



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**America's Cities
San Francisco**

The Streets of San Francisco Report One

August 1, 2005

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. I hope my readers will someday have a chance to visit San Francisco. It's a special city. I also hope these brief reports will capture some of the magic of this town.

Past Visits

For about fifteen years, and before my retirement, I spent two or three weeks a year in the Bay area. During this intensive indoctrination, I came to know San Francisco not well at all. I spent most of my waking hours working inside hotel conference rooms. But I did have a few opportunities to wander around the city, and I also had the good fortune to meet Holly here. She and I met while she was attending one of my lectures titled, "The Contents of an Internet Transmission." The presentation was devoted to an examination of every single digit in an Internet message and was highly attended by insomniacs.

Holly was there because she had begun working with computer network folks and needed to understand happy concepts such as network crashes, frozen screens, worms, viruses, completely indecipherable logon instructions, inscrutable help desk messages, and hostile foreigners---sitting in Pakistan---manning AOL technical support centers.

Actually, our meeting took place in the early 1980s, well before Al Gore invented the Internet. Holly attended my lecture to find-out what a modem was---and given the size of a modem in those days, if it could also serve as a dining room table.

Speaking of the Internet, yesterday, I called one of my network providers to ask a technical question. During this session, the following conversation took place:

- Reporter, "Where are you located?"
- Technical Support Person, "Would you like to take a guess?"
- Reporter, "I'd say India."
- Technical Support Person, "Actually, southern India."
- Reporter, "Ah, of course, I failed to pick-up on your drawl."
- Technical Support Person, "Beg pardon?"
- Reporter, "Never mind."

Goals for this Report

My goals in doing research for this report:

1. Eat a lot.
2. Drink a lot.
3. Look around a lot.
4. Sleep a little.
5. Write about items 1, 2, and 3.

6. I am also here to attend the wedding of my nephew and his bride and participate in a quasi-reunion of the Black Family. I say “quasi” because not all members of the Black clan are going to be here, but a sufficient number to qualify as a reunion.

Eating---A Poor Start

In making this trip, one of my main goals is to sample the fine food of San Francisco’s restaurants. I remember many pleasant meals in the Bay area restaurants, and look forward to revisiting old haunts.

I arrived at night, late into the evening. During the journey, I avoided American Airlines’ two bountiful meal offerings on the two legs of the cross-country flight. Just consider this benefaction from a major airlines---which cost \$3: A small bag of chips, a miniature container of salsa, a cheese stick, topped-off with a cookie, slightly larger than my thumbnail.

I didn’t purchase the “meal,” but conducted this inventory by watching the passenger next to me devour it. Unfortunately, by the time he was into his dessert, he began passing glances my way. I suspect he was wondering why I was staring at his culinary condiments and taking notes. Therefore, being a polite sort of fellow passenger, I did not actually count the number of cookies in American Airlines’ cornucopia of saturated fat.

I usually bring along some fruit to help me get through this part of flying. But as the (former) pleasure of the flying experience descends toward the threshold of a (very bad) Greyhound bus trip, I am considering taking along a flask of booze.

Anyway, I had forgotten my snacks. I refused to eat the airline’s fat-laden insult, and I did not have time to eat between the two legs of my trip. Running to catch the connecting flight out of Dallas to San Francisco, I quickly stopped at a kiosk and shopped for something to hold me until I could reach a San Francisco eatery.

Have you ever looked carefully at the food offerings at a kiosk in an airport? The closest thing to something reasonably healthy and nutritious at this place was jerky. But not beef jerky, or pork jerky. I bought some Turkey Jerky, a poetic name for a plastic wrap housing a salt-laden, dry, stringy piece of semi-cardboard. Plus a diet Pepsi, all for \$11.58. (Truth in reporting: God, did that jerky taste good!)

To summarize, on the last leg of this flight, I dined in splendor on Turkey Jerky and diet Pepsi, while my fellow passengers groveled and sniveled over cholesterol-laden chips and cheese sticks. Admittedly, they had dessert. But no matter, I would even the score after I landed in San Francisco. Plus, my hotel was only two blocks from the famous and historic food-laden Fisherman’s Wharf.

Your on the Street Reporter is headed for Fisherman’s Wharf.

The Streets of San Francisco Report Two

August 2, 2005 (2 AM)

Your on the Street Reporter is reporting from his hotel on Hyde Street in San Francisco. I've just returned from a walk around Fisherman's Wharf. It is two in the morning. Perhaps you are wondering why an old man is still awake at this hour. East Coast time, it's 5 AM in my body clock. The answer is I am wide awake from drinking too much diet Pepsi and consuming vast amounts of... I'm getting ahead of my story.

Fisherman's Wharf in the Early Hours

In need of calories and protein, I walked two blocks from my hotel to Fisherman's Wharf, hoping to find one of my favorite restaurants open. No such luck. It was around midnight, and the eateries were closed. The only visible goings-on were the operations of janitorial crews and the staggerings of human night crawlers---the former attempting to clean up the offal of the latter.

But no food. No open restaurants. And I was hungry. I could not recall the last time I had gone more than a few hours of experiencing no nutritional or semi-nutritional intake. Eating is instinctual. Like most humans, I resort to storing up adipose tissue for those future days when the Woolly Mammoth will have a bad reproductive year and deny me its fat. It's only a small step removed from my attacking my freezer and polishing-off the remaining carton of Bryers French Vanilla Ice Cream. After all, one never can tell. Bryers may have a bad reproductive year.

The only place I found open was a nightclub advertising the playing of live blues music. Lou's Pier 47 Blues Club was holding forth with four musicians. I don't presume to know about the nuances of music. But I do know my recollections of blues music were that of low-key, low-volume offerings. This band was playing tremendously loud music---analog assaults cascading down and through the adjacent San Francisco streets. I talked with the bartender:

- Reporter, "Any chance of ordering some food?"
- Bartender, "Sorry, we don't do food."
- "I could really use something to eat...How about a drink with fruit in it?"
- "We've got some lemons and limes."
- "Any orange drinks?"
- "Nope. I have some cherries though."
- "I see olives over there in your tray. Make me a Martini, with mostly olives."
- "Okay. How many olives?"
- "Twelve."
- "Twelve! There won't be any room for the drink."
- "That's OK. Put them on the side. I'll pay for the extra olives. By the way, are there any places open around here to get something to eat?"
- "Sure. Try Denny's, up the street behind us."
- "Not exactly what I had in mind. Anything else within walking distance?"
- "Nope. Not around here."

Dining at Denny's

If you want some of the tastiest fast food in existence, laden with as many R-rated ingredients as you may choose to ingest into your X-rated body, then take-in a Denny's cafe. Rated or unrated, I needed any kind of food, so I headed for Denny's.

