TOWER TALK

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May 2019 Edition

Happy Mothers Day to All Mothers at the San Francisco Towers

As sons and daughters, we are grateful for all you did and still do for us

Review & Preview

Death, Taxes, and Road Repair are SF verities. Having dealt with death in March and taxes in April, the May 2019 *Tower Talk* concludes this pandect with an article by popular contributor, Paul Sedway, focusing on the City's plan to revitalize Geary Street and perhaps visit upon that thoroughfare the same chaos already imposed on Van Ness. This issue also explains why social media are anti-social and offers lighter fare with brainteasers, nostalgia, and a dialog between the quarrelsome couple, Austin and Van

Another Arterial Busway: Good, Bad, Ugly or Should We Care?

Paul Sedway

The proposed Geary Busway suffers from the stigma of the slow-moving Van Ness project. The rap on our own busway is that it goes nowhere that commuters want to go, disrupts the local street and pedestrian pattern and endangers users. (See my prior article entitled "VanNessthetized!" in Tower Talk in 2017, and Willie Brown's earnest but infeasible proposal to tear out all traffic islands).

Unlike Van Ness, where there are many senior and medical facilities, including the new CPMC Hospital, the Richmond District has a younger more agile population, who may find the new transit islands more accessible.

Yet the Geary version, although sharing some Van Ness drawbacks, might on balance be worthwhile! Sure, it will require passengers to venture out into the center of a busy thoroughfare, but when (and this is the big unknown) the Geary-Inner and Outer Richmond areas somehow become densified, the old 38R express bus weaving in and out of traffic will not be able to bring the new residents Downtown. The busway will.

And this becomes a classic chicken-egg dichotomy: Will the transit system serve the new population, or will it promote its arrival? Either way, this likely will become the right innovation in the right place.

Social Media = Societal Sickness

Sugar Caen

How would you feel if the Internal Revenue Service routinely sold vital information about you to various private sector firms, firms interested in selling you goods or services based upon your income, its source, your business, the stocks you own, your marital status, number of children, and the address of where you live and do business?

The above-listed information items would be vital for a number of profit seeking firms and charitable organizations. However, I suspect you would regard it as your information, and I am confident that you believe it is information that ought to be protected.

However, when Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, and other social media do exactly the above, sell your private information, even if they do not have precisely as much information as the IRS, we

somehow tolerate it, or at least feel powerless to oppose it.

Social media companies are harming us as a society and are begging for government regulation. Their personal pursuit of profit through the invasion of our individual privacy so far has been acceptable and only now and only slowly are our elected officials taking notice of this potentially dangerous situation.

It would be bad enough if the so-called social media were only invading our privacy. However, the situation is worse. They also are actively undermining the fundament of personal interaction, eroding trust, and exploiting our disposition toward compassion.

I am reluctant to appear out-of-date, not "with it," like an old fuddy-duddy or a Luddite. But, I genuinely believe it is *anti* social.

Below are dictionary definitions of "social media."

> *…forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).*
>
> *…sites and applications include Facebook, YouTube, Del.icio.us, Twitter, Digg, blogs and other sites that have content based on user participation and user-generated content (UGC).*

A *Wall Street Journal* poll reveals 70% of Americans have a love-hate relationship with social media.

Riddle

Repeated by Jim Tunnel

A holy man is making his pilgrimage to the Ganges at Varanassi. He has taken a vow of silence but will permit himself to ask one question, but only one, should he need help to find his way. He reaches a fork in the footpath. Two persons wait at the fork. One always speaks the truth and the other always lies, but our man does not know which is which. What single question can he ask to find his way? *Answer on next page.*

They believe these communication paths are socially divisive and personally dangerous, invading their privacy, but they cannot tear themselves away from this devil. I do not have a love-hate relationship. I am heavily, maybe exclusively, weighted toward the "hate" side.

Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, LinkedIn, Texting, Twitter, Tumbir, YouTube, and on and on for the many instant messaging platforms, and seemingly more are being invented daily, are useless. An Uber driver told me, "YouTube is the new radio." Then, he said, "Well, like you know! Whatever, man."

All of these immediate gratification communication means are a waste of time and electrons. They have a socially corrosive and psychologically rancid effect. The ability to say anything to anyone, or to everyone, at any time, or all the time, is provoking otherwise sane people into insane actions.

Mark Zuckerberg, initiated "The Problem"

Case in point: 34 year-old Mark Zuckerberg, who invented and wrote the code for Facebook in his college dorm over a week during which he was cutting classes, is now considering running for President of the United States. His fellow millennials, who rate him on a par with historic real scientists such as Darwin, Einstein, and Salk, just might vote for him, even if, or perhaps because, he owns only one suit and a tie.

