

FROM SHEEP TO SHAWL
STORIES AND PATTERNS
FOR FIBER LOVERS

Joan Jarvis Ellison



FROM SHEEP TO SHAWL
STORIES AND PATTERNS
FOR FIBER LOVERS

Joan Jarvis Ellison

Wandering Minstrel Press
Moorhead, MN

Copyright 2011 © Joan Jarvis Ellison. Manufactured in the United States. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review. Published by Wandering Minstrel Press, 1210 15th Street South, Moorhead, MN 56560. First Edition.

“Woad Blues” first appeared in The Woolly Ways newsletter, 1990.

“The Beauty of Hybrid Sheep” first appeared in “Spinoff – The Magazine for Spinners,” Winter, 1997.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011927556

Ellison, Joan Jarvis.

From Sheep to Shawl: Stories and Patterns for Fiber Lovers / Joan Jarvis Ellison. – 1st ed.
Includes appendix, references, and glossary.

ISBN 978-0-9845253-0-0

Photo credits:

Alice Ellison, central photograph on p. 79

All other credits listed with photo.

Digital reproductions in Appendix originally printed in the pamphlet, *The Gingham Book of Embroidery* (c) 1955 Coats & Clark Inc. Reproduced with permission of Coats & Clark, Inc.

Editor: Athena Gracyk

Book Design: Athena Gracyk

Photography: Photographs are the property of Joan Jarvis Ellison, unless otherwise noted. All photographs are used with permission.

Cover photograph by Dave Ellison.

Disclaimer

The instructions and patterns in this book are presented as accurately as possible and in good faith. However, no warranty is given, nor results guaranteed. The author and publisher have no control over use made of this book, and disclaim any liability for untoward results.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Dedication

To three uncommon women who taught me so much, but who did not live to see this book:

Florence Wright Brooks – my grandmother

Dorothy Brooks Jarvis – my mother

Edith Stevens – my friend

Acknowledgements

Many, many people are part of this book. First are the wonderfully creative women who donated their patterns; without you there would not be a book. Florence Wright Brooks, Dorothy Brooks Jarvis, Halima Ali, Šemsa Nemeč, Jo-Anne Tabachek, Sharon Marquardt, Joyce Valley, and Marilyn Mahlum.

Second are the women who proofed these patterns. I owe an enormous debt to each of the pattern proofers. The email which said, “I can’t understand this pattern at all!” was just as useful in a different way, as the one which recommended using wraps per inch to designate yarn size, or the one which broke a pattern into 114 steps. You are all incredible women and I can’t thank you enough for the time you took on this project. Marguerite Andrews, Alice Ellison, Amber Ellison Walker, Laurel Ellison Dantas, Laura French, Gail Johnson, Katy Olson, Carol Sutkus, Dawn Ellison Jordan, Vicki Bedford, Sally K. Williams, Janet Hensch Knapp, Kathy Sletto, Heidi Goldberg, Meg Sweder Hanson, Brenda Rogers, EvLynn Gilbertson, Gae Jarvis.

That being said, any errors in these patterns are entirely my responsibility. Errors can result from an improper understanding of a stitch, from a distracted mind when transcribing the pattern from one format to another, or from editorial mistakes. I should have caught them all. If I didn’t, my apologies. You may email me for help at joan.jarvis.ellison@gmail.com.

Athena Gracyk and I have worked together on our writing for many years. We edit each other’s work. We encourage each other to finish projects. When Athena began her press, she chose “From Sheep to Shawl” as her publishing debut. Without Athena, this book would not exist.

My husband, Dave, has facilitated my fiber addiction to the extent of acting as my hired man for 25 years. He feeds the sheep, cuts and bales hay, doctors the sheep, helps with lambing, and keeps the equipment running. He has learned to card wool and now does most of our carding. He is fascinated by natural dyeing and grows indigo, tansy, madder, and woad in his vegetable garden. He’s a great photographer and many of the photographs in this book are his. Finally, he nurtures my writing. What more can one ask in a partner?

