

Ashley: Welcome to the first episode of Woolful, a podcast for fiber folk. I'm really excited to share with you some incredible people I've had the opportunity to talk to in this community we love so much. From shearers and shepherds to knitters and shop owners, here's where you get to listen to a little part of their fiber journey.

Our very first episode is sponsored by Fringe Supply Co. In 2012, Karen Templer opened Fringe Supply Co. an online shop full of thoughtful tools for the sustainable and aesthetically mindful maker. From bento bags to rosewood needles, you'll get lost in this carefully curated emporium. Visit [fringesupplyco.com](http://fringesupplyco.com)

Today we get to meet two very fiber passionate women, Kylie Gusset of Ton of Wool and Jess Schreibstein of Witchin in the Kitchen.

Jess is a Baltimore based cook, artist, seasoned traveler, and lover of wool. You can find her at [witchininthekitchen.com](http://witchininthekitchen.com) and on Instagram @thekitchenwitch. Her enthusiasm and story telling is really inspiring. And with that, here's Jess.

Ashley: I'd love to hear about your knitting but starting out with some of your endeavors elsewhere. I know that you love to cook which is obvious by your Instagram and I'm sure you have other things that you love to do to express yourself creatively?

Jess: Let's see where to start. Well, I guess back in college, I graduated from college now five, six years ago. I was actually originally a painting minor. I've been painting since sixth grade for a long, long time and painting was my first creative passion really. I didn't learn to knit, I didn't really start exploring any fiber arts until a little bit later. So I learned to knit from my great grandma. She was a daughter of a Polish immigrant and she'll tell stories, excuse me, she used to tell stories about how she wanted to join the neighborhood girls and learn to knit. Her first pair of knitting needles were a pair of nails that she used to knit on. She would tell me all these crazy stories and I learn to knit sitting on her couch while she was watching like Days of our Lives. And that was in middle school but I was painting this whole time. I was an oil painter and I picked it up, I put it back down and then I was in college and I was pursuing painting that was my main focus and I wasn't really knitting at all. Then it had taken a bit of a back seat and I hadn't really moved beyond the scarves accessories pursuits so I was just really focused on painting. I started cooking a lot and then my friend started referring to me as just the friend who can cook and the friend who can make food and that became more of a passion and focus. After I graduated and I was living on my own and I started up my food blog which in the kitchen as a way to keep in touch with these friends that I'd left behind. So I went to college in Los Angeles but while in school I also spent a couple semesters in Cape Town, South Africa and in Florence, Italy both which have their very different unique food cultures so that was also a real big interest. Anyway, brought that back with me and I was cooking a lot and that was my main focus. And then I started getting back into knitting and when I was in LA I would go and do some weaving workshops with my aunt. My aunt lived North of the city so she and I would go out into the dessert and she knew all of these like cooky ladies at this like spinning fiber studio space. I'm not even sure where it was because I would drive up to her place and then she and I would drive together and I was never really paying attention to where we were going. But I learned some basics about weaving and then my aunt ended up investing in a loom so I was able to practice weaving a little bit with her and learn some basics about spinning on a wheel, spinning yarn that is. So all of that stuff is just kind of in a big mesh, you know the painting, the fiber arts, the cooking and then I moved to DC to look for work. And my day job

pretty much consists of being on a computer 24/7 and so when I'm not at work I really want to be doing physical things. I don't watch a lot of TV. I read here and there but I really want to be investing my body and my mind in physical activity and so cooking fills that hole. Painting has kind of unfortunately fallen by the way side just because it really takes a lot of, a little bit of space for one thing. Daylight is very helpful and really getting in a zone. You know it's not a craft I think in the same way that knitting is. It's not necessarily patterns or rhythms, I mean it can but it's definitely different approach from cooking or knitting. Alas, it has taken a back seat but at the same time it's also allowed for my other pursuits and interests to rise to the fore front. So I've really gotten into knitting over the past few years and then that's branched into other interests as well like fiber dyes and weaving and spinning within my resources. And now I have this really long work commute. I live in Baltimore but I work in DC every day and it's about an hour and a half door to door and I'm sitting on a train from Baltimore to DC for a solid hour each way so that's my knitting time. And I can't paint on the train, I can read on the train but I can definitely knit. Yeah, I've knit my first sweater earlier this year. I can't believe it actually took me this long but better late than never and now I'm hooked on knitting sweaters but that's more or less kind of a timeline of these different crafts or art practices that I've pursued or picked up or dropped off or whatever along the way.

Ashley: Yeah, I knit my first sweater this year too and I don't know why it took me that long. I think I was more intimidated than anything. Both of just the process.

Jess: It's intimidating.

Ashley: Yeah.

Jess: Yeah, I mean well and then also it's like a big investment. If you're looking at a sweater you're looking at I mean anywhere from I think like 60 on a low end to like 150 plus dollars' worth of yarn, compared to like a project that takes one to two skeins that's a big investment and so it's a little scary taking that plunge.

Ashley: It is, it totally is.

Jess: I'm like this is going to be like I'm here for the long haul you know.

Ashley: Yeah. My biggest fear also was like, am I going to finish this. I need to finish this if I started.

Jess: Oh yeah.

Ashley: I'm ending my commute time which you know we were talking earlier. Is kind of a bummer so I'm going to have to figure out how to carve out that special time maybe this 17 hour road trips to Idaho who knows. Kind of as you were telling your story I was making mental notes about some of the things I've watched you go through on kind of your I don't know knitting journey over the last year or two and one of the ones that really comes to mind is I'd love to hear the story behind your trip to Oaxaca and kind of how that came about and maybe just even just a little bit about the trip.

Jess: Sure. So I was funny. So let's see Oaxaca. I first got interested in Oaxaca, the first time I've ever heard about it, I was in college and I was working a summer job at a coffee shop in Chincoteague Island, Virginia, which my parents live there now. I went there every Summer growing up as a kid and then when I was in college I would go there and

work just a Summer gig at this coffee shop and coffee shop is limiting. It's like a home good store. They sell books and ceramics and clothes and a bunch of different stuff. It's a really quirky eclectic store and I ended up getting this one book on super duper discount because it had like a ripped cover and it's on Mexican textiles and I remember just being totally enamored with this book and everything in this book in just the embroidery and the colors and the techniques and the dyes. It's the first place I learned about Cochineal which is this brilliant, like the most brilliant red dye you can get from natural means. It comes from a small little bug in Mexico. That was my first introduction to Oaxaca. One of my best friends from college, she and I were actually roommates when we studied overseas together in Florence, Italy. We were just placed together randomly, she became one of my closest friends and she is Mexican. And I remember meeting her family for the first time in San Diego and they were like have you ever been to Mexico and I said no, no but I really want to go to Oaxaca. They are like, what is this white girl wanting to go to Oaxaca, like all the American girls want to go to the beaches like what is this. And I told them what little I knew. I know that Oaxaca has amazing food and I know that Oaxaca has a really rich cultural history and fiber culture and everything and they were really impressed that I knew all this. And then that same friend called me up this time last year to tell me that she was getting married to her longtime sweetheart in Oaxaca and she's like I want you to be in my wedding please come. And I didn't think I would be able to afford it or swing it but I made it work. I figured hey I wanted to go Oaxaca now for years and I don't know when else I'm going to be back and I'm just going to take advantage of the trip. So I took a week off of work instead of just a long weekend or something. I started researching residencies or workshops around natural dye techniques or weaving and Oaxaca has a lot of fiber history. Oaxaca as a state in South Central Mexico. It's very large. Oaxaca City is the capital and it's a very colonial city, a very European city. There's a lot of history there but it is a city. It's a very vibrant, it's busy. There's a lot of local markets, a lot of people, a lot of churches; it's just beautiful but Oaxaca as a state in Mexico is very large, very diverse. It's also very poor and it has a very large native population, you know Mexican, Indian people. Unlike in the United States where native populations were more or less wiped out, definitely there are a lot of descendants of Native Americans but in Mexico they are very present and strong and the culture is very much alive. And the textile history, the cultural history is embraced. Oaxacan people are, one of my friend—how did my friend phrase it to me—she's like, they are very stubborn people. You know, they're protesting a lot. You'll see people walking around in every day contemporary clothes but you'll also see a lot of people walking around in traditional dress. You know just very, very proud of their culture and their history. But anyway, so I did some research and I found a couple of different things but the one that ended up working out was this weaving workshop with this man who had been weaving his whole life. He learned to weave from his grandfather. He just came from a long lineage of weavers and the entire workshop residency is organized by a woman named Norma Hawthorne who has organized all these different tours and everything under the name Oaxaca Cultural Navigator. And I knew she was legit because she has been featured in the New York Times like years ago. I found that, you know thank you Google. I found it like this is a legit workshop. These people are real. You know when I told my boyfriend I'm like, oh hey well I'm going to go do this for like four or five days and he's like who are these people, are you sure it's going to be safe. I'm a pretty stubborn person myself so I'm like whatever I'm going to go do this it's going to be great and it really was. So I ended up going to this small village called Teotitlan del Valle. It's about a 30 minute drive out of Oaxaca

