

I started a much overdue job today. It has been at least a year since I began telling myself that I had to clean out the filing cabinet and throw away a lot of paper that we no longer need or want. There are instruction manuals and warranties for things we haven't had for a long time. There are copies of letters I don't need to keep. There are pictures that are duplicates of some we have elsewhere, and there are lambing records from so many years ago that the lambs, if they still are with us, are grandmas and great-grandmas.

I did not intend to clean the entire filing cabinet in one day. For one thing, I was not planning on spending all day at this one task. And I did not. But I did complete half the task.

The oak filing cabinet has four drawers. I chose to do the bottom drawer first. Then, I skipped the next one—the file that contained all the manuals and booklets, because I needed to ask Runo which ones he wanted to keep for some of the tools we have or no longer have.

The bottom drawer is labeled “miscellaneous.” That seemed a good place to start. There were letters I did not want to throw away, articles I had written for various publications, and about fifteen years of daily journals. There was also a lot of junk to discard.

I found a large plastic tub with a cover that was not used for anything else. If I could resettle my journals, it would be a big step toward making room in the file drawer for things that we need to have on hand.

The biggest hurdle to cleaning any cupboard, desk, or cabinet that holds papers is the temptation of reading every last one of them. I tried mightily to resist that. I could have spent all day and not had even one drawer tidied. So, I mostly just organized what I knew we should keep and did not delve too much into their contents.

But, there was an exception. I found a letter from 1989 that was such a clear lesson for anyone who needs a better understanding of who we are—or, in any case, should be—in this country today.

In 1989, Runo became a citizen of the United States of America. Shortly after affirming his allegiance to this country, he received a letter from our long time Democratic United States Senator, Carl Levin. The letter read as follows:

“Congratulations on becoming a new American citizen. I share your pride in this achievement.

“The United States began as—and continues to be—a nation of immigrants and refugees. It is this heritage that has made America a richly varied nation proud of its divergent cultures. America is stronger in its sum because of the enrichment contributed by the diversity of its people. As you enjoy and actively participate in the benefits, rights, and obligations of our country, I know you will contribute the pride and traditions of your origins.”

What a contrast to the rhetoric we hear coming out of our nation's capital these days. What Carl Levin wrote then, and what most politicians of both parties and citizens of this country believed, is still what the best of us in this country espouse. In spite of Congressman King of Iowa, Rush Limbaugh, Donald Trump, and the people like them, we need to always keep in mind that our worth as a nation is based on great diversity and on the gifts that have

been brought here from all over the world. The ancestors of some of us came willingly, looking for land. Others came because of the disruption of their own countries due to war. Some came for freedom; others sought a place where they could rise from poverty. Fear brought some to America. And many of us are descendants of people who came against their will, forced to work as slaves for generations. How quickly too many people today have forgotten why they enjoy the freedom and prosperity they have now. We can't let ourselves be part of this demonization of immigrants. History tells us that in no uncertain terms.