There is something worse, however. *Like, you know.* It's the Kardashians. They have no talent, no intellect, no purpose, no scruples, no redeeming qualities, and apparently, no adult supervision. They signal the end of good tastes. And, I read that they have become millionaires with zillions of followers on social media. I would follow Idi Amin before aligning myself with Kardashians. (Well! That just might be an exaggeration.)

I get emails from, presumably intelligent, educated, and reasonable individuals who tell me things I don't need to know and do not want to know. Recently, a University Dean sent me an email, or was it a Snapchat, informing me that upon awaking that morning she felt dyspeptic. *Huh!!* What in God's name makes you think I care if you awake in a bad mood? That's absurd. I don't need to know how you feel, when you got out of bed, what you had for breakfast, or what attire you're going to wear that day. Those things are trivial.

I cannot imagine John Adams, Golda Meir, or Condoleezza Rice writing to people about significant issues of the day and lacing their language with side conversations or footnotes about their shoe color. I cringe at the notion that Lincoln could pen the Gettysburg address and then tweet it.

I do not want to be totally one-sided. I have a daughter who is a serious body-builder. She posts photos of her competition results, and for her professional community, this is a useful means of communication. Another friend reacted to a draft of this rant by reporting that he discovered a long lost Israeli relative through Facebook. Good! Still, if any reader can point to one significant long lasting collective advantage as a consequence of these new social media, please let me know. I actually think they are having a negative affect on human relationships. People who depend exclusively on Facebook or Twitter for a daily dose of human interaction, I fear are lonely.

The whole thing is even becoming personal. It is difficult to communicate with grandchildren without texting or using a social medium. They do not answer phone calls, and God knows they do not know how to write a letter.

Every morning I get tweets from President Trump. Apparently I, and 30 million others, am so privileged. (I know how to turn them off; so don't tell me.) His tweets are self-serving, but, come to think of it, every tweet I get is self-serving. I'm sick of this.

To quote Margaret Thatcher (in the spirit of the social media): "Watch your thoughts for they become words; watch your words for they become actions; watch your actions for they become your habits; your habits become your character, and your character determines your destiny."

I live in a senior center where 75 years ago, my fellow residents were among those fighting for the very survival of civilization. They were in the Navy or flying bombers over Nazi Germany. They did not have the time to feel sorry for themselves. If they awoke dyspeptic, frankly, their commanding officer really did not give a damn. I fear today's absurdly self-absorbed young people would be texting one another while German submarines were about to torpedo them.

Oh God! I feel like, you know, cranky.

Answer to Riddle

The holy man asks either of the two (it does not matter which) "What would your counterpart tell me is the correct path to Varanasi?" If he is speaking to the truth teller, the truth teller will tell him the liar will tell him to take the right fork, which is the wrong way. If he is speaking to the liar, the liar will tell him the truth teller will tell him to take the right fork, which is the wrong way. So our holy man takes the left fork and arrives in Varanasi.

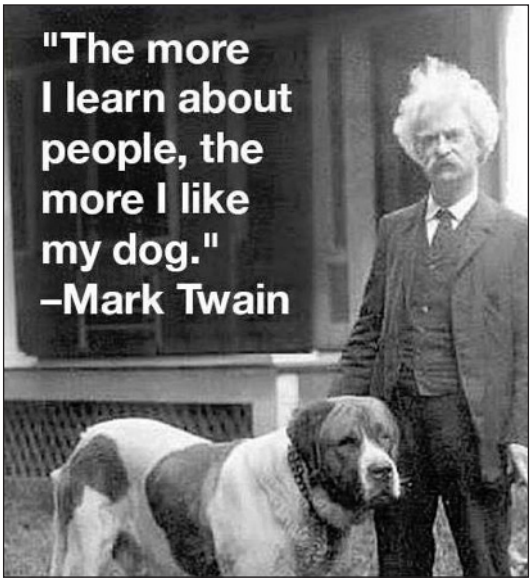
Urban Musings

Paul Sedway

Navigating the Blocs

Today, all of the city's navigation centers, offering health and other transitional services to the homeless, are located in Central San Francisco, centered on the Mission District. By going outside of this traditional location to the Waterfront, the city encountered stiff opposition. On Wednesday, April 24th, the Supervisors approved the Waterfront location.

By the way, did you know that the very first City navigation center, in 2015, and the most recent, in 2019, were both sponsored by Episcopal Community Services? Did you know also that New York City, with a population ten times larger than San Francisco, has a homeless population of nearly zero thanks to its Right to Shelter Program? None



are allowed to live on the streets because shelters must always be available under the terms of a lawsuit.