City. It's very rural but it's internationally known for its weaving, for its rugs specifically. I'm by no means an expert. Like I've read several books on the subject. I'm by no means an expert so I don't want to pretend to be but Teotitlan has such a very long history of weaving and rugs and that practice is very much alive and well. I think my understanding it's the main economy of the town, of the village. You know a lot of tourists will come and buy rugs from weavers in Teotitlan. You know everybody and their grandmother and their child are weavers in this village. What's interesting too is that a lot of these weavings will be imported to the US through Santa Fe. Like Santa Fe is what I found is kind of interesting. That's the link to US collectors in the US is through gallery spaces in Santa Fe. I also went to Santa Fe for another wedding just a couple of weeks ago and it's not too surprising. I mean you see the culture shared in New Mexico and Santa Fe area especially in Mexico is definitely see those connections with the culture and the lineage and there's a very vibrant fiber community in the Santa Fe area, so the connection is not too surprising. What I remember is that Teotitlan really got put on the map, I think a couple of decades ago now and that industry which I think was more or less dying out. I mean not even a real industry. You know it's just crafts and craftsmanship was revived because of international and specifically American interest in investing in these rugs as art. So that's how I ended up there and I was in Teotitlan for I think four days or five days. I reached out, Norma Hawthorne was the facilitator for the whole thing. She was out at the country when I was there so I didn't get to meet her but she facilitated the whole thing. She set up my stay with a local bed and breakfast and I just reached out to her and said, hey I'm going to be in town for this wedding, like is there any workshop schedule, can I just come and she said yeah just come we'll have a class for you, we'll see if anyone wants to sign up but no one else signed for the dates I was there so I got one-on-one workshop with Federico Chavez Sosa. That's his name and his wife Lola and they're both master weavers. Their children are weavers and dyers. They use natural dyes in all their work. So I went to Federico's home every day and he set me up on my own loom and I wove a very small rug by comparison to what most of these people are producing. I don't know maybe it's like two, three by two feet, two by three feet over the course of four days. I mean they can bang something like that out in several hours. I had a basic working knowledge of weaving so I knew kind of sort of what I was doing but these looms are also different. They're looms where you're standing. You're not sitting to move the pedals. You're standing and moving the pedals with your feet, kind of like you're skiing. It's very physical. You know you're bending over the loom the whole day. It's pretty draining work but very meditative as well. All of his walls were just lined with wool and yarn that he had dyed himself in his studio right there so you walk into his house and there's this entire courtyard in the middle of his house. It's more or less open to the sky. It's an open courtyard. There was a plastic, I'm not sure if it's plastic or some kind of roof above that would let in light but would prevent rain from coming in. There lots of ventilation so they would do their fiber dyeing, their weaving, their spinning all in this open space and they also had like a kitchen table there that they would eat their meals. Now the family lived in the second story of this house. The bottom story had a couple of other storage rooms, a place where they keep their other rugs that they've produced but yeah every day I would go into their home and work on my weaving and spend some time talking with Federico and he's share some of his books with me and inspiration. You know they would share their lunch with me. It was really wonderful. Definitely after four or so days I had begun establishing a friendship and a relationship which I think that's what you want to get ideally whenever you want to travel anywhere is get to know who the people are, who live

there, what their story is, what their interest is, their passions are, their history, their culture and I felt like the weaving just facilitated that introduction to the culture that I was interested in. But yeah that was my trip to Oaxaca.

Ashley: That sounds amazing. I had read about your trip on Karen's blog, Fringe. And my husband and I had been talking about going somewhere to do some sort of fiber-related workshop but we wanted it to be authentic and not just a touristy thing and it was funny because as we are talking about this and we weren't sure where to look or what type of thing to do, I was following your trip on Instagram and I was like gosh that sounds so amazing. I looked up the website and got in all to it and I was like we should go in February because they're having one in February and then I realized that it's on my son's birthday and I was like, well I wonder if I can get away with that. So I don't know. It's still maybe in the cards but we'll see.

Jess: And you know they have them all the time. I reached out to Norma. I was like hey I'm in town this week anything possible and she was so accommodating so you know I think if that's an interest, I mean even if anyone listening to this, if that's an interest of yours I know that there are other workshops out there. I've spoken with other people who did similar things with different people and it's a very small world down there. Like everybody knows everybody and you know you're studying with one person and the other person, you'll talk with someone else on the street and like they're their cousin. And honestly everybody is a master. Everybody knows what they're doing so if you want to learn I mean Norma and her programs are a great resource but I know there are some other ones out there too.

Ashley: That's great. You talk a lot about the culture and the history and both with food and their craft and did you take anything away from there that inspired your cooking since returning?

Jess: Oh yes. But the degree to which I'm able to replicate it is a challenge so actually even before I even went I did my research online to find an authentic Oaxacan cookbook and I found one and I bought one and it's amazing but it still sits on my bookshelf most of the time because the ingredients just are not as readily available in Baltimore as they would be in the Southwest or in California or somewhere else. I did find a Mexican grocery in Baltimore and I'm very excited about it but even though Mexican food is, I mean a lot of Mexican food I should say is relatively simple, I mean simple ingredients, simple preparation, a lot of the traditional Oaxacan food is not necessarily simple preparation and does this small herbs and ingredients and spices that makes the difference. So Oaxaca is known for a lot of different things. Oaxaca is considered like the food epicenter of Mexico. I mean I didn't taste half of the things I wanted to taste while I was there but the food there will blow your mind. It's known as the land of the seven moles. So if you heard of a mole it means I think it means mixture and a lot of Americans might be familiar with the chocolate mole. It's this very rich sauce that is a blend of a bunch of different spices and peppers and the mole negro has chocolate in it and you put it on chicken, on rice. It's very rich and so flavorful. So that's the most commonly known mole but then there's like six other main kinds of mole. There's green mole, there's yellow mole, there's red mole and there all different peppers and different spices, very different flavors. So I brought home several bags of mole with me that you can like mole paste to thin out with chicken stock but I got a little mole'd out by the time I left out and those bags and also it's like the sense that these bags are so precious like I don't want to even open

them because then I open them because then when I open them and I eat them then they would be gone. But I brought back mole with me, I brought back chocolate, Oaxacan chocolate is very famous and the chocolate there is unlike any other chocolate you will ever taste. It's not sugary. It's not milky, it's almost a little brittle in the mouth, it's not chalky but it has this really kind of pebbly texture and the flavor is just really intense. You know a lot of times like canella which is like their cinnamon. It's not like the hard, curled cinnamon sticks that we think of. It's very papery pale brown cinnamon that has a different flavor. I mean it's still cinnamon but the flavor profile is really different. That flavor is added to their chocolate and made these different drinking chocolates. So chocolate is a big thing and then you have all these different salsas, fresh tortillas. I mean if anything I would love to be able to teach myself how to make like fresh tortillas, steam some fresh tamales. I haven't ventured into that realm yet and Mexican food was definitely something I fell in love with when I lived in LA and I miss it. I miss it all the time but it's one of those things just teaching yourself an entire new cuisine and it's just a long process. So there's definitely some steps in there you know like okay, start with tortillas, start with tamales but I haven't really gotten there yet.

Ashley: We all have a lot on our plates and I think that's one of those things I struggle with constantly, ok how much time do I dedicate to this, this and this and this which those things have to happen in my free time. You know outside of your day job or whatever and usually it has something to do with knitting.

Jess: Yeah. Totally. I mean it's kind of the unfortunate truth of adulthood. I get home from work at 7:30, 8 o'clock. I go to bed around 11 so I can wake up at 5:30, 6 the next day. Okay, how do I want to spend that three hour chunk of "free time" every day and it usually involves eating some dinner, doing chores, what you got to do and it ends up being an hour of leisure time. I think it's so easy to fall into the trap of okay I'm just going to zone in front of the TV and chill out because I deserve this which is probably true but you also probably deserve to exercise your mind with a good book or a good craft or time with the people who matter to you or exercise, oh god forbid like exercise that's like fallen off my agenda completely.

Ashley: I know, me too.

Jess: Yeah I mean, working women trying to fit it all in. It's tough but you do what you got to do.

