TOWER TALK

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Happy New Year

Celebrating the start of Tower Talk's fourth year!

Sugar's New Year's Predictions: Some Serious, Some Silly

Sugar sometimes sees what others cannot. In 2017, of 16 published predictions, 12 were accurate, the most dramatic being an early proclamation of Trump's election. Sugar also predicted Dallas Cowboy's would win the Super Bowl, and they did not. And, Sugar was insufficiently loyal to the Golden State Warriors, predicting they would lose the NBA title. Sugar will not make that mistake again.

Here are Sugar's prescient predictions for 2018.

» Intensified U.S. and global political unrest will be triggered by escalating and unparalleled wealth concentration.
» North Korean Premier, Kim Jung-Un will disappear from public visibility.
» Golden State Warriors capture 2nd straight NBA championship. San Francisco 49ers return to winning. Giants' baseball continues to flounder.
» Significant biotech breakthroughs will mitigate cancer and neurotransmitter diseases.
» Republicans will retain both houses of Congress in 2018 election.
» Annual economic growth will hover slightly below 3%, stock market will level off at approximately 5% growth, unemployment will dip below 4%, Fed thrice will raise interest rates, and labor shortages will provoke 2% inflation.
» Kevin Gerber will resign as ESC CEO.
» Massive elevator failure will take place forcing SFT upper floors to survive for days on Fudge Tracks hoisted by ropes.
» SFT Pet Club increases influence in Resident Council matters after animals successfully petition for right to vote.
» Marketing department celebrates 120% Towers occupancy rate following Levels G2 and G3 conversion to "Tiny Houses."
» Misplaced memory care blueprints found in Kevin Gerber's refrigerator.

From Optimism to Hopefulness

Peter Hertzmann

Last year, on the Friday afternoon closest to the middle of December, I braved the downtown crowds and inclement weather to wander through the stores adjoining Union Square. I've performed this same ritual for decades. Strangely, this year, the crowds

were thin and the weather was balmy. The City of Paris, The White House, and The Emporium may be distant memories and Gumps may be a mere silhouette of its former greatness, but the general spirit of the season was still in the air, even if it felt like there was the presence of an unseen apparition. (Maybe the Ghost of Christmas Past?)

The one constant throughout the years has been the music. Whether Muzak or buskers, all the music each year is Christmas music. This year, the air was filled with old chestnuts sung by both long-dead songsters and current crooners. Whether the recording of The Christmas Song being blasted overhead in Macy's or Saks was the original by Nat King Cole or a cover version sung by Paul McCartney, the song was full of the same optimism and mirth common to most Christmas carols.

Think about your favorite carols, whether religious or secular, most exhibit a spirit of optimism. (Even the classic Stan Freiberg Christmas-carol parody is optimistic about commercialism.) Some songs start with a sense of longing. The "longing" opening verse from White Christmas is often left off.

> *The sun is shining, the grass is green,*
> *The orange and palm trees sway.*
> *There's never been such a day*
> *in Beverly Hills, L.A.*
> *But it's December the twenty-fourth,—*
> *And I am longing to be up North—*

But like other Christmas songs, this one ends on an optimistic note.

> *May your days be merry and bright*
> *And may all your Christmases be white.*

And then Christmas day arrived. For some people it was a day spent with family and friends celebrating the simple joy of being in their presence. For others, it was a day of watching football on the newly installed widescreen television. For many, the optimism of the season faded into day-to-day reality. Christmas Day was also the start of the season of reminiscing.

For the week starting Christmas day and ending with New Year's Eve, much of our attention was spent thinking about the past year. What were the important events of 2017? What were our personal highlights? Which famous people died? The week was filled with top-ten lists. It was a time to reminisce. It was a time to remember both the highlights and the low lights.

Then came New Year's Day: more bowl games watched, more celebratory food consumed, and possibly a bit too much cheer drunk. By Tuesday morning, the season of hopefulness had arrived.

Whether each of us prepared a formal list of resolutions for the new year or simply made mental plans for the coming months, we were all hopeful. As the year progresses and resolutions turn to past fantasies and plans become circumvented by reality, please remember that the year started on a promising note. My resolution is to be hopeful for the whole year.

Shouting 'Fire' in a Crowded Region

Paul Sedway

With a respectful nod to Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, we must resist his free speech-defining edict that we shouldn't shout "fire" without proof that one actually exists. Rather, a loud and clear warning is now needed that a new hazard confronts us. It is usually called a *wildfire,* and it has taken its place with the abrupt *earthquake fire,* the distant *forest fire,* and the explosive *industrial fire* in the pantheon of societal afflictions, alongside the earthquake, flood, mudslide, drought and freeze. Welcome to California; even with those natural disasters, it is still one of the finest places to live.

The wildfire has come to mean a conflagration that is found typically: a) in an outer-suburban or exurban setting; b) during a hot, California, Indian Summer, August through December; c) with strong offshore Santa-Ana-type winds blowing.

It also needs ignition. Years ago that meant a careless camper or smoker leaving something smoldering or arson or lightning. But, now, there are new culprits. Foremost among them are PG&E, Southern Cal Edison, San Diego Gas and Electric, and other utility companies whose lines are strung on poles deep into our forested hinterlands.

The charge (no pun intended) is that sparks from downed power lines and electrical equipment are now sources of ignition. The PUC has already fined these investor-owned utilities tens of millions of dollars. Fire crews were dispatched to at least ten spots in Sonoma County on the night of October 8, at the outbreak of the Wine Country Fires, in response to reports of sparking wires and exploding transformers.

Global warming has hit California especially hard. Not only has it dried out vegetation and killed trees, but our changing weather now reflects the late arrival of protective fall and winter rains.

