**Optimism about our country’s future is faltering**

By Debra Wines

I have always prided myself on being a realistic optimist. I am not immune to the turmoil and chaos that has encircled us for years. When I was born, there had been a strong possibility that my Dad could have been re-called to activity duty because of the Korean Conflict, in the 50’s. In the early 60’s we were glued to our black and white TV as we waited for word about the Cuban Missile Crisis. Just a short time later we watched coverage of President Kennedy’s death. In my senior year of high school, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy were murdered in cold blood. In the late 60’s and early 70’s, I watched as young men, I went to school with, were drafted to fight in Vietnam and many didn’t make it back. I watched school busing protests and race riots that happened near my home. I lived through the turmoil of LBJ and Nixon’s presidencies during the civil rights movements, the Vietnam War and Watergate. I have lived through recessions and rough financial times, along with good times. I knew of too many young men who fought in what we now call the “First Iraq War”. I watched the planes fly into the World Trade Center on 9/11. Again, I saw too many young men and women going off to war.

Americans have protested many of these wars and the administrations who have pushed us into military conflicts which turned out to be highly beneficial for military contractors and oil companies and temporarily for the U.S. economy. Sometimes our voices were heard, and other times we were successful by voting out the legislators who allowed these poor decisions to be made by whatever administration was in office at the time. During my lifetime, I have always felt our country would remain a beacon of hope to the world, in the darkest of times. After all, my Mother’s great-grandparents left Ireland and Scotland for a better life in America. My Dad’s family left Italy as Mussolini was just starting his fascist dictatorship. It wasn’t easy for either family to leave their homes and everything they knew to come to this country not realizing many Americans wouldn’t welcome them with open arms. They had to struggle and overcome many obstacles for their piece of the American Dream. It wasn’t easy, but they eventually carved out a place in America like everyone else who has chosen this country to be their new homeland.

My story is not that much different than most people currently alive in this country. Some people are several generations removed from their original immigrant family members and others may be new immigrants or the first generation. We are all Americans. Our Constitution and Bill of Rights gives us the same citizenship and supposedly the same equal rights. I am not naïve enough to know that isn’t the case for every immigrant or native born American because I understand circumstances are different for every single one of us, whether it is because of our country of origin, the color of our skin, our native language or our religion, education and gender. It has never been easy for everyone to assimilate into the “American White Culture”. Yet, for those of us who kept some part of our original culture alive, we have been able to weave those traditions into the overall quilt of what has become our celebrated diverse, multicultural America. This has made us a better and stronger country in many ways.

There are factions of our society that have been around since the beginning of our country, who looked at some people and firmly believed they were not worthy to be considered human beings, let alone, full-fledged Americans. After the Civil War, the KKK was organized. In the 20th Century White Nationalist/Neo-Nazi groups have spun off or became part of the KKK. Now they see a centralized leader, in the form of Donald Trump, along with many members of his administration. They have grown more brazen and blatant with their attacks on innocent people they deem are not worthy of calling themselves Americans and living in “their” country

I used to laugh at George W. Bush when he called himself the “Great Uniter”. It wasn’t proper English, but then President Bush wasn’t an eloquent speaker. The divide he helped create was primarily because of the two wars he forced upon the American people. I understood the war in Afghanistan, but I didn’t like it. A great majority of people knew the war in Iraq was mistake. These wars created chaos and danger for the innocents of those wars. It also created Muslim and Christian refugees seeking asylum in America

Donald Trump had been spreading fear and hate long before he came down the escalator in Trump Towers to announce his bid for the Presidency. He has continued advocating that rhetoric as President. Now, unfortunately, he has very strong and vocal supporters in his administration; in the right-wing media and some of the main stream media; Congress; the Republican Party and his staunch cult members who believe he can do no wrong.

It isn’t the hate and fear of other human beings that makes me feel less optimistic every day. It is the 100 other things he has done while he’s been in office. He has weakened every government department and agency by the appointments he has made. Donald Trump’s constant bickering with our intelligence professionals, ignoring their reports and degrading their warnings, is a dangerous way to run the country. His lack of knowledge and utter ignorance of how his words and behavior affects this country, our allies and our enemies astound me. He packs his administration, ambassadorships, and our courts with incompetent, inexperienced campaign donors. The few people who realized how dangerous, unstable and irrational he has become, have left their jobs: that greatly decreases my optimism for the future of our country.