

Annus Horribilis, 2020, Finally Over

James W. Guthrie

One must return to World War II to identify a worse year: millions of deaths worldwide, a quarantined nation, millions of unemployed, old separated from their young, new extremes of personal wealth, a once booming economy driven to its knees, an electorate deeply and darkly divided, rioting in our cities, an increasingly debased culture, few widely accepted leaders, and only a slender flicker of hope on the horizon. Assuredly, 2021 must be better.

New Program

Beginning January 1, 2021, Channel 998 will offer a new program at 11:30AM on Fridays. This show is entitled "Your San Francisco." James Guthrie will be the moderator and weekly guests will include residents who were born in, raised in, or later came to San Francisco. The point is to learn of the City: its activities, haunts, relationships, characters, entertainment, and events that those who now live among us experienced, what and who they loved, and what they fondly reflect upon. Tune in.

Editor's Comments

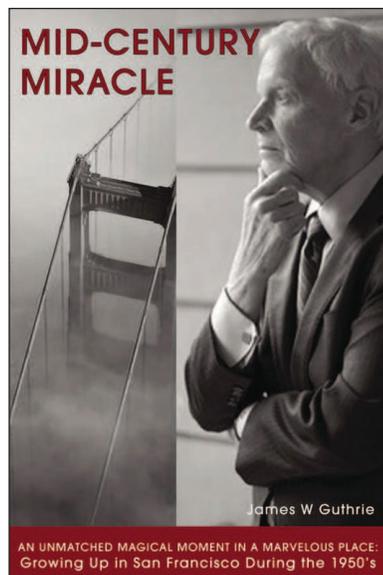
James W. Guthrie

This marks the seventh year of *Tower Talk*. In the middle of December, I asked residents their view of *Tower Talk*, and whether it deserved to continue. I received straightforward advice from respectable people who told me, "You have lost your edge, and it is time to quit" and others who said they found it informative and useful. Most hurtful of all were those who asked, "What's *Tower Talk*?"

There was sufficient positive feedback that *Tower Talk* continues. Its mission is to contribute to and sustain a sense of community. Of course, if this publication offends you, simply delete it or request to be removed from the distribution list. If you have ideas regarding how to improve *Tower Talk*, an opinion, or countervailing view, all are welcome. (SugarcaenOO@gmail.com)

Submissions by SFT residents have increased to a point whereby this issue contains a supplement containing imaginative photos by Bob Lewis and prose by Carole Freidenberg, Olivia Guthrie, James Guthrie, and Barbara Lewis. These contributions appear immediately following the monthly argument between bleeding heart Austin and curmudgeonly Van Ness on page 6.

Self-Aggrandizement



Book now available as a [free download](#) and soon in SFT library.

Opinion: Why I Dislike Covia

James W. Guthrie

My displeasure with Covia is principled, not personal. What little I know of Covia officials suggests that many are quite able. My complaint is not with them as individuals; it is with their actions as a collective.

I am contemptuous of Covia because of its repeated betrayals, eagerness to subordinate community well-being to corporate aggrandizement, and its mistaken belief that big trumps better.

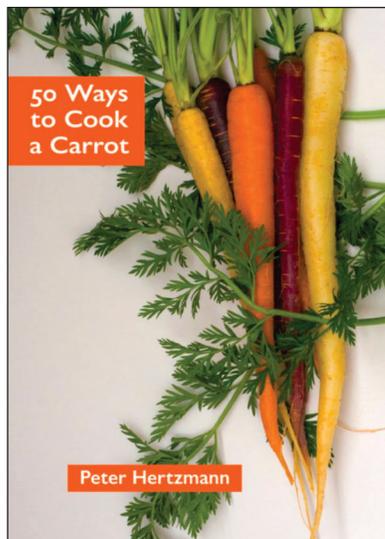
Corporate aggrandizement is visible in petty things such as a Covia-labeled wine, a port cochère

doormat touting the corporation rather than the location, and an obsequious posting of a Covia banner in the midst of SFT second floor resident art displays.

These are relatively minor transgressions compared to the corporation's unilateral severance from the Episcopal Church, pursuit of high-risk expansion strategies, misleading marketing efforts, and forthcoming affiliation with Front Porch.