Damned near famished; weak from a martini on an empty stomach; puckered-up from chewing too many green olives; pissed-off that our airlines now treat us like cattle...I entered Denny's. Again, not exactly what I had in mind for my first meal at a fabled San Francisco restaurant.

Denny's at 1 AM in the morning. A few night crawlers in the booths. But mostly empty. A couple of old men. Your Reporter and another aging gent who talked first to his left hand, next to a cigarette in his right, then to the window facing him. In an attempt to remain part of the landscape, I kept my gestures to myself.

- A guardedly cheerful waitress approached me, "Hello. Would you like something to drink?"
- Reporter, "Hello to you. Any chance for some XO?"
- Waitress, "Uh. ...I think the X stuff is down the street a ways"
- Reporter, "Ha! No, I was just joking about maybe having some XO brandy."
- Waitress, "Oh! I don't know about XO. But we don't serve alcohol."

I studied a plastic six-page, multi-color menu, replete with appealing seemingly three-dimensional photographs of every conceivable way to ingest various combinations of bread, potatoes, beef, cheese, butter, and other chubby-inducing morsels. I placed my order, "This ham/cheese/tomato/lettuce sandwich melt looks tasty."

- Waitress, "How about French Fries?"
- Reporter, "OK."

I consumed a huge and deliciously unhealthy meal. Its intake negated my Turkey Jerky fasting and my abnegation of American Airlines' compost. Denny's Technicolor menu of butter-coated carbohydrates had defeated my resolve.

Thus ended my initial foray into my old haunts in San Francisco. Admittedly, it was a bit of an anti-climax. But my short walk was late at night, and the streets and buildings along Fisherman's Wharf were shrouded in fog. Truth is, I couldn't see very well, and after all, it was after midnight. Not a fair assessment.

The week was young, and this particular evening was old. Time for bed. But hope against hope, I wish an old place in this part of town is still around, The Buena Vista café. I'll look for it tomorrow.

The Streets of San Francisco Report Three

August 2, 2005 (Later in the day)

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter, reporting from the streets of San Francisco. Recovering from my Denny's binge, I awoke later this morning and checked-out my hotel diggings. To my surprise and pleasure, I opened the curtains in the living room and discovered I had a view of the Bay and in the distance, Alcatraz. This view of the famous island was not available to many of the hotel's rooms. The clerk at the hotel desk must have taken pity on me last night. Anyway, I was grateful for his kindness and snapped the photo you see in Figure 1. I thought it might be helpful if I circled the site of Alcatraz, as my photography and the San Francisco fog left the image a bit hazy.



Figure 1. Room with a view.

In addition, the neighborhood surrounding my hotel is just what I had hoped for: San Francisco all the way, with hills, trolleys, small apartments, local stores, all bathed with a cool, fresh Bay breeze. And I was happy to be in a part of a world where I once had spent (and mis-spent) part of my youth.

Reminiscences: A weapon of old age. And as I have grown older, I have come to realize I think about the past more often than when I was younger. With increasing frequency, I find myself reminiscing about times gone by. Maybe my reflections on former days have come about because I consider what the future holds. Maybe I've been watching too many ER episodes. Perhaps it's because AARP publications and propaganda arrive in my mail with depressing regularity. Gray-haired, wrinkled Joan Woodward and Paul Newmans. How did they grow old so fast? Look in the mirror Uyless; if you only looked half as good.

Reporter School

By the way, at Reporter School, we are taught four important rules for writing a report. Rule Number One: Always have an interesting lead-in paragraph to a story.

Rule Number Two: Make certain the lead-in has absolutely nothing to do with the actual report, because the report is supposed to be just that: a report--and not the reporter's musings about life. Thus, the lead-in paragraph is the reporter's only opportunity to write Pulitzer Prize winning adjectives, adverbs, and dangling prepositions about profound and irrelevant subjects.

Rule Number Three: Make certain the lead-in paragraph, however distant from the report, somehow segues into the report itself.

Rule Number Four: Insure the first part of the report contains a word no reader has ever read, thus insuring the reporter's superiority regarding the English language and justification for the reporter's writing in the first place.

I've met all the rules. And my word for Rules Number Three and Four will be *segue*! Pretty cool. And it even sounds cool: "sé gwày," or if you're from the south, including southern India, it is pronounced "sáy gwày."

Segue may be an old word to you. If so, sorry. I have only begun to see it used. For a while, I was baffled (and impressed) by folks who spoke the word during a conversation. For example, during a court hearing, "Let's segue into the central issue of this case: Your alimony payments to me."

Or at a company's PR Department, "Our TV commercial presents an interesting segue into alienating our audience."

Or, "Let's socialize the topic with a segue into a discussion of misusing the word 'socialize.' "

And so on. Let's now segue into the meat of this report: A daytime walk around the famous Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, and to learn about: "Introduction to Segueing 101."

The Buena Vista Café

Fisherman's Wharf has changed since the 1970s and 1980s when I was a frequent visitor. I could not find most of the places I remembered. Ghirardelli Square was still there, but I never cared for this place. Its preponderant size and brick style seem out of place with the other buildings in this part of town.

I noticed the old sailing ship was still at the Hyde Street Pier. I recalled my son Tommy and I visiting it when Tommy was a teenager. Alcatraz was just across the Bay, also a place Tommy and I took-in many years ago. A snapshot of us at the Alcatraz dock is shown in Figure 2. I recognize the picture is fuzzy looking, but the day was foggy.

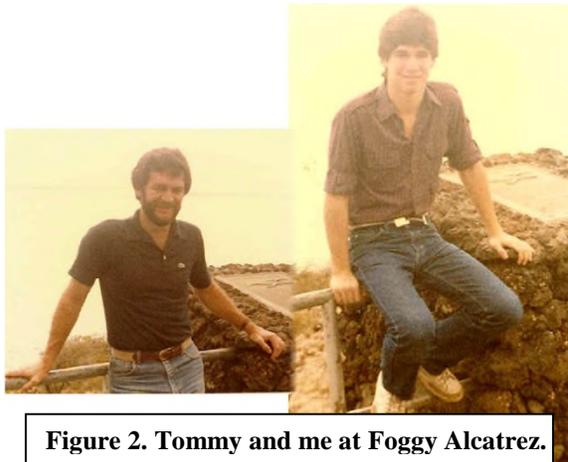


Figure 2. Tommy and me at Foggy Alcatraz.

Changes from the past and into the present. (Segue!) I had no gray hair. Tommy was wearing non-black clothes.

For the present: where was The Buena Vista Café, my favorite place in San Francisco? Had The Buena Vista Café gone under? Had San Francisco's Board of Supervisors issued an Imminent Domain claim to the funky place in order to replace it with another ugly Ghirardelli Square---one that would produce more tax revenue?

