Dear Folks of the Black Sheep Handspinners Guild,

As I mentioned last month in my message and at guild meeting the time for elections for guild officers and positions is nearly at hand. As we are a volunteer organization I think it is time for some of you to step up and volunteer for the positions. Currently we have volunteers for the position of secretary and vice president, web mistress, special programs and a tentative one for treasurer. Someone has informed me that they are thinking about the newsletter. However, no one has stepped up to volunteer for president, someone please do so, I have not heard about regular programs either or the keeper of the key, although this one is not fixed.

Program this month is garage sale, so if you have anything in your stash or among your tools you care to see having a new home bring it to guild next Saturday. Perhaps you will also find something there that is just screaming to come home with you.

Jim

Last Day for registering for the charka workshop is April 19.
See the registration form on p 6.

Coral Reef Knitting will be on display at CNY Fiber Festival

Garage Sale
This presents a great opportunity to combine spring cleaning with the chance to pass along any excess you may have accumulated. All fibers and fiber-related items are welcomed. Whether you sell, swap, or give away, you can reduce your stash, go home with something another member felt able to part with that you find interesting, or both. I have a tub ready to go, and hope to peruse your goodies.

April 13

President- Jim Johnson
Vice President - Sue Quick
Secretary - Audrey Lowes
Treasurer - Vickie Marsted
Newsletter Editor - Susan Sarabasha
Membership - Wayne Harbert
Programming - Sharon G & Marjorie I
Web Mistress - Teresa Porri
Roc Day - Teresa Porri

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**Lucky beginning spinners!**

Teresa has a tremendous fund of knowledge on fiber, spinning tools, and spinning. It was a joy to hear and watch her teach a group of beginning spindle spinners on the first of 4 Saturday afternoon sessions in March. Classes on spinning with hand dyed fiber are planned beginning April 6th. A word to the wise would be to bring a recording device so you can listen again and again as there is so much information that a repeat is desirable. Check the Events calendar at [http://knittingetcithaca.com](http://knittingetcithaca.com) if you are interested.

The group set up at the large table on the sunny side of Knitting, Etc. On the mall side of the store, Hickory is stocking fiber from Lisa Merian and Wild Hare. So one can browse and buy both fiber and yarn. What temptation.

*from Anne F.*

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**No History Here; Just Stories by Wayne H**

Few worthwhile projects would get off the ground if it were clearer at the outset what it would really take to do them right. That was the belated realization I came to when, only a little way into the task I’d brashly committed myself to of producing a history of the Blacksheep Guild, it became apparent how uninteresting and pointless it would be simply to lay out the objective events, facts, places, names and timelines. That sort of history is only warp—lots of straight lines from one point to the next, but empty, insubstantial and incoherent without the intersecting threads of weft to give it substance and color and pattern. In the course of my research for my essays on the history of the Guild, it has been my pleasure to know some truly interesting, accomplished, multi-talented, and extremely accommodating people, who I have imposed upon to help me warp this particular loom. They have acceded to this request with admirable enthusiasm; though in some cases they have not spun with us for years, they all still think of themselves as Blacksheep (as indeed they are again officially, now that we have...
Guild stories continued

