Tower Talk

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Happy New Year

Celebrating the start of Tower Talk's fifth year!

Tower Talk Enters Its Fifth Year

James W. Guthrie

This issue marks *Tower Talk's* 5th year. There are 60 or more residents who have moved into San Francisco Towers in those four years. This turnover offers an opportunity to revisit *Tower Talk's* purpose.

The publication's principal purpose is to promote informed discourse among SFT residents. There are scores of residents with advanced and professional degrees. There are literally dozens of physicians, attorneys, professors, engineers, business officials, association leaders, journalists, and the list goes on.

As a collective, we are predisposed toward a variety of lifestyles, political persuasions, and religious preferences. There are no easy means for classifying us. There is no average resident, only a collection of intellectually independent, strong willed, and artistically able individuals. Because of this diversity, uniformity of outlook is rare.

SFT and COVIA managers have repeatedly criticized *Tower Talk* on grounds that it is divisive. Apparently, their ideal community is characterized by serenity. *Historically, serenity of the masses has served as a justification for autocrats to suppress free expression.*

Conversely, *Tower Talk* welcomes dissent. Its publication is premised on a conviction that SFT residents are adults capable of arriving at individual conclusions. If one disagrees with a point of view expressed in *Tower Talk*, one can easily exit. Better yet, one can submit a rebuttal. Most feared is reader indifference.

If you like *Tower Talk*, let me know. If you disagree, let me know. Or author a rebuttal. If you do not want to receive *Tower Talk*, delete it when it arrives in your email or contact sugarcaen@gmail.com and cancel your subscription.

Sugar's Fearless 2019 Predictions

Tower Talk has a secondary purpose: entertainment. Below is an example

Event	Probability (%)
Stocks Up 10 Percent	99
Trump Impeached	10
Trump Removed	0
Tariff War Resolution	80
GDP Up 3%	85
2-3% SFT Fee Increase	85
5-7% Resident Turnover	90
Church v COVIA conclusion	10
Kevin Gerber Retirement	90
Tower Talk Existence	100

An Unusual Political Prediction

Early U.S. Presidents made many Supreme Court appointments. For example, Washington nominated 11, Lincoln 5, Grant 8. On the next page is a listing of modern appointments.

Trump so far has made two, Gorsuch and Kavanaugh. Sugar predicts he will make at least one more prior to exiting.

President	SCJ (#)
FDR	9
Truman	4
Eisenhower	5
Kennedy	2
Johnson	2
Nixon	4
Ford	1
Carter	0
Reagan	3
[GHW] Bush	2
Clinton	2
[GW] Bush	2
Obama	2

Assessing Accuracy of 2018 Predictions

2018 predictions were 80 percent accurate. Sugar missed on the 2018 Democratic House win, GDP growth of 4%, Kevin Gerber's predicted retirement, and ascension of a Pet Club representative to SFT Resident Council.

Rethinking Our Mobility

Paul Sedway

Three recent events have given self-driving cars new attention, and by implication raise a question of the long-term utility (about ten years hence) of SFT's parking garage. First, the operator of a self-driving Tesla fell asleep behind the wheel while his car drove on, ultimately pulled over by a posse of converging police cars. Second, Waymo, a Google subsidiary, began a robotaxi service with self-driving cars in Phoenix. Third, the U.S. Senate moved a bill providing a regulatory framework nationwide for autonomous cars, with further legislative action expected.

The first event, the sleeping and drunk 15-year old driver, was a humorous moment in the evolution of self-driving cars, but nothing more. Had the police not intervened, the Tesla is designed to pull over and stop if the driver is not putting force on the wheel or, for GM, if the driver's eyes are not moving. The other events, the self-driving robo taxi and the U.S. Senate action are major milestones in the use of autonomous vehicles.

Uber and Lyft are scrambling to be first in every way, including their public stock offerings. This pace is causing problems, but their overall trajectory is consistently upward, even with glitches along the way. In 2016 there were about 37,000 people killed in the U.S. in highway accidents. The sooner we accept far safer autonomous vehicles, the better.

What do these cars have to do with our Towers' parking garage? Plenty. Over the decade or so to come we are going to see increasing numbers of empty parking spaces as we abandon our cars. And abandon we will. Self-driving car services will have a momentum that cannot be stopped, especially as more people become technologically adept at using the hand-held summoning devices.

Alone, these services would be a game-changer, but they are also accompanied by three other mobility transformations that enhance their effect: 1) the ride-hailing/sharing services, like Uber and Lyft, will be going autonomous; 2) the advent of electric cars made of new strong but lightweight materials with a range of around 500 miles; and 3) the more future connecting and disconnecting of several vehicles for long trips, making them even more efficient.

How will these technological changes combine to alter how we get around? Think total transformation: from congested, costly, dangerous, single-occupant car-dominated thoroughfares, to safe, fast, cheap, evenly spaced, multi-occupant vehicles, traveling anywhere. The experience inside the new vehicles will be enhanced by efforts to make car interiors more relaxing, productive, and entertaining.

So, back to the Towers. We use our cars for city driving but also to get to regional and more distant places like Palo Alto, Walnut Creek, Napa, Carmel, Lake Tahoe, and Ashland. If these new cars are so great, why won't we just buy one ourselves to get around? New studies by energy experts show that the current overall cost of traveling one mile in a privately owned and personally driven vehicle is 63 cents, while forecasts predict that using an autonomous electric car service for traveling the same mile will cost only 5 cents by 2030!

