

Dystopia Now!

by S. Wren

Introduction

Since 1901 and as at the time of writing, there have been 934 Nobel Prizes awarded. Of those, 109 have been won by Germans. This does not include German born laureates who lived as citizens of other nations at the time.

Germany gave the world the printing press, got us to the moon and gave us immortal music and culture. And they gave us Hitler.

How did this happen? How **could** this happen?

Aldous Huxley and George Orwell wrote classic dystopian novels. "Brave New World" & "1984" respectively. Huxley claimed that a totalitarian regime would use placebos, games and euphoric pleasure to dull the senses of the masses which would make them compliant. Orwell claimed it would be fear that would make the masses compliant. Both it seems, were right.

While I'm referencing literature, consider Isaac Asimov's titanic "Foundation" series. Hari Seldon, the hero, was a professor of 'Psychohistory.' Set in the distant future, he was able to predict the future based on mathematical algorithms that showed the cyclical nature of history. He was central to the Empire's desire to remain an empire. It was Hari's job to stave off decline and perpetuate prosperity. He knew what signs heralded both.

Without the thousands of millennia of hindsight that Hari could draw on, it should be our priority to exercise our situational awareness so that we can stave off decline and perpetuate prosperity. Isn't that the least we could do to perpetuate the legacy our Anzacs bequeathed to us? You know, the ones we vow annually that we'll never forget?

Ignore history or rewrite it. Or make it politically incorrect. Then distract the masses with games, devices, instant gratification, the worship of celebrity and suddenly they lose a sense of reality in favour of perception or worse; fantasy. People forsake consequences in favour of prioritising the moment. Or scare them enough and they'll forsake the freedoms they once took for granted in order to 'stay safe'.

Only the dumbest observer would fail to notice societal trends right now to acknowledge the accuracy of these notions. Whether the world fulfils Huxley and Orwell's terrible visions or not remains to be seen but the question boils down to, "Utopia or Dystopia?" As it turns out, it's our choice and it starts and finishes at a personal level.

Whilst the problems may be complex and the challenges terrifying, the formula is simple. It's as simple as this question; what standards are we willing to tolerate as acceptable and what effort are we willing to make to maintain and protect those standards?

Every time we make a compromise to a standard, we *retreat* to a new "line in the sand" that we claim we won't allow to be crossed. Every time we reduce the level of effort we make; we compromise results in the short term and potential in the long term. The trouble with compromise is that it equates to capitulation at worst or retreat and sacrifice at best. Either way, eventually, there is nowhere left to retreat to, or the opportunities to prevail; dry up.

The word itself is over rated. If your daughter's reputation becomes compromised, or your online privacy is compromised, or the security at Parliament House became compromised, is any of that good? No, it isn't. So, why then do we use the word within the context of solutions? Not when

there's a much better word or concept that we could use that achieves harmonious, mutual change; the word is "consensus".

When opposing parties discover a third alternative that does not require the losing of status, face, authority or material possession, it's mostly regarded as superior to either of the other proposed alternatives and unified action usually follows. It's the reason most thinking people advocate democracy, equality of opportunity, capitalism and the freedoms that civilised societies usually articulate at a constitutional level.

These notions contribute to change. For better or worse, history is cyclical and empires rise and fall. The duration of the reign of any empire relies on its ability to adhere to the formula that made it great - whatever "great" means within the context of "empire".

So, here's my 2 cents worth about how these notions have manifested from the perspective of my own suburban experience in the course of my own lifetime.

I'm not a Hari Seldon, a George Orwell, an Aldous Huxley, a professor of Psychohistory, history or anything for that matter - just a face in the crowd but it's an interested face. A concerned face and powered by a burning desire to stave off any further decline.

Part 1. Why listen to me? No reason.

Judgement clouds observation; of that I am certain.

As I've aged and come to appreciate the blessings I've had, I realise that I am no longer as judgemental as I once was; perhaps being content with my lot. That doesn't mean I'm not opinionated. We all should be; lest we fall into that horrid category; namely the 'silent majority'.

Being opinionated, it becomes absolutely critical that an open mind is maintained. Life experience should make everyone opinionated because we live through so many events and challenges. To live on the front line of life for 60 plus years and have no opinion, diminishes the quality of the life you've led and the quality of the legacy you leave. Silent majorities only revolt when they can no longer tolerate the stupidity of noisy minorities. I know what you're thinking; "hang on, revolutions are about minorities rising up!" Wrong: noisy minorities that create revolution are members of silent majorities who have the courage to act. Unless you believe that the majority of Germans and Japanese were evil. They were NOT. They simply lacked situational awareness and missed the signs that led their beautiful cultures being led toward oblivion by a few.

However, if you're closed minded or ego gets in the way, or you maintain that old 'once bitten' mentality, you end up with a mindset. Minds, like concrete, are hard to change when they 'set.' That's what cynicism is.

Wisdom is often more prevalent or at least more evident, in older folks because the choices the wise ones make are based on experiences they've had and they usually have a larger reservoir of them to draw upon.

If you gain knowledge on the journey (you will if you're open to it) it can give you unique perspectives.

Observation keeps you dispassionate. That makes it easier to provide balanced opinions and the solutions they should lead to. So, allow me to state from the outset that what follows is 100% observation and 0% judgement. Or as close to it as a passionate observer can get. I'll leave judgement to the reader.

It's reasonable I believe, to offer you a brief explanation as to why I wrote this and what it is that I want to achieve. In essence, I'm concerned about the country I love and the culture I am a product of.