Ashley: So you took away from Oaxaca this idea about food and I guess these hopes and aspirations that someday you can become familiar with them more in your own kitchen but one of the things many people don't realize nowadays is the rich history behind a lot of the different fiber crafts and you probably came away with a much richer history around weaving. But what were some of the things that you took away like personally that you feel affect fiber choices or even pattern choices? Did it affect you in anyway like that?

Jess: Yeah, that's a really interesting question. Well even to preface that before I went, my boyfriend didn't go with me to Oaxaca, it was expensive and it was really a personal trip but I remember just telling him I'm going to go do this weaving thing and he's like well you can't keep that up when you get back so why would you want to do that, like we can't have a loom in our tiny apartment. Wouldn't that be a bummer? You know you go and learn all these skills but then you can't continue to pursue them, at least

not immediately. I mean I would love to be able to come home and weave a little bit every night. That would make me very happy and addition to all the other fibers pursuits I want to pursue like dyeing, I don't have a yard, I don't have much ventilation, a way of ventilation. So dyeing is tricky. You know all these things I love to pursue, they may or may not actually be achievable where I am right now in my life with what's available to me. I wish it were all available but that's not really the point. To me, the act of learning is the real interest or the reward there, everything else is a bit secondary and just being in Oaxaca and being in that environment where outside you hear the trash man go by, like the trash man had this really weird music that would play kind of like an ice cream truck and then you'd also hear like these crows all the time and these goats and dogs barking and just being in a very different environment where you're not plugged in at all. Your body and your mind are functioning in a different space that a lot of other people across the world live in every day. Like a lot of people do not live in this world where they are completely plugged in on their phones all the time. They're living in a different reality and I think to step out of that and see that reality and especially to be in a village in a community where weaving and textiles are primarily what this village lives for, what these people live for. Being surrounded by that is very powerful especially to someone who just loves this stuff, just loves geeking out about it. I have this big kind of carpet bag I would carry around with me. I picked it up at this old antique store in Virginia a couple of years ago and I think it's of Turkish origin and all of these people would stop me on the street in Teotitlan like asking me about my bag and where I got it and wanting to look at the weaving and approving of the weaving, you know because it's a really tight weave and just fascinated by it and you can tell that these people know their craft and they spot it and all the details just the same way that a knitter who's on public transportation and is looking at people's hats and being like I really that person's hat, I wonder how they made that or what yarn did they use. It's the same kind of thing except like practically everybody just has this eye. So to be in that environment I think just really kind of, I can't speak to it specifically what I think that experience provided but it definitely it turns a different switch in your head about I think how you're approaching this or like your understanding of what this craft is and where it comes from and where it could be going. I mean for me personally as well just being surrounded by so much color, like the color is so in your face in Oaxaca. It's so refreshing. The last time I went, I travelled out of the country at all was in Iceland, I did a solo trip to Iceland in 2012 for kind of a very similar reason. It was just a passion. It was something I felt like I had to do and I went and I didn't really turn it into a fiber pilgrimage in the same way that my trip to Oaxaca was but you know as a knitter I was definitely knitting a lot during that trip and at that time and so I was observing a lot. There's sheep all over the mountains in Iceland I mean there are no trees in Iceland because the sheep have eaten them all. Over the past several centuries, the sheep have eaten all the tress off of this island. But the colors there, there's very vibrant colors in the summer in Iceland but the colors that people are wearing are the colors of the land. You know they're grays, they're whites, they're just neutrals. You know I see these colors reflected a lot in maybe the aesthetic of like maybe the Pacific Northwest. You know, I know you're talking about that a little bit before. I grew up actually outside of Boston and people wear black and navy and pine green all the time. It's this very dark wintry colors and for the context to where these crafts are coming from, I mean you're in Iceland, you're in Pacific Northwest, you're in New England, it's these cold places and these cold colors. And then to be in Oaxaca where people aren't knitting sweaters, actually they are. People do wear sweaters. It does

get cold but that's not the primary craft. You know people are weaving rugs. They're weaving blouses. They're applying their skill to a different final product. But the place I think informs that final product so much. Oaxaca is just so, it's a very diverse state but Oaxaca city is pretty arid. There's a lot of dry land but there's also a lot of kind of lush trees. Apparently, hundreds of years ago, it used to be a jungle. This is what I told by someone there and it shares, it hugs, some of the coast as well but you have these cacti and these bright flowers and these tropical colors, flavors, spices and you see that in the fiber and the colors of the buildings and just people aren't scared of color. That in its ways just as refreshing as being in a place with devoid of palette. You have these kind of two extremes. One where it's just so much color everywhere and it just wakes you up and this other you know like Iceland where it's more devoid of color and it's calming and it's introspective and introverted. Just these two contrasts and I think of anything that was my main takeaway where I felt like my palette or the patterns or the things I was gravitating toward were really informed by my trip to Iceland and then I go to Oaxaca and it kind of counterbalances that. I came home with some really brightly colored yarn that I bought from Federico that he dyed himself. Like this bright fuchsia, like the color of like bougainvillea flowers. That was dyed with cochineal and this like rich mustard yellow that was dyed with marigold flowers. I don't wear pink all that often. Right now, I'm wearing like jeans and today I wore like a gray purple shirt and a dark grey sweater. You know I still kind of gravitate towards neutrals but I hope and think that Oaxaca helped pushed my palette awareness and, not even awareness, just my willingness I should say to be a little braver with palette, even in my wardrobe and when I'm knitting for myself or for others and then pattern. There's so much about pattern that I want to learn about from that region that I don't know about but you see a lot reflected in the Southwest of the US as well, these very geometric patterns. I'm definitely gravitating towards that kind of stuff. It may or may not appear in a knitted garment, having this big Zapotec star in the back of a knitted sweater would be pretty cool but it's hard to find patterns with that and I'm not really at the skill level yet where I'm designing my own patterns but you know definitely something to take into consideration. So I think it influenced me in a lot of ways. You know some I can identify and maybe some are a little more, I can't necessarily verbalize.

Ashley: Right, just listening to you talk about color, that's something that you're very right, the Pacific Northwest definitely has a tendency towards more neutrals and I like what you said the introspective palette. Being from Seattle, I always gravitated towards grays and blacks and kind of these muted tones and also I think as a designer and working with only designers I feel like sometimes we look at each other and we'd all be wearing black. In this past year, it was right before my son's first birthday and I was trying to think about what I'm going to design for his birthday. Is it going to be what color? And I picked up this color palette and I look at it one day, I'm like what the hell am I doing. The kid doesn't want gray and yellow for his birthday party. He wants tons of colors. I need to branch out and be more colorful so this year I knit like a crazy colorful pairs of socks which is totally outside my comfort zone but at the same time I kind of like it.

Jess: Yeah, I mean and socks, who is going to see your socks. Hopefully they are in some really cute boots and only you know that you're wearing them but they like give you a bit of secret power or something. I am wearing funky yellow purple socks and you can't stop me.



Ashley: So yeah I think color, it's funny because I think a lot of knitters embrace it and sometimes when I see it I'm like, I could never wear that or I can't even imagine buying that but I don't know, it's part of that whole creative expression that I like it. I like the boldness of it. So we talked a lot about your trip to Oaxaca which the passion and just the way that you talk about it at least for me it's inspiring not only to definitely want to go there but just to be continue in this journey of learning more about this craft that we do. Wool in general and all the different techniques around it but you live in Baltimore and tell me a little bit about your knitting community there.

Jess: Well, I moved to Baltimore in January so I'm still in the process of making friends and making connections and tapping into that community for sure. But that community is definitely here. The more I learn about it the more I find more stuff. What I really wish for here just in my back door in the middle of the city, I would love just a weaving class I could go to after work or on weekends or a spinning class and those resources are here but they are outside of the city like a bit of a drive which I think is the case with a lot of stuff. It takes kind of space in resources to pursue that kind of stuff so it tends not to be in the center of cities and I don't have a car so it makes those things kind of hard to get to. But there are fiber artists in the city who are doing dyeing and stuff. Unfortunately, some are closing their doors. I found about this great little line called Cephalopod that was around for several years but the first time I walked in their doors was for their close out sale which is very sad. And they had this entire dye studio in the back and I got some gorgeous yarns from them but they were closing up shop after several years and going on to big and better things. But I was able to learn a little bit about that. A couple of my friends who I've known from DC who moved to Baltimore before me or who I've connected with since I've been here have also helped me kind of tap into that a little bit. One new friend of mine, her name is Rosemary Liss. She is an incredible fiber artist and painter. She and I have connected for our passion around food, painting, fiber basically kind of like our top three passion projects and she works at Hex Ferments which is this wonderful new business in Baltimore that makes fermented foods that are incredible. Like sauerkrauts that don't taste like your grandfather's sauerkraut and kombucha that's like bright purple and like just crazy delicious stuff. So Rosemary has been taking photographs of some of these foods in fermentation with her iPhone, just really low res or not high tech images but then having them printed and then sewing them and quilting them together on to stretched canvas as these abstract pieces, just really interesting and just created a series of those and complimented that with her paintings. So there's some really cool stuff going on here that take fiber into a different space. It's not just craft and the making of objects, it's also moving it into the fine art space like that. So that's going on and Baltimore is such a great place for that just because it has MICA here. For those who don't know, it's the Maryland Institute College of Art. It's just this fabulous internationally renowned art school and it's right in our backyards and a lot of people, a lot of artists and creators come to this city go to MICA and a lot of them stick around after they graduate and so the city has a very vibrant community of artists of all types and colors. So I think that's also real strength that can inform a fiber practice not necessarily literally or specifically but through proxy.

