

Sometimes forthright acknowledgment of the human condition and insight into our soul is more valuable than anything else.

One of our residents, Harry Lee, passed away last year. Following is the message sent to him by fellow resident Richard Yen. It is such a touching tribute written by one human to another that it supersedes anything else contained in this issue of Tower Talk. The reason for the message is best said in Richard’s own words.

On September 1 of last year, Sophie Lee informed my wife, Fukan, and me that her husband, Harry, would be placed on hospice care in their home. I knew it was the beginning of the end. I was so emotional that night, I could not sleep; I got up at midnight and wrote him a brief email.

Please read it and sense the dignity, reverence, and humanity it expresses.

Dear Harry,

The news of your illness is shocking to me. Although I know pancreatic cancer is difficult to cure, I was hoping that a miracle might be possible. I was trying to hold back my emotion when I heard the news, but the impact was too heavy for me to bear silently.

We only know each other through the Towers, but you have earned my respect in a very short time. You are a person of good virtues: humble, low profile, kind, and yet intelligent and sharp. You are a true gentleman.

Buddhism preaches the four sufferings of life: Birth, Aging, Sickness, and Death. Ultimately, everyone must face the latter. If one believes in Christianity’s Heaven or Buddhism’s Paradise, then death is not that dreadful.

You have had a fulfilling and successful life of which you should be proud. Besides, you have a perfect family. Sophie is your great lifelong companion. Mandy and Holden are great filial children. There is little more can one ask for in life.

Sophie is a capable and strong person. Fukan and I will do our best to look after her at the Towers and I hope you will feel at ease.

Fukan and I are looking forward to spending much time together with you, whenever circumstance permits.

Your friend, Richard

This email is yet another example of the compassionate and fulfilling nature of the community in which we are privileged to reside.

Preview

This Tower Talk issue touches upon local and national political matters via a retrospective view of the San Francisco Unified School District recall election and its possible national significance. The issue also includes a description of the “Perfect Storm” triggering the highest U.S. inflation rate since the Jimmy Carter era four decades ago; a short comment regarding the frustration of the Putin invasion of Ukraine; and an article on the varying significance of friendship and social engagement for men and for women. Austin and Van Ness are, not surprisingly, quibbling – this time about whether social progress is possible and about unrelated matters as varied as motorized scooters on our sidewalks and the Winter Olympics.

San Francisco School Board Recall Retrospective

Few were prepared for the unusually high turnout and stunning rejection of the three WOKE incumbent school board members, individuals who had been pursuing personal political causes unrelated to teaching and student learning. As of this writing, the three targeted board members appear voted out of office in all the city’s precincts. Renaming 44 schools based on Wikipedia research, destroying world acclaimed WPA art, and, during a school funding crisis, striving to appoint an LGBTQ student advocate at an annual cost of \$250K did not endear them to the electorate. They are gone.

But is more to come? Highly visible public intellectuals such as the *Wall Street Journal’s* Peggy

Noonan and election genius Karl Rove have suggested that what started in San Francisco may represent a wave that will move across the nation, signaling a return to normal politics and a rejection of the extreme left.

I like Peggy Noonan. Most of the time I agree with her. This time, I am not sure she's right. She contends that the SF school board recall is historic and has widespread national implications. Karl Rove has hopped on the bandwagon proclaiming the extreme left-leaning portion of the Democratic Party had better wake up.

A Nevada friend of mine who is running for Governor this coming November is heartened by the recall and believes that his Democratic opponent will be fighting uphill if he espouses extreme leftist values.

But wait! The view has another side. Our local recall might just be a local matter, not a national concern. One of the recall movement's major supporters had a far more modest view. She asserts that the overwhelming turnout and 3.5 to 1 vote to turn the rascals out was more a consequence of the Board's highly visible incompetence at moving pandemic entrapped children back in school than its woke politics.

If the San Francisco School Board recall does have national reverberations, it will be an unusual incident. One hundred years ago, Progressive Era reformers moved in state after state to separate school board elections from general elections on grounds that schools should not be politicized. Up to now, these 20th Century Progressive Era political sanitation efforts have been effective. Almost no one votes in school board elections, except maybe in Iowa where there possibly is little else to do, and only in a few places is a school board position a steppingstone to higher office.

Jimmy Carter was a school board member in Plains Georgia. I think Huey Long in Louisiana may have been a school politico before setting out to be a machine boss. However, I cannot think of many others who have climbed to national prominence because of a local school board position.

I need to see more evidence that San Francisco's recall of three silly dupes has a national consequence. High gasoline prices, astounding inflation, and supply-chain-induced shortages may spell the end for a whole lot more incumbent Democrats than a few locals striving to remove the names Abraham Lincoln and George Washington from public schools. As Clinton advisor James Carville famously said, "It's the economy stupid."