My contempt for Covia is partially compensated for by my deep appreciation for the staff at San Francisco Towers who repeatedly place resident interest first and shield us from Covia where they can.

More Self-Aggrandizement



Listed among the *New Yorker's* ten best cookbooks of 2020 is *Tower Talk* contributor and SFT resident polymath Peter Hertzmann's *50 Ways to Cook a Carrot*, which, of course, is not about carrots.

Reviewer, Helen Rosner, captures the essence of both author and subject writing, "With instructions and explanations delivered with the pleasingly brusque encouragement of a seasoned teacher, this is a brilliantly audacious act of culinary pedagogy that (also quite brilliantly) verges on the absurd."

New Year's Predictions: Past and Future

Sugar Caen

Reviewing 2020 predictions reveals Sugar to be about 80% prescient and 20% befuddled. Sugar nailed the likelihood and outcome of Trump's Senate impeachment, the improbability of a "Blue Wave" in November elections, appointment of a new Supreme Court Justice, the Covia/Front Porch cuddle up, and the percent of the annual SFT fee increase. Sugar blew the Presidential election and did not realize that COVID-19 would wipe out the football season.

What to expect in 2021

- » COVID-19 infections will continue to skyrocket into the second quarter. Vaccines will have a positive effect, but not as quickly or dramatically as hoped. Various members of the "Flat Earth Society" and "Sensible Shoe Brigade" will resist vaccination, citing unacceptable invasion of privacy and possibly an other-worldly plot.
- » The nation's deep cultural and political divide, reflected in historically narrow Senate and House margins, will sustain partisan bickering and government inaction on critical issues. The National debt will be alarming. President Biden's and Senator Feinstein's health and cognitive capacity will excite the media. Threats of impeachment will erupt almost immediately after inauguration.
- » Pent up consumer demand will burst forth in the third and fourth quarters: cruise lines, airlines, tourist destinations, vacation real estate, and restaurants (those that remain) will boom, as will demand for luxury goods and consumer debt.
- » Stocks will escalate dramatically in the third and fourth quarters. San Francisco will be an exception to economic growth. Inept local politicians will exacerbate the flight of middle class families from the City.
- » At least one geopolitical adversary will take advantage of divided government to test U.S. defense capability.
- » Clerical, analytic, and technology facilitated employees now working remotely will be a perma-

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- ment, not a temporary, phenomenon. Designers will scramble to identify means for converting modern office towers to alternative uses.
- » Distance learning will be recognized as disastrous, particularly for low-income and disabled elementary and secondary students. Schools and colleges will return to on-campus learning, recreational, and athletic activities, but many more high school and college classes will blend online with on-campus instruction.
 - » Public pressure will intensify favoring breaking up big tech and social media companies and privacy will grow as a political issue.
 - » Donald Trump will be banned from Twitter, will lose forty pounds, and return in 2024 to run against Kamala Harris.
 - » SFT residents will be stunned by an annual fee increase higher than at any point in the last decade.

Politics: Here & There

James W. Guthrie

Politics International: In the past half-century, four major sexual scandals have been of sufficient severity to reshape political landscapes and bring down governments.

In the early 1960's, John Profumo, Defense Secretary in the Harold Macmillan Conservative government, was accused of having an affair with a 19-year-old girl, Christine Keeler. His eventual resignation damaged the Conservative Party in the 1964 election, giving Labor a victory.

Also in England in the 1960's, Liberal Party Chief, Jeremy Thorpe, was indicted for inciting the murder of a homosexual partner who went public with shocking details. Thorpe was indicted, but escaped conviction, saved by brilliant lawyering. Neither Thorpe nor his political party ever recovered. His fall from grace facilitated the career of Margaret Thatcher, the longest serving Prime Minister in British history

In the early 21st Century, French Socialist Party leader and Chief of the International Monetary Fund, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, was indicted for sexually assaulting a New York hotel maid. Adroit lawyering protected him from conviction, but could not save his political career.

Forty-second U.S. President, William Jefferson Clinton was impeached on grounds of perjury, but the underlying issue was his having had sex with a White House intern.

All four miscreants escaped legal conviction, but, with the exception of Clinton, their political careers were left in shambles. Clinton was acquitted in the Senate and went on to finish his second Presidential term. He has continued to be a public figure and highly paid celebrity.

