

December Spinning Sample by Jane Rock Costanza

Ah spinning. For me, the term conjured up visions of myself one day moving confidently through the proverbial “Sheep to Shawl,” spectrum. Having learned to knit at age four after spying the yarn wall at the local five and dime in our tiny Wyoming town, creating with color, fiber, fabric, dyes and threads has played a predominant role in my life; right up there with paints, brushes, papers, inks, stones and bones, and dirt and chert. Growing up in Wyoming, it would have been nearly impossible not to be inspired artistically by the sweeping vistas, as well as impossible to avoid a love of anthropology/archeology and history.

My artist nature and my “ologist” nature converge when it comes to all things fiber and/or textile related. I’ve had lifelong dreams of following in the worn footsteps of the ancestors and adorning myself and my home with all things handmade. The piece that was missing for me was spinning; that apex on the spinning, dyeing, weaving triad. As an avid weaver, I didn’t expect to love spinning, but I needed spinning because a triangle without three points is, well, just a line. Right?

Having never been daunted by working with fiber, naturally once I decided I was ready to begin spinning, I picked up a beautiful spindle, some merino, and checked out several books from our Guild’s library. I consulted with friends, I read everything I could. I whined. I admit it. Imagine my dismay when after nearly five years of having that spindle taunt me from various corners and shelves of my studio, all I was ever able to produce with it were some choice swear words and tears of frustration.

Despite my best efforts, that spindle was like some capricious pixie whose sole purpose in life was to humble me and bring me to my knees as a fiber artisan. Each time Carolyn, Judy, Kathleen, and Karen from our LYS would try to assure me that, “All you have to do is spin a few minutes each day and it will happen,” I thought to myself, “Sure for you maybe – for me, there must be some ancient ‘may your daughters and their daughters and their daughters’ spindles forever fly from their hands’ gypsy curse on my family.”

So I did what any reasonable person would do. I bought a spinning wheel! Fortunately for me, I swallowed my conceit as a fiberista and took both a beginning spinning class and an intermediate spinning class from Sharon Dalrymple. Norman Kennedy’s spinning workshop was also a significant help in my quest along the road of Sheep to Shawl.

It wasn’t long before I purchased a second wheel, and became comfortable with wheel mechanics, technique, ratios, whorls, grist, drafting, plying, and all the other spinning lingo. All the while, that spindle refused to gather dust, and would whisper to me each time I spied it in the studio with its tangled cop --- “Who loves ya baby?” I’d pick it up once again, and then stuff it away into even darker recesses of the space.

Enter: Le Tour de Fleece 2010. Tour de Fleece is a spin along hosted by Ravelry (www.ravelry.com) and runs concurrent with le Tour de France. Spinners sign up with teams and spin each day of the tour. I joined up with Team Schacht Spinners (those of us who spin on Schacht wheels) and also on the Sprinters Team (for those who are either fast spinners or who spin miles and miles of lace weight). Each day I spent up to four hours spinning.

Then came that fateful day: Challenge Day. Our commitment for that day of the Tour was to challenge ourselves, and yes sports fans; I picked up that spindle and put that pixie in a jar in no time flat! By the end of Challenge Day, that haunting, taunting spindle and I were one! Not only did I have a spinning epiphany that day, but I fell in love with spinning. Dare I say that I like it perhaps even a teensy bit more than sitting at my wheel? I feel so completely connected to that first person who picked up stick, stone, and fibers and began producing strings. My wheels connect me to my grandmothers who were spinners; my spindle connects me with the ancestors.