

Review & Preview

π is the mathematical symbol for the universally applicable and constant relationship between a circle’s diameter and circumference. SFT dining staff routinely ignore pi. (See article below.) Additionally, this issue of *Tower Talk* provides breaking news consistent with April 1, and Anne Turner contributes an unusually informative and caution-provoking article on “scamming.” There are short comments on SF government inefficiency and SFT annual fee increases. A major article opines regarding China as a possible threat to the United States, and a tongue-in-cheek jab offers gratuitous observations regarding the Duchess of Sussex. Finally, SFT residents Austin and Van Ness are bickering again.

April 1 Breaking News*

- Because of COVID -19 and negative economic forecasts, Covia/Front Porch management rescinds annual fee increase.
- Episcopal Bishop Marc Andrus is retiring, and diocesan officials have named Covia CEO, Kevin Gerber, as his successor.
- The former SFT Chef was installed recently as head of Le Cordon Bleu in Paris.
- Congress is considering a bill requiring all national office candidates from Georgia to agree that the following occurred: Holocaust, Moon Landing, school shootings, and COVID-19 pandemic.
- Sir Ernest Shackleton’s Antarctic base camp has been discovered and a rare case of century-old Scotch is to be auctioned by Sotheby’s.
- SF School Superintendent resigns and accepts position as CEO of the Victor Arnautoff Art Preservation Foundation.

*One of the above is actually true. Guess which and win a prize.

California Governor Gavin Newsome justifies COVID mask-less French Laundry restaurant romp by wearing newly starched shirts.

Is China a Threat: Maybe Yes, Maybe No, But, If It Is, It’s Our Own Fault

James W. Guthrie

HBO’s curmudgeonly commentator, Bill Maher, recently issued a video rant regarding the coming U.S. capitulation to the uber competitive mega nation of China. He contends that the “crouching lion” will soon eat our lunch and consign the United States to the dustbin of history, alongside ancient Rome, and the Ottoman Empire. Is this fear warranted? President Trump echoed the same message and strove to stand up to and face China down on trade, currency, and intellectual property theft. It is too early to know if Biden will do the same.

China’s history over millennia, its epochs of fabulous wealth and dynastic dominance, cycles of extraordinary cultural accomplishment, periods of regional dominance, and sheer population size far exceed that of the United States. Indeed, China, like India and Russia, sees itself as a civilization more than as a geopolitically bounded nation and clings to a self-image as perpetually destined to be a world force.

Do China’s modern ambitions threaten America’s current global hegemony? Are we doomed to succumb to the Chinese economic and manufacturing juggernaut? Will Chinese replace English as the world’s default language? Will the yuan overwhelm the dollar and turn us into a third-world wanna-be, forced to live off World Bank handouts? Will withering economic competition push us far down the food chain and threaten our material standard of living?

A superficial glance suggests that the answer to all of the above is “humbug.” In terms of total gross domestic product and GDP per capita,

**Yeah!
Memory Care
is Closer to
Reality**

China still is not challenging the United States. U.S. 2020 per capital GDP was \$66,000. China was \$12,000. Its economy is increasing rapidly, but still is far from outdoing ours.

A deeper look is more daunting and reinforces Mr. Maher's moodiness. China is dominant in 5G Internet technology, increasingly is a world power in pharmacological production, and we are scrambling to catch up. Their infrastructure strides, frankly, are dazzling. Since China became a modern nation under Chairman Mao in 1949, highway and rail transportation, airports, dams and waterway projects, and fundamental industries such as iron, coal, cement, shipbuilding, have expanded at a staggering rate.

High-speed maglev rail systems exemplify the worrisome competition. China has 6000 miles of modern hyper speed railway. The United States has nothing. A pathetic effort in the California Central Valley has not yet reached Merced, let alone Bakersfield. While our cities crumble and fill with the homeless, China has built 500 new and ultramodern cities in 70 years.

Given China's stunning progress in moving 70% of its population into the middle class, should we not be fearful of the future? Maybe not. China has large problems, some of which are of its own making and others a function of ambitious and edgy regional competitors.

To achieve its economic progress, China has constructed a Faustian bargain. In exchange for a more comfortable material life, Chinese people have forfeited a great deal of personal freedom. Public cameras are everywhere in Chinese society, and stepping out of line, or even prematurely stepping off the curb, leads to a deduction of "social credits." If you want to travel, visit overseas, accelerate your professional career, or gain entry to a selective school, you must have an unblemished record.

All of this smacks greatly of "Big Brother." But other problems exist too. A third of the

population, rural inhabitants, enjoys nowhere near China's urban material comfort. They are not satisfied and compliant citizens, and they shape the food supply. Minority groups, particularly millions of Muslim Uighurs, are badly treated and increasingly placed in internment (re-education) camps. China reneges on its promises. Ask the people of Hong Kong about the political autonomy they were promised.

Other nations in Asia, namely India and Indonesia, are expanding every bit as fast as China. In another decade they will become economic competitors, not simply with the US, but, more importantly, with China.

Japan and Taiwan are economically powerful. However, Japan's principal problem is not China.

Japanese children have so little economic value to families that the nation is not reproducing itself, and steadfastly rejects immigrants. Its greatest danger is it will run out of workers and shrivel away.

China's neighbors pose more than economic

problems. Surrounding nations simply do not trust it. Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, India, and Russia have all fought with China. It is difficult for a nation to lead if its neighbors distrust it.

Even worse, China distrusts its own people. The whole world uses software (like Gmail) for communication. These are forbidden in China because the central government is frightened that people might learn or speak the truth.

Where does this leave the United States? Our posture should be focused on getting our own act together. Why cannot we address our infrastructure issues when all political parties agree that it is important? We need to fix our dams, airports, railroads, bridges, sewage systems, and clean up our water and air. As each party jockey's to take credit, or project blame upon the other, we all lose. It may be that the real enemy, at least downstream, is ourselves, not our economic competitors.

**CONGRATULATIONS
TO THE NEWLY
ELECTED RESIDENTS'
COUNCIL MEMBERS!**

San Francisco Issues

James W. Guthrie

Offering each authenticated homeless individual \$5–10,000, if accepting a legally binding agreement NEVER to return, would be cheaper than what is now the SF homeless strategy.

San Francisco has the highest annual municipal expenditure per capita of any city in the United States. It is more than \$16,000 per resident, exceeding New York City. SF's spending on the homeless exceeds the City of Sacramento's entire annual operating budget.

A recent accounting revealed an estimate of 8,000 homeless people in SF with an annual municipal and charitable expenditure per each of over \$106,000. The city's homeless agency recently purchased additional tents at a cost of \$5,000 month to house homeless people in parking lots across the city. That amounts to around \$61,000 per year for each tent, a sum that is more than two and a half times the average price of a one-bedroom apartment there, according to the San Francisco Chronicle. Consider paying them to leave.

On the SFUSD school board front, there is encouraging news. Our fellow San Francisco Asian residents, a group supportive of public schools, are increasingly aware of the glaring improprieties of several school board members and are organizing to restore civility, rationality, and purpose to the Board as a whole. The SF Chronicle editorial board has started to criticize the school board. Lawsuits have been filed by Washington and Lowell alumnae. Recall petitions are being readied.

SFT Monthly Fee Increase in Perspective

Apartment Type	Studio	Small One Bedroom	Small Two Bedroom
Current	\$3,633	\$4,187	\$5,434
1997	\$1,650	\$1,900	\$2,250
% increase	220%	220%	242%
Dollar increase	\$1,983	\$2,287	\$3,184

A Petulant Princess in Need of a Spanking

Opinion by Sugar Caen

In the streaming TV serial *Suits*, Megan Markle had a part, not a starring role, as a paralegal. She caught the attention of her husband-to-be, Prince Harry, at a Las Vegas cast party. She may be the world's most spoiled modern celebrity.

Middle-class Megan grew up fantasizing about being a TV star and marrying a prince. Her dreams have come true. She earned millions as a TV actress, and has married a real live, authentic, Prince. Even if he is out of the line of succession and unlikely ever to be King, Harry is a genuine royal. Moreover, his hip style and upbeat personality might well position him as a catalyst capable of restoring a younger generation's regard for monarchy.

Mother-in-law, Queen Elizabeth, spent \$32+ million on Megan's wedding. She inherits a royal title (Duchess of Sussex) has access to some of the world's most stunning real estate, has servants at her beck and call, can at any one time choose between dozens of expensive chauffeured automobiles, a private train, luxury planes and ships, and lives in a multi-million-dollar Hollywood mansion.



But wait, the poor little pouty princess is peeved. She goes on international TV to lament the treatment she receives at the hands of other royals and the British media. She whines that the Queen's handlers have the audacity to suggest she wear a tasteful hat on state occasions.

Slap, slap, slap! "Wake up, Buttercup!" There are literally millions of middle-class and poverty-

stricken little girls who would trade places with you in an instant. Use Princesses Di and Kate as your model, and make something of your life, and the world better for others. By the way, Harry, you got duped.

My O' My: Wi-Fi But No Pi?

James W. Guthrie

Nearby is the universally recognized mathematical symbol for pi, expressing the constant relationship between the diameter of a circle and its circumference. This relationship has been recognized for thousands of years.



In simple use, pi is 3.14. Of course, some are not satisfied with such simplicity and have used modern technology to specify pi almost to infinity. In 2019, a Google developer named Emma Haruka Iwao used Google cloud technology to smash the previous pi calculation record by 9 trillion digits. The official digit count on Iwao's calculation is 31,415,926,535,897 digits.

To put the number in perspective, if the computer calculated one digit per second, it would take 995,687 years to reach the final number. Even extended for that many digits, still no end is in sight.

For some people, simply calculating pi is not enough; they want to memorize it. The challenge to memorize the most pi digits has been a popular contest for years. People from all over the world compete to see who has the best memory.

The current *Guinness Book of World Record's* individual known for most pi digits memorized is Rajveer Meena from India. In 2015, the 21-year-old managed successfully to recite 70,000 digits of pi from memory while blindfolded. The entire recitation took nearly 10 hours to complete.

Given the significance of and attention directed to pi, one can understand that on many college campuses, March 14 (3/14) is pi day and cafeteria dessert routinely is pie of various kinds. Not so here at SFT. Our March 14 menus made no mention of pie of any kind. *Just sayin'.*

Scamming and Me

Anne M. Turner

Frankly, I thought scamming was something that happened to somebody else. Certainly not to me. But then I did an incredibly stupid thing and opened myself to a blatant (and apparently fairly common) scam. I gave a perfect stranger on the phone my Social Security number and exposed myself to disaster.

I am writing about this not to flagellate myself in public (although I deserve it), but to point out the impeccable service I received from the San Francisco Towers' staff. I did not know this help was available and I want to make sure that everyone else does.

Here is what happened. For the last month or so, I had been receiving phone calls from people who identified themselves as representing the Social Security Administration, warning me that there was suspicious activity on my account, and I would be legally liable if I did not investigate it. I hung up on these calls. However, on a recent Friday morning I got another, and the young man on the line, who said he was from the Social Security Administration, raised the specter of serious Social Security account malfeasance, and I should seek legal counsel. Was my name Anne Turner and did I live in San Francisco, California? They had that information, but would I provide my Social Security number? I fell for it and told him the number. He then wanted to transfer me to their own legal department, but I was trying to watch a program on 998, so I asked for his name and phone number and promised I would call him back. He gave me both.