However, it is possible that Clinton's escape from ignominy could end with the upcoming trial of Ghislaine Maxwell, partner of international sex ring operator, Jeffrey Epstein.

Ghislaine is still bargaining for release on bail. Judges are reluctant because she controls great wealth and is a flight risk, Otherwise, one would think that Maxwell would, by now, have cut a deal with prosecutors, spilling the beans on others in order to save herself. However, if the matter does go to trial as scheduled for July of 2021, celebrity after celebrity is at risk as she reveals sordid details. Prince Andrew of England has already been tarnished so badly that his mother, the Queen, has admonished him and probably would send him to a desert island if she could. Ms. Maxwell's trial should take place this month. Stay tuned for details.

Politics National: The election is over. It was awful. Almost a year of transparent pandering, endless donor solicitations, and torrential spoutings of impossible-to-implement proposals came from all sides, but it is blessedly in the past. Of course, it will start all over again in two years. Calm might even end sooner as Biden critics launch calls for impeachment. Thus, let us enjoy the peace while we can.

With almost two months of post-election hindsight, here is what can be distilled.

No "Blue Wave." A nationwide sweep of national and state offices by Democrats did not occur. Republicans continue to hold a majority of gubernatorial positions, 35, and rule more state legislatures. Republicans dominate at the state level despite being outspent by Democrats almost 2 to 1 in campaign funds.

All About Trump. The November election involved few issues of note. Immigration, education, trade policy, income distribution, and dozens of other serious matters were seldom on the campaign or debate agendas. Rather, the election was a referendum on Donald Trump. He proved to be vastly unliked among Democrats and hard to swallow by many Republicans. One surprise was that the election was as close as it was. It is conceivable, but only conjectural, that if Republicans had found an attractive candidate, they might still hold the White House.

Biden's Attenuated Down-Ballot Effect. The absence of an effective campaign by Biden resulted in Democrats actually losing House seats, resulting in the smallest gap (222 D /213 R) in eighty years.

Limited Obama Legacy. Democrats lost more federal and state legislative seats in his two terms (over four elections) than any Democratic President in sixty years.

Continuing Legislative Stalemate. If Republicans continue to hold the Senate by winning even one Georgia Senate slot, under the discipline of Majority Leader McConnell, the Senate will be a major impediment for Biden's proposals.

Republican Party Evolution. This is not your father's Republican Party. It has managed to recruit women and minority candidates that conventionally were Democrats.

Suburban Housewives. Now key to National Election outcomes.

Politics-State: Activists continue to circulate petitions aimed at recalling Governor Gavin Newsom. These go nowhere and fall of their own weight. The surprise is that foolish people keep trying them. Newsom has named Secretary of State, Alex Padilla, to fill incoming Vice President Kamala Harris's Senate seat.

Politics-Local: The Friday afternoon December 18 Townhall held by our District 2 Supervisor, Catherine Stephani, was interesting. Stephani proved herself to be well-informed, concerned about constituents' interests, and articulate. She focused on crime in our district. Virtually all manner of crimes have increased dramatically.

What Supervisor Stephani could not articulate, and for which she was given no help by SF Police Chief Scott and Precinct Captain Yep, were solutions. The police involved in the Townhall were bureaucrats far more than law-enforcement experts. By actual timing, they spent six minutes congratulating each other. When repeatedly pressed by Supervisor Stephani for plans, strategies, and solutions, they came up empty-handed.

An interesting revelation is that San Francisco has an ordinance preventing public deployment of closed-circuit television cameras. The police chief was encouraging private citizens to have their own cameras around their property or their business.

Those readers who travel to London and Paris will note the widespread use of CCTV in those relatively crime free cities. Their governments rationally forfeit a degree of personal privacy in order to reap the benefits for crime prevention. San Francisco has decided the other way.

The police chief could not hide the fact that the District Attorney is not aggressive in prosecuting those arrested. Moreover, an inability to insist upon setting bail contributes to a simple recycling; those arrested are back on the streets quickly.

The Townhall made clear that San Francisco's criminal problems are far ore political than financial or technical.

Politics-Micro: The display of gingerbread houses on the second floor was terrific. The winner appears in the photo below. Congratulations to Skilled Nursing.



Entrez Nous

Austin and Van Ness (SFT 1501) often bicker about politics. We can listen.