voted to offer Emeritus/Emerita membership status to all who were in the Guild during its first, formative decade). Some of them gracefully fielded my questions over coffee in their living rooms. Others, who live too far away, have sent me thoughtful remembrances by e-mail. They patiently listened to and gave detailed answers to the stock list of questions I confronted them with (“When and how did you start spinning?” “How did you become involved with the Blacksheep?” “What wheels did you use?” “What people and activities stand out in your memories of the Guild?” and on and on), and they gave me a wealth of information that has informed the other essays I’ve written and will be writing in this lead-up to our 40th Anniversary commemoration. But such dry inquiries don’t come close to capturing what those involved in a movement really know and remember about it. We each stitch together our individual histories out of sometimes random, anecdotal remembrances of people, conversations, jokes, projects, feelings—good and bad—and the like, and at some point in each of these interviews the question list was set aside and I found myself simply doing my best to scribble as fast as I could while my interviewees filled the tapestry with their own threads—rather literally, in some cases; by the end of my interview with Jean Nowack, a prolific and intrepid knitter who specializes in developing patterns for handspun yarn, the table was covered with no fewer than 25 intricately patterned sweaters which she had pulled from various cabinets to show me—sweaters dyed with the full palette of natural dyes, sweaters of yarn spun from wool and sheep dog, from indigo dyed wool and Norwegian elkhound, from poodle, from Rambouillet and Samoyed, from wool and long haired cat. (The sheepdog belonged to one of her chair-caning customers. The cat, Pookers, is now over 20 years old—but you’ll be hearing more about the Guild’s animals in a later essay.) One of the sweaters had the slogan “I knit therefore I am. I am therefore I knit” worked repeatedly into its design. But the metaphorical weft which they filled the loom—the individual stories of personal experience with spinning and the Guild—was richer still. Jean, for example, worked full time—and still does—at her chair caning business, and had almost no time left over for spinning. In order to make space for it in her daily schedule, she would wake up at 5:00, have breakfast, and spin for an hour on her porch, while her husband read to her from all the English classics—Austin, D.H. Lawrence, Dickens, and so on—using a different voice for each character. Sally Marx tells of vacationing with her husband in the north country, and driving one day from their motel up into the mountains near the Canadian border, an hour and a half away, where in one shop she discovered an antique wheel with which she promptly fell in love.
More stories from Wayne

Sadly, they didn’t have enough money to buy it so she had to pass it up, and they drove the long road back to their motel. But, unable to stop thinking about the one that got away, she called friends back in Ithaca, had them put money in her bank account, and they made the return trek, another hour and a half up north, to buy it. She still has that wheel, which she shows off proudly. Kay Ross’ first wheel was an Ashford, ordered from New Zealand, which came unassembled and unfinished on the very day that she was to go with a bunch of other Blacksheep to a big festival hosted by the Thistledown Guild over in Norwich. She came home to find that the wheel had been mysteriously assembled and finished in her absence. She still has another antique flax wheel which she had admired at an antique show in the Women’s Community Building, and that her husband bought for her as a surprise. Kay’s father, a retired engineer, became a weaver after his retirement. Like a true engineer, he built a loom for himself and then another one for her. Suzy Hokanson related the following the story of a Guild meeting focusing on sharing exotic fibers:

“A lovely older woman (probably younger than I am now - a Mrs. Beasley look-alike) had us all in tears, laughing about collecting her idea of an exotic fiber. It seems that a possum was killed on the road outside her house... she trotted out there and bravely cut the hairs off the dead critter and took it inside her home to spin at a future time. She then quickly took all her clothes off and climbed into a bubble bath (I think, fortified with a glass of wine) to forget the horrors of the experience.”

Karey Solomon reports that she learned to spin “from a neighbor in the shanty-and-yurt community where I lived in the early 1970s. It wasn’t a commune, rather a group of odd buildings rented from an enterprising Slaterville Springs ex-farmer who was gratified and thought it kind of funny that anyone in their right mind would want to live in his back woods. My husband and I lived in a slightly-renovated chicken coop; there were also two yurts and a caboose, and a shared two-seater privy. Our drinking water came from Six Mile Creek, which was probably not a good idea. At any rate, I learned to spin from the woman who lived in the caboose, was recovering from a love affair gone wrong, and taught me to use a drop spindle as a distraction from her misery.”

As you can see, intrepid is not too strong a label to apply to our pioneering early members!

