

## Preview

I have religiously ranted regarding the numbing and negative nature of the month of August. Seemingly, it is a month during which virtually nothing happens, at least nothing really good happens.

I have suggested that August's days be redistributed among other months or eliminated altogether. I challenge *Tower Talk* readers to identify matters of consequence occurring in August. More challenging yet is to find something of a positive nature that has taken place in August.

Some proclaim that World War I started in August of 1914, but who wants to celebrate that?

Abraham Lincoln issued an executive order initiating a nationwide wartime income tax in August. Is that worth celebrating?

Five of the U.S.'s 46 Presidents have been born in August. Only two months, October and November, have seen the birth of more Presidents. Nine other months have seen the birth of fewer Presidents. September can claim the birthday of only one President. This condition suggests something really good, perhaps fecund, about August. However, given the duration of human gestation, should the credit for Presidential births really go to December?

Given the dreadful, dreary, and sometimes distasteful nature of August, readers should not expect too much of this month's *Tower Talk*. Sorry if you are disappointed, but it is not my fault. It is all due to August.

The good news is that Contributing Editor Ann Turner has written an interesting piece. (It should be noted that it was written in July, even if it appears now.) The issue also includes information about a new and really good technology idea intended to make our lives better, a bit about wealth and economics, a few observations about state and local politics, a comment on Front Porch, and Austin and Van Ness are arguing, but that is not new.

## Can Technology Save Our City?

James W. Guthrie

Every now and then a far out and seemingly zany idea emerges that is worth exploring. In this instance, a friend has set in motion an idea that, just maybe, can eliminate or at least mitigate some of San Francisco's most pressing problems. The notion is worth our attention.

The idea is to engage the city's enormous pool of technologically talented residents to address some of our most daunting day-to-day issues. Uber, Lyft, Zendesk, Instacart, Salesforce, and on and on, a long list of SF based technology companies employs literally thousands of creative and sophisticated individuals. Why not engage their brains to restore or even reinvent our city?

By offering financial incentives to individuals to generate new technologies maybe we can come up with creative solutions for homelessness, increasingly rampant crime, bureaucratic bungling, and our eroding quality of life. Is this far-fetched?

Plenty of examples show technology making things better for us. Among these ideas are, for example, the Clipper public transportation pass, FasTrak and cameras instead of bridge toll lines, dialing 311 to report public works problems, and apps for food delivery and restaurant reservations.

Technology, harnessed to combat our civic issues, could be a far quicker means to solution than depending upon cumbersome and dollar devouring conventional mechanisms, such as recall elections and ballot initiatives. It certainly would be faster than waiting for our current majority of elected officials to do anything of significance.

Crime is spiking. Nevertheless, city supervisors debate defunding the police, and the SF District Attorney seems preoccupied with what he believes are more significant social issues than protecting citizens. Meanwhile cars are burgled, stores are pilfered, personal freedom is restricted, and our way of life is eroding.

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The movement can grow organically, not depending upon any one person or small group. It is intended to be a grassroots undertaking. A website is available to inform viewers of the organization's purpose, priorities, and possibilities.

A "GoFundme" account solicits donations and is accessible through the website. These funds will be used to initiate promising projects. Applicants will submit their ideas formally and their proposals will be judged by knowledgeable individuals using objective criteria.

Winning ideas will be funded with \$25,000 for startup costs. If an app or technique succeeds, royalties will flow to inventors. The model, while being pioneered in San Francisco, imminently lends itself to being used in other venues.

Are results guaranteed? Not in the least. Is it worth a try? Absolutely.

If you think this is a good idea, go to <http://www.reinventourcity.com> and donate via "Donate Now" button. Any amount, even \$10, may help find a solution to something we all need.

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### **Wealth Inequality: It just Gets Worse and No Effective Means Counters It**

James W. Guthrie

According to a June 28, 2021 *Wall Street Journal* analysis, the U.S. economy is remarkably resilient. Even during the 12 months of COVID-19 quarantine, individual wealth in the United States increased by \$13 trillion. No other nation could match this in quantity or even as a percent of their gross domestic product.