Aus: The Board of Supervisors is about to discuss an exciting idea.

Van: I can hardly wait. Don't keep me on pins and needles. What is that august body going to take up now? They have already done such a marvelous job in solving the homeless problem, meteorically increasing crime, and the outflow of business.

Aus: It's pretty radical, but it's wonderful. They're going to ensure no individual or family ever lives in poverty.

Van: That really is something! I can see why you are excited.

Aus: Do you think it's a good idea? It is so idealistic.

Van: I think it belongs in the pantheon of the worst ideas I've ever heard in my life.

Aus: Why are you critical? This would help us get the homeless off the streets, stimulate consumer demand, give poor people a greater opportunity not simply to enjoy life, but to take better care of their children and their pets.

Van: It pleases me to see you so full of joy. I hate to be the skunk at the garden party. But, pray tell, from where will the money come to subsidize people below some arbitrary individual or family income level?

Aus: I was sure you would ask that. San Francisco is the second wealthiest city in the nation. We have 37 billionaires living in our midst. If each one of them would simply give up \$1 billion annually, I am confident we would have enough money for a minimum annual income of a comfortable nature. Thirty-seven billion dollars spread over, perhaps, 50,000 poor residents would generate a comfortable living.

Van: You honestly believe that these billionaires, whose daily whereabouts are already so elusive as to defy Sherlock Holmes, will stand still for this? The very idea is likely causing them this

moment to summon their private jets, bring their yachts back from Corfu, and get ready to move to their private islands in the San Juans.

Aus: I think you are cynical. I am sure many of them are publicly spirited and will want to help.

Van: I am unable to judge anything about them; I am not one of them, and I do not know any of them. However, their wealth is illusory. Most of it is involved in securities, future incentives, and various ownership plans that are exceedingly difficult to find or untangle, let alone to tax.

Aus: Simply for conversation sake, grant me that we can find the money. Then, surely you would think it to be a good idea

Van: it is an absolutely terrible idea, no matter from where the money comes. If you think homelessness is a problem now, if you think drug addiction is widespread locally, then just start guaranteeing people an annual income, and you will see what a real demographic transformation looks like.

Aus: Really?

Van: Income subsidies will act as a magnet to attract otherwise helpless sponges to San Francisco, and it also will repulse tax-paying residents in the Marina, Pacific Heights, and Seacliff. They are already starting to move to Marin County, Sonoma, or Hillsborough. Now if you want lower home prices in our city's posh neighborhoods, you have just identified the lever that will do it. Bring in more impoverished, raise taxes higher, add to homeless drug addiction, and middle-class families and the city's elite will start to evaporate right in front of you.

Aus: You throw a wet blanket on every good idea.

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Wiley

Carol Freidenberg

I got a call notifying me that Wiley’s ashes were ready. My beloved, high strung, insatiably curious, intense, and often fierce little 16-pound mixed breed dog had been with me for the past 11 years. A “high cuteness factor” dog, with abundant long red, blond, brown hair, and large eager, expressive brown eyes was a rescue. The then-owner of Grateful Dogs Rescue was happy to take care of him until we returned from a summer trip, reassuring us that if it didn’t work out, he was small, cute and would very quickly find a home. I trusted Jean since she had located a previous dog for us, a great success. When this new hyper bundle of energy arrived, we agreed to “just take him for a week and see how it goes.” These rescue folks are brilliant! Who is NOT going to bond with a dog after a week?

Over the years, Wiley could be a challenge. He was an aggressive opportunist around food. He was quick to steal snacks, so in Golden Gate Park we gave wide berth to picnics or young children snacking beside their parents.

He occasionally nipped friends, usually because he hung around everyone’s feet at any table with food, and would be kicked since no one was aware that he was there. However, the guy was a charmer, a perfect chick magnet. He was soft, furry, an “aw shucks” combination of 5 breeds (recent genetic testing), but mostly Pomeranian and Chihuahua. Eager to walk, eager to snoop around, my son Eric described him as a “very happy guy” and dubbed him “Lil Rojo” for his red-brown hair & small size.

I have had a buddy and comforter through many significant life changes. We had a lovely home with a back yard easily available when he arrived, and daily walks were an enthusiastic “must” for us both. Dogs are an excellent exercise machine. When we moved in 2015 from our house to an apartment at SF Towers, though he trembled in the elevators for two weeks given this new experience, he otherwise adapted quickly.