The Political-Economic Consequences of a Perfect inflationary Storm

Let us stay with Mr. Carville a bit longer.

President Biden and the Democratic Party are confronted by a set of interlocking detrimental domestic conditions that likely will be damaging in the upcoming midterm election and possibly will carry over to 2024. (Already 15% of Democratic House of Representative incumbents have seen the writing on the wall and announced they will not run for 2022 re-election.) Some of these politically threatening conditions were set in motion by events preceding last year's Presidential election and are matters that Biden and Democrats inherited. Other politically worrisome conditions are more of their own doing and may lead to their party's undoing. Below are some details.

The principal domestic problem is runaway inflation. It is eroding the paychecks of America's middle-class workforce; 61% of households now report that they live paycheck to paycheck and are frightened by their inability to meet rising costs.

Inflation occurs when economic equilibrium is pierced, such as when demand exceeds supply. Federal and state economic stimulus packages have generally maintained household income and consumer demand. The problem is on the supply side. An unprecedented shortage of truck drivers has tied up shipping ports and railyards in a way that stretches and, in some instances, broken the supply chain for manufactured goods and commodities. This condition is driving the price of material items and commodities higher and higher. For example, buying a new automobile

is a pricey undertaking because overseas-manufactured computer chips are in short supply. (What would Henry Ford think of that?)

Also, a labor shortfall is limiting supply. Workers are on the sidelines either because stimulus funds offset wages or out of necessity (e.g., staying home to care for children who are not in pandemic-closed schools) or because they believe if they wait long enough, they'll be paid more by increasingly labor deprived employers.

The labor shortage is fueled by another condition: rapidly rising gasoline prices.

Environmental concerns moved the U.S. from energy independence to energy dependence. Gasoline rising from \$3.00 a gallon to \$5.00 or \$6.00 a gallon triggers inflation and keeps workers either closer to home or at home. This fuel cost fuels the labor shortage and drives wages up. The Biden administration released strategic oil reserves to mitigate the gasoline price rise, but that is a temporary solution. These reservoirs hold only a 30-day oil supply.

If COVID fades by the end of 2022, stimulus money slows down, and the supply chain is reconnected, we will fall into a more economically balanced situation by 2023. Will the restored equilibrium come in time, or will public dissatisfaction persist and fuel a big Republican victory in November, providing a Republican House and Senate for two or more years thereafter?

These domestic difficulties could be exacerbated by or totally submerged under the Russia-Ukraine situation.

Putin Versus the West

This newsletter is being written as Russian troops attack Ukraine. Where will this end? A happy

solution is hard to see. NATO is weakened by Western Europe's dependence upon Russian oil and natural gas. Putin is 70 years old, makes clear he wants to return Russia to its pre-1989 breakup status, possesses nuclear missiles that he can use for leverage, and he just might get his way.

Challenge to Males, the Sisterhood, and the Benefits of Social Engagement

I have commented previously in *Tower Talk* on the relative ease of bonding among women and the challenge men have in forming supportive alliances. A neuroscientist offers an observation.

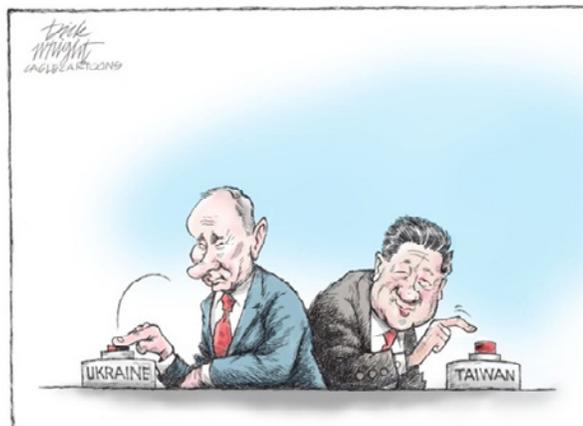
The Stanford head of psychiatry proclaims that one of the best things a man can do for his health is to be married to a woman; whereas, for a

woman, one of the best things she can do for her health is to nurture relationships with girlfriends.

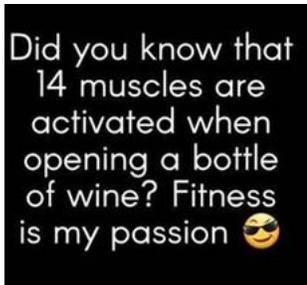
Women connect with each other and provide support systems that help each other deal with stress and difficult life experiences. Physically, "girlfriend time" assists in creating serotonin, a

neurotransmitter that combats depression and creates a general feeling of wellbeing. This may stem from the time we lived in caves and women cooperated in taking care of children and in performing domestic chores. Men operated more independently as they left the cave to hunt.