The money to solve the homeless crisis is largely available, the San Francisco public is on-board, and leadership is beginning to emerge from the private sector. If only we could garner the full participation of our public leaders, the Mayor and Supervisors, in developing shelters. Political will lags, mainly because our supervisors are resident in, elected by, and largely serve their own relatively small election districts. A fortress mentality prevails. Each district seeks to deflect unwanted development into neighboring districts.

Perhaps someday soon, we can modify the voting system and the corresponding outlook of individual supervisors back to a citywide, rather than a voting district-wide, perspective. Each representative would have to be a resident of one of the eleven districts but would be elected citywide. Only then would ours become a true city board, balancing broad impacts, and not just eleven politicians in search of an elusive consensus on homelessness and other issues.

Power Envy

The recently proposed Wiener Housing Bill (SB50) would grant developers the right to build taller buildings with higher residential densities within a short distance of high-capacity transit stops. (NB: This does not and will not apply to our own neighborhood because we are already up-zoned). Local governing bodies, e.g., county boards of supervisors or city councils, would not be involved. This shows that the locus of bold policy innovation doesn't always square with that of political power.

And local power or home rule, as it is so accurately called, can often stop any broadly beneficial initiative dead in its tracks. In this case, the governing bodies of the state's two most prominent cities, San Francisco and Los Angeles, launched a preemptive political attack intended to thwart the controversial legislative initiative by passing resolutions in opposition, thereby putting pressure on their cities' state representatives to oppose the bill. But on April 24, SB50 prevailed and joined with another bill which addressed less populous area resistance to multi-family housing. This was a major turning point. The new Wiener proposal would remove a source of local funding because developers could proceed to build outside of the local approval process, which allows the city to refill its coffers through exactions. At the same time, localities also feel that only active local planning and regulation can effectively integrate the projects into the city fabric. This has them agitated and eager to derail the bill, but this week's actions removed a major hurdle to adequate housing in California.

Entres Nous

Austin and Van Ness (SFT 1501) while drinking their morning coffee are again at odds over political issues. Let's listen.

Aus: Notre Dame! What a shame!

Van*:* I agree. I am comforted, however, by the huge outpouring of financial support for its restoration.

Aus: I still fondly remember taking a tour on our last visit to Paris three summers ago. Didn't we have a wonderful time, and what a monumental structure Notre Dame is.

Van: I was put off by their charging a €10 fee to tour the cathedral. If there is an institution on the face of the earth that has a lot of money, it's the Catholic Church. It didn't seem right charging money to go into a church.

Aus: I've been trying to think of something historically equivalent in the United States.

Van: We do not have any thousand-year-old national monuments unless you somehow include the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, or Niagara Falls. However, Notre Dame is a human triumph.

Aus*:* Speaking of Trump…

Van: (*Interrupting loudly*) I did not say Trump. I said "triumph." I know the words sound similar, but I didn't think we were talking about the President.

Aus: Nice try, but you cannot so easily sidestep "The Donald's" most recent gaffe.

Van*:* How did we ever get from praising Notre Dame to damning Donald Trump? What misfeasance do you have in mind this time?

Aus*:* Trump's unwillingness to reveal his tax returns. He is hiding something, God only knows what.

Van*:* Now I see. The connection is God. Notre Dame, and Trump. Why didn't I get that?

Aus: Every modern President has revealed his taxes. Why doesn't Trump do the same?

Van: First, you are wrong. One other recent President did not reveal his taxes. I will let you guess which. Trump did release a legally required document detailing his personal financial holdings. He does not disclose his full taxes because it would give his post-president business competitors an unfair advantage. Second, he does not reveal his taxes because there is no law requiring that he do so.

Aus: Every other Republican President has revealed his taxes.

Van*:* Oh Yeah! Are you sure? We have not had a republican president who was an actual businessman for decades. The last one I can think of, and that is stretching it a bit, was Calvin Coolidge.

Aus: If would seem simple enough. All he has to do is have his accountant put his tax returns for some specified period of time in a press release. Whamo bamo! Issue gone. Unless, of course, he has done something wrong.

Van: I can tell you he never will make his taxes public. Congress can subpoena all it wants, and he will simply stonewall them. The U.S. House of Representatives, when I last looked, did not have an army they can use to pry the taxes out of the Treasury Department. Not going to happen. The end!

Aus*:* I am not so sure of that. Democrats are pretty worked up about it.

Van: I do not think they should be concerned about a billionaire who becomes an elected official. I think, rather, they should be concerned about elected officials who become billionaires. I would really like to see Nancy Pelosi's taxes.

Aus: There you go again! Always defending Humpty Trumpty. Trust me, he will fall.

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