Wiley strolled the halls with gusto, bushy tail bouncing up and down with his high stepping strut. When my husband developed health issues, volunteers helped, and later a neighborhood dog walker took him on as her “fast” dog. As Bob declined, Wiley was always there, happy to sit on his master’s bed, often bringing a smile to others in skilled nursing, as a de facto therapy dog. He was present during our move, Bob’s decline and death, my widowhood, and now a Pandemic. What a valuable source of unconditional love during this horrific period.



On the Promenade by Bob Lewis

I left our life care facility April 4th, at the urging of our son Eric in the early days of COVID-19 when senior crowding put us at risk. Eric agreed we would create our pod of four beings. How lucky I have been in this arrangement through 4 house rentals, and his patient, loving care. I’m a lucky parent and marvel that we have not yet pushed the limits of this unusual combination.

Eric’s dog, Buckaroo (Movie trivia: Named from the 1984 film “The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension”) is a 40-pound black and white very handsome dude rescued from Mexico. Resembling a Dalmatian, but with

fewer & larger, randomized spots. “Bucky” is Mr. Handsome, calmly in charge, rather stately, “beefy” feeling, with a distinct enthusiasm for cozy, warm, soft places. That involves enthusiastically shoving others out of the way, placing himself in the warm spot. Our “cozy” dog, an excellent sleeper. He tolerates Eric’s wrestling moments, is ball obsessed, also afraid of fireworks and the night sky.

Buckaroo has an amazing vocal range. Not barking, not howling. He talks or sings, striking glissandos of low to high notes which bring to mind both Pavarotti and Barry White. Bucks easily established his dominance and we quickly separated them around food time, but Wiley was no dummy and willingly became the Beta Dog. They regarded each other in passing at first, but over time it became clear that Bucky looked out for Wiley and always seemed to know where he was. Wiley took cues from Bucks.

The sound of their enthusiastic running up and down stairs or halls eagerly awaiting outdoor wonders, was a frequent moment. Happy guys when we walked together to a nearby park or beach.

In Berkeley I searched for a setting that would allow me to see them readily and track their locations when off leash, as they sometimes headed in different directions. The “Albany Bulb” was a wonderful discovery along the beach front in North Berkeley/Albany and it became a good daily ritual.

Wiley, despite an advanced heart condition, did really well, happily nosing around and enjoying our walks. One morning mid-November, he was lethargic, not interested in food or activity and laboring to breathe. The vet was clear that his

trachea was collapsed, and no temporary fix was going to help. We made the painful decision to let him go since there was no quality of life ahead for him. Despite that painful loss, he had a very good happy life with one day of struggling. In the human world we would say “Not Bad”. We miss him so often and Buckaroo has grown quieter.

It’s an interesting and oddly positive part of COVID that there are very few dogs available for

adoption at animal shelters. People who have become tired of loneliness have taken them on, and as I chat with dog owners about their recent rescues, it clearly is a win-win situation.

I’m so grateful that these two creatures could take my mind off the depressing numbers and tragedies reported hourly. When really down, they helped me focus elsewhere. And more than anything, they provided a desperately needed source of comfort, affection, and laughter at a very dark, grim period in time.

North Goes South (Part III)

Olivia Guthrie

Moving from Lafayette, California to 1106 Belle Meade Blvd. in Nashville, Tennessee turned out to be easy for us. The house had recently been decorated and had a new kitchen and new bathrooms. It

was about the same size as our California house, so our furniture fit in well.

After our move, I turned my attention to our two-acre property. It had many beautiful trees, badly in need of pruning. So, we hired a tree service to do the work. On the second day the workers were there, the back doorbell rang. Three men were standing at the door, hats in hand. When I opened the door, the man in front said, “Ma’am, do yew wan’ that pole yonder? Good grief, I



Man About Town by Bob Lewis

thought, what is a pole yonder? Not yet used to the Southern vernacular, I was stumped.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I didn't understand you."



Forget Something? by Bob Lewis

"Ma'am, do yew wan' that pole yonder?" I must have looked totally mystified because the man behind him said, "Ma'am, he means that stick a bamboo. He'd like it for a fishin' pole."

