

Excitement for the Future

(A salutary short story of hope)

‘Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.’

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)

in his 1900 essay *Three Methods of Reform*

‘After all this country has been through ... and a hundred years after President Roosevelt introduced the New Deal,’ US Senator Mike Robinson says, **‘I never thought that such a positive change would be so embraced by American families, now in 2035.** Well done!’

As is the custom in the US Congress, the whole sitting of the now **much-reduced** joint chambers rise in combined applause ... they understand how difficult the journey has been.

The Vice President of the United States, flanked by the Majority Leader of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, stands and says:

‘This is a momentous occasion. **An inspiring hope for a new way forward.** It is **a realignment of the social expectations** of what is expected of men and women in a world that is vastly changed from the times of the Founding Fathers.

‘No longer will success in life for men be about always winning, being tough or making more money than anyone else. It is now more about family, respecting equality in relationships, rearing children with compassion and helping the community ... which makes everyone stronger.

‘For women, you are equal partners with men in the workforce, for payment, in leadership, for raising and educating children ... and in all aspects of life.

‘While **capital** will still be a focus of wealth generation ... the return on investment will be through creating work opportunities for others, respect, cultural tolerance, appreciation for everyone benefiting, rather than the excess for individuals.

‘And progressively, through all the levels of court and civic administration, the laws of this land (in tune with the Constitution), will reflect the social priorities that we have endorsed here today.

‘And now, I request five minutes of silent reflection from us all as we acknowledge the pain in the years leading to this moment ... and so that we can clear our thinking for the exciting challenge ahead.’

Mike Robinson’s reflections are likely similar to many – a sharp memory of that decisive year when the world just seemed to end. He is re-living the feeling:

I cower beneath the grey sky, brooding with clouds. Silence – not even the sound of chirping birds or rustling leaves. Deafening pressure of unaccustomed quietness – and then ... my ears pop.

I wait. No-one around.

A tree has fallen over my bomb trench. Perhaps that is my saviour. Breath gasps out of my mouth. No pain. I feel my arms ... legs ... body ... head. I’m lucky.

Would the chaotic thunder of warfare assault us again?

It had been a horrendous time, everywhere in the world. The intoxication of greed had taken over from reasoned sense, with the thirst for needing more ... more money, more power, more land, more luxury, more downtrodden to serve the crazy ideas of deranged and violent minds. The ‘entitled’ had unleashed their madness, certain that they were right ... that it was their destiny to quash any resistance ...

Of course, it had to come to this. But how could the world have allowed it to happen?

*The creeping virus of aggressive corruption had been washing over countries and continents for years. We had monitored it, recognised it but succumbed. Later, the omnipresent missile and drone explosions appeared, graphically and daily, on the ‘news’ media **until they hit here**. Then, even all that info technology collapsed ... and the armaments held sway.*

And now ... there is this dystopian silence.

‘Can anybody hear me?’

I hear a voice – a male voice ... from over where my street once was.

‘I’m here.’ Another – female.

I listen. Where are they? More voices. I can hear them. Where did they shelter? I crawl towards the sound ... over wet muddy ground ... over smashed trees and loose rocks ... and bits of broken buildings. Nothing is familiar, nothing recognisable as home.

‘I’m here too,’ I call. ‘I’m coming.’

That was months, ago. We have now mustered a group, re-learning how to survive. We started as searchers ... scavengers really ... looking for water, food and shelter ... and I'm part of a little community now. I was a senator once. Some offered to look for others ... where people used to be ... and so we have bumped into a few.

We have scrounged for what used to be ... some tools, clean running water, some sanitation, some waste disposal, some fuel. We dug grave pits for the many dead, waste pits for rubbish. Tradespeople shared skills with hand tools – building shelter and amenities. No money changed hands. There were no banks. Medical people nursed as they could. Everyone just helped as much as they were able.

The senator's thoughts snap back to the present. He looks at his neighbour, Representative Jane Rodriguez – five minutes have passed. Heads are lifting in the chamber and quietly nodding acknowledgement.

Did everyone have similar stories?

Are all feeling chagrin – the understanding of how far the spell of greed and false narratives had brainwashed them ... the majority at least ... into accepting blatant corruption and lies as just ... *life as normal*?

Now, with the collapse of most moral integrity and those devastating recent wars, so much of the world's population has actually been destroyed.

*Civic organisation and supportive natural ecosystems struggle to recapture what had been. Even formerly monetary-rich people have, at last, had to confront **actual survival** ... in the silence of this aftermath.*

The old ways had to change. The scientific, agricultural and technological advances of past years ... indeed decades and centuries before ... have been so deteriorated that a new way forward had to be developed.

One that, by mutual survival agreement, must prioritise survival, family, sharing, respect for individuals and recovery ... without any reprisal judgements of the past.

The working consensus of survivors across the planet has been to place prime value on a sense of contribution to others, collectively.

The priorities are sharing and helping – without conditions or the need for financial gain – because delusions of money or winning or controlling or serving mindless ideologies can no longer be the organising structures for the planet.

