

What people carry in their pockets may reveal something about them. I wonder if that is really true. In my own case, it may well be. As usual, I am wearing my everyday clothes, the ones that see service in the barn and on the farm day after day during the winter. I actually have two pairs of jeans that can alternate in this capacity, because occasionally, even with the low standards I have for cleanliness of work clothes, it becomes necessary.

So, a look in my pockets may be instructive, even for me, about what is relevant in daily life.

The contents of the right pocket vary from time to time. Right now, as I empty it of all that has resided there for the past several days, I find: a red bandanna handkerchief—used; two snaps that we need on cow tie chains; two Sharpie felt pens, black; three new hypodermic needles in their protective tubes (20 gauge X1/2 inch); and one penny.

Most of these items need no explanation to anyone familiar with life on a farm. And why I have two Sharpie pens, I don't know, but I do know that I never go anywhere without at least one. I use it every day in many situations. The needles have been there since we gave injections to the ewes, and I have never put them back in the box. The snaps are for repair and replacement when I am watering the tied cows. The penny? I suppose it was in some pocket when I did the washing, and I put it in my jeans pocket to get rid of it.

The left pocket of my work pants holds only two things—my little jack knife and my worry stone. The reason for the paucity of items in this pocket has a small history: I lost my long-treasured Swiss army knife that I carried for years, and I surmise that it disappeared when I took something else out of that pocket and it followed along and disappeared in the snow or dirt.

My cousin gave me the little one-bladed Buck knife in 1991. I know that because he had the stainless steel case engraved with my name and date when he gave it to me on my birthday that year. I do not want to lose that knife. Keeping only two items in the left pocket of my jeans makes it less likely that I will lose the knife while dragging something else from a stuffed pocket.

The other permanent resident of my left pocket is my worry stone. I know someone who calls such a pebble his “blessings stone,” but for me, it is definitely a worry stone, and it is needed, used, and appreciated, usually on a daily basis.

With the current anxieties we have about our national situation since the November election, my worry stone is in pretty constant use. But, even during the best of times, it is there to assuage my fears, apprehensions, and concerns. I know that some people look upon such “aids” as crutches for situations we should just deal with, but I don’t think that is the case at all. Everyone has worries, and each of us responds to them in some way. Some people chew their fingernails. Others smoke, Some indulge in unhealthful eating habits. There are folks who ease their anxieties by driving like maniacs. Addiction to drugs—including alcohol—is the means others use to drive away the demons temporarily. Somehow, I think reaching for my worry stone is a pretty benign response to anxiety.

I’ve had this particular worry stone for several years. I picked it up in the lane one day when I was on my way to the mailbox. I liked its shape and size, and I stuffed it in my pocket. It’s been in the left pocket of whatever work jeans I’ve been wearing ever since. It was always an attractive little stone, but years in my pocket with frequent polishing by my left hand have made it downright beautiful. In fact, if my worry stone had a hole drilled through it, I could put in on a chain and wear it for a necklace.

I won’t do that, though. It is handy in my pocket, and I can grab it easily when I need it. In times of stress, I will often look down and see the worry stone in my left hand, my fingers adding another burnishing to its almost perfect polish.

If I ever lose this worry stone, I will be disappointed, but I will pick up another likely prospect, and it won’t be long before it, like its predecessor, is smooth and beautiful—and very useful.