Where was the place where I consumed impressive cups of Irish Coffee?---the best Irish Coffee I have ever had. Was I being too sentimental? Maybe sentimental, but don't knock your Reporter until you've had an Irish Coffee made at this café. Then, if you wonder what all the fuss is about, you can segue into your criticism.

But there was (and is) more than Irish Coffee to The Buena Vista. As I recall, the establishment was over one hundred years old. It met my need for old things and old memories.



Figure 3. The Buena Vista.

Sure enough, there it was! On the corner of Hyde and Beach Streets, it had survived urban renewal---at least until larger buildings are needed to increase a tax base. The exterior hadn't changed. I instantly recognized its façade. As I entered the place and found a stool at the bar, I discovered the interior was also pretty much the same---as shown in the photo (Figure 3) I took this morning.

For a few seconds, I had entered a time warp: It was 1983. Tommy and I had just returned from visits to the old ship and Alcatraz. We were cold and hungry. We found two stools at the bar, one of the same stools on which I was segueing into the past. I ordered an Irish Coffee. Tom ordered something non-alcoholic. We followed up with hot soup and sourdough bread. Heaven on Earth, at least for an hour or so.

I segued back to the present and ordered an Irish Coffee and scrambled eggs. An interesting combination but the eggs were appropriate. After all, it was still morning.

The Streets of San Francisco Report Four

August 4, 2005 (Morning)

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. As you can tell from reading thus far about San Francisco, part of my focus has been on my past experiences in this city. A reader of this report, a good friend who happens to be my cousin, emailed me this thought, “Memories are the product of a busy life.”

I think he is on target, and his idea reminds me of something Thomas Mann said in his book, *The Magic Mountain*. It was...hm, I forgot what it was. So much for my busy life.

Mann’s Law for Living Longer

Actually, I recall Mann said something to this effect: If one is busy when one is young, it will appear that time goes by quickly and that life isn’t lasting very long. But in old age, this person will have so many memories it will appear the person has led a very long life.

In contrast, if a young person is idle, it will appear the person's immediate life is dragging by slowly. This person will constantly watch the clock, as the hour hand edges along to chronicle yet another uneventful time. In a touch of irony, when this person reaches old age, there will be so few memories on which to dwell that this person will have the illusion of having lived a short life.

And you thought these reports were devoid of meaning? I fooled you. Embedded into the text of these pieces are deep thoughts that I borrowed from someone else. But I do think Mr. Mann had a handle on handling certain aspects of our lives and how we deal with our growing old.

Black’s Law for Living Longer

Some of my relatives and I occasionally get together in New Mexico, and the conversation often comes down to, “Hey, where did the time go?”

Your Reporter has an answer. It’s called Black’s Law for Living Longer, based loosely on Mann’s observations. Here is how the Law is executed:

Inevitably, it’s just a matter of time. One of your relatives or friends will break-out their family photo albums to show you 100 scrapbooks of nostalgic flotsam. After hours of photo viewings, your thought will be, “God help me. This is taking forever.”

The result? The episode will drag out your life considerably. I didn’t say this extended lease on life would be more pleasant. I only submit that sometime during this viewing, a thought will occur to you that---maybe, just maybe---you have lived too long.

A Good Walk, Unspoiled

One of my favorite past times is walking. I prefer to walk when playing golf. I prefer walking to running---especially considering my knees, hips, and back. The main reason I no longer run (at

least on hard surfaces) is to protect what remains of my skeletal infrastructure. Otherwise, I'm a walking fool.

I love walking in cities, at least those cities amenable to a trek. Some of our cities are so spread-out that a walk is all but impossible. Others are not pleasant to walk in. Atlanta's almost infinite Peach Tree attractions are too widely separated, and its downtown is too homogenized to enjoy. Detroit is too depressing in which to do anything. New York is a great walking city. So are London, Hong Kong, and Singapore. So is Peking, especially the area around Tiananmen Square. (One of the few places that is spread-out *and* pleasant to walk is the Great Wall of China. Of course, if it weren't spread-out and visible from manned spacecraft, it would not be "Great.")

And so is San Francisco---if you can handle steep hills.

A Walking Tour of Hyde Street, Market Street, and the Golden Gate Park

Today, I took a walk of about six hours---punctuated with frequent stops to catch my breath, and eat or drink. I covered about ten miles, and I hope you someday can retrace my steps. I'll wager you will enjoy the day as much as I did. As Thomas Mann suggested, the experience will extend your memories and maybe your life.

I started at my hotel, one block from Fisherman's Wharf. There, I walked uphill and downhill for a couple miles to Market Street. The enjoyable parts of this walk were taking-in the frame houses, the cable cars making their way up and down Hyde Street, and maybe Lombard Street.

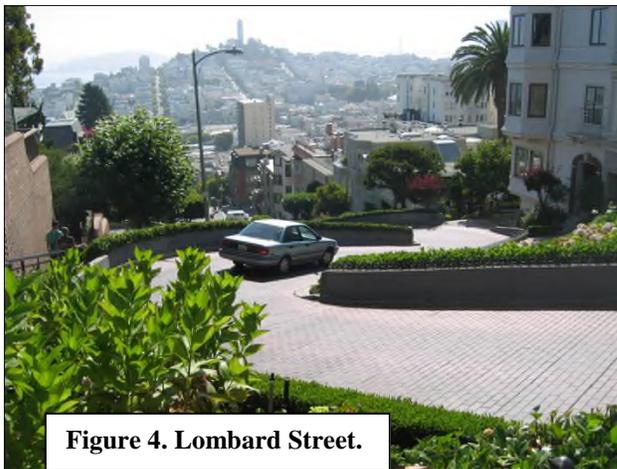


Figure 4. Lombard Street.

I say maybe. It's steep and convoluted. But so are most of the streets in Northern Italy and a host of other places. OK, in deference to San Francisco's Chamber of Commerce, Figure 4 shows a snapshot of the top of Lombard Street, taken from Hyde Street.

This photo would have been much more impressive if Lombard Street had no zig-zags. Imagine the excitement car drivers would have as they accelerated *straight* to the bottom of the hill. Now that would be worthy of a Chamber of Commerce promotional.

Rob, Where are You?

Toward the end of my Hyde Street walk and near Market Street, I walked through what I assumed to be the city's government village. My map was a bit vague about this part of town because I had acquired it from a bicycle shop at Fisherman's Wharf. Their bike tours did not operate in this area so the map was obscure. No matter. The buildings looked governmental. My nephew Rob, toiling away in an urban government bureaucracy, was probably located in one of these buildings. Cranking up my recently purchased cell phone, I mis-dialed his phone three times (I had not yet entered his number into my new directory). Each time a different voice answered.