Ashley: That's awesome. I think being in some sort of creative inspirational and aspirational community is really important to especially newcomers to that city. Seattle doesn't have a huge knitting community. It's even growing a lot in just the last year since I moved away from there. Since we moving to San Francisco, it's like kind of crazy how

many different things I've come to know since moving there and it's really I guess what inspired and motivated me to get this fiber mill going. So it's interesting how cities can take part in your journey as a maker.

Jess: Yeah I mean I almost forgot to mention, what is it called, the Maryland Fiber—I'm going to totally butcher the name. I've only been once but there's a Maryland Fiber Festival —oh Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival, duh. Beginning of every May which by the time it's May it's like 80 degrees here but whatever. There's like a sheep and wool festival where everyone is still walking around in their heavy wool sweaters because it's the Sheep and Wool Festival and that's not too far away from here as well. I haven't been there now. I think I went there three, four years ago. It's been a while but I think it's the nature too of like I came from DC where everything is hyper organized and everybody is in reading groups or this is like this organized activity we do together and Baltimore has a little more of a laid back approach to everything but organized in craft I think is maybe one of those where you have these established connections and relationships with people but they may be not necessarily be organized into specific craft nights or clubs.

Ashley: That's great. You are teaching a class, coming up here in November. Is that right? A knitting class?

Jess: Yeah, yeah. Up in Brooklyn.

Ashley: So is this going to be your first time teaching?

Jess: Yes and no. No because I actually started the NPR knitting club at National Public Radio.

Ashley: Oh my gosh.

Jess: I know, I know. It's so NPR. I worked in NPR for four years and actually around this time last year I was coming up on my fourth year and a friend of mine was admiring my scarf and asked me if I would knit her one and she's like I'll pay you. I'm like okay that's cool but let me just come up with a price quote for you and I quoted her like 75 bucks and that was like a generous discount from the amount of time it would take me to make it and how much the yarn would cost and she was like that's a lot. And I'm like, how about I just teach you to knit and she was like okay that sounds great. And I mentioned it to a couple of other people and they're like I want to learn, I want to learn so we ended up hanging out over lunch once or twice a week and I taught I think like five plus people how to knit and started everybody on hats. I think hats are definitely the way, I mean not definitely, I guess everybody has their thing but I think hats are a really good way to start people out on knitting because it's a smaller project than the traditional scarf. I think people can get really discouraged with scarves because it just go on forever and never end whereas a hat there's more techniques involved but you're basically, if you're just doing a simple roll like a rimmed roll hat all you're doing is knitting, knitting, knitting, knitting, knitting until you're ready to decrease and you're just like knitting two together and knitting, knitting, knitting and then you're binding off. I just think it's a really simple way to get people introduced to the craft without going all in on this like three skein scarf project. So I've taught people in that kind of informal setting before and then this is my first formal, people are actually paying a class fee to attend a class with me which is funny and awesome all at once.

Ashley: I love it.

Jess: But yeah, I'm working with Brooklyn Brainery to host the class and they're really great and I'm totally what they're all about which is basically making knowledge accessible to anybody who wants to learn. You know I see a lot, not to push back necessarily on artist who are charging a lot of money because that's the way that they are making their living to teach their craft but I see classes for skill techniques going 100, 200 dollars for a like a few hour class and that really limits who is able to access that knowledge. Knitting should be accessible to everybody. It historically has been accessible to everybody and it's a relatively low cost hobby and there are so many great benefits like, I mean I'm not going to go into benefits to knitting. Everybody listening to this podcast knows the benefits of knitting. I'm all about sharing the knowledge in an accessible way to people.

Ashley: I was just talking to someone a couple of days ago about the fact that one of the cool things about knitting is it has such a low barrier to entry which it doesn't mean everyone should do it or will stick to it I guess but it does really open up doors for those creatives that may have otherwise been intimidated by it and so I learned online. I mean my old aunt taught me how to originally but really I developed my skills just watching YouTube videos online like four or five years ago. So I think that's cool. I really like what you just said about that. One last thing I wanted to ask you is what kind of fibers that you tend to gravitate towards and what projects you're working on right now.

Jess: Wool 100%. I've worked with Alpaca. I've never worked with cashmere. Cashmere is a little bit out of my budget or at least like what I want to actually spend on my knitting projects. Cotton, I think hemp but yeah I kind of like a good gushy wool is just like the best thing ever and it took a while for me to learn. I'm a pretty thin stick of a person and when I moved back east from LA I was getting sick every single year. Every month I would come down with another cold and I couldn't understand why, why I'm getting sick all the time. And then my family and my boyfriend finally hammered home that you are not dressing properly for the elements. Last year I started wearing wool sweaters, not the acrylic sweaters that you get at the store and eureka, I'm so much warmer and I get sick so much less. You know wool is just this magic fiber.

Ashley: It is.

Jess: But it's hard to find maybe sweaters or garments in the style you want, in the fiber you want. Like you can get inexpensive acrylic sweaters for like 50 something plus bucks at GAP or whatever and then you can get expensive but very thin like cashmere or merino wool sweaters like J. Crew or something for like 200 dollars that aren't necessarily will keep you warm so it's like no I want like a lush, warm wool sweater, like old fashion style where can I find it and I realized I maybe just have to make it. So that's what kind of just kicked me in the butt of like starting my first sweater and then also actually Karen's blog just really laid out how simple it is to start a sweater and the different kind of sweaters that you can knit and that was a real inspiration for me in just getting started. So right now I am finishing up the Ivar cardigan from Brooklyn Tweed. I've been knitting this poor baby since when I went to Oaxaca. I started this thing in May. I'm still knitting it but I started my second sleeve today and I'm going to wrap up the second sleeve then block it and do the finishing and then I am done and it is perfect timing because it's getting really cold here. Yay! And then my friend Claire and I have both decided to take on the new pattern on Ondawa from Brooklyn Tweed. We're kind of doing it as a joint knit-along thing but since I'm still finishing up this

other pattern she was like gone ahead and gotten started and just like speeding through it so I'm probably going to be paying some major touch up but that is next on the list. It's like this beautiful cabled sweater but it's a real kind of rethink modernization of a traditional cable sweater with this real boxy shape in the torso and also kind of these tight sleeves and this open boat neck collar. So adding kind of just a basic wool cardigan to my wardrobe and then shaking it up a little bit with a fun little cable knit. So that's next on my list.

Ashley: I love that sweater the Ondawa. I'm actually talking with Michele, the designer in a couple of weeks for the podcast so...

Jess: She's so great. Okay so every sweater I've knit. Ivar is her sweater, the first sweater I've knit is her sweater. Like I clearly have a thing for Michele's designs or Michele really has a thing for making designs that I love, either way.

Ashley: That's really great. Sweaters, I feel like all I want to do is knit sweaters now, I finally knit and finished my first scarf that I've ever knit and I think it was because the fact that they take forever. At least with the sweater even though it takes a while you're kind of doing something different all the time so you break it up a little bit which is nice. Gosh, well we've already been talking for an hour and it's been so awesome. I'm sure we can talk for much longer. I love hearing more about your trip and just kind of your passion behind kind of everything that you do really. I'm really excited to see you start on your latest sweater.

Jess: Well thank you for having me. It's been awesome talking to you and meeting you. I mean it's been so great to connect with other passionate people I mean if you don't have a specific fiber community in the city or town or whatever you live just knowing that there is a wider community for contacts and inspiration is so great and you're a part of that so thank you.

Ashley: For this week's "Man on the Street" I asked a handful of fiber enthusiasts to answer the following questions, "If you could travel to any country and immerse yourself in their fiber culture and customs, which country would you choose?" Here's what they had to say...