Women share feelings, whereas men tend to form relationships around activities. Spending time with a friend is just as important to men's general health as jogging or working out at a gym. However, regrettably men tend to think that when they "exercise" they are doing something good for their bodies, but having a beer with friends is wasting time that should be more productively engaged.



Not true. In fact, failure to create and maintain high quality personal relationships with other humans is as dangerous to physical health as smoking! So, every time you schmooze with a gal pal or with your men friends, just pat yourself on the back and congratulate yourself for doing something good for your health.



Entrez Nous

Austin and van Ness reside in San Francisco Towers (1501). They have maintained a longtime relationship even though they see the world through widely different lenses. It is sometimes interesting, even informative, to overhear their conversations.

Aus: You seem a bit down today.

Van: Just a little. I'm sorry the Queen was infected with COVID. Prince Andrew has misbehaved badly and cost her a lot of money, and Prince Harry is just simply a jerk. Thank God for William and Kate. Did you like the Winter Olympics?

Aus: I am in despair. I did not watch any of the Olympics.

Van: Me either. I just could not get interested. Whatever has pushed you into such a funk?

Aus: Amidst so much possible happiness, so many are deprived. My heart goes out to the homeless, to the unemployed, to those whose mental condition prevents their keeping a job, to those whose lives are so empty they resort to using drugs, and on and on.

Van: Oh dear! You really are down today. Did you take your meds? What can I say to brighten your day?

Aus: Everything is going wrong; do you think we will ever end racism?

Van: Last time I looked, slavery had been abolished. Would it make you feel better to know that 18% of the entering freshman class at Harvard last September was black? Does that count as progress in your book?

Aus: I am scared to death the U.S. Supreme Court is going to overturn Roe v Wade.

Van: About half the American public hopes it does.

Aus: This conversation is going nowhere. You just don't get it.

Van: What would you like me to "GET?"

Aus: Bernie would have been such a terrific President, what with his great ideas for making our society better.

Van: I would like to hear just one, just one, Bernie "Great Idea." The guy is a total hypocrite espousing all his liberal views and supposed sympathy for the underclass while exploiting his Senate seat to become a millionaire. Bah humbug!

Aus: Surely you see how the staggering trillion-plus student loan debt is strangling our younger people and poisoning their early productive years. Bernie would change all that by forgiving burdensome student loans.

Van: Give me a break! No one made students take out loans. They did it of their own volition. They knew what they were getting into. Now you want to let them off the hook. No one put a gun to their heads. What are you going to do for those who honestly paid off their loans as they were obligated to do? Forgiving outstanding loans would amount to one of the greatest overt class-based wealth transfers in history, taking tax money from the lower wealth components of society and subsidizing middle class youth that go to college. God! How I wish you knew some economics.

Aus: Terrible heartless Ronald Reagan closed all the mental hospitals and now we have these poor sick people out on the street.

Van: For Reagan it might have been a cost-saving

policy move. However, he was assisted mightily by liberals who asserted that mental health hospitals were imprisoning defenseless people. It was an alliance of the left and right that changed the landscape, and certainly contributed to today's homelessness. You might not like it, but your left leaning colleagues facilitated it.

Aus: Doesn't something bother you? Do you think everything is perfect?

Van: I do worry a bit. Things seem to have gone downhill since the death of Henry VIII. I am very worried about the electric scooters being used on our sidewalks. No police efforts are available to stop this. Old people like us are really at risk when we go out for a walk. That bothers me. Paying our income taxes bothers me too. But, thanks to Trump, we had a great year in the Stock Market in 2021.

Aus: I'm going shopping.

Tower Talk is published solely by San Francisco Towers' resident, James W Guthrie. It is distributed electronically. Printed copies are provided upon request. Its purpose is to enhance a sense of community via provision of accurate information, airing of responsible opinion, and now and then an effort at humor. It is not aligned with any partisan organization and, if at all predisposed, it favors "The Underdog." It neither seeks nor bears managerial endorsement and does not rely for production or distribution upon San Francisco Towers' resources. The publisher is individually responsible for content, welcomes dissenting views, and eagerly accepts submissions of original literary works and opinion. Production depends crucially upon Jennifer Hamilton and Peter Hertzmann. Anne M. Turner is a Contributing Editor. Print archives are maintained by John Darby. All past issues, beginning with Volume I, No.1 are available free of charge by visiting jameswguthrie.com.