It occurred to me (as I tried to watch the 998 program) that somehow this did not feel right, and I decided to go down to our own administration and ask Christina Spence or Annie Tang for legal advice. Neither was there, but Max Brodsky came from his office to hear my problem. Although very nice and helpful, he was aghast that I had given my Social Security number. He informed me that this was in all probability a scam, and right away called Jim Mazon, the Towers' Security Officer, to take over.

Jim took me through the whole story, confirming that indeed it was a fairly common scam.

“But what would they do with my Social Security number?” I asked. “Use it to access your other accounts—your checking account, your debit card, your credit card.” He had a list of things I needed to do, but he decided to first try calling the telephone number I had been given.

The area code was in West Virginia, but when he got through to the guy who had called me, he said he was in El Paso, Texas. “What’s your street address?” Jim asked, “I want to visit you.”

The phone contact promptly hung up, and Jim established that it was a residential, not a business phone.

Jim sent me off to do the most important thing to protect myself: call my bank, alert them to the scam, promise I would not use the checking account or the credit card for 96 hours, and get the bank to block or flag any unusual activity on my accounts. Jim set about making a series of calls he had listed for me: to the Elder Abuse Line of the Police Department, where he filled out a lengthy report document, to an Ombudsman program, and to Adult Protective Services. These are all important, Jim explained, because people are trying to keep track of scams and control them.

In the meantime, I spent nearly an hour on the phone with my bank changing all my security information (IDs, passwords, etc.), signing up for a new debit card, and gambling that the credit card would be okay. The Police Department later phoned me to confirm Jim’s report. And now, more than a month later, those scammers are still calling me. These days I shout threats to them and block the numbers on my phone.

Lessons learned: **never, ever give your Social Security number to somebody without verification of who they are and why they need or want it.** And, when confused or in doubt, **ask for help.** What we mostly see at the Towers is the work of dining staff, the front desk, and health services. But behind the scenes there is a lot of skill and knowledge that will be shared for the asking.

Entrez Nous

Austin and Van Ness (SFT 1501) are arguing again!

Aus: I love San Francisco so much. I’m so happy we decided to come back and live at the Towers.

Van: Hmm.

Aus: What kind of response is that? Don’t you like living here?

Van: I am hard-pressed to see why you are excited about San Francisco. What is it you like: high taxes, inefficient government, homeless people, constant filth, an absolutely bonkers District Attorney and school board, and increasingly being fearful of street criminals?

Aus: We certainly have problems, but this is still one of the World’s most beautiful cities.

Van: I have been thinking that we should move.

Aus: (Gasp) Really! Wherever would we go? I cannot imagine living somewhere else. Boston, New York, Washington DC, Miami; they all have similar problems. We would just be going to a lot of trouble and then find ourselves in the same or worse situation.

Van: I’ve been thinking about people who have moved out of the Towers. I can recall about ten recent departures, several of them individuals and couples I greatly liked. It has caused me to think. “Is this where I want to live for the next 20 or 25 years?”



Why don’t we spoon anymore?

Aus: But where would we go? What would be better than this?

Van: I think those who have moved to places like Rossmoor may have the right idea. We would have a less structured life, more freedom, be able to take longer walks, have a cleaner environment, and perhaps feel physically safer. At a minimum, we should keep our eye on the new senior facility under construction south of us on Van Ness.

Aus: You would give up all your friends and the fulfilling social conditions around us? You know that regular social interaction increasingly is found to be crucial for longer and healthier living.

Van: On the other side of the coin, the physical insecurity, traffic noise, and diffuse anxiety of being in the city is wearing on me and becoming more stressful. Moreover, the Towers itself is becoming tawdry and stale.

Aus: I thought you believed this to be a beautiful place starting with the lobby, our public rooms, and all the amenities around us.

Van: SFT needs a facelift, an upgrade. Many of our facilities are outmoded and certainly corridors could stand to have new carpeting and be repainted. However, the biggest problem is our food. It has deteriorated. It was once a point of pride; now it's a target of derision.

Aus: You do not even like our food anymore?

Van: You are a lawyer. Here's a hypothetical. If you were contemplating going out to a restaurant, and you were thinking of the quality of service and variety and tastiness of the food, would you pay to come to our SFT dining room? I know my answer.

Aus: Well! I will grant you that the fitness center is far too small and electronic technology, such as channel 998, appears to be unstable. But those things can be fixed and hardly seem to justify moving. I understand SFT management is exploring the food issues intensely.

Van: Does not the high staff turnover worry you? Maybe there's something of an undercurrent of employee dissatisfaction here that is triggering

low morale. We have lost a chef, a facilities and maintenance supervisor, and we've had a huge turnover in marketing personnel. Uncertainty over a Front Porch affiliation may be provoking anxiety among existing and prospective employees. Fees keep going up, apartment vacancies are high, and we have the great sense of uncertainty about being taken over by Front Porch. I would think these things would concern you.

Aus: I believe vacancies are simply a function of the COVID-19 lost year. There are still plenty of people on the waiting list.

Van: I will grant you that full occupancy may be a temporary issue. But staff turnover and the mediocre food are larger issues that need attention.

Aus: Let me quickly get to my bottom line. We have spent a terrible last 12 months, something unpredictable, and I hope never again to be experienced. We and virtually every one of our neighbors and staff at SFT have emerged alive and healthy. All by itself, that should be a message to you.

Van: You make a good point. I still wish the food were better, carpets changed, and the fitness center were modernized.

Tower Talk is published by SFT resident James W. Guthrie. It is known to but neither seeks nor possesses COVIA approval. The publisher is assisted in typesetting by Peter Hertzmann, proofreading by Jennifer Hamilton, and archiving by John Darby. On occasion, other authors contribute substantive articles. *Tower Talk* is distributed electronically. Recipients should write to sugarcaenoo@gmail.com if they wish to be removed from the distribution list. Recipients wishing an enlarged print copy should make a request and it will be supplied.

Annus Horribilis, 2020, Finally Over

James W. Guthrie

One must return to World War II to identify a worse year: millions of deaths worldwide, a quarantined nation, millions of unemployed, old separated from their young, new extremes of personal wealth, a once booming economy driven to its knees, an electorate deeply and darkly divided, rioting in our cities, an increasingly debased culture, few widely accepted leaders, and only a slender flicker of hope on the horizon. Assuredly, 2021 must be better.

New Program

Beginning January 1, 2021, Channel 998 will offer a new program at 11:30AM on Fridays. This show is entitled "Your San Francisco." James Guthrie will be the moderator and weekly guests will include residents who were born in, raised in, or later came to San Francisco. The point is to learn of the City: its activities, haunts, relationships, characters, entertainment, and events that those who now live among us experienced, what and who they loved, and what they fondly reflect upon. Tune in.

Editor's Comments

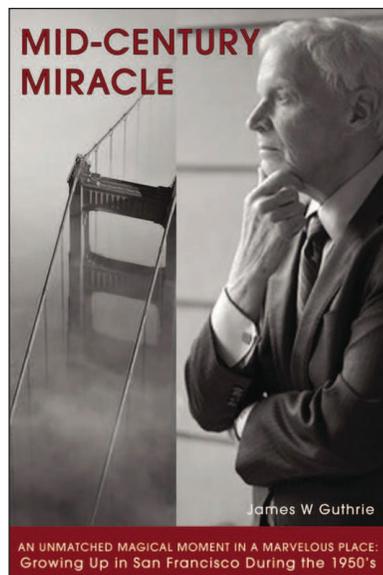
James W. Guthrie

This marks the seventh year of *Tower Talk*. In the middle of December, I asked residents their view of *Tower Talk*, and whether it deserved to continue. I received straightforward advice from respectable people who told me, "You have lost your edge, and it is time to quit" and others who said they found it informative and useful. Most hurtful of all were those who asked, "What's *Tower Talk*?"

There was sufficient positive feedback that *Tower Talk* continues. Its mission is to contribute to and sustain a sense of community. Of course, if this publication offends you, simply delete it or request to be removed from the distribution list. If you have ideas regarding how to improve *Tower Talk*, an opinion, or countervailing view, all are welcome. (Sugarcaenoo@gmail.com)

Submissions by SFT residents have increased to a point whereby this issue contains a supplement containing imaginative photos by Bob Lewis and prose by Carole Freidenberg, Olivia Guthrie, James Guthrie, and Barbara Lewis. These contributions appear immediately following the monthly argument between bleeding heart Austin and curmudgeonly Van Ness on page 6.

Self-Aggrandizement



Book now available as a [free download](#) and soon in SFT library.

Opinion: Why I Dislike Covia

James W. Guthrie

My displeasure with Covia is principled, not personal. What little I know of Covia officials suggests that many are quite able. My complaint is not with them as individuals; it is with their actions as a collective.

I am contemptuous of Covia because of its repeated betrayals, eagerness to subordinate community well-being to corporate aggrandizement, and its mistaken belief that big trumps better.

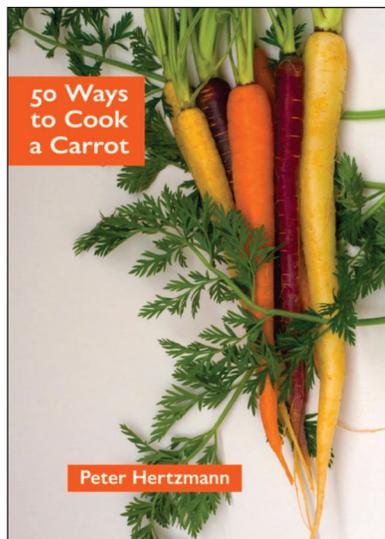
Corporate aggrandizement is visible in petty things such as a Covia-labeled wine, a port cochère

doormat touting the corporation rather than the location, and an obsequious posting of a Covia banner in the midst of SFT second floor resident art displays.

These are relatively minor transgressions compared to the corporation's unilateral severance from the Episcopal Church, pursuit of high-risk expansion strategies, misleading marketing efforts, and forthcoming affiliation with Front Porch.

My contempt for Covia is partially compensated for by my deep appreciation for the staff at San Francisco Towers who repeatedly place resident interest first and shield us from Covia where they can.

More Self-Aggrandizement



Listed among the *New Yorker's* ten best cookbooks of 2020 is *Tower Talk* contributor and SFT resident polymath Peter Hertzmann's *50 Ways to Cook a Carrot*, which, of course, is not about carrots.

Reviewer, Helen Rosner, captures the essence of both author and subject writing, "With instructions and explanations delivered with the pleasingly brusque encouragement of a seasoned teacher, this is a brilliantly audacious act of culinary pedagogy that (also quite brilliantly) verges on the absurd."

New Year's Predictions: Past and Future Sugar Caen

Reviewing 2020 predictions reveals Sugar to be about 80% prescient and 20% befuddled. Sugar nailed the likelihood and outcome of Trump's Senate impeachment, the improbability of a "Blue Wave" in November elections, appointment of a new Supreme Court Justice, the Covia/Front Porch cuddle up, and the percent of the annual SFT fee increase. Sugar blew the Presidential election and did not realize that COVID-19 would wipe out the football season.