And finally, thank you to all the people who have asked me, “How is your book coming?” This book has been a work in progress for a very long time and I really have appreciated every single reminder that I needed to keep working on it. This book is for all of you, the people who love fiber and the people who appreciate creating things - the uncommon people of this world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Uncommon Women	1
A celebration of everyone who loves fibers.	
The Cold Lamb	7
I raise sheep for their wool, but the lambs they produce have the greatest impact on my life.	
From Shawl to Sheep	13
Knitting led me to the sheep, and a change in our lives that we couldn't begin to imagine.	
Project: Easy Felted Boxes	21
This project is easy enough for children, but also successful for anyone with creative urges and limited time. It is a wonderful way to learn felting techniques.	
Creating with Encouragement	25
Fiber artist Joyce Valley talks about her quilting and embellishing passion.	
Project: Embellishing a Box	26
more advanced, embellishing techniques that can be used on fiber projects of all kinds.	
The Beauty of Hybrid Sheep	29
Different fibers for different uses. Each sheep has its own personality and so does each fleece.	
Project: Painting a Sheep	33
Requires sheep, simple dye in a squirt bottle, and a sense of fun.	
The Ram Club	35
When raising sheep becomes more than the life I planned, I realize that it is the life I enjoy living.	
Shearing Time	41
Try controlling ten people and eighty animals (including two or three brand new baby lambs) so that the sheep get shorn, the fleeces get skirted, and everyone has a good time, when the temperature is about ten degrees below zero, and a blizzard is blowing up.	
Project: Edith's Shearing Day Cookies	45
Edith's chocolate and orange flavored cookies are a staple of shearing day breaks.	
Clean Wool	47
The wool you choose and the way you wash that wool make all the difference in your final product.	

Washing Wool	51
Information and instructions about washing a fleece in a washing machine, mohair, wool garments, and a sheepskin.	
Project: Felting a Wreath	54
What to do when all else fails.	
Australian Locker Hooking	55
This simple technique is great for rugs and wall hangings and using up those fibers you don't want to wear.	
Project: Locker Hooked Solstice Tree	60
Pattern graph with detailed directions.	
The Thief and the Good Mother	65
I came to realize that mothering ability is the most important trait of any sheep.	
“Good. Now Begin Again.”	71
Learning to knit, teaching knitting. Two sides of the same problem. Once you understand the fibers and the fabric, both are easy.	
Project: The Grandchildren's Hat	75
Some people follow written patterns, others create their own. My mother, Dorothy, created a crocheted American hat from a Peruvian hat she saw in a store.	
Joy	79
What keeps people raising sheep year after year? Joy.	
Project: Apple Blossom Afghan	83
This simply knit afghan uses up scraps of yarn to create a beautiful coverlet.	
Weight and IQ	87
Theirs and mine.	
Project: Animal Mittens	91
Made by my grandmother for my younger brother and sister, and for me, these mittens are charming and easy to knit.	
Learning to Live With Thistles	97
A meditation on Truth and Beauty.	
Learning from her Ancestors	101
Halima Ali, a Somali refugee, keeps an old nomadic weaving technique alive in a new country.	
Project: Somali Finger Weaving	104
Weaving without a loom, a small project simple enough for even a beginning weaver.	

Woad Blues	107
The trials and tribulations of learning an old dye technique.	
Natural Dyeing	111
Directions for dyeing with easy-to-grow, or harvest, natural dye stuffs: woad, onion skin, mullein and walnut.	
Hay on the Ground	115
The entire goal of baling hay is to move it from the field where it grows to the barn where we use it as feed.	
Felted Vests	123
Sharon Marquardt uses her very clear and easy felting process to create vests that echo the beauties of her world.	
Project: Felted Sumac Vest	124
Felting for the more advanced felter.	
Problem Child	131
She didn't look like a problem. Looks can be deceiving.	
Selling Lambs to the Refugees	137
A gentle reminder that shepherds sell their lambs as meat.	
Project: Shearing Day Lamb Stew	139
Another staple of shearing day activities.	
Blankets for Angels	141
Jo Anne Tabachek and Valerie Olsen, two Canadian women, create layettes for premature and stillborn babies.	
Project: Weaving Tiny Blankets for Angels	142
Simple patterns, white on white, soft and quick to weave.	
The Threads of a Life	145
Bosnian refugees add their own creations to the fiber culture of the United States with crocheted lace.	
Project: Bosnian Crocheted Lace Shawl	147
Šemsa Nembe crocheted a six pointed star for this Bosnian-inspired shawl.	
Companions	153
The right decision is not always the easy decision. The easy decision is not always the right decision.	

The Fabric of Our Lives	157
Fibers, farming, and the people we have met through both, run through our lives, creating a beautiful fabric.	
Appendix	163
References	164
Glossary	165