Hitler burned books.

The idea was to diminish individual thought, initiative and to crush beliefs, ideologies and doctrine that did not align with the Nazi narrative and agenda. It was not the first time in history that this happened. Nor would it be the last.

The Spanish Inquisition – perhaps the first example of 'cancel culture', wrote the recipe on the subject. They commandeered the language, called detractors names (heretic) and cancelled them – literally. Excommunication at best and burning at the stake at worst. The Salem witch trials, Joe McCarthy's (HUAC) House for Un-American Activities and The Bolsheviks all follow the same methodology, though some are more extreme than others.

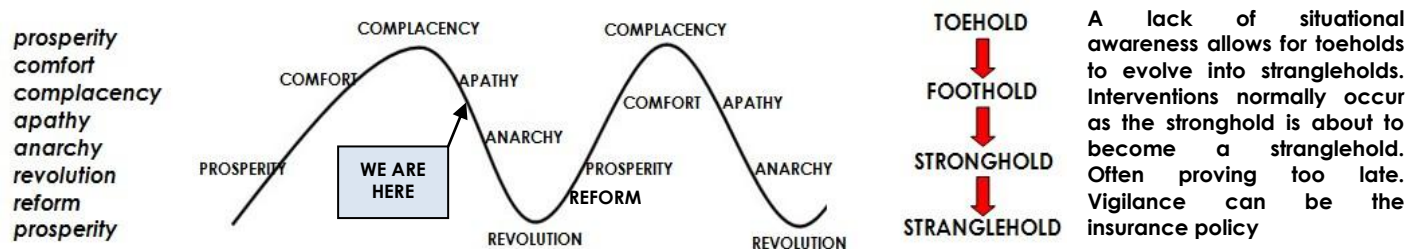
My pet subject over the years has been "change management". I preach endlessly to anyone who will listen; that the best way to handle change is to **cause it**. For this you need to understand **why** rather than simply **that**; things changed. This enables you to know **how** and when how is driven by why, you're fuelled by belief and experience. Nothing extraordinary happens when you're comfortable.

To be the instigator of change, you need to understand the nature of change. For better or for worse, change can be dramatic; as in a revolution. Change can be slow and insidious; which often leads to revolution. A societal "wake up call" perhaps.

The greatest leaders, both politically and in our communities, have been the best managers of change.

Hindsight is always 2020. Better than hindsight is foresight. However, both are useless without **insight**. Insight needs to be honest. It often isn't. Making sure it is honest requires constant personal vigilance and situational awareness. It has been said that eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. The antithesis of vigilance is complacency or maybe even apathy.

Historically this seems to be why empires crumble. Hari Seldon was right; history is cyclical like everything else in nature. What goes around does indeed seem to come around. It goes something like this;



Somewhere between apathy and anarchy is where empires crumble. Knowing where we are in relation to it is 'insight'.

It is my contention from what I've observed that we are at that place right now. Perhaps the recipe to retain society at manageable levels and acceptable standards is understanding **why** and **how** these changes occur. Such an understanding could provide balance and flatten the curve a bit. It seems that complacency is the gateway to decline. This thought may have been on the mind of whomever originally said that the 'price of freedom is eternal vigilance'. Freedom is important and requires responsibility (thus the vigilance) because it needs to be good for everyone. Most people have different definitions of its meaning and implications.

Consider a convict, an abused spouse and someone in a dead-end job, or more recently, someone in lockdown. Four variations of freedom's perspective right there. Liberation will **always** affect way more people than just the liberated.

Something else of which I am certain is that popular culture and the evolution of society generally; are conjoined twins. One seems to affect the other. Fashion, etiquette, cuisine, the law, lifestyles and life choices happen by virtue of the symbiotic relationship that exists between pop culture (what's in) and culture (what gave rise to what's in). The family dynamic, the social fabric, corporate and political agendas, theology, philosophy, the military and of course the media; affect and are affected by pop culture. Modern media is increasingly the conduit between an agenda and the consumer.

Of all the factors that cause social change, the media has evolved the most. Therefore, I think it's fair to assume that the media has snowballed social change. The 'catalyst' if you like.

If the printing press heralded The Renaissance, it's going to be interesting to observe what the internet will herald. The pen was always contended to be, 'mightier than the sword'. One can only wonder at the power of the mouse.

Certainly, the scope of social media has provided noisy minorities with a 'megaphone' which these days, may give them a greater advantage over the complacency of silent majorities. It creates the illusion that there are more of them than there really are and that they have more credibility than they really do.

Once upon a time, if you were the champion of a minority cause, you would have to have purchased the front page of a metropolitan newspaper or stand on a soapbox in a park in order to be an influencer. Nowadays though, all you need is a blog, a Facebook group and a YouTube channel and you seem to have instant credibility irrespective of your agenda, your ability or the number of people you represent.

Instant information at one's fingertips replaces what used to be required between one's ears.

Irony time; anyone under the age of 35 reading this essay, will probably need Wikipedia open and ready as I predict many of them, with respect, won't have heard of many of the people and events that I reference – **if** they have the attention span to make it to the last page. Just an observation – not a judgement.

There you have it friends. My motive for all this is to perhaps bring reason to the fore. A last-ditch effort on my part to intervene on a trend that concerns me. Perhaps because in cyber space, changes are happening at light speed. So, win or lose, this was good therapy for me. I hope it provokes you to think; in observation – not judgement please.

Part 2: Is laziness the real mother of invention?