What to expect in 2021

- » COVID-19 infections will continue to skyrocket into the second quarter. Vaccines will have a positive effect, but not as quickly or dramatically as hoped. Various members of the "Flat Earth Society" and "Sensible Shoe Brigade" will resist vaccination, citing unacceptable invasion of privacy and possibly an other-worldly plot.
- » The nation's deep cultural and political divide, reflected in historically narrow Senate and House margins, will sustain partisan bickering and government inaction on critical issues. The National debt will be alarming. President Biden's and Senator Feinstein's health and cognitive capacity will excite the media. Threats of impeachment will erupt almost immediately after inauguration.
- » Pent up consumer demand will burst forth in the third and fourth quarters: cruise lines, airlines, tourist destinations, vacation real estate, and restaurants (those that remain) will boom, as will demand for luxury goods and consumer debt.
- » Stocks will escalate dramatically in the third and fourth quarters. San Francisco will be an exception to economic growth. Inept local politicians will exacerbate the flight of middle class families from the City.
- » At least one geopolitical adversary will take advantage of divided government to test U.S. defense capability.
- » Clerical, analytic, and technology facilitated employees now working remotely will be a perma-

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- ment, not a temporary, phenomenon. Designers will scramble to identify means for converting modern office towers to alternative uses.
- » Distance learning will be recognized as disastrous, particularly for low-income and disabled elementary and secondary students. Schools and colleges will return to on-campus learning, recreational, and athletic activities, but many more high school and college classes will blend online with on-campus instruction.
 - » Public pressure will intensify favoring breaking up big tech and social media companies and privacy will grow as a political issue.
 - » Donald Trump will be banned from Twitter, will lose forty pounds, and return in 2024 to run against Kamala Harris.
 - » SFT residents will be stunned by an annual fee increase higher than at any point in the last decade.

Politics: Here & There

James W. Guthrie

Politics International: In the past half-century, four major sexual scandals have been of sufficient severity to reshape political landscapes and bring down governments.

In the early 1960's, John Profumo, Defense Secretary in the Harold Macmillan Conservative government, was accused of having an affair with a 19-year-old girl, Christine Keeler. His eventual resignation damaged the Conservative Party in the 1964 election, giving Labor a victory.

Also in England in the 1960's, Liberal Party Chief, Jeremy Thorpe, was indicted for inciting the murder of a homosexual partner who went public with shocking details. Thorpe was indicted, but escaped conviction, saved by brilliant lawyering. Neither Thorpe nor his political party ever recovered. His fall from grace facilitated the career of Margaret Thatcher, the longest serving Prime Minister in British history

In the early 21st Century, French Socialist Party leader and Chief of the International Monetary Fund, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, was indicted for sexually assaulting a New York hotel maid. Adroit lawyering protected him from conviction, but could not save his political career.

Forty-second U.S. President, William Jefferson Clinton was impeached on grounds of perjury, but the underlying issue was his having had sex with a White House intern.

All four miscreants escaped legal conviction, but, with the exception of Clinton, their political careers were left in shambles. Clinton was acquitted in the Senate and went on to finish his second Presidential term. He has continued to be a public figure and highly paid celebrity.

However, it is possible that Clinton's escape from ignominy could end with the upcoming trial of Ghislaine Maxwell, partner of international sex ring operator, Jeffrey Epstein.

Ghislaine is still bargaining for release on bail. Judges are reluctant because she controls great wealth and is a flight risk, Otherwise, one would think that Maxwell would, by now, have cut a deal with prosecutors, spilling the beans on others in order to save herself. However, if the matter does go to trial as scheduled for July of 2021, celebrity after celebrity is at risk as she reveals sordid details. Prince Andrew of England has already been tarnished so badly that his mother, the Queen, has admonished him and probably would send him to a desert island if she could. Ms. Maxwell's trial should take place this month. Stay tuned for details.

Politics National: The election is over. It was awful. Almost a year of transparent pandering, endless donor solicitations, and torrential spoutings of impossible-to-implement proposals came from all sides, but it is blessedly in the past. Of course, it will start all over again in two years. Calm might even end sooner as Biden critics launch calls for impeachment. Thus, let us enjoy the peace while we can.

With almost two months of post-election hindsight, here is what can be distilled.

No "Blue Wave." A nationwide sweep of national and state offices by Democrats did not occur. Republicans continue to hold a majority of gubernatorial positions, 35, and rule more state legislatures. Republicans dominate at the state level despite being outspent by Democrats almost 2 to 1 in campaign funds.

All About Trump. The November election involved few issues of note. Immigration, education, trade policy, income distribution, and dozens of other serious matters were seldom on the campaign or debate agendas. Rather, the election was a referendum on Donald Trump. He proved to be vastly unliked among Democrats and hard to swallow by many Republicans. One surprise was that the election was as close as it was. It is conceivable, but only conjectural, that if Republicans had found an attractive candidate, they might still hold the White House.

Biden's Attenuated Down-Ballot Effect. The absence of an effective campaign by Biden resulted in Democrats actually losing House seats, resulting in the smallest gap (222 D /213 R) in eighty years.

Limited Obama Legacy. Democrats lost more federal and state legislative seats in his two terms (over four elections) than any Democratic President in sixty years.

Continuing Legislative Stalemate. If Republicans continue to hold the Senate by winning even one Georgia Senate slot, under the discipline of Majority Leader McConnell, the Senate will be a major impediment for Biden's proposals.

Republican Party Evolution. This is not your father's Republican Party. It has managed to recruit women and minority candidates that conventionally were Democrats.

Suburban Housewives. Now key to National Election outcomes.

Politics-State: Activists continue to circulate petitions aimed at recalling Governor Gavin Newsom. These go nowhere and fall of their own weight. The surprise is that foolish people keep trying them. Newsom has named Secretary of State, Alex Padilla, to fill incoming Vice President Kamala Harris's Senate seat.

Politics-Local: The Friday afternoon December 18 Townhall held by our District 2 Supervisor, Catherine Stephani, was interesting. Stephani proved herself to be well-informed, concerned about constituents' interests, and articulate. She focused on crime in our district. Virtually all manner of crimes have increased dramatically.

What Supervisor Stephani could not articulate, and for which she was given no help by SF Police Chief Scott and Precinct Captain Yep, were solutions. The police involved in the Townhall were bureaucrats far more than law-enforcement experts. By actual timing, they spent six minutes congratulating each other. When repeatedly pressed by Supervisor Stephani for plans, strategies, and solutions, they came up empty-handed.

An interesting revelation is that San Francisco has an ordinance preventing public deployment of closed-circuit television cameras. The police chief was encouraging private citizens to have their own cameras around their property or their business.

Those readers who travel to London and Paris will note the widespread use of CCTV in those relatively crime free cities. Their governments rationally forfeit a degree of personal privacy in order to reap the benefits for crime prevention. San Francisco has decided the other way.

The police chief could not hide the fact that the District Attorney is not aggressive in prosecuting those arrested. Moreover, an inability to insist upon setting bail contributes to a simple recycling; those arrested are back on the streets quickly.

The Townhall made clear that San Francisco's criminal problems are far ore political than financial or technical.

Politics-Micro: The display of gingerbread houses on the second floor was terrific. The winner appears in the photo below. Congratulations to Skilled Nursing.



Entrez Nous

Austin and Van Ness (SFT 1501) often bicker about politics. We can listen.

Aus: The Board of Supervisors is about to discuss an exciting idea.

Van: I can hardly wait. Don't keep me on pins and needles. What is that august body going to take up now? They have already done such a marvelous job in solving the homeless problem, meteorically increasing crime, and the outflow of business.

Aus: It's pretty radical, but it's wonderful. They're going to ensure no individual or family ever lives in poverty.

Van: That really is something! I can see why you are excited.

Aus: Do you think it's a good idea? It is so idealistic.

Van: I think it belongs in the pantheon of the worst ideas I've ever heard in my life.

Aus: Why are you critical? This would help us get the homeless off the streets, stimulate consumer demand, give poor people a greater opportunity not simply to enjoy life, but to take better care of their children and their pets.

Van: It pleases me to see you so full of joy. I hate to be the skunk at the garden party. But, pray tell, from where will the money come to subsidize people below some arbitrary individual or family income level?

Aus: I was sure you would ask that. San Francisco is the second wealthiest city in the nation. We have 37 billionaires living in our midst. If each one of them would simply give up \$1 billion annually, I am confident we would have enough money for a minimum annual income of a comfortable nature. Thirty-seven billion dollars spread over, perhaps, 50,000 poor residents would generate a comfortable living.

Van: You honestly believe that these billionaires, whose daily whereabouts are already so elusive as to defy Sherlock Holmes, will stand still for this? The very idea is likely causing them this

moment to summon their private jets, bring their yachts back from Corfu, and get ready to move to their private islands in the San Juans.

Aus: I think you are cynical. I am sure many of them are publicly spirited and will want to help.

Van: I am unable to judge anything about them; I am not one of them, and I do not know any of them. However, their wealth is illusory. Most of it is involved in securities, future incentives, and various ownership plans that are exceedingly difficult to find or untangle, let alone to tax.

Aus: Simply for conversation sake, grant me that we can find the money. Then, surely you would think it to be a good idea

Van: it is an absolutely terrible idea, no matter from where the money comes. If you think homelessness is a problem now, if you think drug addiction is widespread locally, then just start guaranteeing people an annual income, and you will see what a real demographic transformation looks like.

Aus: Really?

Van: Income subsidies will act as a magnet to attract otherwise helpless sponges to San Francisco, and it also will repulse tax-paying residents in the Marina, Pacific Heights, and Seacliff. They are already starting to move to Marin County, Sonoma, or Hillsborough. Now if you want lower home prices in our city's posh neighborhoods, you have just identified the lever that will do it. Bring in more impoverished, raise taxes higher, add to homeless drug addiction, and middle-class families and the city's elite will start to evaporate right in front of you.

Aus: You throw a wet blanket on every good idea.

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Wiley

Carol Freidenberg

I got a call notifying me that Wiley’s ashes were ready. My beloved, high strung, insatiably curious, intense, and often fierce little 16-pound mixed breed dog had been with me for the past 11 years. A “high cuteness factor” dog, with abundant long red, blond, brown hair, and large eager, expressive brown eyes was a rescue. The then-owner of Grateful Dogs Rescue was happy to take care of him until we returned from a summer trip, reassuring us that if it didn’t work out, he was small, cute and would very quickly find a home. I trusted Jean since she had located a previous dog for us, a great success. When this new hyper bundle of energy arrived, we agreed to “just take him for a week and see how it goes.” These rescue folks are brilliant! Who is NOT going to bond with a dog after a week?

Over the years, Wiley could be a challenge. He was an aggressive opportunist around food. He was quick to steal snacks, so in Golden Gate Park we gave wide berth to picnics or young children snacking beside their parents.

He occasionally nipped friends, usually because he hung around everyone’s feet at any table with food, and would be kicked since no one was aware that he was there. However, the guy was a charmer, a perfect chick magnet. He was soft, furry, an “aw shucks” combination of 5 breeds (recent genetic testing), but mostly Pomeranian and Chihuahua. Eager to walk, eager to snoop around, my son Eric described him as a “very happy guy” and dubbed him “Lil Rojo” for his red-brown hair & small size.

