

I like paper. Office supply establishments are more interesting to me than clothing stores or shoe shops. I like reams of copy paper, packets of lined notebook paper, stationery, envelopes—both regular and long—manila envelopes, colored card stock, spiral notebooks, tiny notepads, and blank journals. I also like the accessories that make these paper products useful. A new #2 pencil, painted yellow with an unused eraser, is a little treasure. My refillable gel pen that was made of recycled water bottles is one of my prized possessions. I don't know what I'd do if I lost it. I also have a lovely fountain pen that I use for special occasions. It is a mottled green with gold and black accents. I fill it from a bottle of dark blue ink.

And, I also like clip boards. I have three, each with a specific purpose. One of these is seldom used, but very important at certain times. Runo acts as a wool handler for the cooperative to which we send our bags of fleece. Each farmer that brings his or her wool here to be picked up in late fall receives a form that has name, address, and number of bags of wool that the person has left with us. One copy of the form remains with us, and the other two copies go with the wool when the trucker picks up the bags. I have these forms securely fastened to a dedicated clip board.

Another clip board hangs in the hay barn/lambing shed during the spring. A stubby lead pencil, painted red and inscribed *Lake-Osceola State Bank* is attached to the clip board with a long cord. Several sheets of lined paper are held securely in the clip. The current year is noted at the top of the first page. This last April, that sheet was titled "2018."

Below the year marker, the list begins. The date is written, then the ewe's number followed by the sex and number of her lambs. On 04/07 for example, the ear tag numbers for eight ewes are noted, with a total of 16 new lambs for the day.

This clip board is old and well-used. And the lined paper, fresh every spring, is soon blotchy, stained with hands that have just carried a pair of wet new lambs to a pen, or with iodine used on navels. But, it has its place on the wall of the barn every spring, and before the next lambing season rolls around, the notes will be transferred to the record book, and new, clean sheets of notebook paper will be fastened to the clip board.

The third clip board is my favorite. This one holds mostly just unused lined notebook paper. Once in a while, I will fasten something behind the clean sheets as a note to myself, perhaps an idea for an essay or article or a phrase or quotation I wish to remember. Usually, though, the paper on this clip board is available for one of my favorite activities—writing letters to a friend.

I don't have many letter-writing friends. One woman told me years ago that if I'd get "on line" we could more easily keep in touch. But, it doesn't seem that e-mails—I am not involved in social media sites—are any more frequent than letters were. But, the few friends I have who find letters—the kind that come in the mailbox, usually hand written, though typed letters are not to be sneezed at—important and interesting make up for it.

There is something profound about writing or receiving a letter. In the first place, when I sit down with that unused paper, a pen or pencil, and my

faithful clip board, I have time to contemplate just what I want to write. I don't find the same process when I sit here at the computer. Writing by hand, I seldom have to cross out or erase what I have written. On the computer, sentences change, spelling can be corrected easily, and sometimes, it seems that the words flow from my fingers through the keys to the screen without ever passing through that part of the brain that involves contemplation.

And a letter, it seems to me, should be something to savor and mull over, not only when reading, but also when composing. When I write a sentence to a friend and find those words particularly apt or meaningful, I consciously have the hope that she, too, will find the thought behind my attempt somewhat significant.

Of course, much of the letter writing I do is "off the cuff" stuff about daily routines, activities on the farm, and perhaps the antics of the dogs and cats that share the cabin with us. But, I also talk with my friends—on paper—about books we are reading, politics, current events, philosophy, and ethics. E-mails do not satisfy this need. When sitting in a comfortable chair, clip board on my lap, pen in hand, perhaps a cup of tea on the table beside me, I find that these activities that go hand in hand with putting words on the paper produce a satisfaction in the process that is part of the joy of letter writing.

The love of paper is part of the reason that much of the writing I do that does not involve a personal letter also begins with lined paper and a pencil or pen. These essays that become a part of our farm website are exceptions. When I write a book review or article for publication, I prefer to sit with my clip board on my lap and write, erase, cross out, and eliminate whole paragraphs and thoughts. And then, when I revise that piece of writing, it is not uncommon for me to resurrect a crossed-out sentence and reinsert it in the writing. If I had deleted the same thought from an essay I composed on this Mac I am using now, it would have been gone, both from my copy and my thoughts.

One could go on and on about the benefits and pleasures of paper and our covering that pristine surface with little squiggles and scribbles that are instantly understandable to the person who picks up that paper and begins to read. More on this in another essay. To convey meaning with such a tactile activity is truly marvelous.