Sure enough, beyond our door along the fence was a stand of bamboo with a tall straight bamboo stalk right in the front. Of course, I told him he could cut it down. Afterwards, I envisioned him sitting on the bank of the Cumberland River dressed in his overalls and a straw hat catching catfish with our bamboo pole.

I love to garden, and I sure had my chance there in Nashville. I planted an herb garden and filled an empty bed with old fashioned roses, the kind that smell heavenly. I also planted peonies along our back patio. I hired a landscaper to help plant azaleas and rhododendrons in the front of the house and ferns, hostas, and hydrangeas along one side. Unfortunately, I lost her to Allen Jackson. He was building a big house just outside of Nashville and offered her so much money to landscape his property that she thought she would make enough money to retire. I hope it happened.

We had a circular driveway in front of our house. Down at the street on either side of the driveway were beds ready to be planted. I bought some posies, got dressed in my blue jeans and Birkenstocks, put on my straw hat, loaded up my wheelbarrow and started down the driveway. Just then a long Cadillac pulled up in front of the house and a beautifully dressed and coiffed woman got out and came over to me. "How do you do," she said in a soft Southern voice. "Ah'm Betty Lou Barnes and ah live jus' down the street. You're the new people and your husband is at the University aren't you? Ah see that you've cut down the tree in front of your house."

I said, "Yes, we've just recently moved in. We're from California and my husband just retired from UC Berkeley."

She gasped and put her hand to her breast. "I hope you're not LIBERAL?" She looked at me expectantly.

I thought quickly, "No, we really are moderates."

After a few more words she left, got in her Cadillac and I never saw her again.

In back, I had enough space for a vegetable garden and adjacent to that was my compost pile. It didn't take long to make compost in Nashville's humid weather. I even grew corn and chuckled wickedly to myself thinking about what my neighbors would say if they knew corn was growing on Belle Meade Blvd. I do believe Betty Lou Barnes would have fainted dead away.

To be continued.

The Sandwich Maneuver

Barbara Lewis

At first it seemed like the "dog thing" might drive Bob away. My dogs had always shared my bedroom, and when Bob I started seeing each

other, Nicholas, my big gray poodle, slept under the bed. “What do you feed that animal?” Bob asked in a muffled voice after our first night together. I’d gotten up to let Nicholas out into the backyard. Bob was still mostly under the covers. His slicked-back wings of hair from the night before had turned into an Albert Einstein halo. “You better get a gas detector,” he said. “Those fumes could be lethal.”

Nicholas loved knucklebones, and the digestive process had perfumed our night. The emanations didn’t bother me. “Try to think of it as a lovely rich smell,” I suggested, climbing back in bed beside Bob.

He gave me a long look. “More like an instrument of war,” he said. “I think he’s trying to asphyxiate me.” It was possible. Nicholas had been my companion long before Bob hove on the scene. But Bob called Nicky’s bluff and moved in.

I called my sister and told her. “Well, I’m happy for you,” Lily said. “But I’m getting a little tired of Bob. He’s all you talk about anymore. You’re besotted.”

Lily, who majored in 18th century literature, was given to elaborate turns of phrase, but she was right. Decided. Clouded with love. I loved Bob’s bowlegged walk, his lazy mustache, his blacksmith arms, the way he narrowed his eyes at me. I loved his clean-laundry smell, his 19-year-old Ford, the deep contentment I felt when he took my hand in his own.

Bob moved in, and life was sweet. I fell into bed with him every night, woke up with Albert Einstein every morning. His lack of pretense about going bald – the courage, the purity, the nobility – filled me with lust, stirred me beyond words.

Nicholas continued to sleep under the bed, though we cut back on the knucklebones. He left us on Good Friday in the dreadful year we spent in Ann

Arbor. When we headed back to San Francisco, it was Fred the oafish apricot poodle who occupied the back seat, head out the window, inhaling the shifting scents of the continent.

In our 37 years together, Bob and I have lived with seven dogs - nine if you count the short, sad sojourns of Tripod and Marlow, but that’s another story. Our marriage could be measured in dog spans. And all the dogs, even Susie, who went everywhere with Bob, slept under the bed, never on it. He drew the line at sharing his bed with anyone but me. Then came Sandwich.