I have had a buddy and comforter through many significant life changes. We had a lovely home with a back yard easily available when he arrived, and daily walks were an enthusiastic “must” for us both. Dogs are an excellent exercise machine. When we moved in 2015 from our house to an apartment at SF Towers, though he trembled in the elevators for two weeks given this new experience, he otherwise adapted quickly.

Wiley strolled the halls with gusto, bushy tail bouncing up and down with his high stepping strut. When my husband developed health issues, volunteers helped, and later a neighborhood dog walker took him on as her “fast” dog. As Bob declined, Wiley was always there, happy to sit on his master’s bed, often bringing a smile to others in skilled nursing, as a de facto therapy dog. He was present during our move, Bob’s decline and death, my widowhood, and now a Pandemic. What a valuable source of unconditional love during this horrific period.



On the Promenade by Bob Lewis

I left our life care facility April 4th, at the urging of our son Eric in the early days of COVID-19 when senior crowding put us at risk. Eric agreed we would create our pod of four beings. How lucky I have been in this arrangement through 4 house rentals, and his patient, loving care. I’m a lucky parent and marvel that we have not yet pushed the limits of this unusual combination.

Eric’s dog, Buckaroo (Movie trivia: Named from the 1984 film “The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension”) is a 40-pound black and white very handsome dude rescued from Mexico. Resembling a Dalmatian, but with

fewer & larger, randomized spots. “Bucky” is Mr. Handsome, calmly in charge, rather stately, “beefy” feeling, with a distinct enthusiasm for cozy, warm, soft places. That involves enthusiastically shoving others out of the way, placing himself in the warm spot. Our “cozy” dog, an excellent sleeper. He tolerates Eric’s wrestling moments, is ball obsessed, also afraid of fireworks and the night sky.

Buckaroo has an amazing vocal range. Not barking, not howling. He talks or sings, striking glissandos of low to high notes which bring to mind both Pavarotti and Barry White. Bucks easily established his dominance and we quickly separated them around food time, but Wiley was no dummy and willingly became the Beta Dog. They regarded each other in passing at first, but over time it became clear that Bucky looked out for Wiley and always seemed to know where he was. Wiley took cues from Bucks.

The sound of their enthusiastic running up and down stairs or halls eagerly awaiting outdoor wonders, was a frequent moment. Happy guys when we walked together to a nearby park or beach.

In Berkeley I searched for a setting that would allow me to see them readily and track their locations when off leash, as they sometimes headed in different directions. The “Albany Bulb” was a wonderful discovery along the beach front in North Berkeley/Albany and it became a good daily ritual.

Wiley, despite an advanced heart condition, did really well, happily nosing around and enjoying our walks. One morning mid-November, he was lethargic, not interested in food or activity and laboring to breathe. The vet was clear that his

trachea was collapsed, and no temporary fix was going to help. We made the painful decision to let him go since there was no quality of life ahead for him. Despite that painful loss, he had a very good happy life with one day of struggling. In the human world we would say “Not Bad”. We miss him so often and Buckaroo has grown quieter.

It’s an interesting and oddly positive part of COVID that there are very few dogs available for

adoption at animal shelters. People who have become tired of loneliness have taken them on, and as I chat with dog owners about their recent rescues, it clearly is a win-win situation.

I’m so grateful that these two creatures could take my mind off the depressing numbers and tragedies reported hourly. When really down, they helped me focus elsewhere. And more than anything, they provided a desperately needed source of comfort, affection, and laughter at a very dark, grim period in time.

North Goes South (Part III)

Olivia Guthrie

Moving from Lafayette, California to 1106 Belle Meade Blvd. in Nashville, Tennessee turned out to be easy for us. The house had recently been decorated and had a new kitchen and new bathrooms. It

was about the same size as our California house, so our furniture fit in well.

After our move, I turned my attention to our two-acre property. It had many beautiful trees, badly in need of pruning. So, we hired a tree service to do the work. On the second day the workers were there, the back doorbell rang. Three men were standing at the door, hats in hand. When I opened the door, the man in front said, “Ma’am, do yew wan’ that pole yonder? Good grief, I



Man About Town by Bob Lewis

thought, what is a pole yonder? Not yet used to the Southern vernacular, I was stumped.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I didn't understand you."



Forget Something? by Bob Lewis

"Ma'am, do yew wan' that pole yonder?" I must have looked totally mystified because the man behind him said, "Ma'am, he means that stick a bamboo. He'd like it for a fishin' pole."

Sure enough, beyond our door along the fence was a stand of bamboo with a tall straight bamboo stalk right in the front. Of course, I told him he could cut it down. Afterwards, I envisioned him sitting on the bank of the Cumberland River dressed in his overalls and a straw hat catching catfish with our bamboo pole.

I love to garden, and I sure had my chance there in Nashville. I planted an herb garden and filled an empty bed with old fashioned roses, the kind that smell heavenly. I also planted peonies along our back patio. I hired a landscaper to help plant azaleas and rhododendrons in the front of the house and ferns, hostas, and hydrangeas along one side. Unfortunately, I lost her to Allen Jackson. He was building a big house just outside of Nashville and offered her so much money to landscape his property that she thought she would make enough money to retire. I hope it happened.

We had a circular driveway in front of our house. Down at the street on either side of the driveway were beds ready to be planted. I bought some posies, got dressed in my blue jeans and Birkenstocks, put on my straw hat, loaded up my wheelbarrow and started down the driveway. Just then a long Cadillac pulled up in front of the house and a beautifully dressed and coiffed woman got out and came over to me. "How do you do," she said in a soft Southern voice. "Ah'm Betty Lou Barnes and ah live jus' down the street. You're the new people and your husband is at the University aren't you? Ah see that you've cut down the tree in front of your house."

I said, "Yes, we've just recently moved in. We're from California and my husband just retired from UC Berkeley."

She gasped and put her hand to her breast. "I hope you're not LIBERAL?" She looked at me expectantly.

I thought quickly, "No, we really are moderates."

After a few more words she left, got in her Cadillac and I never saw her again.

In back, I had enough space for a vegetable garden and adjacent to that was my compost pile. It didn't take long to make compost in Nashville's humid weather. I even grew corn and chuckled wickedly to myself thinking about what my neighbors would say if they knew corn was growing on Belle Meade Blvd. I do believe Betty Lou Barnes would have fainted dead away.

To be continued.

The Sandwich Maneuver

Barbara Lewis

At first it seemed like the "dog thing" might drive Bob away. My dogs had always shared my bedroom, and when Bob I started seeing each

other, Nicholas, my big gray poodle, slept under the bed. “What do you feed that animal?” Bob asked in a muffled voice after our first night together. I’d gotten up to let Nicholas out into the backyard. Bob was still mostly under the covers. His slicked-back wings of hair from the night before had turned into an Albert Einstein halo. “You better get a gas detector,” he said. “Those fumes could be lethal.”

Nicholas loved knucklebones, and the digestive process had perfumed our night. The emanations didn’t bother me. “Try to think of it as a lovely rich smell,” I suggested, climbing back in bed beside Bob.

He gave me a long look. “More like an instrument of war,” he said. “I think he’s trying to asphyxiate me.” It was possible. Nicholas had been my companion long before Bob hove on the scene. But Bob called Nicky’s bluff and moved in.

I called my sister and told her. “Well, I’m happy for you,” Lily said. “But I’m getting a little tired of Bob. He’s all you talk about anymore. You’re besotted.”

Lily, who majored in 18th century literature, was given to elaborate turns of phrase, but she was right. Decided. Clouded with love. I loved Bob’s bowlegged walk, his lazy mustache, his blacksmith arms, the way he narrowed his eyes at me. I loved his clean-laundry smell, his 19-year-old Ford, the deep contentment I felt when he took my hand in his own.

Bob moved in, and life was sweet. I fell into bed with him every night, woke up with Albert Einstein every morning. His lack of pretense about going bald – the courage, the purity, the nobility – filled me with lust, stirred me beyond words.

Nicholas continued to sleep under the bed, though we cut back on the knucklebones. He left us on Good Friday in the dreadful year we spent in Ann

Arbor. When we headed back to San Francisco, it was Fred the oafish apricot poodle who occupied the back seat, head out the window, inhaling the shifting scents of the continent.

In our 37 years together, Bob and I have lived with seven dogs - nine if you count the short, sad sojourns of Tripod and Marlow, but that’s another story. Our marriage could be measured in dog spans. And all the dogs, even Susie, who went everywhere with Bob, slept under the bed, never on it. He drew the line at sharing his bed with anyone but me. Then came Sandwich.

Sandwich is a massive wirehaired dachshund – 40 pounds, decidedly nonstandard. Unruly tufts of hair sprout from his muzzle. He adores Bob, and the feeling seems to be mutual. In the morning, I can hear my north woodsman husband chatting away to him in the kitchen. “Whaddya think, Sandwich? How about a cookie? Good catch! You’re a good boy, a very good boy.” The very good boy just turned 3. His



Son of Neptune by Bob Lewis

ripping good health seems contagious. Sandwich frequently hurls himself into Bob’s lap from halfway across the room. I’ve learned to recognize what that “oof” means. But Sandwich

can do no wrong. Though Bob may mutter occasionally about claustrophobia, Sandwich is even allowed to share our bed — these days a palatial California king. But throw in Bob’s reverberant sound effects plus my latter-day insomnia, and some nights even the California king is not big enough. When Bob tires of my whispered exhortations (turn over, turn over, please turn over) and begins to feel like a pig on a spit, he’ll haul himself out of bed and lumber across the hall to our extra bedroom so he can rumble in peace. Sandwich sleeps through it all.

This is the guy I once slept with on a kidney-shaped loveseat, on the beach at Truro, in an upper bunk on the Twilight Limited rattling across the plains. I would have endured far worse than sleeplessness to spend the night with Bob. These mornings, more often than not, find us in separate rooms.

But the doggy presence, which I once feared might drive Bob away, today is my way of reeling him back in. To conjure Bob from across the hall, restore his smooth warm presence to our bed, I need only send Sandwich as my messenger. Here’s how the maneuver works.

Sandwich is still asleep at the foot of the bed. I reach down, sling an arm around his torpedo body and drag him up, squeeze him close. After a few moments of this enforced togetherness, Sandwich struggles free, pours himself over the edge of the bed, and gallops into the front room, where he knows his beloved is to be found. If I sit up now, I can see the next act unfold in the room across the hall. Sandwich is facing the bed, tail wagging furiously. The rear haunches lower onto the floor, gather force, and the wiry dark silhouette

launches up and out of sight. I hear an “oof” and know the Sandwich has landed.

In a few moments Bob’s shadow weaves into view on the wall beyond our bedroom. Then he appears in the doorway, dopey with sleep, arms hanging limply at his side, the 6-foot naked length of him. He looks like a Leonardo drawing. I toss back the covers, and he hauls himself in. Mission accomplished.



Traveler by Bob Lewis

We hear Sandwich hit the floor in the guest room and gallop our way. There’s a pause while he listens to make sure we’re in residence. Then our own mattress jolts and the wild face appears at the foot of the bed. Sandwich paddles across our mounded bodies to wedge himself between us, and in short order lives up to his name. Albert Einstein narrows his eyes at me, slings an arm across Sandwich, and takes my hand in his.

One Out of 2,500

James W. Guthrie

I was always an obedient student. I remember only once in elementary school being sent to the principal’s office, but that was for an extraordinarily minor infraction and resulted in no lasting reputational damage.