Andi: Hi this is Andi from Chandler. You can find me at [mysistersknitter.typepad.com](https://mysistersknitter.typepad.com). If I could travel to any country and immerse myself in their culture and customs it would be Peru. And this is because of Peru's history with textiles that goes back 9000 plus years. Their traditions of true Alpaca. Whether it be a scarf, hat or whatever clothing, is still happening today. Their use of local flowers and plants for their dyeing process that results in different and vivid colors. Just to experience the culture of the Peruvians and to see the Alpacas, learn from the dyers and knitters would be a trip of a lifetime.

Nikki: Hi this is Nikki from Asheville. You can find me on Instagram @wildvioletknits. If I could travel anywhere right now, I would go to Scotland because I've always been drawn to it's green beauty, Gaelic customs and recently Shetland wool. In October I participated

in the Shetland Wool Week knit-along, and knit my first fair isle hat. I was hooked with the beauty of the color we made with our hats and the durability, the texture and the warmth of the Shetland wool yarn.

Sonja: Hi this is Sonja from Tenino, Washington. You can find me on Instagram @atreebytheriver. If I could travel to any country I would go to first, Norway. That is the land of my heritage, but as far as knitting goes I haven't dove into that real deep yet so I would probably have to go to the Shetland Islands, thanks in part to Gudrun Johnston for introducing me to that area more. Their heritage there with the sheep is so deep and rich, I would just love to gain some of their knowledge and get my hands on some traditional fair isle and lace. After looking at Gudrun's new book, The Shetland Trader Book 2, and her pattern for the Northdale sweater, I'm just amazed at how that is only 3 colors used in that sweater and it's just gorgeous. So there you have it, I think I would go to the Shetland Islands.

Ashley: I'm not sure I've met a more spunky, sheep loving Aussie than our next guest Kylie Gusset. She has a vast knowledge of the industry, in particular the breed that brings us some of the softest wool I've ever laid hands on, Cormo. In 2011 Kylie crowd funded one ton of Cormo, rallying knitters and makers alike. You can find her at tonofwool.com and on Instagram @tonofwool. And with that, here's Kylie.

Ashley: How's it going?

Kylie: Oh it's going well. It's actually a beautiful Melbourne sunny spring afternoon. We actually have a warm day today which is really unusual for us. It's been lovely.

Ashley: I literally have this long, long list of things that I'm like, okay I need to ask her about this; I need to ask her about this.

Kylie: Yeah, there's a lot, isn't there?

Ashley: We might have to split it up into more than one of these.

Kylie: Yeah quite possibly. So I guess, what I'm happy to do is, let's go with the stuff that might be kind of difficult to get elsewhere so one of them could be about Cormo and how I got to start working with them which is quite interesting in itself. The way that that actually happened with that. I found out about Cormo thanks to going to Sock Summit which was in Portland which was the brain child of the Yarn Harlot situated in Portland City and also Tina from Blooming Fiber Arts, got together and put Sock Summit on for two years in 2009 and 2011. Back then in 2009, I was just starting out a yarn buying business literally in that I hadn't even purchased my dyes or wool or anything and all of the sudden I had found out about this great big festival over in Portland that I was thinking that what I should do is apply and then they'll knock me back but at least they know who I am so then in future years when I go and apply there wouldn't be any problems and I was like sweet okay I'll do that. There was just one problem. They accepted me. So I found myself over in Portland and one of the things that I did while I was in there was that I went to a workshop that Clara Parkes was giving about finding the perfect sock yarn. I basically stayed in contact with Clara since then and her books as well such as the Knitter's Book of Yarn, the Knitter's Book of Socks and of course the Knitter's Book of Wool. And along with the Knitter's Book of Wool she had a knit-along happening on Ravelry where we were actually going to the

chapters of the book and looking at the different kind of wools and what would be great to use for. So my little thing while all of this was happening was that I was going to make sort of as local as possible so that for example if we're looking at say Blue Faced Leicester, I would see if there was some way that I could source it locally. So I think I just ended up finding it in someone's stash or something. But when the time came to look at Cormo I hadn't even really sort of heard of the breed, here I am in Australia and this Australian breed that I haven't heard of I was like okay, time to do some research. So I ended up actually calling Peter Downie and saying to him I am doing this thing and I'd really appreciate it if I could get my hands on some of your wool, could you send me some and he did. We basically stayed in contact since then. They have this thing in Bothwell in Tasmania where they are based called the Spin-in and I thought it would be a smart idea for me to go down there and sell my yarn and I mentioned this to Peter and he said look why don't you come and stay with me because I'm really close there. And I thought it would just be a great opportunity to meet family and see what they were doing and to see Bothwell as well. I hadn't actually been to Tasmania. So it was just this really great adventure to go on and it certainly was. I had no idea what I was in for. I remember saying to Peter before I went, do I need to bring a sleeping bag because I thought we just be staying in shearer's quarters because as a farm girl myself this is the kind of thing that I was used to when you go and stay over at a farmer's place particularly you're in a rural location when its population is 100 or 300 or so and they probably have quite a few other people staying with them. There's no problem staying out in the shearer's huts or whatever they have. And he was just like oh no you'll be fine. So we went to meet him and it was just the most glorious experience ever. They have a gorgeous house, lovely, just gorgeous land and their sheep were being quite plain faced. It's amazing to see the actual wool comes with them. Yeah, very special and one of a kind.

Ashley: You're just making me so excited talking about it.

Kylie: Yeah. Well I guess that was the starting thing. The other thing was this is the time when Ian Downie passed away recently, about three months ago I think now, and while I was there, this is the thing I was actually quite excited that this concept of this is a breed that we've actually come up with in Australia that is quite well-known in the US. How did this happen and how did this come to being? So as luck would have it, I actually had Anne Downey Sr. because both Peter and Ian just happened to marry women called Anne just to make things very confusing. I happen to meet Anne Sr. She came to sort of see what I was up to and so forth at the Spin-in because she is very much involved in sort of wool and handicraft and all that sort of thing. Chatting to her and said to her, would you mind if I actually came and paid you a visit this afternoon so I could meet Ian and she is like, okay if you'd like sure. So I ended up turning up to them and sort of meeting them there at their house and it was just a wonderful experience. The thing that I won't forget is the very first thing that Ian said to me, so you're into the wool. Tell me about this thing what is crimp? So I started to sort of waxing the lyrical about crimp and its importance in wool and how it's different breeds and all these other things and he was just like, this crimp business, crimp means nothing. It's all about these other factors that you need to look at and that's basically where I got schooled was thanks to him. What I didn't realize was that Ian is very much this major pioneer in the Australian wool industry with what he did. The story was he basically, Cormo was born out of adversity. He inherited a flock of sheep and major amount of debt. They were Saxon Merinos, which is a super fine wool, incredibly gorgeous. The issue

with the sheep themselves is that they actually require a lot of care. Things like staying up in all ungodly hours of the night helping them birth and so forth so you can ensure that you actually have live lambs. Things like that were going on. He saw that there were all these issues that he was having is he was sort of sitting there just going this is not going to be viable. This can't work and it can't continue, how can we turn things around? So he was incredibly brave. What he actually did was he sought some advice from CSIRO. CSIRO is actually a government organization or a government funded organization which is about scientific research. And what was really interesting was back in 1959 he actually sought the advice of a female scientist which I guess even in these days as having a female scientist who actually advise you on wool would probably be a bit sort of unusual but back in 1959 it would be unheard of. A bunch of farmers are doing this as well. But that was what he did. So what they came up with was sort of concept of objective measurement. So from here on in what they decided to do was they were going to use microns. So these are millions, let me give it a try, millions of a meter. It's a super, super, super fine measurement which he used. What they decided was with this measurement that if any of the wool that came off a sheep fell outside of the certain parameter which I think at the moment it's around 21 microns. So if it falls out of around 19 to 21 microns, if it falls outside of that they are not going to have good sheep. So anything that fell outside of that would be sold or killed, one or the other. So that was one of the things that they looked at was that objective measurement. So that was the way that things were going to work. And there's been all sorts of benefits from here on in if you don't really need to class wool or look at it that much because all sheep are the same. If they are all being bred at this one measurement well then you don't really need to worry about when you actually go to sell, they are all relatively the same. So there's no issues of classing and so forth that you need to look at which was a great advantage back then. The other thing that they looked at was the actual breed itself with the saxon merino of breeding and so forth. They weren't getting that many lambs and the lambs that they were getting there was this whole issue with birthing and so forth. So they looked at what sheep has got the characteristic that we need that going to help with these saxon merino. We can't do away with them so maybe we can sort of fix things somehow with another breed. So that's where they got the Corriedale from. So that's where they came up with the idea of crossing the two in order to get sort of a bit of birthing range and so forth and then there's also with the wool, it would actually be slightly stronger but then it would also be a slight change. There's also—Corriedale wool has also got this amazing qualities in itself as well. It's got a great sort of luster and even though lan wasn't that big on crimp himself, me personally I yeah Corriedale has got this amazing, if you get it from the right sort of source it's almost like crinkle cut frozen chips that you get in the supermarket that have got that really defined sort of crispy edge to it. It's almost like that. It's just gorgeous. So that was sort of thing that they were crossing with. So the end result was that what they were getting out of that this sort of very defined flock of animals that have this sort of selective micron. It was fine because they crossed it with the Corriedale it was also a type of sheep now. So you could use both meat and wool and also because they crossed it with Corriedale there was also this with the crossing what actually happened there was with the birthing they didn't have the problems but they are also higher incidence of twins and that was something they sort of bred into the breeds so to speak. But that twinability, I mean obviously if you're looking profits and if you need to turn that bit around, two lambs is going to be more profitable than one so that's what they did. He basically created history.