All of that would be good if a sizeable portion of the population benefited. Regrettably, it did not. The top 1% of U.S. household gained \$4 trillion. The lowest 25%, comprised of the infirm, low wage workers, and recent immigrants, grew by only \$500 billion.

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### **State and Local Politics**

James W. Guthrie

California Governor Gavin Newsom will be up for recall September 14, 2021. Numerous candidates

(41 as of July 17) have taken steps to be on the ballot to replace him. Newsom has collected a handsome financial war chest to defend himself. He is vastly unpopular in the Central Valley and Sierras. We will see if his many coastal supporters can save him.

Two recall movements are in play against San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin. One of these must collect sufficient signatures by mid-August to be viable. The other goes into September. Why we have two petition movements, instead of being consolidated, is part of some complicated history not easily known. The recall of three Board of Education members proceeds and has a signature deadline in September.

More locally yet, the affiliation of Front Porch and Covia appears to have happened, but SFT residents have not been told much about it. What this affiliation or merger will look like will emerge more clearly by next April. Residents should buckle their seatbelts when they see what the annual fee increase will be. The probability is it will be in the range of 5% to 7%. Fee increases of this magnitude will result in a doubling of monthly cost in approximately 9 to 11 years.

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### **Adventures**

Anne M. Turner

A few weeks ago, it occurred to me that maybe I could shake my recurring depression and loneliness if I inserted some adventures into my life. Adventures? Yes. Getting out the door and doing something new or different. After some thought I decided that San Francisco was the perfect place for this, among other reasons because I am a relative newcomer. I came to "The City" all through my childhood in San Mateo, but only to destinations my parents thought suitable for youngsters: the zoo, Golden Gate Park, the shop windows around Union Square at Christmas. Before now, I had never lived here as an adult, so I don't know any of the San Francisco neighborhoods.

I must admit that my Adventures plan has some problems. For one thing, I don't have a car, making me dependent upon rides from other people,

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taxicabs, or the SF Muni System. For another, I hate the wind and let's face it, San Francisco is windy every afternoon, and sometimes in the morning too. The wind problem meant that I would have to have my adventures in the morning. But I find it hard to get going in the morning, even on adventures I have carefully planned, and am looking forward to.

Let me describe my first four adventures. Adventure #1 was before I even had the idea. I was hitching a ride with several Crissy Field walkers one morning when there was no Towers transportation. Peter Hertzmann and Curtis Taylor agreed that the morning was perfect for a trip to Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park, so we set off in two cars, and got back to the Towers maybe an hour and a half later. I had never been to the lake or the trail around it and found it incredibly beautiful. I fell down an embankment and had to be helped up by kindly strangers, but otherwise it was a perfect trip.

Adventure #2 was a jaunt along Market to the Ferry Building (familiar territory), a wander around its crowded stalls and a ride back to Van Ness and the bus home via the trolley cars that are a Market Street tourist attraction. As I wrote in my Adventure Log, I was proud of the fact that I didn't buy a book, a croissant, or even a coffee on this trip, although I did reward myself with a French Vanilla Latte when I got back to the Towers.

The 4th of July found me engaged in a "Pacific Heights" walk outlined in my Walking San Francisco book. This was Adventure #3 and it turned out to be a disaster. Do you realize that there are streets in San Francisco that are so steep they are as hard to walk down as they are to climb? Understanding that I was out of my league, I quit at the halfway point and staggered home, vowing that hereinafter I would take seriously the book's description of a walk as 'moderately strenuous.'

Having decided to confine myself to flat walking adventures, I planned Adventure #4 as a trip to North Beach—a walk up Columbus Avenue from Clay, ending at Washington Square Park. Getting there turned out to be the challenge: walking three long blocks to Clay and catching a bus down

to Columbus. On the day (July 6th) I found I had no enthusiasm for the trip, so liberated myself by deciding to take a walk up and down Polk. I walked briskly out of the Towers at 9:55 am and was hit by foggy dampness and a high wind.