Sandwich is a massive wirehaired dachshund – 40 pounds, decidedly nonstandard. Unruly tufts of hair sprout from his muzzle. He adores Bob, and the feeling seems to be mutual. In the morning, I can hear my north woodsman husband chatting away to him in the kitchen. “Whaddya think, Sandwich? How about a cookie? Good catch! You’re a good boy, a very good boy.” The very good boy just turned 3. His



Son of Neptune by Bob Lewis

ripping good health seems contagious. Sandwich frequently hurls himself into Bob’s lap from halfway across the room. I’ve learned to recognize what that “oof” means. But Sandwich

can do no wrong. Though Bob may mutter occasionally about claustrophobia, Sandwich is even allowed to share our bed — these days a palatial California king. But throw in Bob’s reverberant sound effects plus my latter-day insomnia, and some nights even the California king is not big enough. When Bob tires of my whispered exhortations (turn over, turn over, please turn over) and begins to feel like a pig on a spit, he’ll haul himself out of bed and lumber across the hall to our extra bedroom so he can rumble in peace. Sandwich sleeps through it all.

This is the guy I once slept with on a kidney-shaped loveseat, on the beach at Truro, in an upper bunk on the Twilight Limited rattling across the plains. I would have endured far worse than sleeplessness to spend the night with Bob. These mornings, more often than not, find us in separate rooms.

But the doggy presence, which I once feared might drive Bob away, today is my way of reeling him back in. To conjure Bob from across the hall, restore his smooth warm presence to our bed, I need only send Sandwich as my messenger. Here’s how the maneuver works.

Sandwich is still asleep at the foot of the bed. I reach down, sling an arm around his torpedo body and drag him up, squeeze him close. After a few moments of this enforced togetherness, Sandwich struggles free, pours himself over the edge of the bed, and gallops into the front room, where he knows his beloved is to be found. If I sit up now, I can see the next act unfold in the room across the hall. Sandwich is facing the bed, tail wagging furiously. The rear haunches lower onto the floor, gather force, and the wiry dark silhouette

launches up and out of sight. I hear an “oof” and know the Sandwich has landed.

In a few moments Bob’s shadow weaves into view on the wall beyond our bedroom. Then he appears in the doorway, dopey with sleep, arms hanging limply at his side, the 6-foot naked length of him. He looks like a Leonardo drawing. I toss back the covers, and he hauls himself in. Mission accomplished.



Traveler by Bob Lewis

We hear Sandwich hit the floor in the guest room and gallop our way. There’s a pause while he listens to make sure we’re in residence. Then our own mattress jolts and the wild face appears at the foot of the bed. Sandwich paddles across our mounded bodies to wedge himself between us, and in short order lives up to his name. Albert Einstein narrows his eyes at me, slings an arm across Sandwich, and takes my hand in his.

One Out of 2,500

James W. Guthrie

I was always an obedient student. I remember only once in elementary school being sent to the principal’s office, but that was for an extraordinarily minor infraction and resulted in no lasting reputational damage.

Most of the time I played by the rules and did a little to distinguish myself, either

academically or in terms of deportment. There was one exception, a dramatic exception. One day I cut school with a friend.

I do not remember what kind of day it was. I am sure it was not a rainy day, but I have no other recollection. Like most days, school started at 8:00 and we met at his house at 7:30. I remember trudging up the hill from Cabrillo, crossing Balboa, traveling on the level block to Anza, and

then heading downhill to Geary Street where Presidio Junior High was located.

Somewhere along that route, we decided not to go to school. I have no idea what possessed us. I do not think we were avoiding an algebra test or some particularly distasteful action, such as getting back a graded essay in English.

When we got to Geary Street, having decided not to go to school, we took the streetcar out to the end of the line. Now we were at Ocean Beach. We also were close to Playland with its roller coaster, giant slides, centrifugal force platter, and Laughing Sal. Between us, we had enough money to go on rides and buy food. So, we set ourselves out for we thought was going to be an exciting day.

We looked at ourselves in the goofy mirrors that made you fat, thin, tall, or short. We went to the Musée Mécanique and played all kinds of arcade games. Then we decided to go on the roller coaster.

