

Review and Preview

October is not quite as boring as August; we do have Halloween near the end of the month. Moreover, to give October its due, we can look forward to the San Francisco Giants possibly being in the World Series, our 49ers appear to be fielding a good team if injuries do not derail them yet again, and on October 19, the Golden State Warriors begin their 21/22 season.

District Attorney Chesea Boudin’s recall supporters have until October 25 to gather approximately 51,000 signatures. (The initial Boudin recall fell 2,000 signatures short.) No word yet on the indictment of the attacker of Franklin Market proprietor, Peter Johannes.

San Francisco Unified School District board members Gabriela López, Alison Collins, and Faauuga Moliga were named in recall paperwork. Petitions were submitted to the Registrar on September 7. No word yet regarding whether sufficient valid signatures were submitted

And, if none of the above is sufficiently exciting, there is big news about Austin Alley. A neighborhood upgrade is on the way. A public hearing is needed because a code exemption is needed, but quite soon an Arthur Murray Dance Studio will open above the mattress store. Cannot get much better than that. However, it is a tad perplexing that an Arthur Murray Dance Studio needs zoning approval, but a homeless person pitching a tent on the sidewalk does not. Love this city.

Meanwhile, this *Tower Talk* issue contains a nostalgic essay about the end of the 1950s, a descriptive piece by Contributing Editor Anne Turner on significant ecological developments in the shipping industry, and a stream of consciousness essay on right side passing by Eric Kamal Hilgendorf. If you ever read William Least Heat-Moon and his essays on driving America’s blue highways, you will like what Eric has to say. He is a humorist friend who combines Will Rogers with Groucho Marx. Austin and Van Ness are on a marriage counselor-prescribed cruise and should return next month.

BREAKING NEWS

San Francisco Municipal Court declares school board actions regarding world famous Armadillo murals to be illegal and orders their reversal. Admonishes School board in its decision.

From the conclusion of the Order: *The Board and SFUSD failed in their primary duty to follow the requirements of the law. California, as a matter of long-standing public policy, places enormous value on its environmental and historical resources and the People are entitled to expect public officials to give more than lip-service to the law designed to protect those resources.*

Essay: How the Magical and Uplifting 1950s Came to a Splintered and Ignominious End

James W. Guthrie

The 1950s were magical, and if you were fortunate to be raised in San Francisco in this era, you lived in an almost unmatched place in an amazing time. Our parents made it all possible by suffering through the Great Depression and winning the most important war of all time, but, even if we did not ourselves bring about the 1950s, as youth, we surely were the beneficiaries.

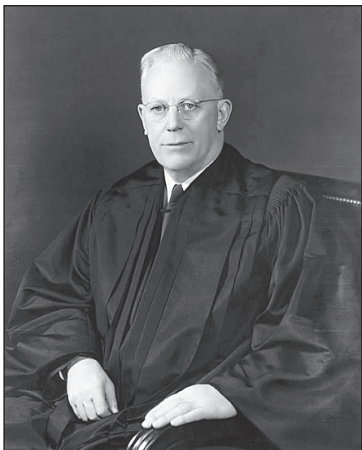
Childhood in the City was materially comfortable, filled with personal freedom and worthwhile activities, and devoid of troublesome conditions such as crime and homelessness. It was a period in history filled with hope. America had won the war, factories were churning out wondrous new consumer gadgets, automobiles were fitted with fancy fins and excessive chrome, and our individual futures looked bright. Seldom before had the “American Dream” appeared more promising.

Over the next two decades, in the 1960s and 1970s, the gloss was wearing off and the glamor was tarnished. America was engulfed by racial tension, fractious politics, and loss of a national purpose and a moral compass.

There is no single and certainly no simple explanation for the end of the 50s magical conditions. However, five unrelated events symbolize the underlying societal changes that brought the Magical 1950s to a numbing close: *Brown v Board of Education*, Sputnik, Vietnam, birth control pills, and Woodstock.

Brown v Board of Education: War hero, college president, and Midwesterner to his core, Dwight David Eisenhower presided over the 1950s. Elected to office in a 1952 landslide, Eisenhower was the perfect icon for a generation tired of conflict, fed up with self-sacrifice, and ready for material comfort.

Eisenhower selected three-term California Republican governor Earl Warren as the Supreme Court Chief Justice with the open understanding that he would do nothing. Then, this judicial appointee went rogue and rounded up eight affirming votes for one of the most stunning Supreme Court decisions in history, *Brown v Board of Education*, overturning six decades of “Separate but Equal,” and commanding legally permitted apartheid be dissolved. By the time the earthshaking social consequences of this judicial decision were emerging, the cities were burning.



