

Changing my barn clothes for a clean set--a not so frequent occurrence during lambing time--entails more than just exchanging one pair of jeans and one shirt for freshly washed ones. Emptying pockets is an important part of the procedure. The contents vary from day to day and season to season, but today's assortment of items was pretty average.

From my right front pocket I removed my jackknife. This one is relatively new, replacing a red handled Swiss army knife my mother gave me many years ago. I had lost that knife twice, but both times, I had an idea of generally the area in which it might be located, but winter snow had covered it so thoroughly that I knew I had to wait for either a mid winter thaw or spring. In both cases, we were feeding baled hay to sheep when I lost the knife.

The first time, I was cutting the twine on bales and flaking them off to the sheep who were following the tractor and hay carrier. The knife fell into deep snow and sheep soon obscured whatever I might have discerned through the white blanket. I knew that there was virtually no hope of finding the knife until the snow disappeared.

That time, there was no thaw between the occasion of my loss and spring, but, eventually, the snow did melt, and I thought I knew exactly where I had dropped the knife. I walked the field and, indeed, did locate my treasure easily.

It was not in the best of shape, though. Rust had discolored the steel blades and other parts of the knife, as well. But, I shined it up the best I could, used plenty of WD-40 and some steel wool, and the knife became perfectly usable again. In time, the residue from the rust was worn away, and the knife was pretty much its old self again.

The second time I lost the knife I also knew the general area where it must lie, but I was not as certain of the exact place. But, when we had a thaw later that winter, I made a thorough search of the area and did find the knife. The third time the red handled knife disappeared, I was not as lucky. I am still not sure when or where I lost it, but after looking all over the house, the basement, and around the last places I remembered using it, I finally gave up. I bought a simple,

cheap, one-bladed jackknife that is easy to open. It does the job, but if I lose it, I won't be nearly as distressed as I was when the Swiss army knife disappeared.

Out of the same pocket I pulled three hypodermic needles in their plastic cases. Two of them were 1/2 inch long 20 gauge needles that we use in giving shots to little lambs. We had just given the lambs injections of a selenium compound at docking time, and I always carry extra needles in my pocket. It is not necessary to use sterile procedures for these shots, so a new needle is not needed for every lamb, but they become dull and need replacing every so often.

Four heavy shiny snaps were in my pocket. We use them for securing chains around cows' necks, for fastening the chains that hold a gate closed, and for other purposes. It is handy to have a few on hand.

I had one maple sap spile in my pocket, too. Syrup making is over for this spring, but I just had not gotten around to putting the spile back in the coffee can where these seasonal items reside during the rest of the year.

From my other front pocket I pulled several pieces of wool yarn of different colors. When I am working on a felt project, sewing or embellishing an item, I stick the ends of yarn that accumulate into my pocket instead of gathering them up and putting them into the cookstove or the wastepaper basket. I don't know why I do this, but I persist in the habit.

I had a big handkerchief in this pocket, too, a dark blue bandanna type perfect for controlling a drippy spring nose. And I had a piece of baler twine in the pocket, as well. There is always a need for that somewhere along the way.

Runo's pockets reveal even more variety. There are always bolts, screws, nails, and other small pieces of metal. There is usually some hay or straw chaff picked up while feeding or bedding livestock. Once in a while there are a few coins, usually pennies or nickels. He might have a kitchen match or two if he has been lighting the propane cooker to heat water for melting beeswax. Often, a sheep identification tag will find its way into his pocket. The chain saw screwdriver is likely to be there, too.

And sometimes, a grease fitting or other small item that did not get used. There is usually not a jackknife, though. He has bad luck in keeping a knife, so he usually borrows mine. I always make sure I get it back when the job is done.

The contents of a person's pockets probably tell a good deal about the individual. I suppose the the variety of items might correspond to what is found in some women's purses, but pockets have the advantage of being firmly attached to one's clothing. There is no chance I will leave my pocket somewhere by mistake.