I have; if Peak Bamboo continues to grow, within two years I think it'll be safe to say that no living rod maker will have handled as many. There is a mastery that develops unbidden when you repeat a task this many times...open the bale, sort the ten culms, open the bale, sort...*ad nauseum*. But in that process of repetition, something positive emerges. Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Outliers*, wrote that it takes 10,000 hours, focused on the details of a task, to reach mastery. If I'm not there, I'm closing in. This should mean something to you if you're choosing me to select your culms – not just the company, Peak Bamboo, which I led to this point, but, if you're paying for Peak's high-graded culms, it's me personally. I'm grading every single stick. I have an exceptionally strong sense for what makes a good culm for rod making, but I also understand that bamboo is a natural product with natural "defects," some of which are inevitable. Every culm is individual and the nominal grade balances the qualities that make it a good culm, or an ill culm, on an undivided continuum.

My most critical job with Peak Bamboo is to estimate where each stick resides on that continuum of great to not-so-great, and to subjectively assign a grade. You may not agree with my assessment, because good rod makers can legitimately find the balance is arguable based on personal preference. If you can do better, given the very real limits of the material, perhaps you need a job here. I won't do this forever and I'm not afraid to work with someone more competent than I am. How else can one learn? Believe me, I didn't knock on Daryll's door two decades back because I was confident in my ability to manipulate bamboo, only confident in my ability to learn. Perhaps Matt best summed up my knack in his pithy style when he wrote to me requesting this paragraph so our clients would know "that it's true that YOU are the pickiest realistic bastard when it comes to this subject matter." Based on little more than that, me being both picky and realistic and perhaps a bit cantankerous, Matt gambled a significant portion of one year of his life on this project, Peak Bamboo, and I say gambled only because he worked alongside me without pay. We both have skin in this game and we both want to create something great.