

## TOWER TALK AROUND SAN FRANCISCO TOWERS

Sugar Caen<sup>i</sup>

*This is a collection of vignettes, encounters, and observations regarding residents, employees, events, conditions and triumphs in and around San Francisco Towers. This publication is routinely undertaken responsibly and is always positive and never unduly critical. It is published privately and does NOT seek NOR carry the approval of Towers management or any other agency. Readers wishing to make comments, submit publishable material, or stop receipt are encouraged to do so by writing to [Sugarcaen00@gmail.com](mailto:Sugarcaen00@gmail.com)*

### Recalling Caen

The journalist Herb Caen became a San Francisco institution. He was born in Sacramento in 1916, moved to The City in his youth, and thereafter wrote a daily SF Chronicle column for six decades.

Caen seldom proclaimed a political position, and was not particularly partisan. He was first a San Franciscan, not a Democrat Republican, or Vegetarian. He was not a public intellect striving through writing to shape serious opinion or critique culture. Rather, he was a talented journalist who combined an artistic eye for The City's God-given natural beauty and a remarkable capacity to capture and communicate the color and character of its citizens. He died in 1997.

Caen only rarely wrote about issues of long-lasting significance. This is not to say he had no influence. His constant criticism of the hideous Embarcadero Freeway ensured it was not rebuilt following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. However, in many ways, and on most days, his

columns were like TV's Seinfeld. These shows were endearing, humorous, light, and, ultimately, about nothing. However, no matter how shallow, one still wanted to watch each Seinfeld episode or, by extension in Caen's case, read each day's column.

Here is a Herb Caen San Francisco history sampler.

Following the Civil War, Irish hooligans dominated SF waterfront. While robbing victims they yelled "Huddle-em, muddle-em." From their criminal modus operandi, we get today's term "hoodlum." (Baghdad by the Bay, 1949.)

Even if not a deep thinker, Caen was still significant for San Francisco. Pre-Caen, The City was a gawky adolescent, fast growing, energetic, chest thumping, but full of rough edges and pointy elbows.

The City, up until 1950, had few nationally known figures or celebrities, only a veneer of culture, and had not played a major role, such as Boston, or Philadelphia in the building of America. San Francisco was way out west, way out of touch, and, possibly, just way out.

However, Caen's literary alchemy was miraculous. He took a hodge-podge of immigrants, spread over 49 highly-piggly square miles and seven hills, and magically created a community. Caen's columns infused the City with pride, of place, injected

into all an air of bon vivant sophistication, and created badly needed civic self-confidence. Oh yes! He drove an old Jaguar

Caen made a difference. Everyone, even high school students, strove for a “shout out” in his column. If he mentioned your name you had instant fame. Better yet, as Sugar experienced, first hand, if your name was part of his clever rhyming annual Christmas column, you were a certified City celebrity. When he vacationed, and the column lapsed, newsstand paper sales plummeted.

This publication, Tower Talk: Around San Francisco Towers, is absent Herb Caen’s secret sauce. However, it is undertaken in his spirit and intended to further our community.

### **Near the Towers**

Progress on the twin Rockwell Pine Street Towers is stunning. This construction has fascinated residents and animates breakfast conversations. Who among us has not enjoyed watching the astonishing speed, technical acumen, and muscular brawn of the contractors at work. Listening to the “aw shucks” good guy, here’s how I do it explanations of high crane operator Scott Lilly was a 2015 SFT Fall highlight.

Now, it is with some regret that construction enters a stage where the building’s outer “skin” is being attached. Once this process is complete on both towers, even though the new buildings use glass extensively, visual access to the project’s interiors will be limited. Construction details will become far

less obvious to Towers’ viewers. Moreover, some day, the crane will be dissembled and Scott will leave, likely never to return. Sugar hopes that SFT Community Committee Chair, Jerry Adams, can arrange episodic tours of the buildings’ interiors, and find a suitable observational substitute.

Sugar has overheard SFT residents musing regarding privacy matters once the new buildings are occupied and there is “high rise cross street peering parity” Sugar understands and is sympathetic to the privacy concern, and in some instances, new, more opaque SFT window coverings may be in order. Sugar suspects, however, that what is likely to take place in Rockwell apartments just might possibly be more interesting than what takes place at SFT. Sugar’s “Just sayin.”

Fortunately for construction fanatics, on the south side of Pine between Van Ness and Polk, demolition will soon begin in anticipation of another high-rise condo. East Tower Van Ness facing residents hopefully will be generous in sharing their eastward views with others whose apartments regrettably face elsewhere.

Sugar is losing hope regarding the eventual completion of the Bush and Franklin Street condo. If progress does not soon accelerate, Sugar fears an unfinished hulk looming over the Towers for years.

