

Preface, April-2022

*Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently - they're not fond of rules... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can't do is ignore them because they change things... they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do. - Steve Jobs*

Greetings from southern Bavaria. My name is Michael Lasher. I was born in late 1967 and grew up on Long Island in a Catholic family with seven kids, all of whom were baby boomers except me, the youngest. I belong to the more than 60 million members of Generation X – born between 1965 and ca. 1984. As I re-write this preface today it is Nov. 29, 2021 and I am in the wonderful town of Fischbachau in Bavaria, Germany. I have been living in and just outside of Munich, the capital of Bavaria, Germany, since October, 1993. In 1995 I started a tourism company which became relatively successful and for over 25 years we have been helping English-speaking visitors to Munich and Bavaria enjoy their visit here more by showing them around on bikes in Munich and by bus, car, and minivan in the beautiful Bavarian “outback” where I am right now. My company’s name is Mike’s Bike Tours. If you’ve been on one or more of our tours, thanks for coming, I hope you had a great time! So, in typical tour guide fashion, I’ve introduced myself and given you some background so you know who’s talking to you. Now I’ll proceed to promulgate my personal process, premise, purpose, proposal and plan to overcome the protracted problems of our present precarious predicament. ;-)

Beginning around 2012 I had the goal to write my first book by the time I turned 50, which happened in late 2017. That goal remained unattained and since then four more years have swiftly flown by while in that period I built a house, separated from my wife, lost over a quarter million dollars because of two bad decisions to trust untrustworthy persons, went almost completely broke because I couldn’t get a loan approved by the almost unbelievably conservative bank regulations imposed upon small business owners in Germany and the EU these days, ironically as a reaction to the lack of regulation which enabled greed and stupidity at the top of the Deutsche Bank to bring that too big to fail bank to its financial knees, muddled through an unusually complicated divorce, watched 3 more of my 5 kids become adults, established and maintained a new relationship and home with my darling lady and our two dogs and two cats, taken about 100 families and couples on all-day excursions in Bavaria as a chauffeur-guide, mostly pre-COVID, struggled to keep my tourism business solvent through the crises, emptied and re-furnished two houses with used stuff collected one piece at a time, rented eight furnished rooms to a bunch of guys who had know idea what clean actually means so I could continue to make my mortgage payments, finished restoring and sold both of my 1973 VW-Porsche 914s in order to avoid foreclosure on my house in 2021, and a lot more, without going into unnecessary detail. It’s already three years since I wrote my original outline in 2019 and I am only now finally getting started in earnest with writing this in 2022. So yes, when it comes to writing a book, I can personally attest that timing in life often plays a very significant role. Thank you for your interest in what I have to share about mine.

I decided to put that out there because I want my readers to appreciate me as someone like themselves; an average American, small business owner, parent, etc. We all have so much in common and we all have our ongoing challenges in life. We all also know and like very cool, good people who have political opinions different from our own. In this respect, we are all in the same boat. So this is my voice, that of an average guy with a somewhat ambitious aspiration; to create an enjoyable book that

actually does help heal relationships which have come under strain or were abandoned in the recent past due to differences in political beliefs. I hope that you will find my material to be interesting and on point and that you will enjoy the background I provide regarding what led me to want to create this at this time in my life.

I will be speaking to you as a storyteller, similar to a tour guide. That's what comes most natural to me anyway.

As a nine-year-old boy on Long Island in the summer of 1976 I marched in the 4th of July parade down Broadway in Hicksville with a banner my fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Starns had created for me which said, Descendant of Roger Sherman. I was dressed as a colonist and wore a three-cornered hat. I still have a photo of myself in that parade which my mother had taken with her 110mm camera. A few weeks previous to that I had never even heard of Roger Sherman, who was the only Founding Father to have signed all four of the Great Documents; the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. One morning before going off to school I was looking at the back of a box of Kellogg's cereal while having breakfast. A writing competition was advertised whereby one would submit an essay on "who your favorite Founding Father was and why". I asked my mother who I should write about and she replied, Roger Sherman. Her maiden name was Sherman and she proceeded to tell me about him and I proudly shared my family heritage with Mrs. Starns that very day. No. I didn't win the competition. Indeed, if I recall correctly, I actually didn't choose to invest the time to enter. My parents never were very encouraging, I must say. They were pretty burnt-out by the time they got to me. My mom was already over 50 and had six other kids in their teens and early twenties at that time.

