

March 7, 2016: The Hope of New Life

Hopefully, readers will forgive me if I again veer from my series on Guam's local courts. But, to be candid, I just can't help myself. A week ago today I became a grandfather for the first time. Admittedly, I wish that my 19 year-old son and his 19 year-old girlfriend had waited until they were married and were several years older before bringing a new life into this world. However, as my friends who faced similar circumstances had told me, once I witnessed the miracle of my grandson's birth and held him for the first time, my frustration and disappointment would evaporate into sheer joy. Boy, were they right!

As I gazed into Koein's eyes, I felt an overriding sense of optimism for this infant. The world he faces today is significantly better than the one I was born into 62 years ago. His world will be much more accepting, civil, and opened-minded than was my early world. These advances are due to a nation-wide shifting sense of social fairness and justice which has been supported and strengthened by new laws and legal opinions.

When I was born in 1954, many southern state remained segregated. In some states, White and Black Americans were required to use different restrooms and drink from different water fountains. Blacks were forced to sit in the back of the busses and were refused service in many restaurants.

Lawsuits and changing laws slowly challenged the *status quo*. For example, as a result of *Brown v. Board of Education*, a Supreme Court case handed down in the year of my birth, the fact that Koein's skin color is other than white will not be legal grounds to subject him to a public school system that is segregated by skin color, as it had been for decades in many states. The Brown case reversed an earlier Supreme Court decision that held public schools could be separated by color as long as the schools provided "equal" educational opportunities. The known fact that most white schools provided a far superior education than black schools went largely ignored until this landmark decision was handed down.

Because of the 1967 Supreme Court decision, *Loving v. Virginia*, Koein will have the freedom to marry a person outside of his racial group, should he so wish. In the world I knew as a young child growing up in Northern Virginia, interracial marriages were legally forbidden. I personally did not encounter an interracial marriage until I moved to Guam in 1976.

As a result of a series of state and federal cases and laws, Koein's skin color will not necessarily dictate where he lives. When I was growing up many communities and housing areas were kept racially segregated through various means. This included my family's all white upper-middle class neighborhood of Lake Barcroft located in Falls Church, Virginia. My neighborhood's racial barrier was broken in 1968 when the first Black family moved in. Unlike many other neighborhoods experiencing integration, no vocal objections were raised. I suspect that had much to do with the fact that the head of the new family was Supreme Court Justice, Thurgood Marshall.

Koein's world will be much fairer to women than was the world my three sisters were born into. For example, most public schools didn't offer sports programs for girls. Many colleges and universities wouldn't admit women, and women were either discouraged or prevented from pursuing many occupations. The military offered very limited employment opportunities for females. Women lucky enough to find a job were often paid significantly less than their male counterparts.

Laws such as the 1963 Equal Pay Act, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act, among many others, slowly increased the rights and opportunities for women. As a result, Koein will rightfully interact with women as equals.

Koein will also live in a world where a person's sexuality and gender identity will no longer be used as a legal basis to deny him or her the right to participate in life's most important opportunities and events, such as education, employment, marriage, and parenthood. The Supreme Court's recent same-sex marriage decision of *Obergefell v. Hodges* ensures gays the right to pursue and enjoy a full and productive life.

Despite these social advances, Koein's world will be far from perfect. As we all know, discrimination continues. And, there are forces working hard to thwart the social progress of the past 62 years. My hope and prayer for my infant grandson is that he grows to be a moral, open-minded adult who appreciates our Nation's struggle for equality and stands up against social injustice wherever he finds it.