I eventually succeeded in entering Rob's number. He and I talked for a short time, as he was immersed in making a living. I was immersed in living from having made a living. We were on different schedules, so I passed by this part of Rob and this part of San Francisco. Rob and I would have ample time to visit later.

Haight-Ashbury, What Happened to You?

I angled-off Market Street, to Fell Street, then over to Haight Street. My goal was the Haight-Ashbury area, a place I had visited a few times during its hippie, drug-oriented heydays. It was still a bit seedy, but not the same as it was in the 60's.

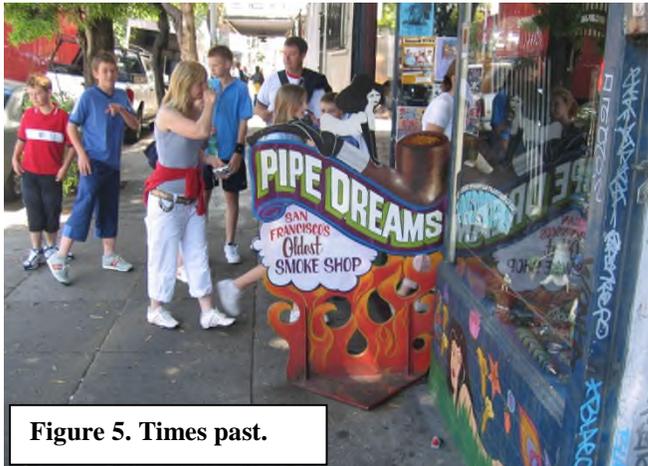


Figure 5. Times past.

Figure 5 shows a photo I snapped of one of Haight-Ashbury's original hippie stores. A few observations about this photo in relation to its past: The young children have no tattoos. The men have no beards and are close-cropped. The women have no Indian beads or Native American dresses. All appear to be coherent. There are no guitar-playing, folk-singing, pot-smoking, war protesters sitting about. And a different aroma quaffed through the streets (ocean air).

I am being harsh for the sake of a joke. The truth is I savor the idea of rebellion against the status quo. Nonetheless, what starts out as a rebellion against ossification and pig-headedness, one in which the noble insurgents take over the fort, ends-up pretty much with the same expression as the former fort owners. These ethical nobles succumb to human nature and resurrect the ills of their predecessors.



Figure 6. A singer.

Historical angst aside, there was one musician on the streets of Haight-Ashbury. And could she sing! She reminded me of Janis Joplin. I wanted to talk with her, but she was busy strumming-away and bringing in some dollars. I contributed to her guitar case, then asked if I could take a picture of her. How could she refuse a benefactor? The results are shown in Figure 6.

My observations of this famous part of San Francisco can be amplified with a quote of Hunter S. Thompson, from his "The Hippies": "I love the whole world," said a 23-year-old girl in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, the hippies' world capital. "I am the divine mother, part of Buddha, part of God, part of everything. "I live from meal to meal. I have no money, no possessions. Money is beautiful only when it's flowing; when it piles up, it's a hang-up. We take care of each other. There's always something to buy beans and rice for the

group, and someone always sees that I get 'grass' [marijuana] or 'acid' [LSD]. I was in a mental hospital once because I tried to conform and play the game. But now I'm free and happy."

For my young readers, I can assure you this quote was not exceptional. And not just in Haight-Ashbury. In those times, some of my running mates in Virginia were popping-in dope and popping-off these platitudes.

Anyway, and as a sidebar, in other writings I posit that much of human's mischief stems from our having too much time on our hands. (I exclude my idle retirement time.) The person interviewed by Mr. Thompson was likely luxuriating in excessive time. I'll bet my next social security check if she were actually worried about eating she would not have been ensconced in Haight Ashbury. She would have been a resident of a vegetable and fruit farm hostel on the outskirts of San Francisco---toiling away in the hot sun to earn her "beans and rice."

On the other hand, I was a vicarious part of those times and milieus. I could relate to money not being important (to others). I managed to have empathy toward those who disdained possessions (as I accumulated my next TV).

Nonetheless, I could (and can) understand why this women was turned-off to what I think is an unhealthy encroachment of materialism into our lives. How many TVs do we need in relation to how much time we spend watching them or interacting with our family? How many part-time or over-time jobs do we take-on to buy those TVs?

The Streets of San Francisco Report Five

August 4, 2005 (Afternoon and Evening)

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter; still reporting on my extended walk though parts of San Francisco.

After leaving Haight-Ashbury, I entered the Golden Gate Park. It reminded me of other grand parks: New York's Central Park and London's Hyde Park; the more modest but elegant Green Park and St. James Parks; Singapore's Mandai Orchid Gardens. Nonetheless, Golden Gate Park is equal to them all. I was amazed. It's a treasure. Make sure you visit it when you are in the area.

McDonald's

Just before entering Golden Gate Park, I paid a visit to a McDonald's. For about three hours, I had been immersed in the city of San Francisco, taken by its beautiful uniqueness. Upon entering McDonald's, it was as if I had walked into the same fast food cafe I had visited in...well name just about any town or city in the industrialized world. McDonald's is the same in San Francisco, California, as it is in Lubbock, Texas. I recall visiting a McDonald's in Hong Kong. It resembled the store in Falls Church, Virginia, except it offered noodles as a side dish. It feels odd to find myself surrounded by sameness while I am in cities and towns that are so different from one another. For the neurotic traveler, McDonald's is a safe haven for sameness.

Golden Gate Park

Golden Gate Park is approximately three miles long and a half-mile wide. It offers a wide variety of recreational activities and a diverse flora. A distinctive landmark is the Conservatory of



Flowers, shown in Figure 7. I wandered around this part of the park for a while, taking in the scenery. The area reminded me of a park in Amsterdam. One of my friends, who is reading this report, is slated to stay at the Amsterdam Marriott this summer. My friend, walk out the front door of the Marriott, turn right, and go a couple hundred feet to a small flora oasis.

Figure 7. Conservatory of flowers.

The snapshot in Figure 8 was taken from a small bridge that spanned a viaduct. While standing there, I began to hear music, seemingly coming from inside the viaduct. It was fine music, blues and jazz, played on a sax. I love sax music; it's one of my favorite instruments. I was transfixed.

