

Commentary... Becoming a citizen

By Kathryn Godsiff
Correspondent

My husband, Allan, became an American citizen two weeks ago.

After living and working and paying taxes here for 19 years, he decided it was time to be able to have an opinion that could be backed with action.

My initial reaction, which I still feel, is pride that he wanted to take this big step. When we lived in his country, New Zealand, I did not pursue citizenship there, afraid that it would make me less American. I clung to my birth country as a lifeline of identity. And now that he is a U.S. citizen, I feel some small fear that he will become less Kiwi. Will he suddenly start quoting baseball stats instead of cricket scores? Will football replace rugby? It appears not, as his first words to me the day after the naturalization ceremony were about a rugby match.

Allan's citizenship day was the culmination of seven months of forms, trips to Portland for appointments at the offices of U.S. Immigration and Citizenship Services, study and yes, dollars. He needed to know the correct answers to one hundred questions about American history and government. On interview day, 10 of those questions were asked and six of them had to have correct answers.

I must have been listening in U.S. History and Civics

classes, because when he'd quiz me for fun, I knew most of the answers. He, however, knew ALL the answers.

I'd only ever seen photos of happy looking new citizens after their naturalization ceremonies and never knew exactly what went on in the courtroom. Available information was sketchy, only saying it was a solemn occasion and to dress befitting its dignity. That left things pretty wide open; there were suits, dresses, jeans and traditional garb on men and women of all shapes, sizes and ages. Each person's face wore a serious expression during the ceremony, but all left sporting a jubilant one.

The courtroom was filled to capacity with the new citizens, families and supporters. The 70 participants represented 36 different countries. They were called in one by one to present their green card and other forms and were seated in order. Allan's green card was a constant presence in his wallet for 19 years. Turning it in and swearing allegiance to the United States makes it possible for another legal immigrant, somewhere in the world, to come here to live, work and pay taxes.

Through the whole process, Allan felt welcomed by all the officials he encountered. From the smiles of the guards operating the security gates to the warm welcome and encouraging closing remarks made by the presiding judge at the

naturalization ceremony, it was clear that becoming a legal citizen, the way America has been doing it for nearly two centuries, is not the fraught journey he thought it might be.

Yes, there are responsibilities that come with citizenship. When the Oath of Allegiance is sworn, declaring that a new citizen will renounce all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty of which they had formerly been a subject or citizen, will bear arms on behalf of the United States, perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces and will perform work of national importance, if required by the law, they undertake a declaration that is wide ranging and unique. Voting, serving on jury duty, upholding the Constitution and carrying a U.S. passport are earned rights for these people and are precious indeed.

The ceremony closes with the Pledge of Allegiance and singing the "Star Spangled Banner." At last Saturday's Rotary Hoedown, the Prineville Band of Brothers presented colors and Audrey Tehan sang the national anthem. For us it was a



Allan Godsiff will always be a Kiwi – but now he's an American.

PHOTO BY KATHRYN GODSIFF

special moment: For the first time in public, Allan could stand before the flag and

proudly put his hand over his heart, just like every other American citizen.

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