Most of the time I played by the rules and did a little to distinguish myself, either

academically or in terms of deportment. There was one exception, a dramatic exception. One day I cut school with a friend.

I do not remember what kind of day it was. I am sure it was not a rainy day, but I have no other recollection. Like most days, school started at 8:00 and we met at his house at 7:30. I remember trudging up the hill from Cabrillo, crossing Balboa, traveling on the level block to Anza, and

then heading downhill to Geary Street where Presidio Junior High was located.

Somewhere along that route, we decided not to go to school. I have no idea what possessed us. I do not think we were avoiding an algebra test or some particularly distasteful action, such as getting back a graded essay in English.

When we got to Geary Street, having decided not to go to school, we took the streetcar out to the end of the line. Now we were at Ocean Beach. We also were close to Playland with its roller coaster, giant slides, centrifugal force platter, and Laughing Sal. Between us, we had enough money to go on rides and buy food. So, we set ourselves out for we thought was going to be an exciting day.

We looked at ourselves in the goofy mirrors that made you fat, thin, tall, or short. We went to the Musée Mécanique and played all kinds of arcade games. Then we decided to go on the roller coaster.

As we stood in line to purchase a ticket, a woman approached me and said: "Jimmy! What are you doing here? You should be in school." Right away, I knew I was in trouble, and it was going to get worse.

From kindergarten through the 12th grade, one attends school about 2,500 days. How in the world on the one day in my life I cut school, out of 2,500 school days, could someone I know find me?

The woman, Judas Iscariot and Benedict Arnold all rolled into one, was the receptionist in my dentist's office. It was her day off. She was quite adamant about it all and said she was going to phone my mother. That threw real fear in me. I knew that in the evening my mother would tell my father, and my father would then call me into the living room and tell me to sit down. Then in his deep voice he would say, "James." Always a bad sign when my parents used James; "Why did you cut school?"

Then I knew some punishment would be issued, such as I could not have my allowance for several weeks or I could not play with my friend for a month or who knows what else. I might be assigned some particularly distasteful chore like taking out the garbage for two months.

This interruption really spoiled our day. Ed and I did not go on the roller coaster. We took the number 5 McAlister streetcar back down Fulton Street until we got to 30th Ave. I got off and hurried home in hopes that I could deflect some of the damage that I felt was sure to come.



Music Lovers by Bob Lewis

I did not get home in time. The dentist's receptionist had already phoned my mother. What followed was not pretty. My mother phoned my friend's mother. She was quite indignant and told my mother that her son would never undertake such an act unless unduly influenced by someone bad, like "Jimmy."

She said her son would never be permitted to play with me again. Even though the whole idea of cutting school was as much his as mine, he got off without being punished. One day out of 2,500, and I get caught and my friend goes free. I did not think this was fair.

Two days later I was walking home from the Fulton playground on 27th Ave when I passed by my friend's home. His father sedan was parked in

front of their house. The driver side window was rolled down. I had an impulse.

I took out my wallet. Like all my friends, maybe all teenage boys, I had a condom in my wallet. Of course, it was never used and was never going to be used. It was the 1950s. There was no sex then. Insofar as I can tell, all children were conceived by some mysterious and remote process, but we all had a condom de rigeur. Because these condoms were never used, they always made a funny little worn out circle in your wallet.

I removed the condom package. Ironically the

package said TROJAN on it. I opened it, took out the contents, and threw the condom through the car window onto the front seat. It was a spontaneous action.

The next day in school, my friend and I were talking between classes, even though we were not supposed to, and he revealed that his parents had had the most awesome argument he had ever heard. Apparently, his mother had found the condom in the car. He wondered if he was going to have to sleep at his aunt's house.

I said, "Hmm!"

**San Francisco Towers
Administration Magnificently
Handled Round One of COVID-19
Vaccinations. Thank You!**



Review and Preview

The 10 weeks between November’s Presidential election and Biden’s January inauguration seemed like 10 years. We witnessed one of the most serious challenges to American democracy ever before experienced. Now that it is over, one hopes that our nation can be restored. The inaugural appears to have given us a good start toward civility and greater unity.

This *Tower Talk* contains comments about national and local politics, SFT resident observations about being vaccinated, another episode of North Goes South by Olivia Guthrie, a nostalgic description of the publisher’s firsthand experience with two highly visible celebrities, and finally, Austin and Van Ness are continuing to bicker.

Instead, his egomaniacal behavior, petulance, and refusal to accept reality rendered him a danger to the nation and an embarrassment to those who formerly supported him. His own shortsighted behavior assured him a place on the wrong side of history, and will preclude him from having future influence. It did not have to end that way.

But why will Biden fail? It might be his health and reduced cognitive capacity. We can all hope that he is not disabled. However, even if in good health, he has little or no electoral mandate. The nation is more divided than possibly at any time, certainly since the Vietnam War and possibly since the Civil War, and his political party is in shambles.

There was no “Blue Wave” powering Democrats into office across the land.

**National Politics:
Unprecedented Unilateral
Self Destruction (Opinion)**

James W. Guthrie

It is one thing to destroy yourself. It is quite another to almost take down an entire nation in the process.

Trump, had his overly inflated ego ever permitted, could have secured a smooth transition for the new President, remained proudly quiet, continued as head of the Republican Party, and re-emerged as a savior when Biden’s virtually assured failures start to mount.



The election was anti-Trump, not pro-Biden. The Supreme Court is balanced toward “Originalists” (thanks to Trump), the Senate is divided dead even, and the House is in the hands of Democrats, but by a more tightly balanced margin than in decades. Moreover, the Democratic Party is itself deeply divided between leftist and centrists. Bernie Sanders, Peter Buttigieg, and Amy Klobuchar are still sore about the way they were tossed aside.

What to look for downstream: more economic stimulus

packages and every now and then a bill that cuts across party lines, e.g., infrastructure.

Local Politics: A District Attorney Who Should Be Recalled (Opinion)

James W. Guthrie (Parts of the following are excerpted from a blog by David Sacks)

Government's paramount responsibility is protection of its citizens. Our District Attorney, Chesa Boudin, has failed miserably in performing this function. He should be recalled.

Boudin, a George Soros subsidized leftist, was fourteen months-old when both his mother and father, members of a left-wing terrorist group called the Weather Underground, were arrested as accessories to the murder of two police officers and a security guard during the 1981 robbery of a Brinks truck. His mother served over twenty years, while his father is still incarcerated almost forty years later. (Boudin was raised by Weather Underground leaders Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn.)

Boudin, previously a public defender and former translator for the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, ran for office on a progressive platform of criminal justice reform, including elimination of cash bail, ending mass incarceration, and eliminating racial bias in the criminal justice system. Boudin also said he would demand the police be held accountable for brutality.

The San Francisco Police Officers Association responded by spending \$600,000 to launch attack ads calling Boudin "the number one choice of criminals and gang members," according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. In November of 2019, Bourdin was elected by a fluke, winning, barely, over a highly qualified competitor, Suzy Loftus. Here is the case in point.

Shortly after 4 PM Thursday, December 31, 2020, Hanako Abe, just 27 years old, was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver while walking in the SOMA district of San Francisco. Another woman, Elizabeth Platt, 60, was killed alongside Abe.

The hit-and-run driver, Troy McAlister, was intoxicated and was arrested driving a car he had stolen in Daly City two days earlier from a woman he met on a dating app. Paroled in April after serving time for armed robbery, McAlister had been arrested five times since his release for various crimes, including car theft, most recently on December 20. But none of these recent arrests

resulted in any new charges brought by District Attorney Chesa Boudin's office and McAlister remained free with no obligation to post bail.

Following the tragic New Year's deaths, local reporter and blogger David Sacks wrote:

This senseless tragedy has brought renewed scrutiny to Boudin's conduct in office as he enters his second year as D.A. During his now-concluded first year, burglaries in the city spiked by 49 percent, with the increase heavily driven by repeat offenders who

were arrested and returned to the streets as Troy McAlister repeatedly was. Displaying a talent for fact-dodging euphemism most politicians can only envy, Boudin referred to these serial reoffenders as "prolific folks," as if they were akin to writers or painters working assiduously at their craft. Faced with one of his "prolific folks" senselessly killing two residents, Boudin deployed a fog of linguistic obfuscation in order to shift blame to the parole division: "We will make changes to ensure that people on parole receive the supervision and structure needed from parole to prevent this tragedy from recurring." If you interpret that to mean that

Program Note

On Fridays at 11:30AM turn to Channel 998 and watch *Your San Francisco* hosted by James Guthrie and Megan Sullivan.

February guests will be:

February 5: Peter Hertzmann – San Francisco cuisine

February 12: Ken Berry – San Francisco at War

February 19: Peter Spencer – Social Security

February 26: Helen Ridley – Golden Gate Park

parolees will be sent back to jail for reoffending while on parole, you don't understand Chesa Boudin and his crusade.

Nostalgia Meeting: Not One But Two Luminaries

James W. Guthrie

Long ago, on a rainy Saturday afternoon, my high school girlfriend Ann and I visited a friend of hers who lived in the Marina District in San Francisco. We decided to bake cookies. (Jeezo Peezo!, How innocent can it get!) I do not know from where that idea came, but at least it was something we could do when it was too cold to go outside.

In the course of our baking, Ann's friend mentioned that she had new neighbors. Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio had moved next door about a month earlier. I jokingly said, "Why don't we go next door and ask if they have any sugar that we can borrow?"



A Web photo of 2150 Beach Street, a home that DiMaggio originally purchased for his parents, but initially lived in with Marilyn Monroe immediately after they got married.

Everyone laughed, and then Ann said, "You can go next door and we will come with you." I suggested we could take them some cookies as a welcoming gesture.

And that is exactly what we did. We stiffened our spines, rang the doorbell, and to our surprise Marilyn Monroe answered. She was neatly dressed in a pair of gray slacks and a long-sleeve silk blouse. We introduced ourselves, offered her a plate of cookies, and, to our total amazement, she invited us in.

We entered the living room. Joe DiMaggio was sitting in a large lounge chair reading a newspaper. He stood up, greeted us in a most amiable manner, and then we stood around awkwardly. Ann began to say goodbye and slowly edged toward the front hallway. Marilyn Monroe said, "Aren't you forgetting something?" We all looked at each other. What had we done? Were we being rude? Marilyn Monroe said, "Can't we have some cookies?" I was chagrined, and handed them over. I was so starstruck I had forgotten our mission.

North Goes South: Part III

Olivia Guthrie

After settling in our house on Belle Meade Blvd, Nashville, we went exploring for restaurants. One of the first places we visited was Uncle Bud's all you can eat fried catfish and fried chicken. The sides were white beans, coleslaw, and hush puppies; that's it. I must admit it was delicious and we went back many times. We also went to the Pancake Pantry where we had to wait in line to get in. The big attraction was that the Pantry was just off Music Row and, if you were lucky, you might see some of the country music stars. We did see Chet Atkins one time. He sat behind us and was wearing the most beautiful cashmere-camel's hair blazer I have ever seen. But finding high quality restaurants wasn't easy. This was 1994 and it wasn't until at least 10 years later that fine dining as we know it came to Nashville.