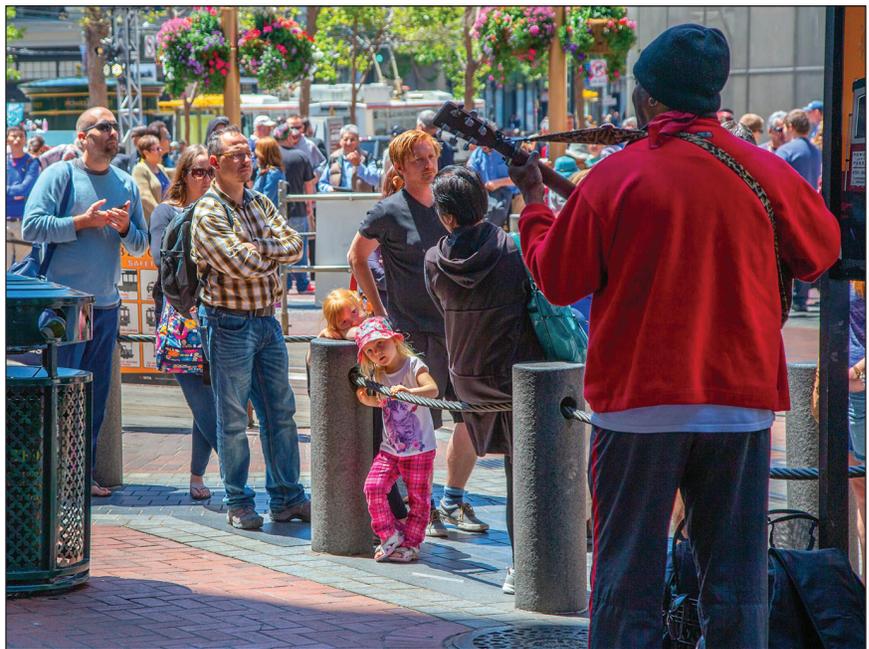
As we stood in line to purchase a ticket, a woman approached me and said: "Jimmy! What are you doing here? You should be in school." Right away, I knew I was in trouble, and it was going to get worse.

From kindergarten through the 12th grade, one attends school about 2,500 days. How in the world on the one day in my life I cut school, out of 2,500 school days, could someone I know find me?

The woman, Judas Iscariot and Benedict Arnold all rolled into one, was the receptionist in my dentist's office. It was her day off. She was quite adamant about it all and said she was going to phone my mother. That threw real fear in me. I knew that in the evening my mother would tell my father, and my father would then call me into the living room and tell me to sit down. Then in his deep voice he would say, "James." Always a bad sign when my parents used James; "Why did you cut school?"

Then I knew some punishment would be issued, such as I could not have my allowance for several weeks or I could not play with my friend for a month or who knows what else. I might be assigned some particularly distasteful chore like taking out the garbage for two months.

This interruption really spoiled our day. Ed and I did not go on the roller coaster. We took the number 5 McAlister streetcar back down Fulton Street until we got to 30th Ave. I got off and hurried home in hopes that I could deflect some of the damage that I felt was sure to come.



Music Lovers by Bob Lewis

I did not get home in time. The dentist's receptionist had already phoned my mother. What followed was not pretty. My mother phoned my friend's mother. She was quite indignant and told my mother that her son would never undertake such an act unless unduly influenced by someone bad, like "Jimmy."

She said her son would never be permitted to play with me again. Even though the whole idea of cutting school was as much his as mine, he got off without being punished. One day out of 2,500, and I get caught and my friend goes free. I did not think this was fair.

Two days later I was walking home from the Fulton playground on 27th Ave when I passed by my friend's home. His father sedan was parked in

front of their house. The driver side window was rolled down. I had an impulse.

I took out my wallet. Like all my friends, maybe all teenage boys, I had a condom in my wallet. Of course, it was never used and was never going to be used. It was the 1950s. There was no sex then. Insofar as I can tell, all children were conceived by some mysterious and remote process, but we all had a condom de rigueur. Because these condoms were never used, they always made a funny little worn out circle in your wallet.

I removed the condom package. Ironically the

package said TROJAN on it. I opened it, took out the contents, and threw the condom through the car window onto the front seat. It was a spontaneous action.

The next day in school, my friend and I were talking between classes, even though we were not supposed to, and he revealed that his parents had had the most awesome argument he had ever heard. Apparently, his mother had found the condom in the car. He wondered if he was going to have to sleep at his aunt's house.

I said, "Hmm!"