

It is not usual—and, perhaps, not even quite normal—to name one’s clothing. And, I don’t usually do it. But, I must admit that I address my new skirt as “Herdis.” If that sounds strange, it might need a bit of explanation.

An earlier essay explained that we sheared a pretty little Icelandic ewe last fall so that her wool would not be damaged by the Michigan winter or contaminated by her plunging her head into the hay that we feed the sheep out on the clean snow. Her name is Herdis. She has two curving horns, a daughter that looks just like her—Fina—and a habit, like the rest of the Icelandics that make up a tiny portion of our flock—of pasturing and foraging on the far fringes of the area they can access.

I washed Herdis’ wool as soon as she was shorn, and when it dried, I stored it in an old, clean pillowcase. There it stayed until after the holidays.

I carded the fleece, the teeth of the drum carder turning the tufts of wool into cloud-like batts. The next step was dividing the batts into long strips of carded wool, called “roving.” That accomplished, it was ready for the another process.

I brought my spinning wheel from the basement, set it up next to the cookstove, and began to make yarn. I wanted to make a thick, slightly uneven yarn instead of my “default” yarn that is much finer and smoother. When I finished spinning and plying (twining the threads by spinning two together), there were just over 460 grams of yarn.

Then, I got out my dye pot, filled it with water, and set it on the stove. After adding the correct amount of red dye stock and a little white vinegar, I immersed the skeins of yarn in the liquid and brought it to a simmer. I had soaked the yarn in warm water for an hour or so to open the fibers to take on color more easily and in a more even fashion.

It is a fallacy that wool cannot be “cooked.” Certainly, it will shrink and felt if taken from cold to hot in a rush, but it can be brought slowly to a high temperature and simmered with no loss of quality.

When the yarn was dyed, rinsed, and dried, it was ready to further the process from sheep to garment. Out came the knitting needles, and a skirt took shape.

This skirt isn’t very long. It is probably a skirt that is more appropriate for someone twenty years younger, but I will wear the

skirt. Over leggings, it will be the perfect garment for a cold day. And, when I look over the flock, Herdis will stand out, and she will receive a mental “thank you” for keeping me cozy in our Michigan winter.