Country music stars were easy to see all over town. I often saw Emmy Lou Harris at the dry cleaners. I would smile at her and tip my head slightly and she did the same. It was de rigueur in Nashville not to approach the stars unless you actually knew them. I saw Faith Hill quite often at one of the restaurants where I lunched with

friends. Crystal Gayle owned a fine shop, named Crystal's, where you would go to buy a wedding gift or a special gift for a friend. Jim and I saw her in her shop one afternoon and, yes, her hair did touch the floor - and she was wearing high heels.

At that time there wasn't much you would call culture in Nashville. The Frist Art Museum opened in 2001. The beautiful Schermerhorn Symphony Hall opened in 2006. It was then that the orchestra went on to be notable, on a par with San Francisco's. But we did have the Tennessee State Museum which had wonderful displays of Tennessee history. One time I read that they were having a show of African American artists. So I decided to go see it. The show was well hung in a large room and the Director had done everything to make it an interesting display. But then I discovered another new show right next door displaying Confederate flags! I couldn't believe the insensitivity shown to the African Americans!

In fact, I was so upset that I went home and wrote a letter to the Nashville newspaper, The Sentinel, and they published it. At that time, under your name, the newspaper published your full address also. Fortunately, they changed that policy a few years later because it wasn't long before I received a large envelope from the Sons of the Confederacy. Inside was a polite letter informing me that they were going to educate me about the South. The material was scurrilous and shocking; so bad that I would not repeat any of it here except to say it did include the N word. Now I really was upset. I could envision a cross burning on our lawn. I never wrote another letter to the Editor. (To be continued)

The Shot: I

Barbara Lewis

Squirreling along in line up against the corridor wall, waiting to get our shot. Slowly, slowly, one Towers dweller after another disappears into The Lounge. My husband prudently deflects to a nearby armchair. Max appears, chair in arm, to offer seating to the rest of us. No takers. When

the line ahead of me dwindles to two, hubby rejoins us. At last Bob and I are whisked into the inoculation destination. He's scooted off into a corner, I'm seated briskly near the entrance.

"Could you roll up your sleeve?" I can, and before I can even apprise myself of the situation, my arm is wiped clean, and a moment later I hear "All done." Another cross-room escort guides me to yet another chair, where a tall, handsome fellow, apparently in charge, advises me, "Stay seated for 15 minutes. Here is your alarm clock." He hands me a smallish round-face watch and disappears. Fifteen minutes, I think. OK. Looking up, I see directly across from me on the far side of the lounge my husband being seated for, I assume, his 15 minutes. Apparently, Miss January is filling in today as his monitor, and Bob, past master of small talk, takes it on as his job to keep her occupied. Miss January chortles away audibly from her seat alongside for 15 very long minutes.

Bob and I head back to our apartment together. "Any pain?" I ask as we amble back to our elevators. "Not even a little bit. You?" "Not from the shot," I reply.

San Francisco Towers: "Trash to Treasures"

Marta Johnson, Holly Robinson, and Judy Donahue



have transformed recyclables into art and are urging other residents to do the same. One can view their creative efforts, and those of others, displayed on the second floor. It is absolutely worth your time, and thank you all.

Shot II: Boredom, Memory Loss, Needing Patience, Who Knows?

Anne Turner

I was doing something else (cannot remember what) when I glanced at the clock and saw it was 4:03. I had completely forgotten that my

vaccination group was scheduled for 4pm. Is this memory loss yet another sign of aging? At any rate, I gathered myself together and rushed downstairs. It turned out to be a good time to arrive, because most of the others in my group had already passed into the “shot-in-the-arm” room.

I signed in and was sent to a vaccinator immediately. The Walgreens employee (who looked no older than 13) loaded up her syringe, pushed up my sweater sleeve, and poked me efficiently. She stuck on a bandage and sent me to the “Rest Area,” where I was supposed to sit for 15 minutes, waiting for adverse symptoms.

None came; hell, the wound didn’t even hurt! This turned out to be the most boring part of the whole enterprise. Because of the six-foot distancing requirement, conversation with others was impossible, and I had not been clever enough bring a book or my iPhone.

Anyway, I seem to be doing a lot of waiting lately at CPMC’s Emergency Room or standing ready at the door before SF Tower’s limo draws up to collect me after a dental appointment.

I am trying to learn patience, but it isn’t easy. Maybe it is too late.



Entrez Nous

Austin and Van Ness reside in SFT 1501. They seldom see eye-to-eye. We can listen.

Aus: (Excitedly) Isn't the chef's departure a disaster? What are we going to do? He will be very difficult to replace don't you think? I'm really distraught.

Van: (inaudible sound)

Aus: Why do you think he left? Do you think he has a new job? Maybe he got tired of us? Were we insufficiently appreciative of him? He has a wife and children you know.

Van: (inaudible sound, possibly a grunt)

Aus: (Again excited) Speak up. What is wrong with you? I am describing a crisis and you are just grunting.

Van: Maybe he was fired.

Aus: (Speaking rapidly) How can you say that? How do you know that? That's terrible.

Van: I do not know that he was fired. I do not know if he is ill. I do not know if he quit. I do not know if he had found another job. I do not know any of those things. It is not my business to know. I do not need to know.

Aus: Why are you not upset about all of this?

Van: Because I never thought he was very good to begin with.

Aus: How can you possibly say that? And why do you always yawn when I talk?

Van: I am not yawning. I am trying to talk, but you are so animated I cannot get a word in.

Aus: What was not to like about the chef?

Van: To begin with, menus were depressingly unimaginative and endlessly repetitive, food items seldom lived up to the fancy French descriptors ascribed to them in the menus, and the kitchen was simply not supervised sufficiently.

Aus: I could not disagree more. Our food is good, and we were fortunate to have his services. I just cannot believe you hold a negative view.

Van: Even if I were positively predisposed toward the former chef, what difference would it make. Residents do not and should not have authority to hire and fire SFT employees.

Aus: But what about the Food & Beverage Committee? Can't they do something about this?

Van: You are becoming absurd. The F&B Committee does not hire and fire people. They act as an intermediary between dining services and residents, but that certainly does not involve evaluating employee performance.

Aus: I hope we survive.

Van: I strongly suspect that if someone had not told you the chef was leaving you would never have known. He did not do the cooking.

Aus: Well, I'm glad you're so calm about it all. Also, I still wish you'd stop yawning when I'm talking

Tower Talk is published by SFT resident James W. Guthrie. It is known to but neither seeks nor possesses COVIA approval. The publisher is assisted in typesetting by Peter Hertzmann, proofreading by Jennifer Hamilton, and archiving by John Darby. On occasion, other authors contribute substantive articles. *Tower Talk* is distributed electronically. Recipients should write to sugarcaenoo@gmail.com if they wish to be removed from the distribution list. Recipients wishing an enlarged print copy should make a request and it will be supplied.

Preview

Tower Talk carries articles about health and wealth. Three articles discuss the creation and distribution of wealth. There are two COVID-19-related articles by Peter Hertzmann, one that unravels the mysteries of “95% effective,” and another suggests appraising not only the medical advice itself but also its source. There is also a polemic advocating recall of the San Francisco School Board for its misplaced efforts at renaming 44 schools and failing to operate the schools it has. Of course, there is a predictable argument between Austin and Van Ness.

Throw the Bastards Out

James W. Guthrie

In an early draft of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, Mark Twain wrote, “First, God made school board members for practice, then he made monkeys.” The San Francisco Unified School District Board of Education and high-level central office administrators provide added evidence of Twain’s derisive observation.

It is likely that our city’s school board and central administration represent one of the most irresponsible government agencies in San Francisco’s modern history. Even the City’s left-leaning Mayor has said that the school board is acting in an unproductive manner and has filed a lawsuit against the board for not re-opening the public schools. An interview with the school board President published in *The New Yorker* displayed how empty a vessel she is, engaging in double-speak and criticizing Lincoln and other historic notables for their flaws rather than proclaiming their heroic accomplishments.

While the school board wastes time and money on personal political agenda items, such as sponsoring reparations for Native Americans, covering up or destroying world-class historic art, and thinking of new names for historically labeled schools, they are defaulting on their principal responsibility: providing a good education to students.



San Francisco School Board President, Gabriella Lopez

Few northern cities serve such a small percent of the school age eligible students as does SFUSD. Middle-class parents rely on private and other non-public schools to a greater degree in San Francisco than any other major American city outside of former Confederate states.

While SFUSD enrollments have been shrinking, school district spending and hiring have been on the upswing. Over the last two decades, enrollments have plummeted by a third, but the district has added one-third more employees. If the added employees were classroom teachers, there might be some justification. However, they are not. It is non-teaching staff, mostly administrators and central office personnel, that have been added.

Money cannot be claimed as an issue. Per pupil expenditures are approaching \$20,000 annually. That is nearly twice as much as the U.S. public school average.

Teacher salaries have not been the beneficiaries of the school district’s profligate spending. The highest possible salary for a classroom teacher is less than the median household income for San Francisco residents.

For the kind of student to personnel ratios and per pupil spending that are taking place in our city, we should have world-class schools. Instead, with our school board and central office personnel, we appear to have world-class fools.

One proposed solution is to subordinate the school board to the County Board of Supervisors and empower that body to appoint school board members. Research fails to reveal differences between appointed and elected school boards. Thus, more to the point, a recall election is in order. If you have an opportunity to sign a recall petition, please do so.

Wealth and Its Problems

James Guthrie

The United States is the World's wealthiest nation. Our annual Gross Domestic Product of \$33 trillion exceeds all other nations, including China, by a wide margin. (On a per capita basis, Switzerland, Ireland, and Norway have higher GDPs than the U.S.) However, U.S. wealth is not distributed equally, either by geography or by household, and as a nation, we are deeply in debt.

A seismic social and economic shift began in the 1990's. The U.S. economic and technical centers of gravity began moving rapidly west. New York remains a major center for finance, and Washington DC is the nation's government hub. Conventional manufacturing, energy, and agricultural production dominate the Midwest and South. However, here is the change.

A massive geopolitical migration of high-tech knowhow, personal and corporate wealth, and potential political influence has congregated within a 25-mile-wide coastal corporate corridor beginning with Microsoft, Amazon, Starbucks, Boeing, and Costco in Seattle and stretching a thousand miles south through Apple, Netflix, Google, and Cisco, in Silicon Valley and continuing downward to the defense businesses of Los Angeles and San Diego. This is the largest concentration of privately controlled economic

capacity on the face of the earth and has no comparison in modern human history.

Genghis Kahn's empire would be a rival. Spain at the height of its accumulation of Latin American treasure or Victorian England with its colonial hegemony might have been equals, but those were nations, not a collection of private individuals and corporations.

In the San Francisco Bay Area alone, the aggregate market value of Apple, Facebook, Alphabet, Netflix, Oracle, Uber, Tesla, and Cisco Systems exceeds the annual gross domestic product of modern-day Great Britain, and equals 40% of the GDP Germany, Europe's wealthiest nation.

Program Note

On Fridays at 11:30AM turn to Channel 998 and watch *Your San Francisco* hosted by James Guthrie and Megan Sullivan.

March guests will be:

March 5: Peter Spencer – Social Security and San Francisco.

March 12: Peter Hertzmann – San Francisco and food.

March 19: Adrienne Jonas – her unusual path to SF and her interesting business career.

March 26: Paul Sedway – San Francisco City Planning Issues.