Ashley: That's incredible. This is obviously a lot of information, you spent a lot of time with the family. How did they share this information with you? Is it just spending time with them on their farm like over multiple occasions?

Kylie: Yeah, I mean with Ian it was sitting down with him I was—well, you can say it was my one regret but it's not my one regret, it's the one thing that I'm really glad of that I actually put my neck out and said hi I'm visiting you this afternoon sort of thing. I mean yeah how was I to know? So I'm just grateful that I have the opportunity to sit down with him and to get that sort of history straight from him but I mean there a lot quite few really great resources there around as well for example Clara Parkes with the Knitter's Book of Wool which is the thing that got me started and there's a quite few others sort of books that are out and more that are coming out as well. So that's being really helpful. I think it's really great to see an interest in diversity because that's one of the things that truly scares me at least in the Australian wool industry is that at the moment where we need to go is where we're going with bread. Where bread used to be is that, you know back in the '60s or whatever if you wanted bread and you purchased it, it would be white, it would be sliced, it would be in plastic and it would be from the supermarket. To this day that is still what we are doing with wool. For example, if you go to wool.com.au and you're a consumer you are taken to merino.com because there's only one kind of wool in Australia and that's merino and there's only one kind of wool and that's white and there's only one thing that it's used for, it's used for high fashion. It's just seems ridiculous. This is sort of seen as you know you can see the Australian wool industry, we only have white merino and that's it. It really does scare me that that is sort of the way that things are at the moment and it give me a lot of hope to seeing what is happening overseas particularly in the US and interest from people such as you who can see that local sort of production is the way to go and that there's a lot more interest now in doing things locally and finding out about the providence of what you're working with or what you're wearing or what you want to make and finding out the story behind it which I think is really important. And particularly with wool given the stories that aren't been told in Australia I could see it is super important. What a lot of people don't know is that 70% of the world's merino comes from Australia. Approximately 90% of that is processed in China. I need to go back and have a look at the figures but one of the reasons why I get sweep under the carpet is that two of the main exports of Australia are wool and coal. So where do these exports go to? They go to China. So the wool goes to China to be processed and what's the energy source that wool is processed with? Coal. How handy. So it's this weird sort of combination of things that nobody really knows about. It's an incredible story. It's the kind of thing where you're really tempted to call up someone like Eric Schlosser who wrote Fast Food Nation to let us know about fast food in McDonalds and sort of go hey when are you going to look at the wool industry and actually tell the story because it's insane.

Ashley: Maybe that's the story we need to tell.

Kylie: I think so. Yeah it definitely is. One of the things that really scares me at the moment is that the whole concept of labelling of wool in Australia is quite scary of you have things like...in the US if you have 100% American wool for example on a finished product you would assume then that it hadn't really left the country. You would think that that was an American made thing. Yeah?

Ashley: Yeah.



Kylie: For example if people have sweater that said 100% American wool, would you think that it was American?

Ashley: I know that it's not. But that's only because I've dug beneath the surface and that's one of the things that has me very concerned is knitting has taken on this huge new craze and for good reason and it's amazing but people aren't looking any further than just the color or the feel of it. Certain brands are just producing such a high production and just like food or anything else they are not looking at where it's processed, what it's made of, what chemicals are used in the process, what harm is doing to the environment. I'm a huge proponent of domestic fiber or sustainably processed fiber so I hear ya.

Kylie: I think it's a massive issue that nobody really wants to talk about because the benefit is having people just not know. And that's really does scare me. If people think that they are doing the right thing because they are buying this wool knitting yarn which is 100% Australian wool, made in Australia and yet there is no mention anywhere that it has been to China for the bulk of its processing. It's been scoured, made into top and spun in China that it just comes back to Australia for literally twisting and dyeing and packing. So if this were a catch it would basically be made in China and then shipped back to be iced before we served that to you. So if it were happening to food there would probably bit of an uproar and it certainly has happened in Australia the supermarket has been banned from advertising bread which is actually made in Ireland and then shipped over here. So in a frozen state I think and then they defrosted and baked it in their ovens and said that it was baked fresh daily. So it does happen. But yet it still happened with wool and I think it will be interesting the day that that does happen.

Ashley: There's a little side project that I've been working on with a friend. It's called Little Woolens and one of the things that we want to do for that is all the fiber that we use for the patterns we want to make sure it meets one of the three criteria: domestically sourced and processed, organic, sustainably processed and then naturally dyed. So literally I have this huge list of domestic companies and any company that meets those criteria that I have been getting in contact with but in the mist of that research contacting many, many different companies. And it's kind of crazy how many even smaller companies that have this fiber that they're dyeing have no idea where it actually comes from. They'll be like, okay I'll get back to you and they'll go check and then I get an email back and it's like they're learning for the very first time not only where it's processed but where it's sourced from and so it's been an interesting educational experience for me around that, something I hadn't even thought of even six months ago.

Kylie: Well, I guess something that I would love to talk to you with you, is the concept of organic. Basically, in Australia it's set that on the buyer when it comes to wool because of in terms of processing stuff there isn't any good organic processing there isn't really anyone that I got, like in terms of organic dyes and so forth. The best that we can get is there's a place in New Zealand that can do that but they don't have business location but they can do it to that certification standards. That's my understanding at least. So there is an Australian organic yarn company but for me it's sort of when I went into actually production with Ton of Wool I was like, what's important to me, what are the values that I'm going to have, what are the companies that I'm going to look up to and go okay here's a way that they've done it and that makes sense to me

so that's the way that I'm going to do it too. So there are a few people that I was looking at I guess in Australia and around the world and I mean the obvious ones was the Downie Family with the other things that they are doing in terms of I guess looking to understand is that they are not just farmers in the traditional sense of farming. They are very much entrepreneurs who happen to have a farm and be using that as a sort of a launching pad basically. In that Peter Downie has actually gotten the way at the moment of having one of Australia's largest private wind mill farms on his farm so they'll be generating enough energy to basically power whole that, if not, a larger part of Tasmania. So that's sort of thing is basically unheard of but it's an interesting way of looking at things. And I guess I wanted to do that as well. Am I just producing wool here or what am I really doing? That to me was the important thing that it was more than just about here's another yarn label, it was more looking at the actual history of here's a wool that nobody knows about but it's also about genetic diversity which I thought was really important to me and also processing as locally as possible even in the end I have no idea when I first started to project that I'd be going to New Zealand but that's way the things have turned out. But when I was looking at that organic certification and whether or not I should go down that path I was just like well if you look at someone like Joel Salatin for example who was a quite a well-known farmer in the US and he has come over to Australia several times and he's a farmer who the Downie's understand and relate to as well and they carry a lot of the same principles with their farming principles. It was the case of why bother. Do we really need to go down that path? As long as we're honest and transparent about what we do those things that matter. And I also had look at a general interest in health and so forth as well and other company that sort of stand out to me was Vega who do vegan food and supplements and so forth who is based on Canada, I think. They had a really interesting way of looking at things as well. They're not organic certified but if they can do it sort of like as local and sourcing direct from the farmers as possible that was given to them and that was the case of me as well. If I could sort of source direct from the farmer and know exactly what's going on, I'm happy.

Ashley: I think the most important part is transparency. One of the reasons we came up with those three criteria is there's a lot of companies or small farms or small mills I guess that have fiber that we can get that 100% transparency with them because it's produced here or it's their own sheep or they know exactly where they are getting their fiber from. But there are certain domestic brands that maybe they do get their fiber from other countries and so that's not their fiber. You know it's not personally them they are not there. They are not witnessing everything and so some of these companies the way that they know that their fiber is humanely processed and using little if no chemicals at all is through that organic certification. And so for me I feel the same way as you. It's just like when you go to the farmer's market. One of the things that I always ask is if they don't have a sign that says that their produce is organic you know I just ask them and they are like we follow the guidelines, it's pretty much organic, we just didn't pay for the certification. Awesome. I'll buy your produce. That's great. The whole organic thing I love it. I try to eat as much organic as possible and purchase organic clothing and whatnot but at the same time it's just do your research and pay attention to how it is made and try and get on and get that transparency. You just mentioned why bother, I think that that could resonate with a lot of people.