The modern inclination towards short attention spans presents a challenge. For example; information contained in Encyclopaedia Britannica was perhaps more trustworthy than what is accessible today through Wikipedia - notice the lack of the "a" in the middle of Wikipedia.

The world now loves its short cuts. Abbreviations, acronyms and emojis save time, words and energy but perhaps at the cost of depth. Only with depth do we really see relevance. If necessity is the mother of invention, perhaps laziness is the mother of innovation.

When are we most likely to be lazy? When we're complacent. When are we most vulnerable? When we're comfortable.

The personal discipline once required to research a subject in Britannica, offered a deeper understanding than the superficiality of a modern Wikipedia entry. The information like the title, is abbreviated. Coupled with the current impatience that prefers instant uploads, the short attention span and the lack of context of today's education, only a superficial understanding is gained. It's actually the goal now - and an easily achieved one. Plus – I didn't even mention the "copy and paste".

A superficial understanding of anything will certainly tell you a lot of "**thats**" but seldom explains many "**whys**".

When people (societies) forget the cause of history, it reduces their potential to play a causal role in the future.

The onset of complacency allows for *toeholds*; those insidious micro changes that seem trivial at the time or go unnoticed altogether. A lack of awareness allows the toehold to become a *foothold*. Or a tendency; a trend. Apathy turns it into a *stronghold*. Or a trend into a habit. By the time it reaches anarchy, it is a *stranglehold*. Now the habit is a lifestyle.

Some of the factors that predominate when complacency becomes apathy include;

1. A lack of commitment or respect for the notion of commitment, or to conventional institutions.
2. Self-indulgence.
3. Greed.
4. Ignorance.
5. Disrespect for history.
6. Diluting or negating completely, the consequences for when rules are broken.
7. Disrespect for and the emasculation of, authority figures.

The lament, "where did I go wrong" is simply the wakeup call that came too late. Insidious change snuck under your radar until the result stares you in the face.

Part 3: Let the Games Begin.....

I was born in 1956. That makes me a baby boomer. My parents were part of what has been referred to since as "the greatest generation".

My parents grew up during the great depression. Their peers fought World War II on our behalf. Responsibility was king. A component of that was loyalty. Marriages, even unhappy ones, lasted because commitment was fundamental to the standards of the time. The institution of marriage was sacrosanct. You could actually get sued for reneging on the offering of, or acceptance to, a marriage proposal.

During the Second World War, Australia at its peak, had 1 million people in uniform. This was from a total population of just over 7 million. Wow, talk about commitment.

There's nothing like a war that claims 65 million lives to create job vacancies. So, when the war was over, prosperity for the winners was a side effect. Eventually for the losers too. There were new mass production techniques, new products and new consumers to buy them. Jobs were easy to obtain and commitment was now shown to the company rather than to the country. People would often stay employed by the one company for the duration of their careers to get that coveted gold watch. That's why there was a baby boom.

1956 was a great year. Not just because it was the year I was born, although that was great for me. It was a great year for Australia because the war had been over for 11 years and Melbourne got to host the Olympic Games. Some of our most iconic athletes shone and their names became legend.

National pride was at an all-time high. The second bunch of Anzacs had perpetuated the magnificent reputation that our veterans from World War I had created. Then they got some extra practice in Korea.

1956 was also the year television commenced in Australia. Media had grown a leg.

Yes indeed, I was a pioneer as part of the original TV generation. Now we had cities linked by coaxial cables and nations by satellite. What a tool (weapon) TV became. It forges attitude, breaks down and creates stereotypes, affects fashion, decor and the entire spectrum of the social landscape.

So here are some observations about changing times in my lifetime. I'll examine them in chunks of decades. I'll do it this way for two reasons. First and foremost, to expose ***insidious*** change. Notice that I typed 'insidious' in bold italics? That's so you'd notice it. Insidious change is change that you don't notice.

Each issue I refer to, in and of itself, would not raise a red flag individually but collectively, they create change for better or worse. Secondly, in the hope of understanding rather than judging, why things are the way they are today. That's our 'now.' That orients us, just as sat nav does prior to offering you options for the trip that lays ahead. Who knows, we might even have a say in our 'destination.' Wouldn't that be nice.

Part 4: 1956 - 1966

If you wanted to be a television personality you had to be talented or attractive and have a classical speaking voice. The voice bit applied to radio too. Growing up in Sydney, I recall Brian Henderson, Roger Climpson, David Lowe, John Laws, Bruce Gingell and Kevin Goldsby. In the U.S. actors from regional areas were required to undergo voice training to rid them of their local dialects. The result was referred to as "Hollywoodese". I often marvelled at the sudden onset of their American accents when they visited Australia and could be heard in interviews.

Just about every prime-time TV show that I watched up until the age of about 10, was made in America. I probably thought I was American.

Sitcoms were wholesome. Interestingly, the first married couple ever depicted in a double bed together was Fred and Wilma Flintstone - and at prime time!

Single-parent series like *My Three Sons*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Courtship of Eddies father*, *Family Affair*, *Rifleman*, *Fury* and a host of others depicted widowers. Even the kid Annie Oakley took care of was her nephew. Later when Mike and Carol Brady created the *Brady Bunch*, they did so from being widower and widow.

In family sitcoms, the families were functional. Mum and Dad were married and in charge. Mum wore an apron rather than a bolt through her nose. She sported jewellery instead of tattoos. They had diversity in their roles. Dad was usually the 'bread winner' and Mum was the housewife. If that seems sexist today, feminists can rejoice that on average, Dad died younger than Mum for his sins. Kids then didn't see Dad as superior to Mum - just different. The difference in their roles provided balance.