Anyway, it felt good to be an American patriot as a kid and for most Americans my age and older this was something most of us will always have in common. Over the past 50 years we have observed a morphing of our nation from what it was (like) when we were kids into something far less patriotic and unifying as our bicentennial celebration was for us back in 1976, and a clear majority of us do not regard the contrasts between now and then particularly positively, at least not when it comes to things that have to do with our society. To say a lot has changed over the past 50 years is truly an understatement and countless millions of us have often been bewildered by this engrossing transformation. This book is written not only from the perspective of a conservative, but also from that of a member of the now (getting) older generations who so often among our own younger friends, family, co-workers, students, etc. have a broader and better understanding of history and in what direction this transformation has been leading us. Aldous Huxley told us, "*that men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons of history*". I agree, and a lot of this book is about history for this very reason. I hope many of my readers over 50 will choose to share it with younger persons they know because there is so much herein that they simply do not know which many of us believe voting citizens actually should.

I believe that *A guide to heal the divide*, written purely as a "*US Politics for Dummies*", would be pretty boring and not something many would want to read from cover to cover. While learning more about writing and retaining readers' interest I came to the realization that I can likely better connect with my readers through storytelling. So, while this book is certainly not about me, I will include personal stories and perspectives so that the reader gets an increasingly clear picture and understanding of my overall motivations, intentions and how I and tens of millions of other Americans like me have been struggling with the complicated aspects of the political situation in the USA since 2016. In the end I want to have made a connection with the reader that has a strong basis in honesty, fairness, trust and respect and for them to understand what this overall project is intended to achieve, how, and for them to want to be a part of it in some way, no matter how small. I also hope that most readers will find my

unconventional perspective as an American ex-pat living in Germany for almost thirty years to be of additional interest, which I will also cultivate by including interesting details wherever appropriate regarding contrasts between how things are in the USA and what they are like over here, in a country that is often mentioned as a quasi model democratic republic which has managed to quite neatly balance what are widely considered to be aspects of a “socialist” society while maintaining a free market economy.

According to a survey I was reading about recently, over 75% of Americans say that they would like to write a book someday, and more than a million(!) new books are published every year, with the vast majority of them selling fewer than 250 copies. I imagine that sharing aspects of this journey may also enhance many readers’ interest since apparently the majority also have interest in the challenges of writing a book. What I can already share with you is that this endeavor includes overcoming a lot of self doubt and thoughts as to whether one is qualified or even able to put together something that is actually *good* which most readers will find worthwhile and recommendable. This final product is the culmination of what I was able to “suss-out” and aggregate during and after countless hours of thinking about this subject matter and doing various reading and research over the past five years. Ultimately, what I have managed to create is my best effort to make a meaningful contribution with impact-potential to what I refer to as the Great Debate, which continues to rage on at this critical time in the history of the United States and our world by and large. This “great debate” has to do with who’s been right and who’s been wrong, and about what specifically, in the controversial “age of Trump” and fake news in the USA. So I say, let’s have the debate, and let’s discover along the way, together, that what we really need is less divisiveness, hypocrisy and dis-ingenuousness and instead more agreement, cooperation and sincerity. I certainly hope that is something that all my readers can appreciate and agree upon.

