

My Perspective on the History that Occurred during my Lifetime

What follows is a narrative, composed entirely by me, based on my memory of the events that occurred during my lifetime. The items addressed are in fact MY recollections and what I remember. They may, or MAY NOT, be entirely accurate, and they occasionally might conflict with other sources. In those cases, I apologize in advance and suggest you confirm the other source and then decide for yourself which is the most correct. I try very hard to not intentionally mislead anyone with these remembrances.

I have organized my thoughts into the decades of my life, starting from the 1950s (I was born in 1952).

1950

The things that I understand happening during this decade (I was only 8 when the decade ended) were the explosion of suburbs (after WWII numerous soldiers returned home, got married and had children – the so-called Baby Boomers generation began).

The second major event was President Eisenhower directed that what became the interstate highway system be developed. These highways changed things in many ways besides making it easier to move freight from city to city, not the least of which was the loss of tourism spending in many small towns that happened to be “bypassed” by the interstate. Many towns along Route 66 for example suddenly lost the traffic that sustained them. This happened all across the country when the interstate went through.

Number three on my list for this decade is the television. The advent of TV meant that visual, instead of simply radio, would allow folks in the “big city” to send pictures and visual images to receivers in people’s homes was such a technological move as to fundamentally change the manner in which information and understanding happened. The speed and immediacy of the communication, with visual support was astonishing. My opinion was that not only did the evening news change substantially, but the advent of evening entertainment was now on the table and folks started to postpone going to bed until they watched the 10 or 11 o’clock news!

The final, and most socially impactful event of the 1950s that I recall was the practice of Civil Defense. I remember going through drills where the school children practiced hiding under desks. We also had, I think twice a year, drills where we, in an organized manner, moved – classroom by classroom – into the basement where we waited until all the classrooms were assembled before returning to our classroom. I’m not exactly sure whether there were incentives, but I remember my family deciding to build a “storm shelter” in our backyard. It consisted of a cement room about 15 X 15 X 7 feet, with a vent in the top. The top was at ground level, so the 4 to 6 inch top was very much strong enough to stand up to any storm that might happen to occur. We did use it many times for the intended purpose of protecting against tornados. Our home was never in the direct path, but as you might imagine, the panhandle of Texas was ideal geographically for tornadoes to form and explode onto the population.

1960

Before I get into the actual events, as I remember them, I have to put down in writing a few thoughts I have about my own “coming of age” experience. I know everyone thinks of their angst during those years where you change from a “child” to a “teenager” to an “adult” as being some of the most difficult and tumultuous time periods of their lifetime – and my transition was a doozie! I changed from a relatively gentle, kind, considerate child into a wild and uncontrolled idiot, seriously battling with uncontrolled alcohol availability (not exactly addiction – but alcohol seemed to drive our pleasure senses). I eventually was asked to withdraw from high school, which precipitated my father asking me what I wanted to do – he would support me either way! I did withdraw from that school and a few days later my sister and her husband, with two young children (8 and 10 or so as I remember) invited me to live with them and complete high school, which I accepted. That move broke the cycle of rebellion (nothing happened overnight of course) and I graduated from high school, having made some enduring friendships that continue to this day.

OK. Here are some events I recall from the 1960s, in no particular order. I start with a unifying event, knowing that this decade has as many yen as it did yang events.

How about the introduction of color TV – what an improvement to our quality of life. The Wonderful World of Disney was a perfect example of what was possible!

The space race happened. The Soviet Union put a monkey on top of a rocket and shot him into space. That did not sit well with US leaders and those of us who lived in that period can remember President Kennedy announcing that we intended to put a man on the moon “in this decade!” The US did put a man on the moon.

The Cuban Missile Crisis happened. Those days (I was like 11 years old) were tense – the evening news gave updates – there were even some “breaking news” segments that interrupted regular broadcasting to give us the latest updates. I seem to recall the announcement of the blockade of Cuba as one of those. We understood that the threat of nuclear war was very real. The idea of the countdown clock ticking to 11:59 and 30 seconds was not lost on the nation. At the time, we understood that the Soviets “backed down.” Only a few comprehended at the time that a compromise had occurred.

The assassination of President Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Dr Martin Luther King were certainly some dark times during this decade. Like the items I mention in the following paragraph, there is plenty of documentation and opinion on these events and I doubt my opinion would help.

I’m going to throw a bunch of things into one section here, let’s say “civil upheaval” and put a bunch of individual events into it. Those events were the women’s liberation movement, which had plenty of real and actual righteous indignation underlying the protests. It fits right in there with the “right to vote” events of earlier in the century. What can I add to the mere mention of Woodstock, hippies, flower power, smoking pot??? These are so iconic of events, my poor interpretation of them can’t really add much!