Earl Warren

Cold War: The Soviet satellite Sputnik did little but broadcast an electronic ping as it orbited the earth. Some readers will remember looking up at the Autumn night sky and seeing this shiny object spinning above us.

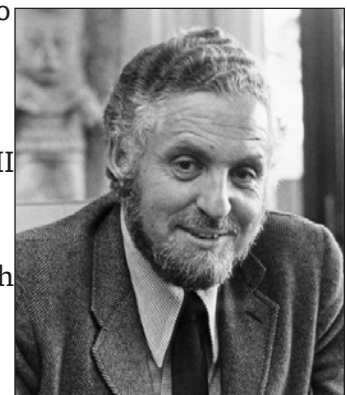


Sputnik

While it had no significance militarily or technologically, the beachball-size globe was highly visible testimony that the Soviet Union was challenging U.S scientific hegemony. How could this happen? How could a nation that had just fought and won the most horrible conflict in the history of the World, and preserved democracy in the process, succumb to sloth and permit itself to be outstripped by a secondhand power?

Sputnik was a signal that we were now engaged in a fearful four-decade-long undeclared war of mutually assured destruction against the Soviet Union. School children had to learn not only the Pledge of Allegiance and the National Anthem, but also “duck and cover” as we all anticipated a nuclear Armageddon.

Vietnam: Via hindsight we can now see that our civic fabric was about to be ripped open by intergenerational differences over the Vietnamese War. WW II was easy. There were good guys, that were pretty much the English and us, and bad guys, pretty much Germans and Japanese. It was simple, and we knew why we were at war.



Carl Djerassi

Vietnam was different. It came through the back door and snuck up on us. Initially we were providing “military advisors,” then we sent war materiel, and before we were fully aware, we were sending troops, lots of troops to prop up a government that was clearly corrupt. We did not seem to be winning anything; all we were doing

was losing soldiers — eventually 50,000 of them. Protest mounted, and we felt that we had to choose sides. Were we for or against the war, but whose war was it and why were we even in it?

Carl Djerassi: Who? Few scientists have changed society as much as Carl Djerassi. By chemically synthesizing a steroid mimic of the hormone progesterone, Djerassi paved the way for the oral contraceptive pill, allowing women to reliably control their own reproductive choices for the first time. Wild orgies ensued. Well? Not quite, but what eventually evolved in dating relationships was very different than 1950s teenage groping in the back seats of family cars parked along the Marina Green and Ocean Beach.

Existentialism: Finally, there was Woodstock. This occurred in 1969. On the surface this was little more than an enormous marijuana-filled rock concert set on unused farmland in upstate New York. Who cares? However, this event symbolized the triumph of Existentialism over conventional spirituality, a condition that had been a hallmark of the United States from its founding until the 1960s when the nation lost its moral compass. God was dead!

When all of these and related events were summed, the magic of the 1950s was over, and nothing like it has ever characterized America since.

Powering the Ocean-Going Fleet*

Anne M. Turner

One of the things I love about my SF Towers apartment is that I can see across the city to the Bay, where some of the big container ships are parked. They are waiting for room at the port or getting ready to depart for some foreign destination. Crissy Field offers even better views. I see all those stacked containers on the decks, and I wonder what mysterious and wondrous products are in them.

I belong to an organization called Ocean Conservancy, whose Fall newsletter, *Splash*, arrived a day or so

* Virtually all facts in this article are from *Splash*, the Fall 2021, Newsletter of Ocean Conservancy.

ago. Aside from the usual fund-raising appeals and ads for the 26th Annual International Coastal Cleanup, this issue featured an article on commercial shipping that surprised me.

For example, I did not know (did you?) that 80% of all international trade is carried by ships. We are talking here of clothes and living room furniture and cars. Shipping by ship is not only efficient but it saves money. Fishermen in Scotland ship their catch to China for filleting. China sends the fillets back and the fish is sold in local markets. I don't know what the turnaround time is on this, but the filleting is outsourced because it is cheaper than paying people to do the job in Scotland.

Ocean Conservancy considers the international shipping industry a major climate polluter because ships emit an estimated one billion metric tons of carbon dioxide per year. The people who work or live around ports are exposed to deadly air pollution, resulting in 250,000 global deaths each year, plus six million childhood asthma cases annually.

President Biden appointed John Kerry as Special Presidential Envoy for Climate Change. Last spring, he announced that the United States will lead an international effort to achieve zero carbon dioxide emissions by the shipping industry by 2050.

