

One might think, since we have spent the past three weeks in the lambing shed, that for our off-duty reading time, we would choose some escapist thrillers, or light comedies, or anything that was somewhat removed from the actual activities of our lives. Or, it would be logical to think that we would be too tired to read anything at all.

But, as a matter of fact, we both read two books about sheep and the people who look after them. *The Shepherd's Life*, by James Rebanks, and *The Yorkshire Shepherdess*, by Amanda Owen, record the experiences of two shepherds in the high country of England.

Both authors discussed a term and concept that was new to me. They talked about “heft” and “hefting” in sheep management. When a farm in that area of England changes hands, the sheep go with the land. This is because the sheep were “hefted” or “bonded” to a certain area of the grazing land. Each year, the ewes went back to the same “heft” and grazed. In the process their lambs became hefted to the same area. So, if a flock was sold to another high country shepherd, the sheep would not stay in their designated area. No fences were necessary. The sheep knew where home was.

It always surprises me that people who grew up here move away. I don't think my mother and father could have driven any of the three of us away with a club. My brother, my sister, and I all settled within half a mile of the house where we grew up. None of us have ever shown any inclination to move away.

This was always a curiosity. Why did so many people we know pack up, go somewhere far away, and build a new life? When this area where we live is the best place in the world, why would anyone want to leave?

After reading the two shepherding books about the high country in England, I finally had the answer I had been seeking. For some reason, and I haven't quite figured this out yet, my siblings and I were “hefted” to this farm in a way that is not usual these days. This was home, and there was no place we could imagine that could possibly draw us away.

So, why were we “hefted” when so many others move from place to place, sometimes several times during their lives? I am not sure, but maybe, it is the same for us as for the sheep. My father was definitely “hefted” to this farm where he lived all his life. He could not conceive of a reason to leave it. I suppose we—like the

lambs that head to the same place on the moors where their mothers go year after year—have inherited this sense of place and home from the three generations before us who lived on this farm. I don't think I could envision any better gift.