There are, however, some events from this decade that I think I should address. The first being the Vietnam war. Whether or not we should have gone there in the first place was well beyond my ability to

understand or influence at the time. My simple belief was that the nation had elected leaders who had decided that we should “fight communism, wherever it was” and therefore we involved ourselves in Vietnam. I need not go over the various stages of the war but I do believe we started with noble purposes – and ended with a less than noble withdrawal (NARRATIVE OPINION: But not as ignoble as Afganastan). I’ll add a little more in the 1970 section.

What happened at My Lie was so terrible! I’m aware of atrocities that happened during WWII, particularly one at a road junction in Germany where US soldiers were lined up and executed. I also know the US did our fair share of NAPALM bombing and “jungle clearing” operations that probably had at least a partial basis in logic, but still, we should consider as BAD decisions. My Lie had no underlying potential justifications at all. It was criminal for all those who participated. As a retired Sergeant First Class, I suggest that during this period (well documented) we had eviscerated our NCO Corp to such an extent that the intermediate leadership that should, and I hope today would, say NO SIR, THAT IS AN UNLAWFUL ORDER! And refuse to take part in such an event.

The beginning of OPEC happened in this decade – and that was something that cut to the heart of our collective understanding of the “manifest destiny” our country had assumed for almost two centuries. The United States had created the longest period of peace and prosperity around the world (of course there were pockets of war and discontent), and we had set the stage for later decades of “globalization.” More on this topic in the 1970 section.

1970

The rise of OPEC and their ability to say “No, we will go our own way” was such a shock. Collectively, we didn’t know exactly what to do.

What about the explosion of convenience stores?? What at first started as the corner grocery evolved into something a little less attractive, with a mark up in price that reflected the idea of paying for convenience, eventually turning every “gas station” into a convenience store that had gasoline as a “loss leader!”

I was stationed in San Francisco in the early ‘70s. I experienced the Haight Ashbury societal experiment up close. It was the epitome of the “drugs, sex and free love” attitude. I stayed away as much as possible. I did venture up to North Beach a few times, just to observe society at its worst.

I can’t leave out the Desert Debacle and the hostages release – I wonder what the follow-on to the inaugural day would have been if the embassy folks were not released??

Our withdrawal from Vietnam seemed to be going according to plan until the very end, when the embassy was under siege. The sight of the helicopter taking off from the roof of the building will forever be etched in my brain, only to be paired with the people hanging from the airplane in Afghanistan.

OPEC decided to embargo exports during this period. I happened to be assigned to Germany from early 1973 until mid-1976 so I missed the biggest impact here in the US. We had been operating under gas rationing the entire time, and our allotment was above our need, so we didn’t actually experience anything like what happened stateside. Until the second event. We did find ourselves in gas lines for a

few weeks where our friendship with the brother of a gas station operator gave us – not special treatment – but informed timing suggestions that allowed us to avoid the height of the lines.

On a personal note, our life in Germany was not a storybook affair. We existed, for the first few months, on the local economy. That meant we had a subsistence existence. We ate beans and potatoes while making sure Amy had diapers and formula – later Gerber food. We would occasionally share a barbeque with our landlord. We lived in an upstairs attic one bedroom apartment, with on demand, 2 liter electric hot water in the kitchen area, a shared bathroom with another apartment and fire heated bath water. As I said, this was only for a few months. We eventually obtained government provided housing and moved to a nice two-bedroom apartment. I say all this simply to make the point that in my life, I have, contrary to some who believe otherwise, experienced some “hard times!”

1980

For me personally, my association with the establishment of the School of Advanced Military Studies at the Command and General Staff College represented the most lasting impact I would have in my lifetime. The school became one of the most respected in the Army and had some immediate impacts, providing enhanced planning perspectives to the Army with well trained and thoughtful, “deep thinkers” that could assist in the development and execution of many subsequent campaigns and wars. Graduates of our School helped plan and design military operations as early as during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. We went from conceptual idea in March to student selection and presenting instruction in June – an unheard-of speed of curriculum development – that is not to say that first year went smoothly, but those graduates went on to become some of the most respected planners in the Army.

Who can forget the Presidential speech “Tear down this wall!” Living through that period, serving in the Army, how can I not be proud of what we collectively accomplished?

Our Olympic hockey team overcame some dramatic opposition and won the Gold Medal, despite facing some, on paper, much more highly ranked opponents.

The attempted assassination of President Reagan also happened in this decade – wow.

