

We had a friend who was enamored of black lambs. Every time Joyce called to check on the lambing season, she asked, “Any little black ones?” The regular answer was, “No.” We did have a couple of black ewes, but they usually had white lambs, and on the rare occasion that a black lamb was born, it was a buck, destined for lamb chops.

Joyce had been fighting a battle against a terminal illness for years, but seemed always to carry on, working, knitting, visiting with friends, cooking, and baking.

A few years ago, I called her at her office. “Joyce, guess what?” I said, knowing she was well aware that it was the lambing season.

“You have a little black one!” she said,

“And, it is a girl,” I replied. “And she already has a red tag in her ear with her name on it.”

“What is her number?” she asked, well aware of how we marked our ewe lambs.

“Well, we didn’t give her a number. She has a real name. On her ear tag it says ‘Joyce.’”

She laughed. And, later that day, she arrived to look at her namesake.

Joyce—the real Joyce—eventually lost her battle with disease, but Joyce the ewe is still with the flock. Two years ago, she gave birth to a black lamb for the first time, but it was a ram. Last year, she had a white lamb.

When we went down to feed the flock this morning, neither of us noticed anything unusual in that pen, but when Runo fed grain in the long manger, he saw a little lamb trying to climb up into the feeder. It was black.

Joyce, and the other Icelandic ewes we have, are exceptional mothers. This wasn’t a case of a sheep having lost her new offspring. Joyce had merely gone up to the manger to eat and had momentarily allowed her lamb to wander. She knew perfectly well where it was.

But, there were two of them, not one, and both were primarily black, though they don’t look alike. One has a lot of white on its face while the other one has just a little white. And, both are ewe lambs!

If there is another realm where those who have lived among us are now in residence, there is surely a laughing Joyce saying, “You have two little black ones!”

So, spring lambing is underway again. This is the beginning of the season when each birth is interesting. A little later on, we note the dates, tag numbers of the ewes, sex of the lambs, and anything else that seems pertinent as a matter of course, but without the excitement of these first few days. But, we will keep a close eye on those little black ones.

Covid cases in our northern Michigan area are surging right now. At least one of the new variants has been identified here, and a lot of people are sick. Some are not surviving. Will this result in less vaccine resistance? Will people begin to understand that this virus cannot be defeated by politics or religion, but only by prevention through the protection of masks, social distancing, and staying away from crowds—and by vaccination? Tomorrow will

be the fourteenth day since we received our second shots of the Moderna vaccine. Does that mean we are going out into a crowd, wandering through stores, maybe eating in a restaurant, inviting friends and relatives to a party?

No, we will go on as we have for the past year, just being a little more secure when we need to go into a public place.

And meanwhile, we will be looking after little lambs and their mothers, always on the alert for the possibility of another “little black one.”