Ever since I had already realized back in early 2019 that I was most inspired to write about the political divisiveness in the USA during the Trump presidency I had the idea that I wanted to create a communications tool which held the potential to bridge the gap between Trump supporters and those who had little to no understanding as to why anyone would support him at all. So one of the book’s purposes and goals from the start has been to convey and clarify Trump supporters’ perspectives, sentiments, opinions and reasoning *for* them because I understand that doing so is very complex and challenging, especially off the cuff against a Trump hater who has limited capacity to listen and who generally hates Trump due to a distorted perspective and a general lack of pertinent information. After over a thousand hours of contemplating the ongoing and protracted issues during Trump’s tenure, believe me, I know that this is certainly not a simple nor easy thing for any of us to do and it certainly cannot be done in a half hour or so. So, after countless hours of research, writing, editing and ~~the~~ feedback, time and effort of many beta readers and my editors, I imagine my final product will have the potential to be a very effective tool to help set many people straight on a good number of things about which there still is a great degree of confusion and misinformation to this day and unfortunately will likely continue to be for a long time to come.

This final product will take the average person roughly 10 hours to read, without checking references, watching videos or reading entire books that go into the subject matter far more deeply than anyone could fit into one book while remaining as broad as I have chosen to. If my choice of bundling represented a somewhat optimized defense of the conservative, Trump supporter’s “case”, then all of us could be happy to stop debating whether or not Trump is good or evil with that college buddy or sibling and simply hand this to them instead. If they read it for half an hour a day, five days a week, they’d finish it a month, and wallah! Those whom we wish would better understand where we are coming from and that we are not “crazy”, stupid, ignorant or brainwashed would have the opportunity to grasp

it all without getting into the slightest argument with us about any of it and hopefully choose by the time they're finished to stop thinking such negative things about us. I figured, if the book and its accompanying online platform can succeed in helping many people realize that they don't think so differently after all and instead, that they actually agree on far more than they would have imagined, then this product would offer a tremendous value for the money. It could be a real time and possibly even relationship saver! I was like, Wunderbar! There *is* significant demand for this!

Although it often seems to be almost the exact opposite, I truly believe that we are nowhere near as divided as we seem to be because I honestly believe that the vast majority of us share almost all the same values and principles we feel should be considered primary, or normal in society. Almost all of us agree on what makes sense and what obviously doesn't which becomes far more apparent when considered objectively, one piece of the big puzzle at a time. Like almost all of us I also believe that we all should agree on a basic set of moral and ethical standards. Let's start there. I feel when reconsidering our foundation, which I address in chapter one, Relaunch Platform, that it makes all the sense in the world to re-affirm what our most basic values and principles are. After we (re-) establish those and other elementary and essential basics then we can build upon that foundation the cooperation necessary to come together as a clear majority with the power to rebuke those "forces" which have fostered the illusion of division that has most recently seemingly all but completely neutered the power of the people. This, too, is a significant part of my entire concept and premise.

How could we possibly master the challenges that our nation faces if the population is divided right down the middle, as if our values and our priorities were diametrically opposed to one another? The short answer is, we can't. So we need to realize that we are all on the same side and that we all, by and large, expect the same things from our government and our society. Nevertheless, we seem to be hopelessly divided, which is very problematic and a difficult problem to solve at that. I feel that there is an acute need for someone to compose and coordinate a concise, cohesive and cogent common message which essentially everyone can agree upon. At the same time, compacting the broad amount of pertinent information from the complicated puzzle into a quasi nutshell while also providing context and useful insights will be a real challenge, but I am up to it. It's not exactly rocket science and after a few thousand hours invested and all the help I will receive before publishing, I expect that in the end I will have done as good a job as most anyone can. I hope you'll agree.