The United States is doing several things to reduce shipping pollution, hoping to wean shippers away from fossil fuels. It is encouraging use of zero carbon technologies, renewable energy, and new port infrastructures. As Ocean Conservancy staff pointed out, "We know that the shipping industry can change and change quickly. In the early 1900s, it switched from coal to diesel in a generation. To prevent the worst-case scenarios of climate disruption, we urgently need a similarly rapid transformation."

For hundreds of years all ocean shipping was zero-emission, because the vessels were sailing ships that relied on renewable energy — the wind in their sails for their power. The 1800s brought piston-engine steamships that used wood for

fuel, then coal. Diesel fuel, adopted in the 1900s, turned out to be cheaper, especially after it was discovered that “residual fuels” left over from the refinery process were the least expensive of all.

Ocean Conservancy reports that “Nearly 80 percent of today’s merchant ships run on pitch-black heavy oils, thick as molasses and high in carbon. The other 20 percent are powered by marine gas oil or, increasingly, liquefied natural gas, also potent global-warming fuels.

All these facts lead me to wonder how many and how big the sails would need to be to power one of container ships of which I am so fond. I was beginning to think this was just another dumb idea when I learned that a Norwegian design team has unveiled plans to build the world’s first zero-emission cargo ship. It will be powered by wind propulsion (sails? windmills on the deck?) and green hydrogen power. The ships will be available in 2024. Okay. Good. I sure am looking forward to seeing one of them.

Stream of Consciousness Driving: How Automotive Blind Spot Technology Stretched My Thoughts

Eric Hilgendorf

I love summertime for a variety of reasons: the smell of cut grass, neighborhoods filled with the growling of mowers, trimmers and leaf blowers, and, of course, I love summer for summer driving. I live overseas and when I return to the U.S. for the hotter solstice, the Eisenhower Interstate System beckons to me like an Odyssean siren from a distant fog-draped shore.

There is something about the sound, the vibration, the hum of the wheels on the pavement that is simply entrancing. Couple that rhythmic purr with the panoramic view of the highway ribbon cutting through the distant green and fading into purple hazy hills and the interior of my car becomes my dojo. And like any dojo worth its tatami mat, the environment elevates me to a higher plane of thinking.

When I consider myself seated as the driver, I realize that I am simultaneously stationary and

in motion. This allows me to zip past a never-ending line of mile markers while comfortably sipping my cappuccino, basking in the surround sound of Cold Play. If I focus on the road, the cornfield to my right flies by in an unbroken blur of greens and tassel yellows. And yet with an intentional change of focus I can also single out a solitary ear of corn and watch it approach in crystal clarity, like a Nolan Ryan fastball, draw alongside of it, freeze-frame it and then leave it in my rearview mirror, as I whoosh by. Ok, so it’s more tricycle thinking and less quantum.

This summer my routes were busy with construction (wait until the trillion-dollar infrastructure bill activates. I’m buying a hot air balloon). This meant that frequently all drivers and vehicles were at a standstill. But even that is enjoyable, like an impromptu picnic in which no one shares food or talks to each other. “We’re all in this together,” I profess. Even the clown cruising by on the shoulder is going to hit a stopping point and then sheepishly face the ire of all the other motorists. If you have motorized wheels, you’re part of the club. We are brothers and sisters in an armlock and we’re all going the same direction. What’s not to love?

Last year we didn’t return to the U.S.: COVID, no vaccine, flight cancellations, etc., it just wasn’t worth it. So, this year, I was doubly excited to hit the road and hit it I did, logging an impressive 2,500 miles over an 8-week period, mostly in the Midwest and Southeast. However, during these treks I noticed a pervasive idiosyncrasy, a driver foible, that has either bloomed in my two-year absence or has simply been inching forward, uncontested (cue the title).

We all know, or at least driving manuals for learning drivers indicate, that in a multiple lane highway the rightmost lane is for the slower vehicles and the left lane is for those drivers who are more speedierly (my word) inclined. This rule of the road is designed to mitigate the dangers that blind spots can cause.

As such, when a faster car passes a slower car, the passer should pass the passee on the left side because there is less of a blind spot than on the

right. This is Drivers Ed 101 and what I thought, a common understanding. So why was it that during my summer excursions, I found myself (and others) consistently needing to pass on the right to get around a slow car (sometimes two) occupying the fast lane. For sure, one such driver on a lonely stretch of asphalt is less of a safety hindrance and more of a wave at an annoying fly. However, such gruppendenken on even a small percentage of drivers on crowded highways filled with summer Covid escapees will flash burn the concept of dojo and challenge any Zen monk's ethereal repose.

Perhaps such driving is an outgrowth of "states' rights." When I am in my state, I have certain inalienable rights; therefore, when I am in my car, licensed by my state, those rights follow me into the driver's seat. I can go any speed I desire, and I can sit in any lane that I choose. If you don't like it, go around. I'm here for me and at the end of the day, what are you going to do about it anyway?