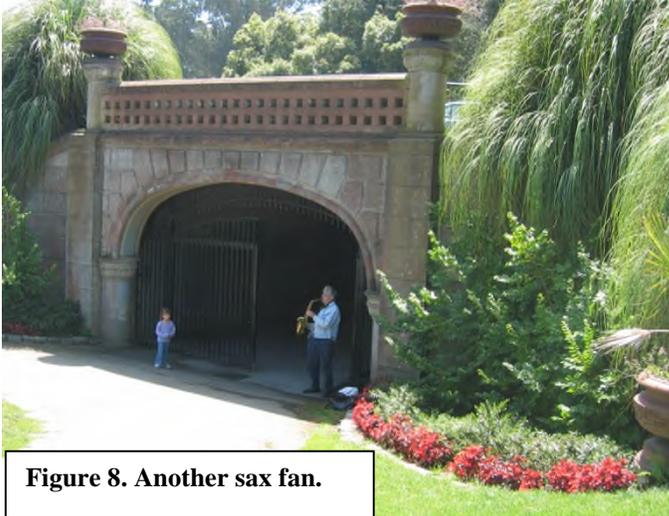


Figure 8. Another sax fan.

I leaned over to find the source of the sounds, but I could not spot anyone below. So I walked around and under the bridge to discover the musician who was entertaining the crowd. I listened for a while. As I listened, I noticed the musician had a tiny companion accompanying his performance, as seen in Figure 8.

She was as glued to the scene as I. Speaking to the musician, I discovered the two were not together. He said she had wondered over from her nearby parents

but had not moved an inch during his concert.

- Reporter, "Quite a loyal fan she is."
- Musician, "I'll say. I wish they were all like her."
- Reporter, "All listening and no tipping?"
- Musician, "I get a lot of those, but I wouldn't take any of her money, even if she offered it."
- Reporter, "Ha. ... Well, you're a good man in that regard, and you're a fine sax player. I love your stuff."
- Musician, "Thanks. Any requests?"
- Reporter, "How about 'Misty'?"

He launched into the tune as I made my way back to the bridge and down the road toward the Pacific Ocean. His gentle solo of the classic melody followed me for a few moments then gradually faded away.

The Pacific Ocean and back to the Hotel

If you decide to go on foot through the park, I recommend you take water, maybe a snack. I did not come across any food stands until I arrived at the west end of the park, which is where the Pacific Ocean begins. There, I had lunch at a restaurant overlooking the ocean. I forgot to record the name of the place, but it's the only restaurant at that part of the seaside. True to my inclinations, I did not forget the wine. Try it: Pinot Noir, bottled by Isabel (New Zealand).

Fortified by a Dungeness Crab salad and wine, I started my walk back to the hotel. (And while you are in San Francisco, make sure you have some Dungeness Crab). For a while I headed north along the highway (don't worry, lots of wide sidewalks are on the ocean side) and enjoyed some fine views, one shown in Figure 9.



Figure 9. A view on the return trip.

More Hints

On the return trip, I decided to give my old bones and body a rest. I made my way back to Hyde Street where the cable cars turn toward the Bay (and my hotel). I waited for about fifteen minutes for the trolley. There it came. There it went. It was full. I had another mile or so to walk, mostly uphill, to the hotel. I found the cable cars are not a reliable way to get around San Francisco unless you board them at the beginning of the line. Also, taxis are difficult to find and do not always respond to a phone call. So, don't get yourself stranded, thinking transportation is at your beck and call. It may not be.

Multistar Dining

Several of my friends recommended places for me to eat. For this evening, I selected a restaurant called Gary Danko's because it was located only 200 feet from my hotel, and I was not in the mood for more walking.

As you may have guessed from some of these reports, my palate is pretty plain, but I still consider myself adventuresome when it comes to different food. In my younger days, I made the mistake of spending an entire week at a Japanese hotel near Mt. Fuji---on the Japanese Plan. Every meal was served to me by one woman, and I was her only customer. Each meal contained mysterious combinations of seaweed, kelp, phytoplankton, red algae, and (thankfully) rice. As the week progressed, the intake included immense amounts of sake. After this experience, I considered myself indoctrinated into "unusual" food.

But not tonight. I was dining alone at the bar (the only seat available at this fine restaurant). I was tired. I wanted something simple. Reporter to the bartender/waiter:

- "I'll take your recommendations, but I want something uncomplicated. Say a fish appetizer, a fresh salad in between; then, some beef."
- Waiter, "May I suggest you start with our Moroccan spiced squid with chermoula." (I'm only relaying facts here.)
- Reporter, who did not wish to come across as a culinary Luddite, "Eh, that is your idea of simple?"

- Waiter, “Hm. Sorry. Well, how about something very simple to start? May I suggest caviar?”

I love caviar. Not because I particularly like uncooked globs of mature fish eggs. Truth is, their taste is rather bland....except they are salty. Case closed. I'll consume just about anything that has salt on it.

- Reporter, “Fine.” After which, we worked-out a simple salad. Then for the main dish, I asked, “Many years ago, I had a fine steak in Kyoto, Japan. It was Kobe Beef. Have any?”
- Waiter, “No sir. But we do have a soy mustard glazed beef filet, with eggplant and red pepper marmalade.” (Again, I'm not making this up.)
- If a piece of beef is really good, it needs no dressings. I was tempted to give him a Jack Nicholson *Five Easy Pieces* reply, “Fine. I'll take that beef filet, but hold the soy mustard, the glaze, the eggplant and the red pepper marmalade.”
- But after all, why go to a Gary Danko's if you are not going to sample a Gary Danko's meal? So I replied, “Fine.”

I was not disappointed by the choices. As I partook of this fine meal, as I struck-up conversations with my bar neighbors, as I sipped the fine wine recommended by my waiter, I discovered the XO was a reasonable \$28 an ounce.

The Streets of San Francisco Report Six

August 5 and 6, 2005

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. These past two days, I spent some of my time walking around Fisherman's Wharf and nearby Fort Mason. If you grow weary of asphalt, concrete, and crowds, or if you become tired of the piers, stores, and streets around Fisherman's Wharf, take a short jaunt to the West, up a small hill to Fort Mason Park. It's another example of those restful patches of green that are sprinkled throughout this city. Figure 10 shows a part of Fort Mason Park.

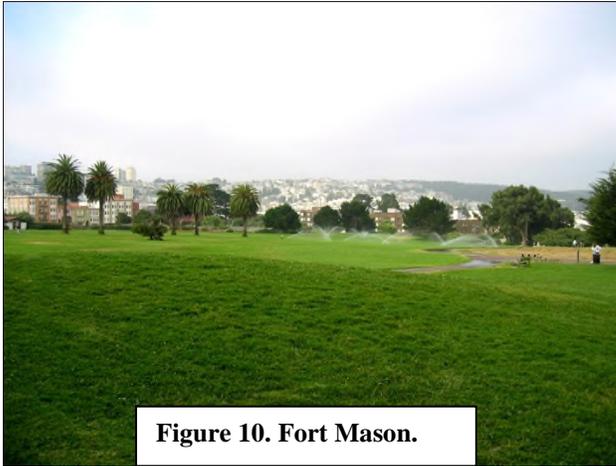


Figure 10. Fort Mason.

