

# Serendipity Spinners

By Brenda Kissko

Turning materials that nature provides into a handiwork can remind us of a simpler way of life and provide a reward beyond the finished product.

Such has been the experience of the Serendipity Spinners, who for 19 years have been starting from the ground up and spinning wool into yarn, which they then craft into prized possessions.

Although they come from varied backgrounds in and around San Angelo - doctors, businesswomen, retired teachers, certified public accountants - they share a common love for the spinning tradition. And they are members of their own co-op, which owns a flock of sheep, goats and alpacas whose wool, mohair and fiber they spin and blend into rugs, scarves, hats and other craft pieces. The group, which includes several members of Concho Valley Electric Cooperative, meets at Ruth Jordan's property on the South Concho River near San Angelo, where their flock lives on 11 acres.

"Each spinner brings her special knowledge and talent to the group," Jordan says. They share techniques, supplies and equipment, she explains. "Beginning spinners usually start with me as the teacher, with everyone pitching in for help and encouragement."

Even though the members chose the name Serendipity because they liked the sound of the word, its meaning holds relevance for original member Peggy Tharp. She had given up weaving because there was no place to buy materials in West Texas. Serendipity Spinners changed that.

Being involved in the process from the beginning - starting with animals and through the finished product - offers creative satisfaction. "Spinning is

fulfilling and elemental," Tharp says. "This group got me to do something I'm not sure I could do otherwise."

The Serendipity Spinners continue a tradition of spinning that dates back more than 10 centuries, to a time when fibers were hand spun on spindles. The spinning wheel was invented in India and introduced to Europe in the Middle Ages. The wheel sped up the yarn-making process, which became mechanized during the 18th century.

Crafters who crochet typically buy yarn from big-box stores and craft shops, which mostly supply acrylic wool. Yarn spun from natural fibers can be harder to come by and costs more. Purists buy raw fibers and spin them into their own yarn. The Serendipity Spinners take it a step further by raising their own sheep to produce their own wool.

The group spins the wool into yarn on varied styles of spinning wheels: some Saxony, some Castle, some electric, some antique heirlooms.

"If only these wheels could tell us their stories," says Jordan, who owns several. She purchased one from northern Europe at a secondhand shop in Mason, concluding it probably came to Texas with the German pioneers who settled the Hill Country. Her Schacht Matchless wheel came from an estate sale, and she learned that its former owner, whose initials are painted on the wheel, traveled from New York to Mexico to teach spinning there.

Through her experience with different wheels, Jordan has become the mechanic of the Serendipity Spinners, troubleshooting occasional problems.

Though there are faster ways of acquiring a scarf nowadays, the machine-made one you select from the shelf at the

department store won't be imbued with the same love a handmade scarf offers. The Serendipity Spinners take the wool from a sheep they've cared for and work it through every step of the process to become a warm wrap.

Each spring, the group hires a local to shear their sheep and goats. The spinners shear the alpacas and do the skirting (the term for sorting and cleaning the wool) of all the fleeces themselves. The wool is then carded - combed - into roving so the fibers are lined up and ready to be spun into yarn.

When group members gather, they enjoy a potluck of food and fellowship. The room is filled with familiar smiles, the scent of fresh-baked treats and the gentle whirring of spinning wheels. The Serendipity Spinners are not in business to make a profit; they're in business to produce affordable fiber for members to use.

The group sells dryer balls made from their castoff scrap fiber at craft fairs and events at the Chicken Farm Art Center in San Angelo. The dryer balls are the one product the group sells collectively, and they use the proceeds to help with the cost of feeding and shearing their flock and processing their wool.

The Serendipity Spinners' flock came about during a spinning session when one of the ladies complained about the high cost of fiber. Jordan suggested the group invest in their own flock, so each member chipped in \$200, and they purchased four sheep.

They sought a variety of sheep breeds to produce a diversity of fibers. Their flock now includes Teeswater, Wensleydale, California variegated mutant, Jacob, merino and Rambouillet. Each breed has unique qualities in its fiber and yarn.

Mohair, produced by Angora goats, is glossy and strong and dyes beautifully. Merino is soft. Jacob is strong and ideal for rugs and handbags. Teeswater is

lustrous. CVM offers larger fleece that's easy to spin and is often blended with other fibers. Alpaca fleece comes in a variety of shades and colors. Shetlands produce an especially desirable fiber for hand spinning in many colors.

San Angelo, well-known as one of the largest sheep, wool and mohair markets in the U.S., makes a fitting home for the Serendipity Spinners. The Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association and the Mohair Council of America are headquartered in the city.

The Serendipity Spinners observe Roc Day, or St. Distaff's Day, each January 7, the

traditional date that the cottage industry spinners in Europe resumed spinning the day after Epiphany. The San Angelo women celebrate with a weekend spinning retreat at the Jordan Ranch near Menard. On that weekend they exchange handmade items.

"Fiber friends are the finest," Jordan says, smiling as she reflects upon her time with her fellow spinners.

*Brenda Kissko is a native Texan who writes about nature, travel and our relationship with land. Visit her online at [brendakissko.com](http://brendakissko.com). This article also appeared online at [www.texascooppower.com](http://www.texascooppower.com).*

## The real story of border crisis impacts

By Gary Joiner

Publisher, Texas Farm Bureau

Farmers and ranchers near the southern border have a story to tell. It's a story of frustration and alarm.

Many believe the American public is not being told what's really happening on their property and in their communities.

The border crisis impacts are many. Texas farmers and ranchers describe an overwhelming and often dangerous situation that must be addressed.

A new webpage (located at

<https://texasfarmbureau.org/border-crisis-impacts>) hosted by the Texas Farm Bureau is helping tell their story. There are videos and personal accounts on the site. Unfiltered. Straight from the source.

The current situation is untenable. Farm and ranch families in Texas, California, Arizona and New Mexico are bearing the brunt of this unprecedented number of migrants illegally crossing the border.

America needs to know. Understanding the real impacts of the border crisis is the only way to truly discover a solution.

**Please pray for the fallen  
Concho County Sheriff's  
Deputies and their families!**



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