I'm not callous and certainly this does not apply to all drivers encamped in the left lane. Like the sheepish guy in the early model Toyota Tacoma, who was simply trying to deliver a load of chickens using a converted boat trailer. I get that. He probably just didn't realize that towers of four and five-high chicken crates, plus the chickens added to the initial weight of the boat trailer, might be a little more than his twenty-year old pickup could handle, especially ascending an incline. Perhaps this explains why I passed him on the right, his rear suspension was bottomed out, lifting his front suspension skyward, like a Mercury 7 astronaut, positioning for launch on a test vehicle.

And maybe, such leniency should also be extended to the woman in the Ford Taurus who was hauling so many pizza boxes in the back seat and the cargo area that she couldn't see out of her rear window. Maybe she was on her way to a soup kitchen, and it was "pizza day," or providing snacks for an entire football conference, or perhaps delivering the essentials for a marathon carbo-loading session. "Not to worry," I said as I passed her on her right, triggering a yellow

flashing alert on her side mirror, which I'm sure she was unable to see, her passenger seat stacked to the ceiling with pizza goodness.

"Those are exceptional situations," you might proffer, and I would agree but does that explain the couple in the midnight blue Honda CRV bivouacked in the fast lane? Both driver and passenger were wearing wide brimmed Panama hats with sports sunglasses and engaged in a lively discussion, with the driver gesturing to his passenger with his free right hand while his passenger deflected his gesticular offenses with airy bimanual movements, as if engaged in a Wing Chun training session.

As I passed them, causing their right-side mirror indicator to flash a yellow triangle, I paused to question why they might have a need to wear such large hats inside their vehicle and whether that might be hindering their view of the line of cars piling up behind them. "Perhaps their sunroof is open and despite the overcast day, they are concerned with the cloud penetrating UV rays that customarily produce squamous cell carcinomas." This would explain their over prescriptive use of sunglasses as well. And quite rightly, even on sunless days we should all be concerned about protecting our eyes from glaucoma. As I passed the aerobic twosome and sped up to catch the fleeting pack now unleashed in the open water of the left lane, my mind registered the fact that the CRV did not have a sunroof.

And if that is true, then what of the two young women in the black muscle-car, cruising in the left lane at a terrapinean 63 mph, breaking from their chatting only long enough to enjoy a long slurp from obscene straws poking out of horse-bladder sized cups? As the dam of cars and I cruised by them on the right, forcing their side mirror to flash a red triangle, I could not help but think out loud, "Perhaps they are conscientious organ donors, or perhaps a close relative is on a kidney-dialysis machine." This would explain why they are flushing the Ganges through their system and driving so cautiously. Rather than curse their impedimentary speed I should take notice. We should all be as conscientious and

proactive towards our organ health.

But how to explain the lone driver on his cell phone, maintaining a conservative 61 mph, in the left-hand lane, in his maroon Ford F-150, with a gun rack on the inside and on the outside of the cab: both empty. As this occurred during the Tokyo Olympics, my mind immediately accommodated this direction as I passed him on the right, causing his side mirror to light with a blind spot warning. "Perhaps this is a new Olympic Biathlon event, the "Backwoods Biathlon" in which contestants must drive on a fixed track in their F-150s, stop at designated markers, and hop into the bed to shoot at targets."

That makes the most sense and if so, he is probably on the phone with his coach discussing his driving tactics while en route to pick up his target rifles from the Backwoods Biathlon Rifle Cleaning, Range and Family Bowling Center.

2,500 miles is a lot of road and consequently a lot of drivers. There were other incidences and other drivers, who challenged me to extrapolate, but this is not an ethnography, just an essayist's commentary. Besides, summer is over, and I am back at my overseas location, already pining for the hum of the wheels and the stretch of open road, despite who is on it.

Tower Talk is published solely by San Francisco Towers' resident, James W Guthrie. It is distributed electronically. Printed copies are provided upon request. Its purpose is to enhance a sense of community via provision of accurate information, airing of responsible opinion, and now and then an effort at humor. It is not aligned with any partisan organization and, if at all predisposed, it favors "The Underdog." It neither seeks nor bears managerial endorsement and does not rely for production or distribution upon San Francisco Towers' resources. The publisher is individually responsible for content, welcomes dissenting views, and eagerly accepts submissions of original literary works and opinion. Production depends crucially upon Jennifer Hamilton and Peter Hertzmann. Anne M. Turner is a Contributing Editor. Print archives are maintained by John Darby. All past issues, beginning with Volume I, No.1 are available free of charge by visiting jameswguthrie.com.