The parks in our cities are often afterthoughts of the city planners. *What the hell, might as well put some grass and trees around the new water tower.* They may have been places where businesses did not want to locate. *Not much customer traffic here.* Whatever the reason for their existence, I thank the men and women who somehow reserved spaces

for space. In my travels, I have many times sought refuge in them from a hotel room. Anyway, take in this part of San Francisco. It's a different relief to the city's fine streets.

The Buena Vista Again

I headed back to The Buena Vista Café for lunch (BV, as the insiders call this eatery). I knew I would be leaving San Francisco soon, and I wanted to consume sufficient amounts of BV's Irish Coffee to hold me over until my next visit.

I have almost no recipes to share with anyone. Although I can concoct awesome Gazpacho and fantastic Crab Cakes, my approach to reading recipes and eating the associated food is a short cut: Read a restaurant menu and order the associated food. No dirty dishes, keeps things simple.

Simplicity usually works best, unless you're an accountant or an attorney. If you are so-designated, the complexity of your trade keeps bread on your table. Same with my former profession as a writer and lecturer on computer networks. The more complex the Internet became, the more money I made.

A fact about our modern world: If you labor in an occupation whose subject matter has not been obscured by complex words, phrases, symbols, rules, and laws, then my friend, I wager you are not making much money---unless you are in the sports and entertainment business.

Cutting to the chase, here is a fine example of the pay-off by keeping things simple.

- Place hot water in the Irish Coffee glass.

- Allow the glass to become hot from the water...a few seconds.
- Remove the water, and immediately pour in an ounce of Irish Whiskey.¹
- Put two cubes of sugar into the glass and grind them up. Try to make the concoction a mushy liquid.
- Pour in hot coffee.
- Stir a bit.
- Top off with (real) whipped cream.

Why is this simple recipe mentioned in this report? Because I have suffered scores of Irish Coffees made by well-intentioned friends who were compelled to put complex ingredients into the glass. Here are a few examples: Kahula, Brandy, Irish Mist, Sherry, Port---even ice cream.

How Times Have Changed

As I polished-off my coffee, I idly watched the outside traffic and passers-by. During this time, a one-horse carriage pulled up to the curb across the street from the café. My memories went back many years ago to my carriage rides, and I reminisced about those short trips taken around some beautiful cities. But what struck me about this scene was a reversal in roles of the people in the carriage. In my past rides, the drivers were black.

This carriage driver was white. The passengers were black. Blacks were paying a white to perform a menial chore, even tipping the white for a job well done. This scene would never have played-out in this country just 30 to 50 years ago---not even in San Francisco.

I suspect my younger readers are wondering why I am bothering to write about this event. It is simply an observation that less than a century ago, a black person even offering a tip to a white person might have sparked the lynching of the black person. Even lesser “breeches” of behavior could doom a black man to torture, followed by a noose around his neck.

As I watched the interactions of these folks, the thought occurred to me that our country has come a long way in dismantling its racial barriers. We’ve still a long ways to go, but we’ve made gains.

Island Hopping

Finally, it was time to participate in the Main Event for the San Francisco trip, the wedding of my nephew Rob Black and my soon-to-be niece, Lisa Williams (In my mind, Lisa was already my niece). They were holding a pre-wedding reception at their home, on Treasure Island, located in the Bay between San Francisco and Oakland.

In 1963, I spent several days on Treasure Island, then a U.S. Navy Base, where I was “out-processed” to a long tour in Asia. I was looking forward to the party and a short stroll through memory lane on Treasure Island. Luckily, I found a vacant cab near my hotel. I say luckily because it was rush hour on Friday, and taxis were at a premium.

¹ Irish Coffee experts differ even on the sequence of these events. Some of these specialists prefer to pour the coffee into the glass first, then add the sugar, followed by the whiskey and whipped cream. An aphorism for life: Even with the simplest of things, nothing is simple.

Entering the cab, I said hello to the cabby. (Who told me later he was from China.) Off we went toward the Bay Bridge, as he said, “You are lucky. It’s crowded tonight.” He spoke English reasonably well. Better than I spoke Chinese, which I don’t speak.

I agreed. It was slow-going. Stop-and-go for the entire trip from my hotel to the bridge. During this time, the cab driver silently ate his dinner. No big deal. It was his car, not mine. The reason I bring up this point is that I had begun to notice what was on his dinner menu. Something very simple: lettuce. That was it. No meat. No rice. No noodles. No fish. Just lettuce. As I have mentioned before, I do not make things up for these reports because it isn’t necessary to invent events about human behavior. Reality is more fascinating.

And he looked healthy enough, so who was I to question his eating habits. Still, I thought he might need more protein to pilot his cab---if not on the outbound drive to Treasure Island, then on the inbound leg back to San Francisco. As I said, I like simplicity, but his meal was too simple for my metabolism. In spite of his meager diet, he succeeded in navigating his cab to the Treasure Island off-ramp. I then instructed him, “Head for Exposition Drive.”

The cab driver responded, “Ne Ho Ma. Wo Hein How, Shee, Shee.”²

What? All of a sudden he did not speak English; a millisecond transformation from a multilingual conversationalist to a recent immigrant from Canton. What was going on here? I have been in hundreds of cabs, and I have been the victim of scores of fare scams. But this ploy was a new one. It appeared he was pleading ignorance to my request, even ignorant of the language through which I made the request, a language he had just spoken.

Granted, Treasure Island’s streets are not common-place knowledge, and Lisa reminded me of this fact when I told her this story. Fine, but why did he resort to Chinese? It made me suspicious.

He drove us through an open, military type gate. Next to the gate was a sign declaring we were entering a U.S. Navy Installation. I said, “Eh, we just entered into a Navy Base. My nephew and niece live in private housing. I think we are on the wrong part of the island.”

“Ne Ho Ma. Wo Hein How, Shee, Shee.”

I suspected he knew exactly what he was doing. I think he was testing my knowledge of the location of my destination. Because he then broke into English. Yes, English! He said, “How long have you been in San Francisco?”

His cover was broken. Throughout the world---even London, where most cabbies are as honest as Mother Teresa---a dead give away to an impending fare scam is the question, “How long have you been in [fill-in the name of the city]?”

² I take license with what he said, and how it is spelled, but I do recall the gist of his intonations.

I have learned to reply, “Forever. I know this place like the back of my hand. By the way, why did you make that last turn away from our destination?” Even though the turn may have been toward the target, I at least offered token resistance to being scammed.

On this occasion, I replied, “Long enough to know San Francisco cab drivers have a radio to their dispatcher. Please call and get directions.”