The little hotel or hostel being carved out of a 1905 building on Franklin and Pine and is not worthy of much comment. Construction is internal.

**Sugar's Monthly SF Quiz**

When Herb Caen issued the dicta  
"Never brown in town." He was  
referring to?

- A. Men's shoes
- B. Willie Brown
- C. Jerry Brown
- D. Brown Cows

Where was:

Grant School?  
The Hippo restaurant?  
City Lights bookstore?  
The Condor?  
City of Paris"  
Commerce High School

- A. Broadway
- B. Van Ness
- C. Columbus
- D. Union
- E. Geary

What is a "paraprosdokian?"  
(Hint: Associated with Herb Caen)

- A. Skin lesion
- B. Advanced halitosis
- C. Armenian Developer
- D. Literary gimmick

Which is not a S.F. neighborhood"

Cow Hollow  
SOMA  
Pacific Heights  
Twitterloin  
Portrero  
MOMA

**Sugar's List of this Month's Most**

Stylish: John Rasmussen

Unsung: Flower Arrangers

Missed and endearing: Joby

Valuable: G3 Jaguar E Class

Touching: Beth and Joe's marriage

Disgusting: Donald Trump mask

Aggravating: Narrow garage ramps

**Sugar's Episodic Rant: Macro Burst**

Do not even think about ever again supporting the once-great San Francisco 49ers. The situation has simply gone to hell. Their days of glory, with the passing of Coach Bill Walsh and other true heroes are sadly gone, It's all over. Colin Kaepearnik, now on IR (Injured Reserve) for the season<sup>1</sup>, striving to fill Joe Montana's shoes. Really!!

Sugar is not lamenting the team's current won/loss record, however pitiful. We have had bad years before and overcame them. Rather, Sugar is saddened by the loss of the team's soul. The team that captured our youthful hearts formerly played in the center of the City at Kezar stadium. Then it lost its way and gradually drifted south out of our purview, first to Candlestick Point and then to Santa Clara. Who ever heard of Santa Clara as a city. TV coverage of 49er games must now resort to purloined photos of the Golden Gate Bridge, cable cars and Coit Tower to establish any geographic identity for the team. Shame on the greedy, money grubbing, capitalist owners who abandoned The City. "Oink,"

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<sup>1</sup> Do not feel too sorry for him. He will still receive his contracted \$16 million.

If Irving Breyer were really our U.S. Supreme Court Justice, he would have enjoined this move. We deserve better. Why did not Mayor Willie Brown or Eddie Lee intervene? If Frankie Albert, Jerry Rice, Dwight Clark, Steve Young, or, Ronnie Lott were mayor, this would not have happened.

BTW: Sugar loves the Giants and Warriors.

### **Sugar's Episodic Rant: Micro Burst**

Rooftop flagpoles have been in place for a month and still no flags.

Just sayin.

### **Residents Seeking Sugar's Advice**

*Dear Sugar: What to do about vultures who gobble up teatime snacks virtually the minute they are displayed on the lobby cart, often taking multiples?*

*Frustrated*

Dear Frustrated:

Sugar is most sympathetic having once personally witnessed a resident simultaneously pocketing three packets of Famous Amos cookies and two bananas.

This is not likely a supply and demand issue. There is probably plenty of supply and selfishness does not count as demand.

Sugar suggests a three-step process. First, SFT management should issue a fatwa regarding good citizen behavior at the lobby snack bar. If that mitigates the issued, then periodic public reinforcement may

be needed, but it should all stop there.

If the problem persists, then a sign should be posted informing residents that the location is under routine video surveillance. Actual cameras should not be needed, but if they are then the issue can be handled on an individual basis with those observed engaging in excess being admonished privately.

*Dear Sugar: Can you explain the advantage to Tower residents of a proposed merger with a Presbyterian senior community?*

*Perplexed*

Dear Perplexed:

Sugar adores Presbyterians, but shares your vexation regarding affiliation. Regrettably, residents collectively appear to have little formal authority in the matter. Regardless, ESC officials should see themselves as morally compelled to make a better case.

*Dear Sugar: The Café dinner service seems erratic. Some days it is cancelled with little or no advance notice. I come down for dinner only to find out that I must go back to my apartment and change in order to have dinner. What can be done?*

*Vexed*

Dear Vexed:

Sugar is sympathetic, having had a similar experience. It seems that two conditions are coinciding to exacerbate matters. On one hand, fashion is evolving and an increasing proportion of residents prefer

informal dining. Second, SFT Food Service is shorthanded and, of necessity, wait staff are sometimes rotated into the main dining room. Budgeted positions seem difficult to fill because of low local area unemployment and intensifying labor competition from higher paying City hotels and restaurants. *(As an aside, are we not thankful for the loyalty of our long time staff members!!)*

Long run solutions for expanded informal dining are in the planning stage, but will assuredly take a while to implement. Wage competition will eventually bring the food service labor market into equilibrium. (Of course, SFT monthly fees will increase as a result.)

