

Introductory Note: Some of you may think that perhaps you've read this some time in the past. If so, chances are you probably have...at least parts of it. It continues to work in many situations here in the U.S. I just add or subtract a few new words like Iraq and Afghanistan and "meltdown" as the same themes go on. There is one difference now. I do believe we have a chance to change things, but we must be willing to make some real changes.

Choose Your Own Topic

Family values, Iraq, Afghanistan, Globalization of the Economy, Immigration, and America's place in the "New World Order" and now the "Meltdown" that is taking place in our economy are just a few. I'm sure you can think of many others.

While the U.S. of A was basking in the 50's, 60's, 70's, and perhaps even the 80's, many other peoples were working very hard, for much less, to improve their lives. They still are.

I guess I need to say it. I believe many Americans have lost the willingness to spend time hustling for a dream in the future. They want it now. Why is it that many people from many parts of the world still come here penniless and own their own homes within a relatively short period of time?

I've lived among extremes at the other end of the spectrum. With aboriginals in Asia of the 60s, I noted people who expected very little from any government. They were fairly happy people with little crime, enough food, and a lot of honesty. Admittedly that is an extreme. It is not in any way what the typical American can imagine as his or her future. We generally expect to be on top of the heap.

Living with the overseas Chinese was a bit different. I've seen their expectations of government. Most do not count on government to help them. They work, they hustle, and they go after education with a vengeance.

As a young American living outside the "fishbowl" in those days, those experiences helped me look at my own goals and what would constitute "quality of life" for me when I returned to the U.S.

When I finally found myself in a family situation, it was from some of those experiences in "third world" perspective which helped us build our own living structures as we went. No mortgages and little debt...using our

own trees and stone and doing our own labor. Our kids grew up involved in that process. Whether they do it themselves some time in the future, they do know it is quite possible and, in fact, practical in many cases. Do you seriously think most Americans today believe that they can do it themselves? Do you think most of them would even consider it even if they would otherwise be saddled with debt?

There was a time when I began and administered a program for delinquent youths. This program was treatment orientated and took, as it still does, delinquent kids with pretty serious offenses in their past. It was also work orientated. We built our own facility among other things. Most kids who came to the program (and it didn't matter whether they came from the middle class or the ghettos) were surprised when confronted with heavy physical work in rain, snow, and hot sun. Usually, within several weeks or so, with decent food and moral support, they began to feel very different about themselves...much more positive. The hard physical work helped. The work ethic began to stick. It was something many of them had not learned at home.

On my way home from Asia in the 60s, I spent some time in India. It was an amazing country to travel in. At the time, I was shocked by the wealth. Yes...the wealth. I had expected the death, the poor, etc. I did not expect the other.

I noted a society with many cultures, languages and much strife among the races, religions, and castes. I also noted a country that was heavily involved in nuclear science for the purpose of war as well as power and had ghettos that made ours look like suburban communities in comparison as well as religious extremism that was and is ...well...extreme.

Today, India is still, by and large, a country of extremes with the absence of a large middle class of people who share values. They are also very hard workers and believe in education. Interestingly, India is moving towards a larger middle class as the Global economy changes things there.

Also interesting, the U.S. is moving away from the large middle class with shared values and towards some of the extreme differences culturally and economically of India and much of the third world. Admittedly, we have quite a ways to go, but the change has begun. Have you looked at the want ads in average newspapers in America lately?

Perhaps we should look more closely at India. It is the largest democracy in the world. We are the next one down. Consider the poor and

the wealthy, the multi-language and multi-culture, as well as the political and religious extremism there...the polarization.

Have you ever thought about what it would take to bring back the ethic, or whatever you wish to call it, which enabled the U.S.A. to succeed so wildly in defining what people all over the world wanted (and I say that in past tense for many)?

At this point in time I do believe good leadership is necessary to simply begin the process of change in this society. It would only be a beginning. Without this leadership we will continue to regress towards something else. Think about what has happened in this country in the past nine or ten years of war, in the many more years of environmental degradation, and in the series of economic disasters basically already visited upon us, or in the process of happening...and caused by greed.

The only question remaining: how involved or advanced must these events be before Americans recognize the process and then take action to effect changes?

Our government, at least our federal government, has not been able and/or willing to lead this effort on our behalf. You probably are aware of this. Most of our leaders are career people who will not take those kinds of chances with their own employment and are more loyal to their particular political fantasy. They are not in front of us. They are behind us testing the wind.

So, where am I going with this little dissertation? Take a look around you here in Tioga County, especially now with the Gasland phenomena upon us. Check out the way even our local, rural economy is going. Look at the distribution of wealth.

Kerry Gyekis

For those of you reading this who do not know Kerry, he is a refugee (as many others are in our area) who came here to raise his family some 31 years ago. He is also a private forester, writer, and avid sea kayaker and adventurer. His wife Janet is a retired teacher. His Oldest son Keto is a wetland biologist in Michigan, and his youngest son Raed is an Air Force Guy and former war pilot/company commander of a squadron of Kiowas both in Iraq and Kosovo.