The past 20 years of America's history is something we almost all have in common. In just the past ten years alone we have together witnessed more than most of us realize, including but not limited to, the emergence of the term "fake news", rampant censorship by Big Tech companies, an obviously politicized and often incredibly unprofessional mainstream media, COVID, mask mandates, "lockdowns", attempts by authoritarian politicians to compel persons to accept an experimental gene therapy pushed as a vaccination in the traditional sense, which it indisputably never was, the controversial election of 2020, the cover-up of the Hunter Biden laptop revelations just prior to the 2020 election, the blatant incompetence of the Biden Administration, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and who knows what's coming up next?! What I would say this all amounts to is a particular *Zeitgeist* which we have all been living through, both separately and together, each of us perturbed and bewildered in our own ways to varying degrees throughout, sometimes almost overwhelmingly so, sometimes less. This book is for all of us to gain a better insight and understanding into the overall picture of what has become a cold civil war; an information war for control and influence over our opinions.

If we seem to disagree on many things, at least we can almost all agree that we are living in a very dynamic and controversial day and age. In this respect we are also all in the same boat, yet there are so

many other ways as well, and that is why I chose this title. This book is about what it is that We The People have in common and how essential for the success of our nation and society it is that we all realize, recognize and focus on our overwhelming commonalities instead of petty differences that have no substance and hold no water. I emphasize what I believe we should (re)affirm as the foundation of our society as well as what I refer to as Our Commons, which includes common history, values, rights, decency, sense, goals, principles, laws, opportunities, respect, appreciation, among others. In the end readers should feel better informed and more optimistic that we actually still can stem the tide of America's decline while personally making a positive contribution simply through being better informed and more involved to help end the political gridlock, the acrimonious debate, the rampant hypocrisy, the corruption, the dangerous censorship and unprofessional practices of the politicized mainstream media. Only through cooperating together towards common goals instead of competing like opponents in a tug of war can we take back the power from those currently still at the wheel of our great ship who live the high life in the luxury suites while their staff, the MSM and Big Tech, keep us all preoccupied in a fog of misinformation about their incompetency and utter lack of leadership.

I call attention to the obvious and very significant problems of extreme media bias, an alarming decrease in journalistic standards and the incredible power the biggest tech companies have to influence and sway public opinion through search manipulation, outright censorship and difficult-to-document and prove shadow banning and throttling of sources deemed "less desirable" or "controversial" whatever label and justification they want to use. The status quo is that they still make their own rules for their platforms and that is very unlikely to change as long as they are supporting whoever is in power, which is clearly a serious problem in a democratic republic.

There is a power struggle happening on the bridge of our great ship which is holding us back as time goes by and we drift further away from where we would all prefer to go. If Americans do not manage to put an end to the counterproductive struggle happening at the helm of the ship, its crew and passengers will continue to be adrift at sea, floating aimlessly without an agreed-upon course while our problems and weaknesses continue to make our position increasingly precarious as a massive storm on the horizon approaches that will stress our vessel and its systems to the brink of failure. Our biggest test is still ahead of us and we need to prepare for it. In this respect as well, we Americans really are all in the same proverbial boat.

A change of direction can happen for the U.S.S. America but a critical number of people will have to get in sync with their ideas and efforts and cooperate on an agreed-upon course change, just as if we were on a massive cruise ship with thousands of long oars sticking out of both sides. If the rowers don't work together that vessel will not go anywhere, let alone swiftly towards any particular destination. In a very competitive geopolitical and economic world that is not a good thing.

So, to finally conclude this long preface I would like to close by stating that I firmly believe a new emphasis and reaffirmation of what it is that we have in common is a fundamental part of the antidote to heal the irrational divide in American society today. My perception that a guide book to facilitate that purpose should exist and thus far seems not to lie at the heart of my inspiration to create it. Statistics tell me that the odds of these words being read by many people are very slim and common sense tells me that even if they are, the odds of them changing anything about the problems America faces are close to zero. Nevertheless, I have decided to pursue my endeavor to do my best to formulate a meaningful contribution that I believe will at least have the potential to resonate with a majority of the populace. No one person and nothing anybody says or writes are going to solve our protracted issues at one fell swoop but I believe that it would be more helpful to have a manual on how we can accomplish that lofty goal than not to. Towards that end, I make this effort.