“Ne Ho Ma. Wo Hein How, Shee, Shee.”

We proceeded to drive around the (decommissioned) Navy base for quite a while...actually a long while. I used my cell phone to put out an SOS to my nephew, but he was likely preoccupied with his entertaining duties. I got his voice mail and asked him to call back (hopefully, before the cab ran out of gas, and my nephew and niece ran out of wine.)

I somehow directed the driver to exit the security gates and drive to the other side of the island. He understood and readily obliged---as his taxi meter kept clicking away. In this part of the island we encountered several empty buildings, one in which I stayed many years ago---a BOQ (Bachelor Officers Quarters). The area was almost devoid of people. The place seemed abandoned, and our honking to gain folks’ attention had the opposite effect of our purpose. One driver accelerated her car. Another driver, apparently thinking we harbored hostile intentions, gave us the finger. Finally, we came across a pedestrian walking her dog. She could not escape.

- I exited the cab and approached her, “Excuse me, but do you know the location of Exposition Drive?”
- Her, “Yes. You’re on the wrong island.”
- Reporter, “I’m on the wrong island?...I...”
- Her, “You’re on Yerba Buena Island. Exposition Drive is on Treasure Island. The two islands are connected by a road across a land bridge.”
- Reporter, “Thanks.”
- Her, “Don’t mention it. Good luck.”

Great. There I was, looking for a simple street in a well known part of America. And I found myself on the wrong island. Not the wrong street. Not the wrong neighborhood, or the wrong city. The wrong island! And a nearly abandoned island.

With silent animosity, I glared at the taxi driver...who was still eating lettuce leaves. I thought, *At the very least, that sonofabitch must know we are not on Treasure Island. He can’t be that stupid. It’s a wonder I’m not in another state.*

Offering some much needed help, the woman suggested, “Just go back to the last turn on the road from the freeway. Make a right, go through an open security gate, then head straight into an old, two story housing complex. You’ll find your street in that area.”

This two story housing complex is exactly where the driver had taken me thirty minutes ago. I relayed this fact to the driver, “C’mon what gives? You drove me to this area, then drove away from it...just after you asked how long I had been in San Francisco.”

“Ne Ho Ma. Wo Hein How, Shee, Shee.”

During my battles with cabbies around the world, if I discover I am being cheated, I will try to make life more difficult for the driver. But I also have come to accept defeat if it is obvious I have no recourse. This was such an occasion. What could I do? Get out of the cab in the middle of an island? An island that had almost no human activity? (We spent most of our time on Yerba Buena Island---seemingly fewer people per square mile than New Zealand.) An island onto which a cold fog was descending? I resigned myself to the ride and copied down the cab’s registration number.

It might surprise you to know I am not upset that my stroll through memory lane on Treasure Island (and Yerba Buena Island) turned out to be strolls through many lanes---thanks to a cab driver of dubious honesty. In hindsight, it was funny. But then, in hindsight most of our past experiences are funny, if we choose to look at them this way.

Good News. I’ve just returned from my multi-island jaunt and a very pleasant evening at Rob and Lisa’s party.

The Streets of San Francisco Report Seven

August 6, 2005

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter, once again reporting from the streets of San Francisco. On this day, my niece and nephew, Lisa and Rob, were wed. This report will focus on their wedding, and we will also explore other parts of San Francisco.

Cycling Along the Bay

For the past three days, I have relied on a bicycle for some of my transportation. I recommend this mode of movement, especially if you want to explore the areas around the Bay, including the Golden Gate Bridge, and the communities on the other side of the Bay. Not too many hills populate this part of San Francisco, although the ride up to the bridge might require a stop or two. It's a fine way to see parts of this beautiful city.

You might want to check out the weather reports before you begin your ride. One of my jaunts across the Golden Gate fell prey to morning fog. The left picture in Figure 11 shows a view I had of the Golden Gate from a bike path. To the right is a view from the Bridge.



Figure 11. Views.

Irish Coffee to Go!

This aspect of my ride was a small disappointment in consideration of the other parts of the day, and especially the day's beginning. The Buena Vista Café was located just one block from my hotel and a few feet from the bicycle rental agency. On my way to the Golden Gate, I stopped by the BV and placed an order to the bartender, "An Irish Coffee to go."

It wasn't XO, but it was still morning. I hold to the dictum, "Nothing succeeds like moderate excess." An Irish Coffee---sipped slowly during a pleasant bike ride to the Golden Gate---not only helped palliate the chilly winds, it also brought to memory another proverb, "Living well is the best revenge." I recited this cliché to one of my friends not long ago. He responded with, "True. And at our age, it could be slightly altered, 'Still living is the best revenge.' "

The bartender informed me he was not allowed to mix an Irish Coffee to go because of potential problems with the law, and the location nearby of a Salvation Army office. Not to be thwarted by the police or the thought regulators, he poured all but one ingredient of this tasty concoction into a Styrofoam cup. He then placed the coffee, accompanied by an Irish Whiskey miniature bottle, inside a small sack--- giving a new meaning to brown bagging.

Off I went on my bicycle. I cycled up a small hill overlooking the Bay and Alcatraz, through Fort Mason Park, past a boat marina, across restored wetland beaches, along miles of the Bay's coast--while sipping my Irish Coffee and munching on a sourdough cinnamon bun.

Dog Days in San Francisco

Even at my age, I am still capable of wonderment. As one example, I am in wonderment of how easy it is to go through life ignorant of and oblivious to pervasive, visible goings-on around me. For example, dogs. They are omnipresent on our city streets and parks. They have their own hospitals. They have their own stores. They have their own hair salons; their own dentists. They eat better than many children in Africa.

Why have I come to suddenly notice the ubiquity of dogs? Because I have recently become a dog owner. All of a sudden, I have become aware that the dog population in America is huge. If dogs could vote, they would rival the AARP bloc, maybe the Evangelicals' election machine. In San Francisco, the dogs even have a beach---a place I initially assumed only dogs and their owners frequented. Take a look at Figure 12.



Figure 12. The dog beach.

A dog owner informed me this beach was not restricted to dogs,

- "Oh no, anyone can use this beach. Sometimes, when the waves are good, surfers come out."

- Reporter, "Yeah, but the only swimmers I see are dogs. A picnic on this beach might not be so pleasant."
- The dog owner directed a condescending stare toward me, "Why not?"
- Reporter, "Look for yourself; there are forty or fifty dogs out here right now. It could get pretty messy."
- Another long stare from the Dog Owner, "You're obviously not a dog owner."
- Reporter, "Not until a few weeks ago."
- Dog Owner, "Then you don't know what you're talking about," as he removed his dog and himself to another part of the beach to communicate with less offensive animals.



