

Immersed as we are this time of year in everything related to sheep, I guess it is fitting that as I sit here writing this short essay, there is wool behind me and wool in front of me. All of it has undergone some sort of process that changed its appearance, altered its aroma, and moved it another step toward its ultimate use in our lives.

Behind me is my spinning wheel. A fluff of white wool from Ghost, the Clun Forest ram, hangs from the wheel. I was spinning yarn from that wool when something else intervened. And now, it will be another day before that flimsy, cloud-like veil is transformed into a strong, sturdy yarn that will be suitable for knitting stocking caps.

In front of me are three bags of wool. Like the airy batts of spinning wool, the fiber in these bags has been washed and fluffed. There are twenty-some pounds of wool in these three bags. Wool, the old saying goes, “washes away half.” And, in fact, it is sometimes even more than half of its weight that is carried off in the soapy water.

This wool is going to a mill for a commercial project. The wool in boxes near the spinning wheel is undergoing its transformation here at home.

Either way, it is a remarkable fiber. With our oceans filling up with plastic, our homes and bodies attacked by the stray filaments from our synthetic clothes, and plastic everywhere we look, it would seem that wool clothing would make a comeback. So far, that has not been the case.

But, we will do our best to give it a chance. We have this year’s wool clip waiting in big bags. Whether we can ever sell this product of grass, rain, and sunshine, it is a reminder of all that our sheep can produce that is necessary for survival in a cold climate. Food, clothing, and shelter—our sheep flock can provide all of that to us. So, I spin yarn to knit, wash wool to have processed, and thank those ewes and rams in the barn who provide us with fiber and food year after year after year.