Jane Rodriguez gives a pondering smile to Mike Robinson.

‘How long do you think this new order will last, Mike?’

‘It **has** to last, Jane. We can’t allow the lessons of these past years to repeat.’

She smiles tolerantly again. ‘I seem to have heard that before. I remember, after the second of our now three World Wars, similar bold comments were made at war crimes trials and United Nations forums. But here we are again. **Isn’t it just human nature to be self-interested and competitive?**’

‘Vigilance is the key. We won’t allow the world to sleepwalk complacently into this disaster again.’

‘Really? Didn’t Justice Jackson say that – at Nuremberg in 1945 – about the *wrongs we seek to condemn ... that civilisation cannot tolerate their being ignored because it cannot bear their being repeated*. But isn’t that just what has happened over the decades since?’

Mike Robinson takes a deep breath. ‘But we didn’t get rid of the old ways of thinking, back then.

‘The narratives about right and wrong had no nuance ... because it was all about victors, warriors. Justifying everything as destiny ... and moving on without challenging the rational basis for fundamental beliefs and practices.

‘We now have a chance to educate young and old into a sustainable lifestyle ... living in harmony with the ecosystems of the planet.

‘It’s about the balance of nature ... and that doesn’t sit well with the old habits and customs of conquest and self-interest.’

‘Good luck with all that, Mike.’ Jane’s cynicism is not veiled. ‘We live in the real world.’

He sighs – intensity in his gaze.

‘Give it a chance, Jane. **Hope with a plan** is not the same strategy as in the past.

‘Competitive instincts can be distracted by sporting challenges. Song and dance can certainly uplift tired spirits. You can see that happen. People are too bruised to lapse back.’

Her unconvinced smile encourages more from the senator.

He leans forward.

‘Learning is based on the need to reason, to think,’ he says, ‘and to justify in terms of the community’s needs. To argue with respect – so that worth and belonging become the valued rewards for gaining new skills and helping others ... without personal gain, other than the satisfaction of thanks.’

‘Mmm. And everyone across the planet is going to follow that dream, Mike? Is that what you are telling me?’

‘It is a new world order – without a fancy ideological name.’

‘But what about the past damage? The world is wrecked – badly damaged, at the very least.’

‘Jane, that recent World Convention of Survivors has agreed that the history of our past is to be explained by testable truth – not by concocted narratives. Rather, people will develop an honest understanding of how and why this dystopian journey happened.’

‘And you think this can happen, Mike?’ She shakes her head.

‘Jane, the emphasis now is on clarity, on educating for probity in public and private life. It’s the sense of feeling worthwhile – being valued by the community.

‘Our now pared-back United States Congress is but one example of many changes happening around all the world’s countries. The co-operative tasks of cleaning up, preserving ecosystems and operating sustainably in a culture of **being content with sufficiency**. That’s the acknowledged priority of all nations.’

His expression pleads for understanding.

Her’s is more disingenuous as she gives a distracting smile.

‘Mike, it sounds awfully like the old *mansplaining* to me. If vigilance is the key ... then I wish us all well with that. But we’ll need very good checks and balances to make sure that it’s not just another arrogant *belief* system being pushed through ... to convince others.’

‘Have faith, Jane.’

‘I have no faith, Mike. Too many dead, too much mindless destruction for any of that. But your **Hope with a Plan** might be an improvement on the

blind acceptance of the past ... if we can demonstrate integrity, commitment and logic in our planning.

‘And, Mike, the notion of sustainability has **serious questions for our current understanding of morality**, doesn’t it? Infinite growth on a finite planet was always just **the fantasy to justify self-interested behaviour**. Even in nature, there are checks and balances. You can’t always have what you’d like. **Winning can’t be the main goal.**’

Mike Robinson sighs. ‘Okay, Jane, I take your points. But, differences **can** be handled by dialogue within and between communities – without violence, death and conquest.’

‘That’s not quite how it happens in nature, Mike. It’s a balance.’

They look at each other, quietly ... wanting to find answers that are not more of *same old, same old*.

‘Jane, **sustainable population balance is now an agreed world priority – managed by necessity**. That is the process of nature – and we have the means. The past unchallengeable righteousness of belief systems is now recognised as having been a major contributor to the world collapse. Now, we can all shine a light. We have **a unity of purpose ... going forward**. That is hope with a guiding plan and a process ... and an understanding of the consequences of unfettered recklessness.’

The silence of thoughtful contemplation cloaks them both again.

‘Then I wish us well.’ Jane says, eventually. ‘**Vigilance. Truth. Critical thinking in social education. Checks and balances**. It’s possible ... but not easy!’

‘But,’ with energy surging through his veins, Mike says, ‘**the challenge is exciting**, Jane. Is it not? Involvement in that **process of planning** to make our future brighter.’

‘Plans are worthless but ... planning is everything!’

President Dwight D Eisenhower

Speech to the Defence Conference, Washington DC

14 November 1957