TOWER TALK

AROUND SAN FRANCISCO TOWERS

Sugar Caen

Fourth of July Message

Two-hundred-and-forty years ago, the Revolutionary War provoked civic discord and economic disruption. However, the 13 colonies eventually prevailed, drawing heavily upon the leadership of George Washington.

Today's world also seems perilous. Thus, there are among us those seeking a heroic leader, another Washington. Sadly, there appears to be no hero of such proportions on today's horizon.

However, rather than lament the limited number of acceptable current American heroes, Sugar offers a contrary view.

The absence of heroes might reflect a healthy Republic. Living heroes are often created from waves of popular feeling. They seldom flow from thoughtful undercurrents.

Nations with living heroes do not routinely prosper, and quite often neither do their neighbors. Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and Castro come to mind.

Fisher Ames, in the 18th Century, likened monarchies to large merchantmen, the great ships of his day that provided apparent safety and a sense of elation.

Inevitably, however, he asserted, such great ships hit a reef and sink.

Democracy, on the other hand, is like a raft. It seldom sinks, but you almost always have your feet wet.

He could have added that merchantmen require a captain, strong, perhaps a heroic figure, able to give orders and impose discipline. The crew need only have strong backs and be compliant.

"Rafts," democracies, need few or no officers. They rely upon a strong witted, self-reliant, and self-disciplined crew.

One should not be so shortsighted as to believe that heroes serve no purpose or are never needed.

A people in crisis often must be able to evoke heroes from the past or give birth to new ones. Should our nation find itself deeply imperiled, it might well need a hero, and there is no reason to believe that Americans would be unable to meet the challenge.

However, in the hoped-for absence of a national peril, the shortage of living heroes is not worrisome.

America does not now need a strong hero in whom citizens can invest emotionally so that they themselves may benefit. Rather, America needs strong citizens who will invest in themselves so that democracy can benefit

America is gritty and creative. This is not a hollow proclamation of American exceptionality. We remain haunted by huge past mistakes such as slavery, WW II Japanese resettlement, Vietnam and Iraq Wars, and unequal voting access.

Still, be heartened by President Lyndon Baines Johnson's words upon the assassination of President Kennedy:

"Our enemies have always made the same mistake. In my lifetime — in depression and in war — they have awaited our defeat. Each time, from the secret places of the American heart, came forth the faith they could not see or that they could not even imagine. It brought us victory. And it will again.

That is what America is all about.

ESC/Episcopal Church Divorce

On June 9, SFT residents received a communiqué from Episcopal Senior Communities (ESC) Director Gerber and Board President Skaggs announcing "voluntary dissociation" from the California Episcopal Diocese.

SFT's Resident Council formally requested more detail regarding the communiqué's meaning. In a June 28 open letter, Kevin Gerber responded to SFT Resident Council President Moreland. He claims pending litigation prevents detailed explanations of the benefits of unilateral severance.

The Church/ESC judicial hearing is September 19. An effort at mediation was to be held on 6/29. No results yet.

What is at Stake, and Why Residents Should Care About Church Separation

This is a conflict between two parties, neither of which has totally clean hands.

Fundamentally, the conflict is over which organization, Episcopal Diocese of California or ESC management, will control appointment to the ESC Board of Directors, the body that is the ultimate authority over the future of SFT
Here is Sugar's view.

Some SFT residents eschew controversy. They appreciate life at the Towers and do not want serenity pierced. Sugar is deeply respectful of this outlook. However, before altogether disavowing the ESC/Church severance issue, consider the following possible consequences for you or your neighbors.

If one is over 85, possess net worth exceeding $3 million, and derives income principally from securities and property, one may be immune to ESC's one-sided church severance. Monthly fee increases of 5% or more, even compounded, may be of little long run consequence to you.

Conversely, if you do not have a large capital corpus and your income does not routinely parallel inflation, you are imperiled by annual fee increases that can be steep in the absence of a brake.

And, acting as a brake on misguided mergers and unexplained fee hikes is a principal benefit of an alliance with an ethical agency, be it sectarian or secular.

The issue is muddied by apparent past neglect on the part of Bishop's designees. If past ESC boards had been more active, today's conflict might have been avoided. However, the current Bishop's actions suggest a revitalized Diocesan interest in ESC oversight.

Regardless of the past, if bonds with the Bishop are severed, SFT residents' interests are likely jeopardized.

Church severance gives ESC management a wider path to inappropriate mergers and a self – perpetuating rubber stamp governing board. Residents' will inevitably be subjected to increasingly higher monthly fee increases

If wealth insulates you from fee increases, then this issue may be irrelevant.

However, if you see yourself at risk financially, or are offended by an unjustified assumption of power, by either party, then inform the Council of your views.

Globalism: Brexit Collateral Damage

Talk about global connectedness. Brexit spooked Wall Street; thereafter SFT residents, (it is said, Mel Flyer alone) lost millions from securities portfolios. And, we did not even get to vote on the issue. Here is what REALLT happened.

When elections become circuses, there's always a chance the dancing bear will win.
(Nancy Isenberg quote via Curtis Taylor.)

