

Now that fall is here, our thoughts turn to colder weather and to the things we need to help us enjoy winter. For me, good mittens are a necessity and also a joy, both to make and to wear.

I will probably knit a few new pairs of mittens this fall and winter, but I have some already that will also see plenty of use. Each pair of my mittens has a story, and the story often makes the mittens more interesting to wear.

I have a pair of plain knitted mittens in a color that is called "blue spruce." These hand warmers aren't anything special to look at. In fact, they are a bit uneven and "textured" in appearance. But, I still like them.

I call this pair my "mile high" mittens. I had spun wool yarn from the fleece of our sheep for years, but I had always used a spinning wheel. Then, one fall, I experimented with a hand spindle. I wasn't very good at it, but it was interesting, and I thought it might be a "portable" project to take with me on our trip to Sweden.

I gathered up some suitable wool and carded it, brushing it into a fluffy, tangle-free pile. I stowed it in my pack along with a wooden spindle Runo had made. I anticipated short periods of time waiting in airports and train stations when I could spin a little yarn.

As it turned out, I used the spindle in other places, as well. I spun on the plane, on the train, in Runo's mother Gunborg's kitchen, and in the back yard there in Värmland.

A few days before we were due to fly back to the United States, I wound my single ply yarn into two equal balls and then plied it, making a slightly uneven, chunky yarn. I decided that I had enough yarn for a pair of mittens.

I had not taken any knitting needles with me, so Gunborg and I went to the store in Årjäng that sold such tools as well as other home craft materials. I bought two sets of knitting needles--smaller ones for the cuffs of mittens, and a larger size for the rest of the knitting.

As soon as the plane was in the air, I took out my yarn and needles. From Norway to Michigan I knit a pair of mittens. The natural white color of the yarn was pleasing, but somewhere I had inadvertently picked up a bit of black fiber, and without noticing it at the time had knit

that bit of yarn into the cuff of one mitten. I didn't like the looks of that, so I decided to dye my mittens. I looked through my powdered dyes and found "blue spruce." The blue of the Scandinavian sky, the green cast of the conifer forests--a good color for my mittens.

So, this pair of "mile high mittens" has earned a place among the favorites in the mitten box. I will wear them often this winter, alternating with others I like especially well. And, every time I put them on my hands, I think of the circumstances around their creation. Almost every pair of hand knit or felted mittens I wear has a particular tale to tell, and I think my hands are warmer because of the pleasures the memories bring. It will soon be time to take out those knitting needles again and make some more handspun mittens. I hope they, too, will have their own story.