A short run solution may come from the SFT Food Committee meeting with Larry Brooks to ascertain service priorities, formal dining versus Cafe.

*Dear Sugar: What can be done regarding a resident who talks incessantly about himself, virtually never providing airtime to mealtime companions?*

*Out of patience.*

Dear Out-of-Patience:

Oh Yes!! Sugar knows of whom you speak.

Such insufferable narcissistic behavior often stems from deep-seated individual insecurity. However, Sugar is no Sigmund Freud or Dr. Phil. Just sayin.

The obvious practical answer is to avoid or possibly confront the offending person. However, in our

closed environment, this is sometimes difficult to do. Moreover, isolation does not serve us well. Ideally, we would not want to put this person "out to Coventry." It would be better to reclaim the individual who, after all, has redeeming features.

Therefore, Sugar suggests, putting scissors to this part of the column and anonymously placing this severed segment in the offending individual's box. If that intervention fails to render him a less self-centered soul, well, then, reluctantly, just stay away, if you can. It is not easy. He is everywhere

### **Sugar Coated**

November has been a special month, what with numerous public events, most of a spectacular nature. Below is a partial recounting and Sugar's observations. However, readers would do well to consider the burden this large number of events in one month places on SFT staff.

Halloween. SFT celebrated Halloween on Friday night, October 30. A number of residents appeared in costume for the 5:00 pre-prandial mixer. John Bolton, dressed as a "Sister of Perpetual Indulgence," may have been the most interestingly attired. Howard Moreland made a great Cossack. Executive Director Melody Mitchell's stunning, glittering, form-fitting outfit suggests a deep-seated wild side. Hard to tell what John Darby was channeling!! He was something, perhaps to be revealed to us later. Duncan Howard insisted that his really neat western outfit was not a "costume," but rather a working cowboy's protective gear leftover

from his youth as a ranch hand. OK, I guess. But, 118 pound cowboys. Really!! Just sayin. Jim Guthrie, dressed and acting as a boorish Donald Trump managed to insinuate himself in more of John Spicer's (dressed fittingly as a baseball umpire) photos than anyone else. (Oink! Oink! ) Jerry and Marilyn Jacobsen, as Mickey and Minnie Mouse, were a cute twosome. Sugar was surprised there was no Hillary Clinton lookalike. However, the hands down spectacular winner was Sabrina Castle of maintenance who was the world's cutest ever Minnie Mouse. On balance, this was a neat event.

Anniversary Party It is difficult to imagine an event undertaken to a higher standard and in better tastes. The November 6, Anniversary dinner was superb. Mel Flyer's planning Committee and Larry Brooks and his kitchen and dining room staff created a beautiful environment and served a delicious dinner. Filet mignon and scallops were a terrific entrée!!! Towers residents, particularly the women in our midst, rose to the occasion dressed in elegant formal finery. A few of the men's tuxes seemed strained at the waist, but that's OK, they made the effort. "Just sayin."

Veterans Day. While less well attended, and notably less publicized, SFT Veterans, day celebration was moving and admirable. The photographs of our veterans, men and women alike, in their service uniforms were stunning. Sugar extends never-ending gratitude to all of these selfless Veterans. The gravity of the occasion was deserving of greater visibility.

Big Game Brunch. Sugar is agnostic when it comes to Cal and Stanford football. Both institutions have served the San Francisco Bay Area well. (Note to Cynthia Sirkin. Relative to Cal, Stanford grads are vastly underrepresented at the Towers. Just sayin)

It is hard for Sugar to care about which team wins. However, it should be noted that Cal was no match (35-16) for the nationally ranked Stanford juggernaut and its Heisman candidate running back, Christian McCaffrey. Better luck next year Cal fans, but Geraldine Clifford gets kudos for her spirited lobby decorating efforts.

BYW The electric train set and companion carnival settings in the Great Room entry are about as darling as Holiday displays can get. Thank you Roger Cutler and Dick Brain for pleasing us all.

Thanksgiving. Press deadlines predetermine a more fulsome report on this event in the forthcoming December edition of Tower Talk: Around San Francisco Towers. However, pumpkin pie can be bad.

**Collectively, November's events illustrate The Towers at its creative and compassionate best. There is no better place to spend ones golden years than with silver haired colleagues at SFT. Sugar is grateful and hopes you are too.**

See you in December. Stay sweet

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<sup>i</sup> "Sugar Caen" is a *non de plume* that bears no relation to any Towers' residents