Even the creepy and kooky Addams family displayed open affection in front of the kids and Dad was called Sir. My earliest memory of a family sitcom was actually called "Father Knows Best". Imagine that today? Anyway, the title was more about respect and a strong role model rather than being superior.

Eve Arden played a school teacher in "Our Miss Brooks" where her homespun wisdom and pragmatism always led to a good moral to each story. A strong woman and a lady too. The era spawned the only true reality show ever made. *Candid Camera*. It was 'real' because the 'stars' didn't know they were being filmed. Adventure series were often based (admittedly loosely) on history or classic folklore. The American west and the Middle Ages accounted for most.

The news was read soberly and with little to no editorialisation. You never heard a cuss word. You seldom saw a dead body and there was no looped CCTV footage of coward punches. Current affairs programs probed politics, business and social issues rather than backyard disputes over barking dogs, rip-off merchants or filthy tenants.

At the cinema there was no doubting that John Wayne, Robert Mitchum and Kirk Douglas were tough guys. But they didn't have to use four letter words to prove it. Horror and violence were often implied. Scripts and characterisations allowed for art in lieu of CGI. The fringe benefit was that it also allowed audiences to think for themselves.

At school if you misbehaved there were consequences. Corporal punishment was prolific. All the kids I went to school with knew who the good caners were. They knew who the pushovers were too. It meant that the exhibited behaviour of the same group of kids throughout the day would vary from lesson to lesson depending upon fear of the consequences for breaking the rules. Our behaviour wasn't required to be medicalised because everyone knew the best medicine for bad behaviour was consequences. Attitude was and remains a choice.

We were taught history. We knew the price our parents' generation had paid for the privileges we enjoyed. In those days the brightest kids were in the "A" class. Then B.C.D.E and F was remedial. I

knew many kids in the lower classes including me at one point, who aspired to get promoted the following year into higher classes. Sounds like a good prep for life doesn't it?

In the school yard there was bullying. I got bullied and I had my turn as a bully. It's never much fun for the victims but it sorted out the pecking order. The hierarchies. Social creatures (humans are) have pecking orders, just as the natural world does. Or just like the world of business that it prepared us for does. Taking a licking once in a while toughened me up. And if that didn't condition us a bit, there were the 10-meter-tall steel monkey bars in the playground which in winter, coated in morning dew, could be lethal. If you fell, you landed on bitumen. To be awarded a ribbon at the sport's carnival, you actually had to win the race. Imagine that!

At that time in Sydney's west, nearly all my best mates were the children of post war migrants. Sometimes they ran the gauntlet of taunts and often taunted each other. Yes, my friends, racism is **not** an Anglo-Saxon invention. The whole human race is racist *which is why there are races in the first place*. They did however win respect due to their work ethic, their willingness to integrate and their smarts. Their parents (the non-English speaking ones) learned the language, often anglicised their family names and contributed to an actual melting pot. They had to. I guess they wanted to as well.

After school we all knew that if you misbehaved in the street, the local cop would kick your behind and when you got home, you might get a clip in the ear from your dad. My greatest fear was hearing these words from my mother, "wait 'til your father gets home!" Please note that that remark actually empowers BOTH parents. My parents were both loving and demonstrative.

At dinner time we ate together. I had to sit up straight with my elbows off the table and not speak with a full mouth or maybe not at all unless spoken to - especially if we had company. Bed time was strictly enforced and oh - you ever hear that urban myth about sleeping without having to lock the front door? That was no myth my friends. In summer, only a slender flyscreen door prevented the bogeyman from murdering us all in our sleep.

Neighbourhoods were close knit. I greeted my neighbours on my way to school with a "Hi Mrs Doran" or "Good Morning Mrs Eather."

All in all, summer were hot, winters were cold and we truly were told to just make sure we got home before the street lights came on. Hose water was fine for drinking and we rode our push bikes without helmets.

Part 5: 1966 - 1976

Society had shifted by now away a bit from the notion of 'responsible'. There had been some paranoia (the Cold War, Kennedy – both of them and King shot dead, Vietnam, Nixon, the Dismissal, etc) and there's nothing like a little paranoia to make younger people rebel and try a little *ir*responsibility when they see responsibility failing.

Voila! The hippy movement was born.

The precursor to hippies were the beatniks. They invented chilling out and being cool instead of square. Urban philosophy was captured in the poetry of Rod McKuen, the music of Dylan and the perspectives of Andy Warhol which challenged authority and convention.

Hippies appealed to a wider market than beatniks. Dropping out was the western peacetime version of Gandhi's passive resistance. It was cheap to do and the country (and the parents) could afford it. It created martyrs whilst marijuana numbed the senses to any notion of consequences, careers or failing economies. 'Moon Unit' suddenly sounded like a good name for a kid. Woodstock was turning out to be much more appealing than the stock market.

In the early 70's the Beatles' hair got longer, they discovered LSD and Ravi Shankar, Elvis got fat, we started having love ins, sit ins and laughed at Laugh In. Authority figures were called "The Man" or "The Establishment." Striking became the national pastime for workers in Australia, which often crippled cities and commerce. Gough Whitlam paved the way for multiculturalism at an unprecedented level and we saw a wave of refugees from Asia and Eastern Europe. Integration now relied more on society accommodating new Australians than on newcomers needing to integrate. The notion of multiculturalism was the sales pitch to convince the country that integration wasn't enriching us. Enrichment relied on diversity rather than unity so we were told.