It is not simply financial capital that is shifting. Demographers have documented the flow of advanced and scientific degree holders from the East coast and Midwest to the western tech corridor.

Wealth of this magnitude portends of disproportionate political influence. All of us living in San Francisco Towers marvel at and derive investor and consumer benefits from the brilliant efforts of our neighborhood's technological experts.

Nevertheless, one must acknowledge that these ambitious, brilliant entrepreneurs possess the possibility of unduly influencing the political landscape. Apple's Tim Cook is routinely discussed as a national political candidate. Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, the fourth wealthiest American after only Microsoft's Bill Gates, Tesla's Elon Musk, and Amazon's Jeffrey Bezos, is said to harbor presidential or senatorial aspirations.

Not only do Tech Titans and their corporations have unmatched wealth and visibility that could be converted to political capital, but they also have an additional asset never before previously

possessed. Tech companies have unquantifiable reams of information about each of us: our assets, our aspirations, our consumer tastes, and our preferences.

Modern America is characterized by seldom seen wealth concentration. Today's Tech Titans and their peers comprise less than 1% of the total U.S. population. They control almost 40% of the nation's wealth. The situation is every bit as pregnant with the prospect of evil as was possessed by Gilded Age Titans of a century ago. Key ingredients then were oil, steel, brute labor, and guile. It is now silicon, technical genius, and hubris.

Gilded Age tycoons were conservative. They used their partisan political power to protect their interests. Some of today's Tech Titans follow. For example, the Koch brothers, Charles Munger, and Peter Thiel lean right. However, judging by their contributions to electoral campaigns, a majority of tech billionaires are liberal in their outlook and are capable of using their wealth and foundations to further their political views.

Solutions to wealth concentration and disproportionate political influence are hard to come by. Breaking up huge companies risks ceding markets to competitors in China and Korea. The issue of potentially inappropriate political influence is complicated by recent a Supreme Court ruling sustaining the right of corporations to be political actors. Thus, for the moment, there is little to be done but to be alert to corporate misdoing.

Where Wealth Begins: Economic Engines in Our Back Yard

James W. Guthrie

Wealth formation relies upon land, labor, and capital. It is in the domain of intellectual capital that the San Francisco Bay Area excels. The Bay Area benefits from the presence of two world-class universities: University of California at Berkeley ("Cal") and Stanford. The 2020 Forbes University rankings proclaims Stanford as the best university in the United States and Cal as number seven.

The two institutions maintain a friendly rivalry and each probably benefits from the competition. Both are academically distinguished, and sometimes they also have good athletic teams. This is particularly true of Stanford which for several recent years has had more successful athletic teams than any other university in the nation. On the academic side, when combined, the two institutions have more living Nobel Laureates (35) than any nation, except the United States.

These schools have contributed powerfully to the Bay Area's, California's, and the nation's economies. It is no accident that the electronics and emerging biotech revolutions owe their birth in large measure to the scientific R&D activities of these two schools. Cal and Stanford together are estimated to contribute \$200 billion annually to California's \$3.14 trillion Gross State Product, the fifth largest economy in the World after, the U.S., China, Japan, and Germany.

The University of California, founded in 1868, is the older and by far the larger of the two institutions. It now enrolls approximately 42,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Stanford was founded in 1885 as a private university by California's former governor and railroad magnate Leland Stanford and his wife Jane. The university is actually named for their son, Leland Stanford Junior, who died prematurely. It enrolls approximately 19,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

Cal is a public institution, deriving its charter from the state legislature and governed by a gubernatorially appointed Board of Regents, members of which serve extended terms. Stanford has a self-perpetuating Board of Directors. Each of these oversight bodies is comprised of highly visible business and political luminaries who are expected to make substantial financial contributions.

Cal's annual operating budget is \$3 billion. Stanford's annual operating budget is twice as large, but that includes Stanford Hospital. Even though it is a public institution, Cal derives only a small percent of its annual revenues

(about 15 percent) from the state. It, like privately chartered Stanford, depends heavily on charitable and alumni donations, contract research funding, endowment income, and student tuition.

Institutional leadership and governance provide an interesting contrast. Stanford has risen to greatness, primarily as a consequence of having brilliant and dynamic Presidents, seemingly blessed decade after decade with creative and forceful CEOs.

Cal certainly has had highly visible and dynamic Chancellors. However, Cal's academic prominence, far more than Stanford's, is due to the comprehensive role in governance played by the faculty. Faculty appointments and promotions, student academic requirements, and oversight are provided at Cal by faculty committees. Stanford's faculty is active, but it is far more advisory and less operational than is Cal's.

The two institutions together and their multifaceted R&D efforts have spawned literally thousands of Bay Area and worldwide companies and contribute billions to the economy. Boston has Harvard and MIT, Los Angeles has UCLA and Cal Tech, but no other U.S. city can boast of two powerhouse universities.

One worrisome trend, particularly if it accelerates, is the hundreds (Hoover Institute claims thousands) of corporations abandoning California over high taxes and crazy politics. So far, these firms include large employers such as Oracle, Tesla, and Schwab.

Glaring Problems: Debt and Distribution

James W. Guthrie

The United States Federal Government has not had a balanced budget in a quarter-of-a-century. The national debt is \$23 trillion and growing. Per capita debt share approximates \$80,000. (A family of 4 owes \$320,000) That means we have borrowed \$80,000 per person from future generations, an amount unlikely to be repaid in our lifetime. It matters because our children and grandchildren will pay interest on that

debt, probably, forever. We have borrowed this money from future generations. This effects the economy because there is less money for each person to spend on day to day living.

Most of the debt is held publicly by U.S. corporations and agencies. Japan and China are the largest foreign holders of treasury bonds. This house of cards will collapse if the United States can no longer pay interest on this debt and sacred treasuries are devalued. And that will include treasuries in which the Social Security Trust Fund is invested. We are currently lulled into complacency because interest rates are at such a low level that the payments are tolerable. This will not continue.

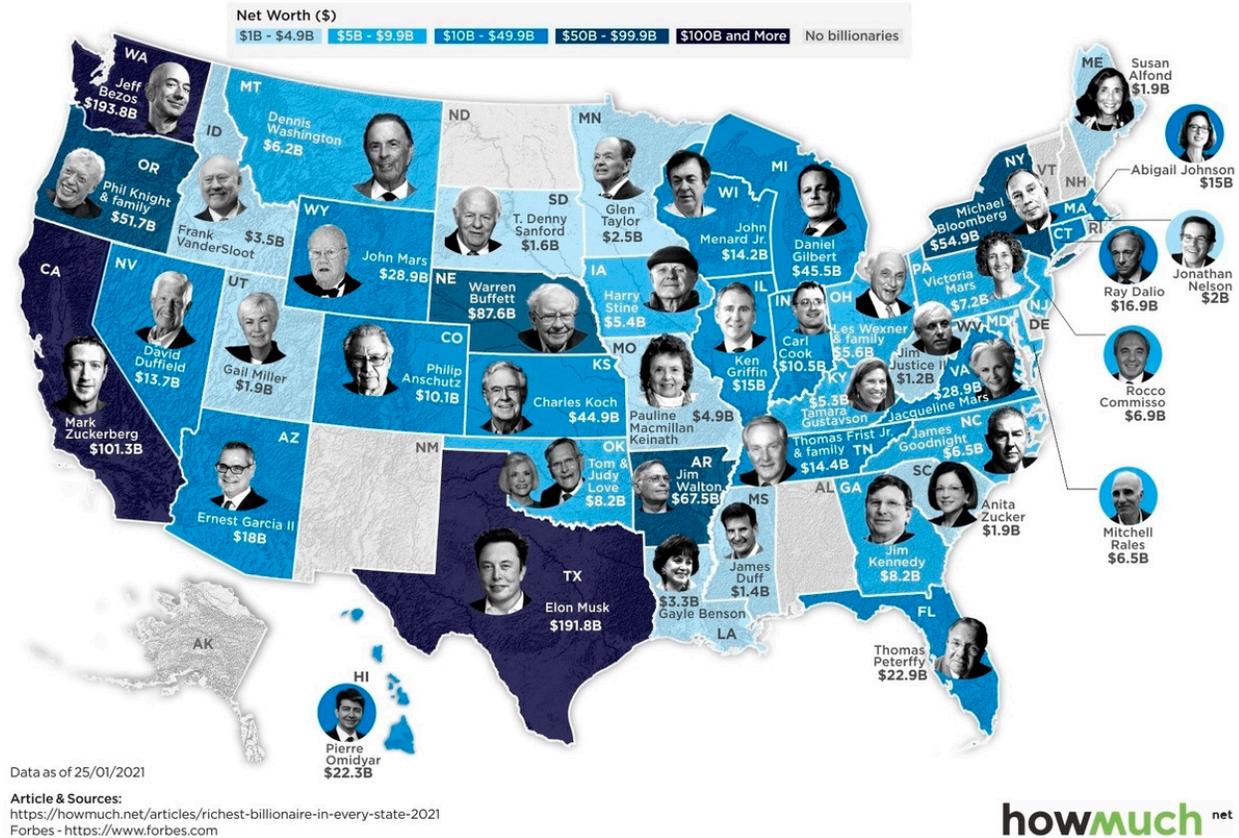
The billionaire map on the next page, brazenly expropriated from Money Magazine, is evidence of the increasing household income disparity in America. We are now matching and en route to exceeding the excesses of the Gilded Age, more than a century ago. These were the "malefactors of great wealth" against whom Teddy Roosevelt railed and eventually tamed.

At the end of the 19th century and into the early years of the 20th century, the U.S. economy was controlled by a relative few oligarchs. Rockefeller, Carnegie, JP Morgan, and Vanderbilt were household names, much as Bezos and Gates are today. While touting the virtues of capitalism and competition, Gilded-Age Barons relied on cartels, monopolies, stock scams, and illegal contracts to control more than half the nation's economic assets and exercised vastly disproportionate political influence. At the time of his death, in 1877, Cornelius J. Vanderbilt controlled 15 percent of the U.S. economy. In today's dollars, Vanderbilt's wealth would equal approximately \$210 billion, more than Jeff Bezos.

While not quite as wealthy or powerful as their counterparts from yesteryear, today's billionaires are adding to their wealth at alarming rates. Together, Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, and Warren Buffet (the five top-ranked American billionaires) experienced a collective 85% increase in their wealth since the pandemic began. This equates to an added \$303 billion in

Richest Billionaire in Every State in 2021

Estimated Net Worth (\$)



wealth in a year. In contrast, the median wealth of American households is about \$121,700, and due to COVID-19, there has been a rising inability to cover monthly bills and a risk of losing one's home.

Another way to view the enormous concentration of wealth among America's billionaires is to realize that the top five, listed above, have more combined wealth than the total of public-school annual expenditures for all fifty states. Five persons have more wealth than is spent annually on the schooling of more than 50 million U.S. school children.

Something must be done about wealth inequality. If it continues at the current pace, the less fortunate among us, perhaps having lost hope, will withdraw their fealty to the social contract, and further imperil democracy.

Simple and outmoded solutions are discussed everywhere. Vastly increased taxes on the super-rich never fully succeeds. They find dozens of ways to shield their wealth. They can, as a last

resort, always purchase their own island and establish their own nation.