Kylie: Yeah there's certainly a lot of issues there that need to be looked at. I mean just recently I came up with someone that they said to me, look I'm not getting the usual colors that I did when I'm dyeing with Cormo what's up with that, it must be something to do with the breed. And I was just like what else are you dyeing with. And they mentioned a company that they actually source from the UK and I was just like well yeah you're using Chinese processed yarn, what do you expect. Because that was the thing. It's like trying to compare apples and oranges of when you, this is the thing with Chinese processed yarn you don't really know some of the chemicals and so forth that have been used on that and the process is that the wool has been to that sort of strip the wool of what wool is basically. And this is the thing so many Indie dyes in particular use superwash merino. I mean that was the yarn that I started out with. As when we say it's a sad thing because the stuff when you're actually go to dye with it is awesome because they will give you this incredible insane intense colors and so forth. So I guess does that mean in the future that this is what we have to look forward to of we simply have to change like our own palettes and that's the same way that would sort of done with food of we're understanding that perhaps sugar isn't the best thing to be eating at every meal and perhaps we need to have to look at how can we cut back and what else we can eat and have a look at the way that our taste buds might need to change or will change if we simply ditch sugar from our diet. And is it going to be a similar thing with our tastes in fashion and color when we actually have a look at what we're using and more we're wearing and what the impacts of that are.

Ashley: I feel like as a society we try to take things and we try to mold them to fit them into this box that we feel like it should be whether it's food. We process things. Everything in our life nowadays is either a process or is processed. We need to learn to embrace the natural state of things. I recently did a bunch of natural dyeing with my friend Annie and it was my first real experience diving into all the different things that you do to make these incredible colors and the colors are very vibrant but they neutral. They are definitely not like a neon color or these crazy rainbow that are gorgeous they are from nature. We literally walked around her property, grabbed different plants that she was really familiar with and the colors were incredible and people will just learn to embrace it because if they just saw that color in a store they may not be attracted to it but it's the story behind it. That was a native plant that was five feet out someone's door and someone used it to dye this wool that came from 50 miles away and this is all so sustainably created but also it's beautiful. The story is what makes it beautiful, not only just how it looks or it feels. I'm like sitting here shaking my head. When I first really got into knitting, I gravitated towards some of those companies that touted superwash merino and having a kid, okay that's what I should do and I didn't know. So half my stash is full of this stuff and while I love it I think moderation which is what something you just touched on but maybe you could talk a little bit more about why is it so harmful not only to just the fiber but to the environment.

Kylie: Wool when it goes to the superwash process it's basically similar to hair goes through the perming process. That's what you basically doing as you're doing kind of similar to if you're applying—first of all you strip back but then you need to apply chemical and keep it that way. So what happens in the superwash process of what you're doing is wool naturally has scales which enables it to felt. And what you're doing in the superwash process in removing those scales and then giving it a special treatment like a smoothing treatment to keep it that way. Speaking with another lady recently the

way that she sort of put to me was that what they basically do is they coat it in plastic. So it does have a special polymer coating to it which means that it's a lot different as well. It means that when you actually go to dye with it, it's a lot more absorbent and it can take color a lot better. But when you actually go to wash with it as well you should actually try and felt with superwash merino, nothing happens. If anything it might sort of stretch out a little bit but that's about it. It basically does completely change the actual structure of wool itself and if you compare the two if you put them side by side, they feel different, they react different but the wonderful properties that wool is meant to have such as the things of it's meant to be compostable and biodegradable and all that kind of stuff if you try doing that with superwash in comparison to normal untreated wool, I'm willing to bet even though I haven't done the experiment myself you're going to get two very different results. But basically to deal with it is the chemicals used in the process are not kind to the environment. I do know basically, super wash treatment itself does not occur in Australia. As far as I know it's being banned because the chemicals and their effect in the water ways here. We have quite strong laws in terms of what is and isn't allowed in water ways and that is one of the reasons why it did go overseas and that's one of the reasons why China is one of the major areas is because of that superwash process and because of the chemicals used and they have much lax laws over there in terms of for example, water in China can be a different color and different according to what fashion houses dyeing their fabrics. So if the dye run off oozing to their water ways. That's not unusual in China so the actual of quality of water along with quality of air and so forth. They are all major issues absolutely.

Ashley: Do you feel like this is a very controversial topic amongst processors, dyers or what not?

Kylie: I think it could be more once someone actually comes along at lifts off the lid if we do get that sort of Eric Schlosser Fast Food Nation type story about what is actually going on, yeah I do. But right now, not so much. I think people are more sort of attracted to the qualities. I think it's just something that you just deep down in your bones you know. It makes sense that you go and buy direct from the farmer, rather than hit the supermarket and buy junk food, you don't have to have someone tell you that but because we have it just helps things along. I think it's a case of being you know intrinsically we know that these things are wrong but we're not really going to do much about it until someone actually comes along and says you know, these are the things that have happened if you continue to do this, this is what's going to happen and we can't continue. So if you're going to do that I'm not quite sure I can tell you that it's definitely not in the Australian government. It might be. I think it's a case of yes starting out small. I think it is a case of people like me and you Ashley of you know who are starting out these small companies and willing to do that things are different and here's how and here's why what we're doing a special.

Ashley: It makes me even more excited about what we're doing. If I could be even more excited than I already am. Last year I did a ton of research on organic cotton and for very similar reasons I decided that in 2014 I would pledge just to myself that I would not buy any clothing that wasn't organic or sustainably processed. Because particularly cotton is so hard to trace down the sources. I feel like with yarn, it's not easy but it's a little bit easier because a lot of these domestic fibers you can track down through local forms. So in 2014 I pledge to do this and it's like the hardest thing. I literally have bought maybe under 10 pieces of clothing in almost a year now and just using

what I have and whatnot basically recognition of what we're using what we're creating with, what we're purchasing and just being conscious of it. I've read some of your blog posts and just some of your journey you talk a lot about the Australian wool industry, one phrase in particular I think I read somewhere was just this one gentleman said that they wouldn't apply tax dollars or something to developing more domestic processing and I think your reply was we might have to do this without the Australian wool industry and I was just curious what your thoughts around that because I think that was a couple of years old article that I read. What's developed since in there, what's the current state?

Kylie: Nothing has changed. That was Stuart who is the CEO of Australian Wool Innovation and continues to be. Yeah definitely. That's the thing, it's not going to change. One of the reasons is—I think one of the really interesting things about the Australian wool industry is what we're seeing with AWI which is funded by the government and by a tax of sorts of farmers, people we're actually on the board. A lot of them are involved in this offshore industry so of course one of the benefits of local processing and the thing is if you want to start local processing where do you start, you start small. Who's interested in small processing in Australia, it's certainly not these large government organizations so it's just the case you just need to start small and do it yourself. So I think a really lovely example of this is a friend of mine Marcus Westbury saw that New Castle one of the big sort of towns in Australia was basically crumbling. You go down the main street and there's nothing there. There were no shops that were open. There was nothing new and he was just like, what can I do about this? And he sort of saw that it was this issue, not so much of hardware of all these shops being shut but it was more of a software as of this sort of intellectual property and getting people in doing interesting things which would then sort of rebirth that and that's been a massive success so Marcus is currently over Detroit of all places seeing how small ideas are working over there. I mean if it can work in New Castle and around Australia and in the US, it's an example that things that start small can work and I think it's a case of what the Australian industry really needs now is for that sort of small processing at least to sort of get started but I think it needs to be a lot more larger processing and I don't see why we can't sort of start relatively large some of these areas and kind of kick start behind it. For example, I do know in the US you do actually have a machine wash wool facility over there that is funded by the army because it's one of their requirements to their uniform so I think that's really interesting and that's something that I would love to see here. At least if you're going to do machine wash do it properly and do it in such a way that we can apply science and technology so that it's done in a way that can be environmentally sustainable. Get the worst things and make them better rather than shoving them under the carpet and saying that it's not happening.

Ashley: Obviously, you're super passionate about all of this. When you think about your role whether it be big or small in this movement, I guess I'll call it, what do you see as your next steps? Or what do you want to do?