Nuts to this, I thought, and walked just as briskly from the corner of Van Ness and Pine back to the Towers entrance. So much for Adventure #4. I now plan to wait for the sun and walk in North Beach on Thursday or Friday. I set off on Friday morning, caught the Clay Street bus and got off at Sansome Street. I then had a heck of time looking for Columbus, which I never found. Instead, I wandered around this fascinating section of the Financial District—potted plant-filled alleys, real brick buildings, public open space at the foot of major towers, upscale bars, smart dress shops, and small art galleries. Finally, with the help of two Muni workers, I got back to Sacramento and took the bus home. 45 minutes and a French Vanilla Latte, which I dropped on the lobby floor.

I still think my Adventures plan is a good one, but I need to reconceive it a bit. In the planning I had been focused on the destination, which is okay but only half the fun. The other half is the "getting there" part. I am learning a good deal about how the SF Muni transportation system works, and I find it rather interesting. Riding the bus gives one the opportunity to observe the working people of San Francisco as they travel to and from jobs or the grocery store. Here at the Towers we only see the ones who are serving us, but there are many, many more people doing important work in San Francisco.

I suppose I will eventually turn into one of those chronic bus complainers, but for right now I think the transit system is doing a pretty good job supporting my search for adventures. And I came across another book, here in my own apartment, that I think may provide not only the best adventures, but the ultimate challenge. It is called Walking San Francisco's 49 Mile Scenic Drive. It claims to have 17 "enchanting" walks and looking through it I agree. So I think I will spend some time over the weekend figuring out if a woman of my age can eventually cover the 49 miles. I suspect not, but who cares?

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## Entrez Nous

Sugar Caen

Austin and Van Ness reside in SFT 1501. They bicker quite a bit. Let's listen.

Aus: Aren't the dining room changes wonderful?

Van: To what changes are you referring?

Aus: We have seen so many improvements. For example, the servers are doing a much better job and the tables are now set appropriately. They take drink orders quickly and refill your water glasses. I think that's progress.

Van: I agree with you that those things are happening, but do you not think that is quite a low bar for measuring progress?

Aus: I think we also have more variety in the menu.

Van: Possibly, but somebody in the kitchen is growing mushrooms and zucchini on G4. They seem to be the vegetables every day. And please do not forget the incredible porkchop return night, and the dinner in which you pushed your chicken casserole to the center of the table and refused to eat it

Aus: Don't you like the Market Place?

Van: I do like the Market Place for lunch, but I fear its arrival on our scene has had some pretty substantial consequences.

Aus: You mean "negative" consequences?

Van: The pre-Covid luncheon buffet has morphed into something about which I am ambivalent. The availability of the lunchtime Market Place has taken away a great deal of social interaction as people get their meals and return to their apartments instead of eating in the dining room. In this way I see the Market Place as a mixed blessing, satisfying individuals, but perhaps hurting us a community.

Aus: I see your point, but it seems like dinner in the dining rooms, both informal and formal, is doing pretty well. Moreover, it really is a good idea to enable the Activities Room to serve double duty.

Van: What is not doing well is a search for a Chef and a Dining Room manager. How long can the

food service operation run on inertia? We certainly will be testing the boundaries.

Aus: I understand that it is difficult to identify chef candidates.

Van: I have a magic solution to any labor shortage such as that.

Aus: Oh, great sage, what is your solution?

Van: Higher salaries is the only choice. The overall economy will continue to go up, but inflation is inevitable because of selected labor shortages. As temporary unemployment benefits dry up, children go back to school, and parents stop babysitting and go back to work, then the labor market will eventually come into balance. Right now, there is no choice but to pay higher salaries.

Aus: That eventually will be reflected in our monthly fees, right?

Van: You are so right. I'm anticipating this coming April that Covia/Front Porch or whatever else it will be called by then, will probably raise our fees between 5% and 7%.

Aus: Wow! That's going to be a heavy hit.

Van: You can withstand it. Your investment portfolio is up about 20% over 2020.

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