The nightmarish Wine Country and Santa Rosa Fires burned 5,000+ homes—yes, ours among them—and killed 44 persons. Now the California Southland is getting hit. Damage is running into billions of dollars.

So what can be done? Years ago, we might have prohibited homes in far flung, low density, fire-prone areas, or discouraged their rebuilding once burned, but the Santa Rosa fire burned an entire urban subdivision, Coffey Park, adjacent to Highway 101 and near Downtown Santa Rosa. Along with the Oakland Tunnel Fire of 1991, this suggests that California wildfires can strike anywhere.

A policy of development prohibition is probably DOA, as they say in Congress, because the fires are footless and ubiquitous. And owners would demand compensation, as they did in response to similar efforts in New Orleans following Katrina. Tightening building fire codes is a long, necessary process, but it protects only a newer homes while old homes around them remain combustible.

There is always the hope that new technology will protect us. New paints are being developed with fire-retardant qualities. Sprinkler systems are being devised that spray roofs as well as interiors. But is there a material that refuses to burn? Nothing is emerging yet that can withstand the 1000-degree heat generated by wildfires; wood bursts into flames spontaneously at 572 degrees! Will cellphone alerts come in time to save lives? The Wine Country fires moved so fast that warnings were non-existent or late. Would a rigorous program of vegetation clearing provide a real benefit? The wind-borne embers of our recent fire suggest otherwise.

So for now let's simply remain vigilant and well-insured. And, oh yes, digitize those treasured baby photos and store them in the cloud!

The Detroit Effect

Peter Hertzmann

At the Towers' Anniversary Dinner, the menu included an item labeled "Snake River Waygu Beef". In this case, the name refers to the producer, Snake River Ranch, and not the river in Idaho.

It seems only recently that adding a farm's name or a producer's name to a dish is a common practice to make a dish sound more exclusive, better tasting, or expensive. To the diner, who often knows little or nothing about the farm, the dish sounds more appealing. The concept seems based on an earlier use of meaningless adjectives in menu descriptions.

In August of 1967, I moved from Menlo Park to Rochester, New York. I was there to attend college. I quickly noticed that I missed certain foods from home. I was never served avocados or fresh artichokes at the Greek diner where I ate most of my dinners—my biggest longing was for San Francisco sourdough bread. Each time I returned home, whether flying or driving, my return luggage included two long loaves of San Francisco sourdough bread.

While living in the northeast, I also experienced Boston baked beans, Philadelphia cheesesteak sandwiches, Chicago pizza, St. Louis ribs, Texas barbecue, Kansas City steaks, and New York cheesecake. It turns out that if you add a major-city name to food, and it just tastes better. Even state names work. The one exception is Detroit. You can add Motor City to a dish, but not Detroit.

I haven't been able to determine when city names were first attached to food descriptions. As to the menus at the Towers, the residents on November 3rd were left with a beef dish loosely described by two marketing terms of little meaning. It might as well have been called Boise beef. After all, any city will do, any city except Detroit.

Entre Nous

Sugar Caen

Austin and Van Ness reside in SFT #1501. Over their morning coffee they are discussing a Colorado case currently under consideration by the U.S. Supreme Court. Not surprisingly, even though both are lawyers, they hold different views. Let's listen.

Aus: This Colorado baker makes me furious. Why does he think he has the right to refuse to a bake wedding cake for a gay couple? I think his religious objections are a cover for homophobia.

Van: Loosen up: This is a tough one.

Aus: How can it be tough? The guy is violating the civil rights of a couple who simply want a wedding cake. That they are gay should not matter.

Van: The baker, Mr. Phillips, has long been opposed to gay marriage on religious grounds. He is a fundamentalist who believes the Bible ordains marriage only between a man and woman. The First Amendment protects his right to practice his religion. If his views are found to be legitimately religious and authentically held, the Court might side with him and agree that he does not have to bake a wedding cake for a couple whose actions violate his religious beliefs.

Aus: Mr. Phillips is a merchant. His shop is open to the public. Whoever enters, assuming they act in a civil manner and are prepared to meet an announced price, should have the right to buy his product, regardless of the customer's race, religion, gender, or lifestyle. How can equal protection be interpreted in any other way? I cannot refuse to sell my house to someone because they are black. You cannot refuse to defend someone accused of a crime because of her gender.

Van: Would it make matters any different for you if you knew that at the time Mr. Phillips refused the request to bake a cake, gay marriage was illegal in Colorado? Mr. Phillips would seem to be within his rights not to facilitate an illegal act would he not?

Aus: Even though you are factually accurate, I believe that the prior condition is a canard. Mr. Phillips did not refuse a request because gay marriage was illegal; he refused it because he didn't like gays. Colorado shortly thereafter changed the law and permitted gay marriage. The state's approval of gay marriage takes away the criminal component from the baker's case. Moreover, in 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court said states have the right to approve gay marriage. Regardless of the couple's legal standing at the time of their cake request, that condition no longer adheres.

Van: What would you have the Supreme Court do?

Aus: They should simply declare that no commercial undertaking has the right to discriminate in the delivery of a services or products on the basis of the customer's lifestyle or sexual orientation.

Van: So you would simply ignore the First Amendment?

Aus: I agree with you that is a tough decision.

Van: In fact, it is sufficiently difficult so I suspect the Court will try to dodge it. They could remand the case back to the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, give guidance and request that the Commission review their initial position.

Aus: Not the first time the court will have kicked the can down the road eh!

Van: I find this exactly the kind of issue for which we have a Supreme Court. I hope all nine justices deal with it in good faith and with good reasoning.

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