

The first of January is a unique date. It shares with the first day of every other month a kind of “new start,” but—a whole new year?—only January 1 has that distinction. So, as 2022 begins, we seem to be internally programmed to do a bit of planning for the month ahead, if not for the whole year. I suppose that is where “New Year’s Resolutions” come from.

Most of these promises to ourselves to better our lives in some way do not interest me. Instead, I like the beginning of January because it signifies the end of an intense holiday season that begins in late October. We do have an important holiday in January to commemorate Martin Luther King’s birthday, but it hasn’t lost its real meaning and has not devolved into a frenzy of gift buying and sugar eating. So, January has become, for me, at least, a “project month.”

There is always the hope for good skiing, and we have the same barn and household chores as during the other winter months, but, somehow, January seems to give me time to focus on interesting endeavors that don’t come to the forefront during other times of the year.

The table runners in threads of cotton/linen will soon be finished and come off the loom. Then, for a time, that piece of equipment will be idle while I concentrate on work with wool.

We will shear our yearling ewes next week, and I will sort wool as we go along and wash the nicest parts of the fleeces. Then, I will be ready to prepare that wool for making yarn on my spinning wheel. I have an electric “carding machine,” a drum-shaped arrangement that allows me to brush wool into soft, fluffy batts. The teeth on the carding machine are similar to those on a dog grooming comb, and two passes through the machine can produce wool that is ready to spin. It may seem ironic that we shear our sheep with hand blades, and I spin the wool by hand, weave and knit by hand—and yet, card the wool with an electric carding machine. And, I guess it is kind of strange.

But, it is also easy to explain. I like to shear sheep. I enjoy the craft of spinning wool on the wheel. Weaving and knitting are interesting. Carding by hand is not. And, I am not very good at it. I can spin much nicer yarn from the machine carded fleece. So, my only defense is that my work with wool has never been something I have bragged about in regard to its absolute faithfulness to following the old way. Instead, it is my interpretation of history as revealed by materials and what can be produced from them.

January is the month for activities like these. It is too early to plant garden seeds, even inside under lights. It is too early to worry about lambing season. There is no milk cow at the moment, though that should change soon. The social distancing of the Covid era has resulted in a lack of necessity for any kinds of social interaction.

It is peaceful and quiet here on Coe Creek this time of year. The whirr of the spinning wheel or the quiet click, click of the knitting needles do not disturb the calm. Getting ready to use that carding machine provides time to think about the wool I am preparing to use. Do I want to knit socks with some of it? Might that black yearling’s fleece provide soft enough yarn to combine with white wool for a patterned sweater? Or, shall I spin thick, soft yarn and

keep it all for weaving rugs.

And, although I spend a good bit of time contemplating such minor and arbitrary decisions, my thoughts often turn to our country and our world as I wonder if we will ever confront the issues of climate change, right wing and racist political thought, anti-science, and food ignorance. It is more productive to think about wool.