SBS began transmission in 1975. No one was changing their names anymore and multi lingual neighbourhoods, schools and suburbs were becoming prolific. First generation migrants were starting to disproportionately populate prisons and mental hospitals.

Corporations used humans to balance the books in the form of unprecedented layoffs; often as the result of the damage caused by industrial disputes.

Jimmy Connors and Ilie Nastase were changing the personality of tennis - perhaps reflecting on the court, the 'in your face' behaviour proliferating in the street. A few years later, John McEnroe took that to the next level. Cassius Clay, the draft dodger, was now Mohammad Ali. The mouth from the south was now "The Greatest."

1975 saw the introduction of colour TV to Australia. It wasn't just the picture that was colourful. The language coloured up a little too. Australian soapies like No 96 and The Box weren't averse to nudity, sex (all kinds) and the liberalising of social stigmas. I recall my mother threatening to wash my mouth out with soap if she heard me say what Alf Sutcliffe (No. 96) said. The word was 'bloody.' At the movies we started hearing all the four-letter words and the violence was seldom subtle. 1973's The Exorcist was the first film I recall hearing the most vulgar (in my opinion) four letter word. Then "Death Wish" a year later made it standard lingo. There was more rage and cruelty in the violence than depicted previously. Think James Caan's role in The Godfather. There's nothing though like winning three Oscars to create benchmarks for box office success. It should not be surprising therefore that some of the most violent and profane movies of all time came out of the early to mid-70's. "A Clockwork Orange" and "The Devils" come to mind.

TV's functional families started to shift just slightly towards dysfunctional. Suddenly we were entertained by hippy parents with loose discipline, rebellious smart-aleck kids and fathers who were starting to look like they *didn't* know best. Some examples include All in the Family, Maud, Welcome Back Kotter and Please Sir. The kids were starting to rule the roost not only on TV but in the community too. And we liked them. There's no room for 'Leave it to Beaver' in this decade

that's for sure; not at prime time anyway. The Germans have a great word. It's 'schadenfreude.' It refers to the morbid sense of pleasure we experience at the misfortune of others. "New Faces" evolved into the humiliation of contestants at the hands of the likes of Bernard King. Phil Donohue and a legion of variety hosts on US television rated the highest when brawls broke out or conflict was exhibited. This probably culminated in Jerry Springer a few years later. Plenty of schadenfreude and the ratings were huge. These shows possibly were the genesis of the premise behind modern day reality television.

At school, the A and B labels were taken off graded classes in favour of colours or whatever, in an effort to maintain the self-esteem of the kids who weren't the smartest. Regimentation loosened up and corporal punishment came to an end. The nature of examinations was changed to a sliding scale with increasingly high components of assessment contributing to grades.

In the community, The NSW Attorney General, Frank Walker, repealed the Summary Offences Act which effectively decriminalised vagrancy, unseemly words, offensive behaviour and many other anti-social misdemeanours. Essentially, society compromised the standards it was willing to tolerate. That's nice. People reciprocated by behaving worse. Police were issued night sticks in lieu of the benign baton that used to be standard issue and now carried speed loading extra ammunition. The Tactical Response Group was formed. The police force was now the police 'service'. "Force" is just too, well, forceful. 'Service' is somehow softer. It should be noted that 'Force' has been reinstated recently. Language starts to soften with the beginning of political correctness - except in the movies where four letter words are now an art form. I always thought that was ironic.

Network news now included opinion pieces and panels of 'experts.' The first of the radio shock-jocks debuted as the public fascination for conflict escalates. Triple J commenced broadcasting in 1975. They actually did a lot for local music talent but over the years slanted towards pro drugs and irresponsibility.

At home Australia hit the No1 spot for divorce rate (per capita) and maintains high status in the leader group to this day. Dysfunctionality at home reflecting what was depicted on TV perhaps. Industrial disputes and strikes characterised the latter part of this period. Noisy minorities were never noisier and demonstrations which often resulted in an orgy of violence were commonplace. Moratoriums to end the war in Vietnam saw unprecedented violence in our capital cities. As did anti-Apartheid demonstrations, union demonstrations and University students picketing against exporting yellowcake to France. Hired agitators were commonplace at these events.

Part 6: 1976 - 1986

The baby boomers had given birth to the X & Y generations by now. They got married younger than previously, got divorced more often and having children wasn't confined to happening within the once revered institution of marriage. Us boomers had launched our careers from jobs that were easy to find and we were doing well. Many of us consider the 80's as the greatest decade ever. The music was great. The fashions were certainly better than the 70's (not hard) and there wasn't a major war to worry about fighting. At 64 years of age (at time of writing) I'm about as old as any human being in history has achieved without having to fight a war. Yes indeed, from experience, we were in our prime. Life was good and that's a great excuse to shut down the force field.

Remember my graph? I reckon this is about where we went from comfortable to complacent. Apathy was not far off. Let's consider these observations for their potential for being responsible for what happened next.

Economically, it was the 'greed is good' decade. We'd run out of money in the 70's and risked being a banana republic. Malcolm Fraser told us then that life wasn't meant to be easy and the interest rates of the mid 80's proved his words to be prophetic. Suddenly having money and demonstrably having money was cool. It created self-indulgence. Brokers went broke because they lived beyond their means and invested in companies that didn't exist or produced nothing. That's why plenty of them jumped out of windows during the crash of '87. The Wolf of Wall Street made hundreds of millions of dollars, along with a battalion of likeminded scammers as greed shut down victims' radar that would normally have recognised a fraud. Decadence does that. Think Nero fiddling while Rome burned or Marie Antoinette's metaphoric 'let them eat cake'. Both empires crumbled shortly thereafter.