Bus Teachers, Not Students

The *Brown v Board* of Education decision with a moral imperative to eliminate *de jure* racial segregation took place seven decades ago. Ironically, America's schools are more racially segregated, albeit *de facto,* today than ever before.

From 1975 until 1983, Sugar was a twice-elected member and board president of the Berkeley Unified School District. The approximate 25,000 enrollees were balanced between middle-class whites living in the hills and lower income black, Hispanic, and Pacific island students residing in the flatlands near San Francisco Bay.

The voluntary racial desegregation plan implemented by prior boards, involved bussing low-income students into the hills for kindergarten through 3rd grade. Students living in the hills were bussed to the flatlands for grades 4 through 6. Grades 7, 8 and 9 were concentrated in three large middle schools located across a central band of the school district. Tenth through 12th grade students attended an unusually large single campus high school located in central downtown Berkeley. Thus, K-12 enrollees attended four schools.

This logistical nightmare necessitated an expanded transportation system and added personnel. Taxpayers accepted added costs. However, many middle-class parents, of every race and color, moved, sought private schools, or relied on home schooling.

As a newly elected school board member, it would have been heresy to question the desegregation plan. Busing was not simply a stratagem intended to advantage low-income students; it was taken to be dicta. To doubt underlying assumptions and question presumed positive outcomes, was to be a heretic, or branded as a racist.

In the experiment's early years, low-income student scores were stagnant. The achievement gap persisted. Never ending explanations were given for this condition. It was said that low-income children suffered from low self-esteem. Experts were employed to elevate their self-image. Then, insufficient parental engagement was identified as the culprit. Thereafter, inducements were offered for parents to engage in their child's school.

The experiment progressed; test scores did not. Professional development for teachers was intensified to overcome their alleged cultural ignorance and possible racial prejudice. After school day care, field trips, weekend instruction, extended school hours, summer schools, new curricula, and on and on were added. Change was imperative. However, there was one constant, a race and income achievement gap.

One option was never debated. That was identifying effective teachers, and offering inducements to concentrate their efforts on instructing low-income children. Today's empirical research makes clear that for elevating student achievement there is no instructional component, no technological innovation, no optimum class size, no professional development, no magical self-efficacy strategy, no facility, that can match the power of an effective teacher.

If I had been a school board member with today's knowledge, I would have advocated identifying effective teachers and offering inducements to transfer where their talents were needed most. If we had known to pursue this option, we might have closed the achievement gap and maybe we would have been able to retain middle-class families in public schools. Everyone would have won.

Instead, today, Berkeley's public schools serve half the number of students they enrolled at the experiment's beginning.

A San Francisco Vignette

Contributed by Al and Dee Whitman

When we arrived here a year and a half ago, we wondered what San Franciscans were like. Tower people were welcoming and friendly; others appeared diverse and tolerant. Our first real encounter occurred when we attempted to visit a government agency and got lost. On inquiry, a young woman walking a dog gave us directions and as she watched us first walking up a steep hill and then unsuccessfully trying to hail a cab, she approached us to advise that the distance was great and uphill. She had contacted Uber, and a car arrived within a few minutes. We boarded and requested the fare, but the driver stated that the fare and tip had been paid by the young woman. We insisted he reverse it, but the driver told us it was too late. When we found our benefactor, we took her and her school teaching husband to lunch. We were delighted by this young and inspiring couple. What a wonderful first impression!

Memoires

The June 12 memorial service for Phyllis Levy reinforced for Sugar the unusual nature of SFT residents. Phyllis was one the Towers' men and women who served in the military during World War II.

Virtually all our colleagues have accomplished matters of note and have been and may still be engaged in efforts of interest.

Frankly, the rich reservoir of SFT resident experience is deserving of being preserved. That leads to the point of this essay.

If you have not already captured the essential points of your life, then Sugar implores you to do so. It will be rewarding for you and possibly instructive for others of us.

Puns Denote Intelligence

A vulture boards a plane carrying two dead raccoons; a flight attendant said: "I'm sorry, sir, only one carrion allowed per person."

Two Eskimos sitting in a kayak were chilly, so they lit a fire in the craft. Unsurprisingly it immediately sank; proving once again that you cannot have your kayak and heat it too.

Into the depths? Recent SFT residents are named Boring, Tunnel, and Hoel.

"Central Committee" declares Warrior NBA loss unfit for DR conversation.

New Word

Inoculatte: To take coffee intravenously when running late.
(Thanks to Albert Vizinho)

Council Resignations and Replacement

Volunteers significantly enhance SFT-life. Whatever Cathy Moreland's and Mike Gerber's resignation reasons, Sugar and dozens of others are grateful for their service. "Thank you."

Edward Hoyt ad Patricia Willets have been nominated to fill vacated terms. These individuals need Resident Council approval. All involved should be congratulated for acting with discretion and dispatch.

James Guthrie produces Tower Talk (TT) under the nom de plume of Sugar Caen. This is a collection of vignettes, anecdotes, efforts at humor, and informational items regarding residents, employees, events, and conditions in and around San Francisco Towers. This publication is published privately and does NOT carry approval of NOR rely upon resources from Towers management. It has no commercial content and is not intended to replace regular Towers' publications. Those wishing to comment or stop receipt may contact Sugarcaen00@gmail.com