When Karey connected with the Blacksheep, she took up spinning on a wheel. She relates that “all our wheels back then were single-treadle. Laurie Scheeler, an early Blacksheep member who quickly became a life-long friend, wondered aloud whether our right (treadling) legs would grow larger than our left legs, and several times proposed measuring ourselves and keeping records. No one took her up on it.”
In the early days, meetings often took place at members’ homes—especially the prodigious dye-pot sessions. Some of these were ‘dye-pot to pass’ events, to which each participant brought a plant to experiment with, as well as fiber to dip in them. At some of these, there were as many as 25 dye-pots with no duplicates. The adventurous spirit with which they were approached is reflected in newsletter announcement of an upcoming pot-to-pass event, where the invitees were admonished, “Let’s make this an unusual dye session—no onion skins or the like, PLEASE.” Still other dyeing sessions involved mystery dyes, whose identities were revealed only after the fiber emerged from the pot. In hosting such meetings in your home, of course, you ran the risk of exposing your housekeeping secrets to the scrutiny of others with possibly different standards. Joan Johnston recalls one session at her house in the following way:

“The dyeing workshop was already scheduled to be at my house, and we were going to be outside as it was summer, so I wasn't worried about cleaning up inside my house much. The night before the meeting, I discovered that the outside faucet wasn't working and people would have to come into the kitchen. Then, while waiting for their buckets to fill, they'd be staring at this wall of open shelves filled with random things that my family didn't know what to do with while walking past, so they'd stuff whatever junk it was in the shelves. That was too much for me to take, so I cleaned up all the shelves. So sure enough, the next day Ellie May was standing at my kitchen sink, staring at the shelves, and after a bit she said ‘I hope you cleaned these shelves up just for us; I'd hate to think you lived like that!' I've felt much better about messes ever since”
CHARKA WORKSHOP

Date: Sat. April 27

Where: Lansing at All Saints Parish Hall

Time: 9 am to 4 pm with a one our lunch break (pack a lunch)

Cost: $65.00 includes workshop and materials fee

Come learn about spinning on a charka or perfect your charka skills. Our instructor, Glenna Chumtley is an experienced charka spinner. She not only spins cotton on the charka but is one of the few charka instructors who also spins wool and exotics on the charka. Glenna has written a booklet on charka spinning which will be included with your fiber for the workshop. If you do not have a charka but would like to try it out we have several which can be borrowed for the workshop. WORKSHOP LIMIT IS 10 PARTICIPANTS.

To sign up for the workshop please forward your check to:

Marjorie Inana 41 W. Court St., Cortland NY 13045. Make check out to Black Sheep Handspinners.

Name______________________________

Phone Number ________________________________

Email_____________________________________

I have a charka for the workshop_______

I need to borrow a charka for the workshop_____________
**Membership Form**

*Please type or print*

**Date:** ___________

**Name:** _____________________________________________________________

**Address:** __________________________________________________________

__________________________

**preferred email:** PRINT NEATLY please ____________________________________________

__________________________

**preferred phone #** ___________________________ **birthday month (opt)** __________

This info will be made available to the guild membership. If you wish to remain anonymous please let Char know.

**Please list your wheel(s)**__________________________

We welcome spinners of all skill levels. How long have you been spinning? ______

Do you: Knit? Weave? Crochet? Dye - *(Natural or chemical)*?

Which of your skills might you be willing to share with a member or the group?

*ie: teach beginning spindle/spinning or dyeing; teach a spinning / knitting / crocheting skill, etc*

If you raise any fiber animals, please list them here____________________________________

Which committee(s) are you interested in joining?

• Roc Day
• Membership
• Programming
• Charity Works
• Outreach including Events & Activities Schedule for non guild members
• Newsletter - advisory & review
• None

Would you be interested in chairing or co-chairing one of these groups? If yes, which one(s)?

*Newsletters are sent via email. If you would prefer to get yours via snail mail please give 12 SASE envelopes to Sharon Gombas. Postage should be $2 per envelope.*
Convert your Baynes hook flyer to a SLIDING PINCH HOOK FLYER for $32.00 including rebalancing. See Jim Johnson at a meeting or call 607-564-7178 or email hilltoppaddles@earthlink.net.

For Sale - Double wide Strauch Hand Crank Drum Carder. Great Condition. Purchased 2 yrs ago but barely used.

Originally $1050. Asking $800.
Located in Horseheads.
Contact Jennifer Ostrander 607-279-6617