

Annie Kelly – A character sketch

The Western Maryland countryside is a pretty scape of rolling hills and farms. Annie Kelly has a big farm there with silos and lots of out-buildings. She lives in a house, sturdy but unimproved, that dates to about 1890. Driving up, you don't know what to expect. The [Valley Craft Network Studio Tours](#) weekend map showed a yarn store, Kiparoo Farm Studio, Bussard Road, Middletown, Maryland. Some in our party wanted to see it.

Annie's Kiparoo Farm sits in the valley between the Catoclin Mountains and South Mountain, west of Frederick. The big town is Middletown, population about 4,000. Pennsylvania Dutch people settled the valley in the 1700s and a lot of German names survive on the streets, headstones, and among the farmers.

We parked and had trouble opening the car doors in a gale blowing at exactly the wrong angle. Annie Kelly met us on the farmhouse porch, helping us wrestle her front door against the gale. In a second, she made us welcome, cracking jokes about the wind and saying "come on in!"

Annie has large, symmetrical curls in her chestnut-colored hair, worn in a throwback, 50s, even 40s style, medium length, practical, but still some care taken, time in curlers at home, or even at a salon. And as we got a sense of her, it grew more remarkable that she had time to curl her hair.

Annie runs the farm and a yarn business. If she has a partner, that person made themselves scarce during the craft weekend open houses. This was her nightmare. For all the evidence I could see, Annie runs cattle, raises sheep, gets them shorn, spins yarn, makes dyes and dyes the wool, knits, and sells yarn and patterns. Sidelines, as if she needed more, include making soap and ice cream.

"What time do you even get up in the morning?"

"Oh, I'm a 4:15 girl," she says. "Girl" somehow fits only because she uses it.

She points out, not 4:15 to milk the cows, they aren't ready that early.

Annie is at least 60 and about 5' 6". But I'll bet she's as strong as anyone with that frame. Small as she is, it's like Annie's made of steel and leather straps. You know she can milk dozens of cows and then get all the other work started, even before she mentions milking. Annie ricocheted around the three-room shop and studio, answering questions, specifying knitting needle gauges, and commenting on patterns.

And Annie is heart and head strong too. You wonder at her years of working her way along, a woman who was not going to do what women in her society are supposed to do. A woman who set out to do, and does, man's work in addition to women's.

That Annie is not all steel showed through. She picked up a skein of royal purple yarn and looked at it, and then held it to her chest and closed her eyes.

“Oh, did you see it? The speech? She wore this.”

She about teared up remembering. It was a few weeks after Hilary Clinton’s concession speech. Annie, living deep in Trump territory, was with Her, and not afraid to tell anyone that.

These days it seems like some kind of hell is going to hit us, superstorm or politics-inspired violence. Or economic meltdown. If those things happen, I’ll want the steel, the guts, the know-how: raise food, make what you need, hold off threats of every kind, and do it cheerful. If those things hit us, I’m with Annie.