

**MICROCOSM TO MACROCOSM
DURING MY LIFETIME**

Life Experiences

Janet W. Meuwissen

Much has changed in the United States since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki Japan in August 1945, shortly before the birth of this baby girl on October 4, 1945. The beginning of the nuclear era led to a leadership role for the US in world conflicts and in the growth of non-fossil energy uses.

For much of my life, I was unaware of major events occurring within our country and/or around the world—unless those events directly affected me or my family and friends. I knew they were happening, but I saw no reason to become emotionally involved. I was busy within my own microcosm—becoming educated, marrying, building a nest, working to maintain the nest, birthing, mothering, and doing it all over again when my first husband died.

The Cold War and McCarthyism fanned the flames of anti-communism with McCarthy's sensational and unproven allegations of subversion during the nationally televised 1954 hearings—a mass communication first.

I was in college and then starting my teaching career during the 1960's widespread social and political upheaval. The assassinations of President John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr, and Robert Kennedy seemed so senseless. So much relating to segregation, withholding voting rights, and desegregation sparked the civil rights movement. Then there was Kent State and opposition to the Vietnam War. The emergence of youth-oriented counterculture was in evidence at

Woodstock NY. The establishment and reactionary elements pushed back against change. These events and others revealed the tragic, violent consequences that could result from a country's political polarization--all could be brought into our homes over television and radio. AND the birth control pill was approved in 1960—something that affected me personally.

The 1970's with the Watergate Scandal, President Nixon's role in it, and his impeachment leading to his resignation—the only president to do so—seemed to be the icing on the US's governmental cake. The loss of faith in government officials, that resulted from the scandal, filled both popular and political culture with paranoia and disillusionment. California's Proposition 13 decreased the amount and quality of public services. This change represented a new unwillingness to view government as a provider of benefits for all. It embraced more individualized ways of securing services. Each of us was responsible for our own wellbeing—whether or not we had the ability to do so. The concept spread throughout the country.

Then President Reagan came along, with his “trickle down” economics in the '80's. Although he was a has-been Hollywood star, he had a rhetorical ability to convince the citizenry that the country would be so much better with things like lower taxes on the wealthy businesses. They would then create more jobs with their extra money. It didn't work—the rich got richer, and the poor got poorer.

Then, thanks to a computer algorithm, the stock market crashed on October 17, 1987—four months into my second marriage, with now four children to consider in our recovery planning. Fortunately, we were both government employees and had a terrific financial planner, so we survived the crash with minimal long-term effects. As the internet and all forms of media became more readily accessible to me, I was more aware - deluged even - of events in my country and the world.

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 changed my world as we educators implemented its statutes related to education and accessibility. Although President Bill Clinton had some great democratic ideas like universal health care, he was confronted by Republican conservatism which took over the legislative branch of our government in 1994. Their partisan tactics, which had once been impermissible, made it much more difficult for liberal ideas to succeed in the US. This method of governance continues until today.

21st Century America and the world, too, are beset with many downs and ups. The September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in NYC and the Pentagon in DC introduced a new sense of vulnerability that Americans had previously never experienced. Yet the 2000s were full of many changes—first female leadership of countries; first black President in the US; iPods, Google, and Wikipedia launched; Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and other social media opened on the internet; the iPhone introduced. Worldwide recession in 2008 signaled a slowdown.

The 2010s brought more chaotic events--worldwide unrest, mass shootings in the US, police shooting Blacks leading to riots, earthquakes, floods, wildfires, deadly weather events, Ebola epidemic, space exploration, social media-Instagram, Snapchat plus many more, gay marriage reaffirmed by Supreme Court, Donald Trump elected President. The COVID-19 Global Pandemic engulfs the world.

My awareness of my country and my world seems to have increased in the 2020s following the election of Donald Trump. His chaotic behavior and his incessant use of all kinds of media, particularly social media, has led me to question my own sanity as well as that of our country. The lack of governmental controls regarding what can be said and done over social media, I think, led to the January 6, 2021 Insurrection (as the media is calling it.) President Biden's inauguration, I hope, will bring order to our ever-changing macrocosm. The outcome of his presidency is yet to be seen.

Now, as a septuagenarian, my world-view has changed tremendously from my entrance onto this earth in 1945. I spent the first third of my life in the microcosm of the small upstate town of Naples, NY. During the next third, I continued my education, married, birthed two children, buried my husband. My own life was full of so many changes that the world's chaotic activities were of minimal interest to me. With marrying to my second husband, launching our four blended family kids, and retiring, my microcosmic life has exploded into the macrocosm that surrounds

me today. There has been no 'empty nest' or boredom. The Information Age is with me night and day. Yikes, as I type this story, I have a text, emails just arrived, my phone's ringing! My Ring doorbell tells me someone's at my door so I must turn off the TV before I answer it! Welcome to my macrocosm.