On the other hand, catering to the low-income side of the ledger, financial giveaways, such as guaranteed annual incomes, create government dependency, encourage individual sloth and criminality, and dash personal dignity. Similarly, elevating the minimum wage serves principally to eliminate entry level jobs.

New, or at least renewed, approaches are needed. A multi-pronged approach is in order. Billionaires need added incentives to give their money away or direct it toward good causes. (Bill and Melinda Gates are model citizens in this regard.) At the lower end of the wealth spectrum, we need financial help and renewed lifetime hope for individual workers, poverty impacted families, and small businesses. We need bold ideas, not old political rhetoric. It is time for a modern-day equivalent of The New Deal or The Great Society.

Previously, innovations such as Social Security, Medicare, space exploration, Obamacare, federal aid to education, environmental protect, and ingenious infrastructure projects such as the Interstate Highway System have resulted from Presidential Task Forces. It is time to try this mechanism again.

Joe Biden should convene a Presidential Task Force focused on “Post-COVID America.” Its charge should be a practical plan for a revitalized economy, debt retirement, and more equitable society. It must be perceived as being and indeed operate in a nonpartisan manner. It should be co-chaired by Vice President Harris and Stanford University’s Condoleezza Rice. It should be provided with expert and bipartisan staff and required to report by November of 2021. It should scour the nation for ideas, hold widespread public hearings and public forums, distill ideas, and issue an understandable report intended to mobilize Congress and state governments and give Americans confidence that hopeful and peaceful days lie ahead.

COVID-19 Vaccination: The Significance of Two Little Words

Peter Hertzmann

A two-dose regimen of BNT162b2 conferred 95% protection against Covid-19 in persons 16 years of age or older. Safety over a median of 2 months was similar to that of other viral vaccines.

This is the conclusion stated in the abstract to a paper published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on December 31, 2020. BNT162b2 is the technical name for the Pfizer vaccine most of us received. Later in the paper, “95% protection” is replaced by “95% effective.” What does “95% effective” mean?

It does not mean that you have a one-in-twenty chance of contracting COVID-19 after two doses of the vaccine, even though this was written in one of the unsigned emails from Covia Headquarters in Walnut Creek. It simply is the ratio of the number (8) of study subjects who tested positive on a PCR test for COVID-19 after

two doses of the vaccine compared to the number (162) of study subjects who tested positive on a PCR test for COVID-19 after two doses of the placebo. The median follow-up time was two months. The ratio assumes that the number of subjects in each study group was equal, which it essentially was.

This method of determining effectivity is one of convention and is typically used in drug trials. The difference in this trial is that the placebo is not expected to have a positive effect.

A statistician would state the results differently: Of the 21,720 subjects who received two doses of the vaccine, 8 subjects tested positive on a PCR test for COVID-19 in a median period of two months following injection. This translates to less than 0.04% of the subjects who were vaccinated later contracted tested positive for COVID-19.

In lay terms, the vaccine administered in the SFT Lounge is probably much more effective than 95%. But what about the word “contagious”? We are hearing news as to how the South African variant of COVID-19 is twice as contagious as the initial (?) variant. What does this mean? How contagious was the first variant?

From a technical viewpoint, a contagious disease is a category of transmittable diseases where the disease is transferred by physical contact with a sufferer or by casual contact with their secretions.

Contagiousness is calculated from an entire population model, not a sample. Thus, much of the current publicity is inaccurate. The measure of contagiousness is R_0 . If R_0 is less than 1, the outbreak will become extinct. If R_0 is greater than 1, the outbreak will become an epidemic. The value of R_0 represents the number of secondary infections caused by one infected individual.

There is disagreement in the infectious disease profession as to how accurate a predictor R_0 is since it is only looking at individual transmission instead of the population as a whole. Another way of stating this is that a non-random small sample of the population may not correctly predict how the entire population may react.

The CDC estimated value of R_0 as of last September for the original variant of COVID-19 is 2.0 to 2.5, or one infected person will cause 2 to 2.5 secondary infections. With the South African variant estimated to be twice as contagious, its R_0 would be between 4 and 5.

Last month, it was reported that the South African variant was believed to have an R_0 value of 3. This would indicate that either it is not twice as contagious or that the R_0 value of the original variant was only 1.5.

Further inquiry discloses a wide range R_0 values of all the virus variants. The South African variant may be twice as contagious as the original variant, but what does that mean it is twice as contagious for us as individuals?

We are willing to accept that the effectiveness of a vaccine in a sample population is a predictor of how effective the vaccine will be in the entire population. Scientists seem to be less likely to accept contagiousness on the same level.

And Your Source Is?

Peter Hertzmann

In 1978, I was awakened by a phone call instructing me to rush to El Camino Hospital to witness ear surgery. My boss was scheduled to observe the procedure, but luckily for me, he felt faint upon entering the operating room. I was called to take his place. That morning was the start of my future career developing new surgical devices. It was also the first of many mornings where I would learn about the practice of surgery from the many surgeons I worked with in the U.S., Europe, and Japan.

One concept that I learned early in career that I later taught other non-doctors who came to me for training was that there are different kinds of doctors and each treats human maladies from a different approach. Initially, there were just physicians and surgeons. Although there are some differences dating back to guild-produced doctors versus university-produced doctors in the late middle ages, the primary difference is how each approaches illness. Physicians tend

to use a chemical-based approach and surgeons tend to use an extraction-based approach. Each looks at illness differently. By the time I was entering that operating room, there were three other common types of doctors: psychiatrists, pathologists, and radiologists.

The field of gynecology has become a crossover profession in that gynecologists are surgeons by training, yet they also tend to be primary care physicians for premenopausal, adult women. Other crossover doctor-types include groups like interventional cardiologists. Cardiologists, by training are physicians, but an interventional cardiologist is trained to perform limited surgery.

Why does this matter? For the past year, we have been listening to advice and counsel from different doctors and public health officials regarding COVID-19. Sometimes their counsel are provided in their introduction and sometimes not. The most common group counsel epidemiologists, but there's also virologists, immunologists, biostatisticians, evolutionary biologists, and persons with the three letters MPH after their name. Some of the experts are just identified as holding an endowed chair or as being the administrator of a department in a university or hospital. One expert commonly seen on MSNBC giving advice has both a Master of Public Administration and a Master of Science degree in addition to his medical degree. My issue with all these experts with alphabet overload is that each looks at the same problem through different types of training.

Another basic facet of medicine I learned is that for most doctors, the principles of practice have not changed in one aspect since doctoring was learned by apprenticing: do what you were taught. On many occasions when I was talking to surgeons about changes to a procedure I was proposing, I was told that they do what they learned in medical school and residency and there was no reason to change. I learned that to introduce new procedures it was often necessary to find ways of putting market pressure on the surgeons before they would consider a change.

The most common title given seems to be epidemiologist. How many viewers or readers know anything about the field of epidemiology? Wikipedia provides this definition:

“Epidemiology is the study and analysis of the distribution (who, when, and where), patterns and determinants of health and disease conditions in defined populations.” By definition, epidemiology is a data-driven science that relies heavily on statistics. Unfortunately, the advice given by epidemiologists is based on little real data or little accurate data, and more likely to be predictions based on opinion. It’s not uncommon for modern epidemiological studies, prior to the pandemic, to be controversial and often discredited. Epidemiologists have learned how to coax precise conclusions by selectively applying statistics to carefully massaged data. (I learned this from a biostatistician I worked with at Stanford.) Advice from epidemiologists has to always be investigated further.

Virology “focuses on the following dimensions of viruses: their structure, classification and evolution, their ways to infect and exploit host cells for reproduction, their interaction with host organism physiology and immunity, the diseases they cause, the techniques to isolate and culture them, and their use in research and therapy.” Virology is a subfield of microbiology. Virologists have masters or doctorates in the field, and a few have also studied medicine. I have found that the virologists I have heard interviewed on television

to be some of the most credible people discussing COVID-19. They tend to be fact based and stay away from both advice and predictions. Their answers are the least sensational and therefore least likely to be found on news programs.

Immunology is another branch of biology, and it covers the immune systems in all organisms. There is a subset of immunology that study diseases caused by disorders of the human immune system. Every once in a while, when I see an immunologist being quoted or interviewed. It often feels like the expert has been sought by the reporter to say what the reporter wanted, rather than provide new information.

The last type of expert we hear from, the one that touches each of us most personally, is the public health official with the letters MPH behind their name. The letters mean the person has a master’s degree in public health. (In my career I worked with many people with the title. They tended to also have the initials JD behind their name and work as regulatory lawyers.) A public-health masters is a non-thesis degree with a heavy emphasis on regulations and public policy. Most public health workers spend their time enforcing codes written by others.

As we are pummeled with information about the pandemic each day, it is important understand the source of the information and how the training and background of the person providing the information may color it.

My wife is blaming me for ruining her birthday. That’s ridiculous. I didn’t even know it was her birthday.

Entrez Nous

Austin and Van Ness reside in SFT 1501. They are bickering again. We can listen.

Aus: London Breed said some nasty things about the school board; she is even suing them. That seems out of line.

Van: As Mayor she can use the bully pulpit on matters important to constituents.

Aus: But why pick on the school board? What have they done that justifies a Mayor unloading on them?

Van: Perhaps the question ought to be framed differently. Has the school board done anything NOT deserving of criticism?

Aus: You and I went to school in San Francisco. We did all right.

Van: When we were in public schools, the school board did not busy itself with irrelevant issues like recommending Native American reparations, destroying world famous Victor Arnautoff murals at Washington High School, or renaming 44 schools, including your beloved "Lowell."

Aus: What is wrong with renaming schools? Who cares?

Van: One group that cares are alumnae. It takes away a part of their personal history. You went to Cal. What if the name were changed to Ché Guevara U?

Aus: Might it not be good to have schools named after modern heroes rather than those whose relevance has faded?

Van: Who might those modern heroes be?

Aus: Let students decide.

Van: Hip Hop HS, Justin Bieber Nursery School, Snoop Dog Technical High?

Aus: If that is what students want, let them have it. After all, they attend, we do not.

Van: With what frequency should a school's name change, every year? Should high school seniors decide what to name the school for the year they

graduate? What if by prank, seniors adopt Adolf Hitler High?

Aus: Perhaps there could be a contest for a school's name?

Van: Good thinking. Schools could sell naming rights just like stadiums. Jeff Bezos could offer some pocket change and change Lowell to "Amazon Prime" or Zuckerberg could pay for the naming rights for Lincoln and call it, "Face Lift High school." How would that suit you?

Aus: That would be wrong. Private individuals can name their own buildings however they like. Salesforce Tower and the Transamerica Pyramid are effectively advertising for big business. Lowell is a public institution.

Van: Oh! So names do matter. Maybe they should carry names important historically. Washington contributed to the founding of the nation. Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln freed slaves and kept the Union intact. Those seem to me to be significant accomplishments and of continuing relevance.

Aus: I think you are missing the School Board's point. All of these white men had flaws. Washington owned slaves, Jefferson exploited a slave as his mistress, and Lincoln is said to have held Indians in low regard.

Van: FDR cheated on his wife, Clinton exploited a youthful intern, Martin Luther King was a philanderer. No human, save possibly Mother Teresa, is without blemishes. I think we had better select heroes for their preponderance of good lest we never have any heroes whatsoever.

Aus: Covia could change SFT to "Kevin Gerber Senior Self-Fulfillment Center."

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