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) started something to allow rapid communication – it evolved into the internet!! What a great accomplishment!

The fall of the Soviet Union also provided some consternation about who would control the nukes!

1990

If I told you this decade was fantastic for me, I’d be lying. In one sentence, I’ll explain. I retired from the Army, started a business, it failed, got divorced, got a job, got married, changed jobs, got laid off, spent 9 months unemployed, went back to work and finished the decade on the top floor of a downtown building watching fireworks everyone else was enjoying while I was waiting for disaster (Y2K) to happen!

Thankfully, we had foreseen all the traps and possibilities and Y2K came and went with no issues to report!

OK, I guess I should write a little more than one sentence for the entire decade. The concept of efficiency at all costs came into vogue. Venture capitalists became the latest wave, where it didn't matter if a company was profitable and stable, rather if the margins were not such that the various parts of the company could be separated out and spun out to competitors or even new uses of the various parts for a short term profit (windmill we used to call it I think) the company became a target.

My official retirement date from the Army was January 31, 1991 but I had about 65 days of leave accrued, and had already cashed out 60 days, which meant my last working day in the Army was the day before Thanksgiving, 1990. We moved off post into a small 2-bedroom house, thinking we didn't really know what would come next, whether we would move to California, North Carolina, Texas or stay here. My thoughts were don't decide until you know more about the future. My then wife didn't agree, but decided to try and see what would happen. She wanted to go to North Carolina and work for her father (someone I didn't really get along with).

I eventually went to work for an insurance company as a "PC Technician" and as time went on that changed to "business analyst."

Five years later (a day or two after becoming eligible for the retirement plan) I left the property and casualty insurance company for a life insurance company in a similar business analyst role, particularly fixated on the Y2K conversion. It turned out to be a major effort in the life (annuities primarily) business as a result of the various trade activity that occurred daily, where in the P&C company, dates were relatively fewer and a formulaic solution worked in most cases (i.e, if the year was '60' or more, assume 19, otherwise assume 20). In the annuity business that formula, in various forms (say 57 instead of 60), sometimes worked, in others we had to expand the database so it included the century digits, and that became complicated every time!

2000

Corporations started following the GE model of Six Sigma where statistical analysis was king! I even became a Green Belt and participated in several projects. I once used statistical analysis (and logical thinking – the actual hero of the story) to prove that a new mainframe was not needed, rather our previous incentive for customers to only place high demands on our computer at night was flawed. We used the computer at night to 97% of capacity and during the day, we were using something like 15%. The "industry standard" had been that the consumer interface (CICS was what it was called, was king and NOTHING could interfere with CICS). Our analysis was that CICS had been impacted by other activity something like .02% of the time in the last 10 years and that CICS had recovered in less than a minute on that one occasion – and that total demand on the system was not the root cause of the outage either. The company saved over \$10 million by not replacing the mainframe and moved a substantial amount of the nightly load to mid-afternoon.

There also was a business trend to off-shore some of the non-consumer facing (and later consumer facing) support overseas. That impacted our computer programming industry to reduce staff in the US

and move the work overseas to India (in our case). That coupled with the idea that mainframe computing and COBOL programming were dying made for some trying days as more and more of our staff was let go. Our building shrank from over 300 folks to less than 200 and eventually when I left less than 100.

Interestingly, after being laid off for 9 months, I went back to the same company in a lesser role! After a few years of again proving my worth, I was offered to be restored and I accepted. However, nobody had obtained HR approval and eventually I decided that the offer was void. I walked out in the middle of the day. Nobody applauded, but I knew folks were happy someone had finally given the headquarters the finger in a way that was clear.

Now, the back story is I had an offer from another company in my back pocket when the first company made their offer. The second company had offered more than the first company and I eventually accepted.

It turns out that when I came to the life insurance company, one of the people who had been a contractor during the Y2K project was a manager in life company 2. I don't know why I'm not naming my employers, but I've gotten this far so I'll continue. So, my friend, who had obviously gotten me an interview (I think the interview was more "can you work with this guy" than should we hire him) was in a position to help, and I'm sure he did, as I am also aware my background and experience also helped.

In any event, we worked together for several years until one day a coup of sorts happened and my direct supervisor, my friend, and their boss were let go. There had been rumors that something was about to happen, and it did.

I'm not too sure exactly why, but I think my boss had made some promises that didn't work out, and his boss was sort of a "talk a good game" sort of person. I think my friends loyalty is what got him ousted.

After that, the strategy seemed to change from maintenance to strategic rebuilding, moving away from mainframe, everything on one program to separate client server applications directed at "best of class" products.