On TV, Friends and Seinfeld made the urban coffee shop set attractive. When you observe the characters though, Friends were friends with benefits and plenty of them. The characters of Seinfeld were psychotic, soulless and amoral. Consider the series finale that chronicled their misdemeanours over the nine seasons of the show's run. And we laughed. Big time. There's nothing like laughter to legitimise anything. Want to remove a stigma? Make it funny. Or sympathetic. Want to hide the danger? Make it funny. Social taboos evolved. Humour, especially satire or sympathy was a decisive factor for Dame Edna, Bob Downe (Mark Trevorrow), and Julian Clary. Pioneers like Danny La Rue, Carlotta and Divine had paved the way. Authors Germaine Greer and Desmond Morris broke down even more stigmas.

The time was right and the stigma had loosened sufficiently for a gay mardi gras. It started in 1978 as not much more than a civil rights protest but as little as three year later, was an anticipated event on Sydney's social calendar. The gay and lesbian mardi gras perhaps more than any example I could cite, illustrates how essential a combination of factors are, in order to facilitate changing societal values. Can you imagine the repercussion in say, the early 50's had gay people decided to do what they did in '78?

Family sitcoms have by now reduced the father figure to a blithering idiot. Think Home Improvements, The Simpsons and Roseanne. And a little bit later; Married with Children. Often the kids take centre stage. Michael J Fox was the star of Family Ties – not his ex-hippy parents. Dad was another dufus and Michael was coincidentally an aspiring Gordon Gecko. Special mention time; Roseanne ticks all the boxes. Working class, overweight. Dysfunctional, coarse; and that's just Roseanne Barr! Looking ahead, they now have a gender nonspecific grandson who wears a unicorn sweater. Just an observation.

Do you remember the 3 eyed fish episode of the Simpsons? The scene is a pond. Bart is fishing. An EPA man has come to the pond to investigate the 3 eyed fish, suspecting the nuclear power plant was the cause. He approaches Bart and says, "Hello young man. What's your name"? Bart replies, "Bart Simpson. Who the hell are you"? The EPA man says, "In my day, we didn't talk to our

elders that way?" to which Bart replies, "Well, this is my day Sir and we do." At least he said, "Sir." In and of itself, this seems trivial - hardly worth a mention. That's why it's dangerous.

At school the kids were no longer required to commit facts to memory. Shakespeare is all but forgotten in public secondary school curricula by now. History is now superficial (like Wikipedia) and the kids study 'themes' rather than established facts. They're handed certificates for participation rather than achievement and are taught rights more than responsibilities. Their playgrounds are padded, they all wear hats because of that now forgotten hole in the ozone layer and they go on play dates. They aren't allowed to keep score at kiddies' soccer games in case losing destroys their self-esteem **but** they are allowed to divorce their parents.

Socially, the difference between male and female is diminishing. Thanks to Germaine and pop culture, the girls are now as sexually aggressive as the boys. They swear like wharfies (no disrespect to wharfies) they binge drink and having fun is called 'raging.' Oh, the rage! There's road rage, surf rage, shopping trolley rage, school pickup rage – you name it.

Back in the day, if someone cut you off accidentally on the road, it'd be like, "Hey mate, watch where the bloody hell you're going!" These days, the first exchange includes every four-letter word and ugly label in the book. Here's an observation and a theory; I reckon the reason there's so much violence in the streets is that when there are arguments, the first words said leave nowhere to escalate an argument to, short of violence. There's no buffer zone! And the violence is not Marquis of Queensbury rules anymore – perhaps reflecting what's seen at the movies - or in the MMA cage.

By this time, Australia has added further honours to the national trophy cabinet. Still up there for divorce, we now rank for teen suicide, alcoholism, gambling addiction and narcotics use. Maybe that's what happens when the most memorable thing about Bob Hawke was that he was in the Guinness' Book of World records for sculling a schooey. Lead by example I always say. Just an observation folks.

Due to the massive interest rates and the world economy of the late 80's, it was a near necessity that both parents worked. This means that during their formative years, kids were consigned to day care. I'm no sociologist but I consider, from what I've observed and lived, that there is no substitute for having mum at home after school. Sounds old fashioned, doesn't it? Well, I make no apology because old fashioned isn't necessarily old hat and guess what we return to every time a system breaks down?

PART 7: 1986 – PRESENT DAY

I've forsaken the blocks of decades observations for now because of the rise of the internet and the personal computer during this period. What took a decade to change was now happening in a year. The evolution of society went into hyper drive with the advent of cyber space. This pretty much changed everything and almost literally overnight. Added to that was cable TV and social media.

I think by now you might get my drift.

Let me wrap this up with some random points that should capture, or at least illustrate the environment I've observed that we've created for ourselves. It won't be difficult.

Let me stress – just to remind you, that I'm observing; not judging. If you think I'm judging, it just might be because I've illustrated something in the narrative that struck a nerve with you. That's what happens when insidious change is about to turn apathy into anarchy or a habit into a lifestyle. Someone or something outside the situation – not too close, intervenes. It's that light bulb aha moment! The intervention is a last-ditch effort to stave off the harm. The harm done by the opposite of vigilance.