Figure 13. Prime land for resting places.

On my way back from the Golden Gate Bridge, I experienced yet another wonder. I cycled past a pet cemetery, shown in Figure 13. An acre or so of beautiful forested land, devoted to pets (mostly dogs). Prime land, condominium potential. As I walked through the cemetery I thought, *San Francisco city officials are probably salivating over the impending Imminent Domain seizure.* I had never given pet cemeteries much thought. But where are the remains of dogs supposed to go? A crematorium? Burial at sea? They have to go somewhere, and I'm told by friends who have plots for their animals in pet

cemeteries that they gain great satisfaction when they visit their departed pets' graves.

The Wedding

In keeping with the spirit of this series, Your on the Street Reporter Reports for 2005 have concentrated on uneventful events. I do not mean to suggest our first report about the 2005 Presidential Inauguration in Washington, DC was uneventful unto itself. But as you know, I missed the swearing-in ceremony because of security checkpoints that created queues meandering into distant time zones. The wedding of Rob and Lisa was eventful. Not to you? Tough. I'm in charge of these Reports.



Figure 14. Lisa and Rob at their wedding.

Here are two snapshots of Lisa and Rob in front of the church. The right photo in Figure 14 was taken at the wedding reception.

Serious Boogieing

Lisa and Rob's reception was as successful as their wedding, and I am proud to state I was an honored guest at the head table. Food. Wine. Folic. Fun. Dancing, one of my favorite past times--with very cool nieces. They were gracious enough to put up with some 1970's boogie steps.

What more could one ask for? An appearance by Elvis, of course. No wedding is complete without Elvis singing "Heartbreak Hotel." ...Hm, wrong song for the occasion and the upcoming night for the bride and groom. Maybe "I'll be True to You" would be more appropriate.

Elvis did not "leave the building." He entered it. Rob, in the guise of Elvis! What a way to top-off the day. Rob's best man announced a famous performer was going to perform a special piece for us. We cheered. Rob sauntered into the room wearing Elvis stuff, including shades. We cheered again.

Rob walked onto the stage, then struck his best Elvis pose---which I thought looked more like John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*. No matter, we cheered once more. Then we waited for a wedding-type ballad. Of course, something Elvis-like. "I'll be True to You" would have been a good choice.



Figure 15. Elvis abandons his guitar.

Rob, being a different sort of musician, began playing a different sort of musical instrument. By the way, Rob is the writer of one of my favorite country and western tunes, "I'm Hanging Out With My Hangover, While He's Hanging Out With You." I was hoping he would sing this classic, but I also knew the theme of the song was not in keeping with the spirit of the occasion.

But the instrument? A guitar is romantic. A piano would do. A banjo? Not tonight and not in urbane San Francisco. An accordion? Later, for the (very) old folks in the crowd. OK. How about a didgeridoo? Of course, what could be more appropriate than Elvis serenading his new bride with a didgeridoo, as shown in Figure 15.

For the musically handicapped reader, a didgeridoo is an Australian aboriginal musical instrument consisting of a wooden pipe. The player blows into the thing, creating a low-pitched, reverberating humming sound---a sound that is plaintive, morose, melancholy, depressing, haunting, troubling, and downright scary. Just the right touch for a serenade to a wedding bride.

Everyone loved it, including Lisa. We all cheered. And consider this fact: If ever there were a weirder musical combination of (a) Elvis playing (b) a didgeridoo, I could not think of one. It was my kind of uneventful, eventual event,

Red and Blue All Over the Place

San Francisco has a reputation for harboring (besides ships) folks who live alternative life styles, and people who are liberal in their political views. In previous reports, I have made light of the Blue population of San Francisco, just as I have parodied the Red population of Orange County. Notwithstanding these stereotypes, I met San Francisco citizens who crossed the social-choice and political spectrum.

I think most us would also acknowledge the Reds in this country have seized the so-called mantle for *assertive actions* to supposedly solve problems (invading Iraq, for example). The Blues are characterized in this regard as *mediators, conciliators* (questioning the invasion of Iraq, to use the same example). I take no sides on this debate in this essay, but what I find interesting is the implication that Reds (say, Orange County residents) are tough, and the implication that Blues (say, liberal San Franciscans) are soft.

These claims are made by many people. One example is Karl Rove---proclaiming to America with his testosterone-laden statements that liberals are basically wimps. Karl Rove? The Bushies' Macho Man! Arnold I can accept, and Arnold's "girly men" statement was hilarious. Rove's only assertive actions have been his aggressive mailing lists and fabricated leaks about his candidates' political opponents.

So, what's my point? As you know by now, Your on the Street Reporter Reports have no point. I try not to provoke unnecessary synapse firings. But I do wish to make a point here. Let me share a story with you.

After the wedding ceremony, as the guests were departing, a woman exited the church's front steps in a wheelchair, near the car where I was sitting. She was accompanied by a stalwart man, who guided the wheelchair down the church steps onto the street sidewalk. After navigating the steps, he removed his hands from the chair handles as the woman and he visited with other guests who had accompanied them from the church.

I sat in the car, passing time with my nieces, while idly watching these folks on the sidewalk. After a few moments, they bade goodbye to each other and began to disperse themselves for a short drive to the wedding reception. The woman in the wheelchair and her companion then turned to their left and began a trek up a steep hill.

I had been climbing and biking San Francisco's hills for a week. I'm in fairly good shape. I had been able to advance up San Francisco's streets without experiencing too much discomfort. But on more than one occasion, I stopped to regain my strength and breath before I continued my assents.

I watched this women start her trip up the hill. What gained my attention was her companion walking beside her, but not behind her. He was not pushing her wheel chair up the hill. She was making her own way, stoking the chair's wheels with her arms and shoulders.

She and her companion chatted with each other as they traversed the hill. Up they went. And up. And up. I grew tired as I watched her arms push the chair's wheels against the steep slant of the street.

My nieces and I continued conversing while we waited for other guests to join us. But the thought of this woman and man, trekking up that hill, stuck with me. In a way, the image was the opposite of the stereotype of San Francisco: A city of soft wimps. I suspected this woman was neither soft or wimpy.

Later, at the wedding reception, I discovered the woman was a San Francisco city official and her companion was her husband. I have no knowledge of the political persuasions of this woman. Whatever her political views, my impression of her is---using a rather hacked-eyed expression--- she is a tough cookie. I expect she holds her own in San Francisco's political wars. I'd like to see her arm wrestle with Macho Man Karl. I would wager on the outcome.

By the way, to further discredit the liberal stereotype of San Francisco's citizenry, my bartender at The Buena Vista was to the right of Attila the Hun.

Leaving San Francisco and heading for Virginia, this is Your on the Street Reporter.