That means that we will be able to travel to Lake Tahoe for less than $15! And if you are willing to share a vehicle, the cost will be reduced further by from one-half to two-thirds, thus reducing the cost to under $7.50, leaving lots of money for the ski slopes or the slot machines.

So how many of us will still be interested in buying our own car in, say five years and having it sit in the garage? Even a beautiful, privately owned and autonomous Tesla will soon become a needless and costly showpiece. You won't need a Tesla to get your groceries. Amazon and Safeway will be delivering them to your door.

At the very least we should hedge our bets by leasing rather than buying a car. Let's think of fun things to do with the Towers garage. Badminton, anyone?

Towers Garage: Another Idea

Sugar Caen

SFT has a problem recruiting and retaining staff. San Francisco is expensive and commuting from outside The City is arduous. Surplus garage space offers an opportunity to render employment at SFT more attractive.

As residents increasingly forego having an automobile, why not convert G3 and G4 into one-bedroom employee apartments. This would call for electrical and plumbing renovations, and probably some code exemptions.

Let us say that twenty apartments each cost $100,000 on average to construct. Each could be rented at below market rates to our employees but at rates that would amortize the $2 million in costs in ten years. They would be devoid of outside views but could otherwise be quite comfortable.

Government and Innovation

James W. Guthrie

The fact that the San Francisco Bay Area generally and Silicon Valley in particular, is at the heart of the world's modern electronic and medical revolution is not random or predestined. Rather, it is an enormous return on billions in federal research investments made to the University of California and Stanford University.

The appropriate role of the federal government in the initiation and stimulation of basic scientific research is little understood and underappreciated. Fundamental scientific research seldom has clear and immediate commercial application and, thus, is not likely attractive to capital markets. (For example, fifty years ago, there would have been few companies interested in investing in space exploration.) Even when benefits are clear, spillover and neighborhood effects render it difficult to restrict financial returns to initial investors. Hence, few take the risks.

Beginning in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the federally funded University of California Berkeley Bevatron and Stanford University Linear Accelerator, huge scientific machines, began unlocking secrets of the material universe. When most of *Tower Talk*'s readers were taking high school chemistry, we learned that the 92nd element on the periodic table was uranium. Since then, 30 more elements have been discovered or constructed thanks to Cal and Stanford physicists.

Those who previously doubted basic research undertaken by these and related projects would some day produce valuable knowledge should see the results now. Whereas California stands fifth amid the world's economies, the Bay Area itself

Sugar's Monthly Mystery

Yummy chocolates await the first reader to identify the adorable children pictured above. (Those born in the 1930's and reared in San Francisco are ineligible. Here is a clue: They are married and live at SFT.)

ranks among the top ten, ahead of Russia.

The danger is that debt and entitlements will trump research as a federal priority. Our children may suffer as a result.

Entré Nous

Sugar Caen

Austin and Van Ness are sipping a postprandial whiskey in their SFT 1501 apartment and exchanging thoughts regarding the New Year. Let's listen

Aus: I would value your opinion as a lapsed Catholic about what is going on in that Church.

Van: That's pretty broad. Help me a bit.

Aus: I think because of its inability to clearly face the issue of child abuse and molestation, the Catholic Church is losing its purchase on moral legitimacy.

Van: Oooh! This sounds heavy.

Aus: It is heavy. For more than 2,000 years, the Catholic Church, with its ups and downs, has been a major means by which to transmit and reinforce the Judeo-Christian ethic. That is important and worth preserving, particularly during this ever-more secular period in history. Moreover, the Catholic Church has a billion followers. They deserve truth and trust from their priesthood.

Van: I do not agree that the Church has abandoned its entire mission. You and I went to Washington and Lowell, but we had many high school friends who went to Saint Ignatius, Sacred Heart, and Riordan, They are all well educated and became good citizens. And, God knows they had great athletic teams.

Aus: My problem is not with what happens in high schools, it's what happens earlier. I think this child abuse and molestation epidemic is the biggest issue the Church has faced since the Protestant Revolution and the draconian actions of Henry VIII. I am particularly vexed because there are real life answers to these current problems.

Van: The issue has been public for four or more decades. We have had stunning investigative reporting, even Oscar award-winning films. The problem is visible, known, discussed, and the Church still will not face it head on.

Aus: I think I know the answer. Jews and Protestants have had women priests and rabbis for decades. It has worked well. Catholics should follow suit.

Van: Letting Catholic priests marry and letting women become Catholic priests would be a giant step forward. But how can we get the church mobilized around such a simple answer?

Aus: I fear you will not take this seriously, but there is a way. All the Pope has to do is awake one morning and proclaim he had a conversation with God, and God mandated that women be eligible to be priests, and priests can get married. If God talks to the Pope, that should end it.

Van: I like it. You know there are those proposing that the Catholic Church lose its tax exemption because of its failure to maintain its public trust. I would hate to see such a nuclear option.

Aus: You have been most civil in this discussion. I expected vitriol. Would you pass the Jack Daniels?

Aus: Alcohol trumps vitriol.

James W. Guthrie publishes *Tower Talk*. It has no relationship to SFT or COVIA. It is dedicated to promoting informed discourse among and providing entertainment for SFT residents. Every effort is made to render it fair and balanced. Opinion is often authored under the *nom de plume* of Sugar Caen. Recipients wishing to unsubscribe need only contact sugarcane@gmail.com. Submission of manuscripts is welcomed. All past issues of *Tower Talk* can be found at Jameswguthrie.com. Peter Hertzmann, Kathy Trapani, and John Darby assist with the production of *Tower Talk*. Errors and omissions are the responsibility of the publisher alone.