There's another reason why you may see me as judgemental. You may read into my observations that I don't like or advocate what I've observed. If you do like or advocate the issue I'm referring to, that could put us at odds. It shouldn't because I could write an essay fifty times lengthier than this one about all I've seen that I love about humanity and society; including many of the changes I've listed. They however, don't present a danger to the future. The fabric of humanity requires a symbiotic approach in order to reach our collective potential. Nothing will diminish that quicker than **distrust**, **hypocrisy** or **inconsistency**. Sadly, I've observed all three in recent times.

Allow me to restate that what I feel is concern for the future because what happens will be due to the things we decide now. So, in no apparent order, here goes;

- We saw (and are seeing) an AIDS pandemic that to date, has killed more than 39 million people. The mortality rate remains higher than 50%. The Grim Reaper campaign was meant to scare people into acting responsibly. Can you imagine the fear that a blunt campaign like that would have today given the frenzy of the coronavirus pandemic? That campaign had an acute effect. The current media frenzy over covid 19, the constant barrage of press conferences and a focus on infection rather than mortality has caused chronic fear. History tells us that fearful people, chronically fearful people, will forsake their freedom in order to remain safe. 9/11 proved that.
- If social distancing and hygiene is such a big deal today, to the point where the most modest infringement is regarded as a crime against humanity, why isn't promiscuity discouraged considering the staggering number of lives AIDS has claimed and affected?
- Doug Mulray (the same Doug Mulray who hosted a TV show on channel 9 in 1992 entitled "Australia's Naughtiest Home Videos" which was so vile, Kerry Packer rang the studio and yanked it off the air mid telecast) once described political correctness as the modern fascism. He said that what it does is bog down debate about substantial issues by diverting the discussion to arguments over protocol. I agree. The network however, replayed the show in its entirety three years after Packer's death in 2008 despite PC being in full swing. The show depicted animals having sex, uncensored nudity, made fun of fat children and depicted a young girl grabbing hold of a kangaroo's genitals. Hypocrisy. And more taboos gone the way of the dodo.
- Reality TV flies in the face of political correctness to the point of being the ultimate in hypocrisy. PC advocates inclusionism and anti-bullying. It denounces the objectification of women or minorities, vilification, misogyny, racism, stereotyping, discrimination, taunting or

language that incites, belittles, humiliates, offends, isolates, is aggressive or alienates. And then they made Big Brother a world hit. And Love Island. And Married at first Sight. And Gogglebox, Famer wants a Wife, The Naked News, Naked First Date, Girls of the Playboy Mansion, Kendra, Snog Mary Avoid, The Bachelorette et al. I could type for a week. These shows champion everything PC claims it's against. Even more benign shows like The Block, MKR, The Voice etc promote aggression, conflict and exclusionism. They 'poke the monkey', film the tantrum and peddle it to a public that wouldn't have the foggiest idea about how parliament works. Worlds are colliding folks.

- In 2012, British nurse Jacintha Saldanha committed suicide after being pranked by Australian radio shock jocks Mel Greig and Mike Christian. John Laws, at one time the highest paid radio personality on Earth, never needed pranking for ratings. Neither did Gary O'Callaghan.
- Kids play inside more than outside. They get promoted or win medals in virtual battle fields that offer dangers no more real than the reward. Yet the dopamine release causes the same effect as it would in a real-world scenario. Therefore, they gain a false sense of achievement. And they want more.
- The institution of marriage has been extended to include same sex couples.
- There are now considered to be multiple genders. The number continues to grow as does the rights bestowed on them.
- That hole in the ozone layer has taken a back seat to climate change. Climate change itself has usurped the former 'global warming' label as perhaps easier to validate as climates do change and that happens whether we're here or not. They think that taxing us (and that's the 'solution' short of sending us back to the stone age) will fix it. Well, hello! Corona virus, if it's done anything for us at all, it has proven that with half the population self-isolating, the planet cleans itself. Dolphins in Venice and apparently you can see Shanghai from space for the first time since there was a satellite. Logically and happily, the answer is simple. The planet can't sustain 7 billion. 3 billion might work. With fuel technology and a shrinking job market, this sounds more like a plan than taxing a country whose total population doesn't equate to a dozen Asian cities. If somebody invented something that improved the air as quickly as self-isolation has, there'd be a Nobel Prize on offer. At time of writing, areas of NSW have experienced the coldest temperatures on record for this time of year. So, is that global cooling? Climate change perhaps. Who would've thought?
- People get depressed or angry or resentful when they compare their mundane life or achievements to others. Once, to do this you had to frequent places where other people go. Nowadays you can compare your life to others' 24/7 on Facebook. You can wake up to someone else's status. You'll see photos of the steak they're eating in the piazza or the spindrift flying off the jet ski.
- People begin and end relationships on social media and then suffer the scrutiny and abuse of others who witness it. People are happy to share it and to air their dirty laundry to the internet. Then they bleat about privacy. The irony is deafening. Only a distracted or self-absorbed public miss anything that is deafening.
- A common response when I share a snippet with young folks is, "I've never heard of that – that's before I was born." Given that history is by definition, about things that happened before we were born, I've observed this response to be unfortunate. Where news or current affairs are concerned, people seem to want to be entertained more than informed. Thus, the glibness of The Project, The Panel, Karl Stefanovic et al. There seems to be more agenda in news which gives rise to accusations of fake news. Is their agenda to inform or to conform us? This is the distrust I alluded to. Frivolous litigations and false flags

that engineer consent to declare wars, lock societies down and change laws seem commonplace. We've seen weapons of mass destruction. A lie. Children overboard. Dubious. 9/11, plenty of unanswered questions. One thing I've observed is that when people are scared, they'll sanction ANY action their governments take that keeps them safe or that offers the perception (illusion) of safety.