2010

We implemented imaging and workflow, which resulted in staffing savings (no layoffs, simply no replacement when normal vacancies occurred – obviously this means sometimes moving people from one obsolete job to another more productive one). I became the overseer of these business processes and became the "expert" who knew how everything worked.

We implemented a new accounting system, which the CFO himself managed the project (asking for my participation in an "overwatch" capacity) which I did – and it was hard not to get too deeply involved! He did ask that I develop a formal testing plan. When I delivered it, the managers asked "Do you expect us to test each of these steps?" to which I replied, no, but I do expect you to acknowledge that they have been tested in one form or another. I also advised that they should pay particular attention to where one action in one department fed into another department for additional action making sure everything then interacted appropriately.

The final transition was to the policy administration system, which another person had been in charge of until the “last mile” of the project when he was relieved and reassigned to be my subordinate rather than co-equal. It wasn’t my contemporary’s fault exactly, rather he had not “taken” the directive power and become a supervisor of the project, assuming he did not have sufficient authority since it was a multi-department project. I on the other hand, assumed if they didn’t want me to take charge, they would tell me and so I assumed control over the assets from other departments (in relation to this project) and pushed through those final few months to completion.

At this point, I had been promoted to Director and there wasn’t much doubt about my authority. In meetings with VPs it was clear they looked to me to get the project completed.

With all the software conversions complete, I had once again found myself in the unenviable position of having worked myself out of a job. But this time, I was very happy with retiring.

This time I had one final mode of modernization in mind, but I knew it would take longer than I intended to remain working. I planted the seed that data about prospects could influence marketing (internal prospects particularly, but external prospects could be “refined” through surveys and other means). My point was that even using simply census data you could target direct marketing (using cheap email) to people who are much more likely to accept an offer than simply mailing paper to 20,000 people. The concept was to send much more targeted material, for a dramatically lesser cost, to folks who had a much larger than 2% chance of accepting. If you could use statistical analysis, and send the email to 100 people instead of 10,000 where 50 accepts instead of 50 accepting for 10 times the cost, then you have done something worthwhile!

Another point I am proud of is one of the major projects that imaging and workflow had included was the ability to “work from anywhere!” What a magical premonition that turned out to be! In actuality, it had been a major disaster recovery feature that had been identified decades earlier where the company had secured space in an underground cave (there are many in the Kansas City area) for storage and had a number of computers and a rudimentary ability to resume operations (on a limited basis) from that alternative location. Imaging and workflow, enhanced that and allows for “anywhere” rather than the cave as an alternate site. COVID proved that planning had been worthwhile! All that was needed was one or two people to work “in the building” taking the mail and scanning it into the system.

2020

There seems to be some finality to this section! I’ve reached the current time period. Lots of folks will have lots to say about the COVID outbreak. From my perspective, people and governments were doing the best they could for the people and of course mistakes might have been made. So, even if the origins of the disease were man made and it escaped from a lab in China, I don’t think that changes hardly anything! Unless there is a cure that someone is still sitting on to this day, where it started might help some researchers sometime in the future, but . . .

Well, anyway, COVID happened, and it changed EVERYTHING in some ways. For me, it changed our Miata Club in ways I’m not happy with (I understand, but I’m still not happy). Our club was full of folks who got together in large groups, often filling the bar and grill we meet at monthly. Often with 30 or 40

folks attending. Now we are lucky to have 10 to 15 folks. The same is true with our drives. Attendance has dropped considerably. That is not to say the club is dead, or dying, rather that people found other interests that are much less “community” oriented and found satisfaction there.

COVID also accelerated thought about population too. It caused people to begin planning for a less globalized environment, where things don’t move from manufacturing in one country to assembly in another country to sale in a third (or multiple) countries.

Globalization was going to die. I predicted it would to a fellow employee in the 1990s when offshoring had begun. I was a little inarticulate in the specifics, but I said it would “ebb and flow” like our politics. Well, although I want to take credit for the prediction, the method I absolutely got wrong. I predicted that economics would equalize, and as coders it might have, but the driver is demographic rather than economic.

OK, my final thoughts: Two primary things:

One: These are my perspectives. They may be wrong in every sense, but they are mine.

Two: Each of you who read this article have your own perspective on these decades. If you perceive that posterity, or your own children or grandchildren would be interested in having your perspective, I encourage you to take the time to make a recording, audio, video, written, or however you are comfortable with, make a recording of your thoughts. Someone, someday, will discover them and at least say “Wow, XXX decided to record their perspective for me! How thoughtful!”

So, be thoughtful!