Kylie: Well, I guess this is the thing I have no choice. It's basically a case for me, I feel like it's a choice of go big or go home because the thing is there is no processing in Australia in the moment so in the end I can go in New Zealand. The minimum is looking like at least one to two tons each time I want to process. And certainly with the Downie's it's a case of there is no lack of wool there. So I think it's just the case of I just need to seize the opportunity I just need to plan and to get a methodology in place I guess.

One of the main things that I am interested in is I've already started out with the pilot of doing a 20% gray and now basically it's a case of getting more of those colors happening naturally 20, 40, 80% blend. So that's the next step but it's also looking at dyeing, in terms of natural dyeing and scale I'd rather sort of go baby steps. One of the things that I would love to see happen, I mean in short term I'm more than happy to go look, I'm going to dye chemically at a manufacturing level that I can live with short-term, long-term it would be great to see something set up in Tasmania that actually sort of it's a wool store dye house in retail area and a workshop area as well. Something like that would be the ultimate dream but it's a matter of baby steps towards that. I think that that could be something that could be viable in Tasmania and it could be seen as being a tourist attraction type thing as well and Tasmania is one of the beautiful parts of the world. It's simply stunning down there. They have one of Australia's high unemployment rates. They certainly starting to do renew sort of thing down there. So they started with, one of their parts I think, they are a renew project down there so I certainly love to get stuff in and see particularly in a rural area even if it is, even if it were of wool or something like that it's just seeing what will happen. But I mean, while there is a certainly a lot of things against you, I think it's also a case of let's look at the positives here. There's certainly an interest in wool and rare breed and so forth. There's certainly an interest in natural dyeing and so forth. This happened a lot recently. There's an interest in providences and interest in locally made and so forth much that we can do with that.

Ashley: I couldn't say it enough. Just listening to your passion about this I think. It gets me so excited just to not only support you and your endeavors but also share this with everyone because I think a lot of people don't know what the first step is. Once they learn about everything that we've been talking about they are not sure what the next step is or maybe they can't have their own mill or they can't have their own flock. What part can they do and I think there are so many different levels and it's going to be the voice of a few that preaches to the many about what next steps we have to take as a community to make this have an impact. And one thing that you just said you know about the dyeing is, natural dyeing while incredible you're right on a commercial I don't know if there's a means right now to make that possible but there's a couple different companies just in the US here like O-wool and a couple of others that have GOTS certified dyeing processes. So they are more sustainable chemical dyes. They have a more eco-friendly process and less harsh residual chemicals on the yarn after dyeing and whatnot. So I think not going natural is obviously not the end of the world so.

Kylie: I guess to me it's not much about dyes, it's more about water. It's the big one. Something to understand is that when you are dyeing on a commercial level, I'm not sure of the correct term, I think it's the dye-water ratio. I think that's sort of the technical term. I could be wrong here. I think it's something along those lines but it's basically around 30 to 1. So that is 30 liters of water are required to dye one kilo of wool. But that's seen as being really good and today I'm just like you need 30 liters of water to dye a kilo, what? And I mean in Australia dye to water is more I know for one company it's probably 200 to 1 and I was just speechless when I found that one that's like I am never buying in this town again. So yeah. It's very wildly set. It's also even if you have an Indie dye which was using the most hideous yarn and the most horrible dyes and so forth but they are doing it in a couple of buckets and they are doing it in a

sort of thoughtful way, I mean yeah, there are so many things to layout as what that is going to set and I guess yeah.

Ashley: Yeah it's a really good point.

Kylie: I have seen in the US that they are doing, they have got things in place of recycling water and so forth when they are dyeing. So I think it's really good that it's coming to the fore front with mills. So I'm looking for something more of that happening worldwide when it comes to wool processing because these are the things that people aren't talking about. When it's wool and it's sustainability they often go to these sort of you know the problem is sheep and meat thing, it's not at all. It's processing and it's also what consumers do with wool when they actually get it. It's how you take care of it. It's how you wash it, it's how you dry it. And I guess that's the thing with machine wash, if you put it in a washing machine that's using energy and so forth whereas if you just hand wash it in a bucket and you just take it out roll it in a towel, leave it to dry rather than tuck it in a tumble dryer completely different piece of the life cycle of the garment. So these are the things that we need to keep in mind as consumers and as people in the wool industry.

Ashley: Your knowledge is far beyond mine but just--

Kylie: I know nothing. Seriously, it's amazing when you deal with the people in the industry. These crusty old guys in there who have grandchildren who were just lecturing me. These are the ways that things work, lady. Yeah, I know nothing. Really I know nothing. Yeah the excel spreadsheets that you go through when you get a ton of wool that give you all the difference sort of. Because it goes through testing when you buy a ton and I was just sitting and going I have no idea what this means so you have to get someone to talk you through the whole thing but yeah.

Ashley: When I think about everything that I want to and I need to learn as we're building our mill, it's easy to get overwhelmed but at the same time where do I start. There are so many specific areas and one of the areas that I really decided just to prioritize and start out is that whole water waste during just scouring. I had a really amazing conversation with a local woman here in California named Sally Fox and she grows naturally colored organic cotton and she also has Romney sheep. Anyway she--

Kylie: Is she a provider for A Verb for Keeping Warm? I know her from somewhere.

Ashley: Yes she is. Well, she is a huge part of the Fibershed here in California so her name pops up everywhere. I was sitting down and I was talking to her and you know I was like, what is your biggest painpoint as a producer that's trying to get your wool process and she goes the whole certification route for her wool and her cotton and the scouring and the processing, not only they can't use all these chemicals they have to get the vegetable matter out which is so hard to get out, not using harsh chemicals or harsh processes but also the amount of water that's getting used and here in California we're in a major drought right now. Anyway, that's a whole another crazy long topic but just listening to her about that, it's really starting to come together and what you're saying now it's just affirmation that this is a really important topic and one that I feel confident is a good place for me to start with my minimal knowledge as of now.

Kylie: Yeah, it's good to have that conversation but I think in an email to you my advice to you is start making yarn, do it. Fleece your sheep before you have a mill start making yarn.

Ashley: Okay. I'm going to buy a ton.

Kylie: I have a little bit sort of experience but yeah not enough. In the US and I am so jealous and you are so lucky because you don't need to buy a ton like I have to. As far as I'm aware you might be able to start out small as even as tiny as a fleece so it might be kind of tricky getting that to a spinning mill but I certainly do know that there are scourers and small operators over there that kind of thing. But it's more I think the actual thing of working with people and learning about the supply chain process and what to do when things go wrong and how to communicate with people and how to ensure that you get the product that you want at the end. Those things that gold that no one can really teach you, you just have to jump on the deep end. It's a tough one.

Ashley: Yeah, you have talked about this in your email. While I'm looking to have an excuse to buy a ton of wool. You're right there are--

Kylie: No, no no, don't go there.

Ashley: Yeah there's a couple of great mills near here that do fleece and a roving or there's another mill that do a fleece and spin it so little mini mills so.

Ashley: I'm pretty sure you and I we could probably spend some days talking not just hours. But thank you so much in just this short conversation I've learned enough to pick your brain about a bunch more.

Kylie: Look, it's my pleasure. Thank you so much for taking the time. I am really interested in seeing this podcast turns out and see who you talk to and what sort of information they are going to impart to you as well. And look if there's anything else I can do for you, by all means let me know.

Ashley: Our giveaway this week is sponsored by [Stash](#), a local yarn shop that specializes in natural fibers and is based in Corvallis, Oregon. One of the favorite yarns of our first guest Jess, is the Fiber Company's Canopy, so we're giving away two skeins. To enter this giveaway, visit the giveaway post on Instagram @woolful and tag a friend in the comments. You can also enter by leaving a comment on today's episode's blog post at [woolful.com](http://woolful.com)

Ashley: In December we will be starting the very first Woolful knit-along, a Little Woolens hat pattern designed by myself, using the amazing Ton of Wool Cormo yarn AND tomorrow I am thrilled to say the [Woolful Mercantile](#) will be opening shop. Here you'll be able to find Ton of Wool yarn in both fingering and aran weights, along with special pattern and yarn kits, including the knit-along hat pattern.

Ashley: I wanted to make sure and thank today's sponsor again, [Fringe Supply Co.](#) Don't forget to share [fringesupplyco.com](http://fringesupplyco.com) with your loved ones this holiday season. As a hard to buy for person myself, my family appreciate knowing they can't go wrong here.

Ashley: The biggest of thanks to everyone involved in this week's episode, Jess, Kylie, Karen, Sonja, Andi, Nikki and Sonja. I hope you'll join me each week as we talk and learn from more fascinating fiber folk. For podcast notes and transcription, visit [woolful.com](http://woolful.com). If you're interested in being a part of this podcast, shoot me an email at [hello@woolful.com](mailto:hello@woolful.com) Have a wonderful Thanksgiving. :)