- Prime time TV nowadays filters out nothing. language is Carte Blanche. The kids are hearing it. The kids are saying it. I'm hearing and seeing families in public using foul language to each other. Even prime time commercials are littered with innuendo and suggestivity. Boating Camping Fishing ..." it's fishin' f'in fun." AAMI's "up ship creek" campaign just to name two. In and of themselves, it sounds nit-picky but it's insidious and it compromises standards when combined with everything else. Pretty soon, there'll be nothing left to compromise. A reminder; compromise means sacrifice.
- In an enlightened era that holds anyone who objectifies women to account and rightly so, we've seen the rise and rise of Madonna, Britney, Paris, Miley, the girls from Sex and the City and the Kardashians objectifying themselves quite nicely and all the way to the bank. They are, rightly or wrongly, role models. The fact that we've made them super rich proves it.
- Caitlyn Jenner wins Glamour Magazine's "Woman of the Year" award.
- Tiger Woods' falls from grace and innuendo continues to mount regarding Michael Jackson's alleged improprieties years after his death. Improprieties generally fill the newspapers and fuel litigation across industries and communities as leading figures from politics, the clergy, Royal families and the world of entertainment hit their respective hurdles over allegations of indecency. Powerful people have, since time immemorial tended towards corruption and deviation. It seems Jeffrey Epstein had a cartel of wealthy, famous degenerates surrounding him.
- Our legal system is not what it was nor what it should be. Our judiciary refuses to apply appropriate consequences to convicted offenders. Why aren't parole boards held accountable when a parolee reoffends? Do they not have a duty of care to keep us safe – since safety has become so trendy? Why does being high or drunk mitigate circumstances when it should increase culpability and the associated penalties? Why are psychotic criminals allowed to profit from book sales and doing centrefolds?
- Our police on the beat look like tactical soldiers. It's ironic that their authority has never been weaker. From what I've observed, their response has never been more hesitant. Perhaps by virtue of the hamstringing of procedures, or the fact that everyone's filming them. Or the fact that their actions will be more scrutinised than the offenders'. That hasn't changed.
- Another observation about police is that they are often heavily tattooed. Their facial hair is sometimes long and unkempt; as are their uniforms. They don't seem as disciplined as was required of my peers. The danger is that how you do anything becomes how you do everything; which is why the military and para military used to be so strict on personal presentation and kit. If the shoes are shiny and the bed is made to regulation, the gun will be clean. That's life and death,
- Police departments now include Asian crime squads and Middle Eastern crime squads and soon, African crime squads. Was this a fringe benefit that our social engineers who said multiculturalism was our future, foresaw? Is this an example of integration do you think? Is it evidence of a healthy society, a melting pot or is diversity becoming division? Grammar often holds the clue - the root word is divide.

- There is much ignorance in our society. It seems fashionable to be dumb. It concerns me that we think it's amusing to mispronounce the name of our own country. We were made to apologise for a history we had no part in. Nor did the parties who required the apology. Well I certainly wasn't there. What we do share is the future and the decisions we make now will decide it for us. Nor do I harbour any malicious intentions to anyone. I think a unified approach to the future is the best way to go. That requires equality. Equal opportunity to learn and earn BUT an equal obligation to put our country first, be decent and contribute. Last I looked, equality was a two-way street. It currently isn't. That's inconsistency. I believe and have witnessed, that the only (and best) criteria to judge anyone by, should be their behaviour.

IN SUMMARY

I'd like to see us (I mean every section of the community) pull back from the brink a bit. I'd like to see Hollywood abandon the SJW agenda and just tell some great stories without explosions and foul language. I'd like to see our TV audiences demand a bit more from the networks regarding the quality of what's served up under the banner of entertainment.

I'd like to see the notion of family built on a foundation of togetherness, respect, safety and hope. If Australia is an organism, families are the cells. I'd like to see relationships, marriages, friendships, and businesses built on mutual respect and transparency. I want to see silent majorities shouting down noisy minorities because it's our apathy that has detoured us away from the potential this country had. And we're allowing the noisy minorities to drive.

I want to see us expect more from our elected officials and public servants. I want to see anti-social behaviour punished appropriately and I want the judiciary to recognise the sanctity of our homes and belongings as well as our right to move within our communities without being molested.

Most of all I want our country to grow a backbone. Be smarter, wiser and less gullible. Do more, learn more, expect more and come together. There's more to courage than staying isolated because of a pandemic, the credentials of which seem increasingly dubious.

We're big on Anzac Day and what it represents. That means being brave. Yes, lives are important but without livelihoods, life can be miserable. In any battle there are casualties, acceptable losses and calculated risks. I want our politicians to recognise this post covid 19 because now we have a dangerous precedent and a phone app.

Our apathy has almost led to anarchy. The stepping stone is paranoia. That's when we turn on each other. Are you kidding me!? It started with fights over toilet paper! Now the media/political/pharma triumvirate are engineering public opinion to demonise the non-vaccinated.

But here is the danger folks. NRL star Nathan Cleary was vilified for dancing with girls during lockdown. Horror of horrors! But then people asked, "Yeah...and how old were those girls?"

Do you not see it? This is how inquisitions start. This is why 'witches' were burned in Salem. This is why innocent people were blacklisted by Joe McCarthy.

I'll go one better – this WAS how Hitler happened.

Never heard of the inquisition or Joe? That just might be the problem. Thanks for listening.

By the way, that last bit **was** judgemental.