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### PREFACE

I began writing a daily column for *The San Francisco Chronicle* on July 5, 1938. It was a magic time in a faraway city that has largely disappeared and may have existed only in foggy myth.

A curly-haired wide-eyed open-mouthed 22-year-old gee-whizzer from Sacramento, I felt like a kid who had been turned loose in a candy store. I was unreservedly in love with everything in the city and wrote about it with the unabashed and often excessive enthusiasm of the newly smitten.

"City of the world, a world in a city," I rattled on, glorying in the genuine excitement of the old waterfront, "The Roar of The Four" streetcar lines on Market Street, the dance bands in the big hotels, the round-the-clock nightlife, the ornate sidewheeling ferryboats that even then were fading into the mist as the great bridges were completed.

A world depression was on but San Francisco never seemed busier. Prices were low and wages were high in this strong union town where Harry Bridges strutted like a king. Row after row of almost identical but highly efficient houses, built by a colorful entrepreneur named Henry Doelger, crept across the sand dunes from the Sunset District to Ocean Beach, where an amusement park named Playland entertained thousands each weekend for peanuts and a few coins.

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Give or take a strike or two, the city had been a tranquil place for many years. From 1912 to the time I began my column, San Francisco had only two mayors, the legendary "Sunny Jim" Rolph, who served from 1912 to 1932, and Florist Angel J. Rossi, who emulated his predecessor, down to the toothbrush moustache and the winged starched collars. For an amazing decade (1930-1940), the population remained almost exactly the same, around 630,000. Racism was a growing problem largely overlooked because there were so few minorities. The city was dancing on the edge of a war at the end of a charmed life, almost cut off from the rest of the world, but it was about to change forever.

World War II brought thousands of "outsiders" (old-time native San Franciscans were intensely xenophobic) who discovered the secret place and couldn't wait to return to it. When the war ended, they did return, by the thousands, and a delicate balance was destroyed, through no fault of anyone. The United Nations Charter was signed in San Francisco, validating the city's historical importance.

Still fairly snug and characteristically smug, San Francisco drifted into the 1950s, prosperous and changing only slowly. It was not until the rise of the Beat Generation that the phlegmatic natives became a little restive. The old bohemians had been perfectly acceptable—even welcome in some of the better houses—but the scruffy beatniks were different. A little threatening, even. Against the system and all that. And the worldwide publicity they were getting—why, complained the Chamber of Commerce and convention bureau types, they were giving the city a bad name.

We come now to the time of great changes, bits and pieces of which are chronicled in my columns of the years 1960 to 1975. As the Beats phased out, the hippies and rock 'n' roll came on with a roar that shook up any old-time San Franciscans who were still complacent.

At the same time, the skyline, once one of the most gracious in the world of metropolises, began disappearing behind walls of look-alike high-rises. The very weather changed as sunlight disappeared in the cold canyons of "progress," that thing you can't stop, and icy winds swept debris along the shadowed sidewalks. "Progress" was stopped in the "freeway revolt" that killed the Embarcadero Free-

way at the halfway point, but that didn't solve the growing problem of heavy downtown traffic. In fact, it added to it.

Still, San Francisco remained at the cutting edge of much that was new, daring and outrageous. The hippies died out, too many of them literally, but their influence would be felt for years among the young. San Francisco rock 'n' roll artists were high in the world hierarchy. The protests against the war in Vietnam produced "peace marches" of vast proportions that played a significant role in ending the conflict. In the more conservative parts of the country, San Francisco was looked upon as sort of a "kook capital." We who knew the essential conservatism of this outwardly liberal city looked on with amusement.

Fifteen years in the life of a young-old city, a place of careless enchantment that grew up overnight and had long preferred to face the dawn, bottle in hand, than the hangover of cold reality. The assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King sobered even pleasure-loving San Franciscans. Racial tensions increased. Nightlife withered as the streets became more dangerous. The flight to the suburbs began and the face of the city kept changing, sometimes overnight.

Through it all, I sat at the keyboard of my loyal Royal, trying to make sense of at least some of it, or, failing that, making the jokes that are also part of all serious problems. In these columns of 1960 through 1975, I hope I captured a little of the kaleidoscopic nature of the city I long ago dubbed Baghdad-by-the-Bay. That Baghdad was out of the Arabian nights, a place of myths and fables told by seductresses far into the night.

It is an atmosphere that still exists, thank God or Allah or whoever it was that blessed this small, special, annoying, irresistible place at the tip of a peninsula and the end of the world.

Herb Caen  
San Francisco  
*June 6, 1991*

\* \* \*

1960

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### GEE, WHAT A CRAZY TOWN

Historic parks being sold down the drain for a mess of parkage, bearded Beatniks seeking peace of mind by chewing Zen-Zen, grown men fighting like kids over a multimillion-dollar stadium dedicated to a child's game, Gray Line buses hauling gray-faced tourists through the gray city on a gray day, a City crew washing the Broadway Tunnel as the rain splashes outside, Chinese selling Japanese trinkets to South Americans carrying German cameras ... Gee, what a crazy town.

\* \* \*

Police cars bearing "No Riders" stickers prowling around in search of somebody to pick up, a splendid example of Greek Revival architecture (the Old Mint) being used for little more than a pigeon roost, Tom Sawyerish kids washing a fire engine while the coffee-sipping firemen lounge against a wall, derelict buildings being torn down along Skid Road to leave the cold and homeless even colder and more homeless, fur-clad women huddling under umbrellas to peer at resort clothes in the downtown shopwindows ... Golly, what a mixed-up place.

\* \* \*

Two hundred people standing in a row at the Zoo to watch four Teddy-bears from Down Under chew dully on eucalyptus leaves, a cable car waiting in a lot at the foot of Hyde like a windup toy whose key has been lost, an \$85,000-a-year baseball star searching in vain for an apartment to rent at any price, \$7,000 cars parked outside all night because their owners' \$500-a-month apartments have everything but garages, Coit Tower going dark at midnight

because that's late enough now in the city that once stayed up all night . . . Jeepers, where do we go from here and what do we do next?

\* \* \*  
Crippled newsboys cheerily shouting the headlines of tragedies less poignant than theirs, bay-windowed beauties of the Western Addition disappearing to make room for concrete blockhouses that will solve the population explosion in explosions of monotony, Symphony musicians standing around the rear of the Opera House after a concert like kids with no place to go when school's out, at 6 p.m. the flowers hanging their heads in the sidewalk stands as though they know it's time to call it a day . . . Wow, so many bits and pieces of nothing and everything adding up to the whole which is equal to the sum of the encircled squares.

\* \* \*  
Jobless men killing time by watching afternoon shows designed for women in the window of a Market St. TV shop, a blind man humming a tune as he taps his way along Montgomery with a transistor radio plugged into his ear, a dear old lady (bedridden) living all alone in a 14-room Fairmont penthouse across the street from a mansion that was once her home, the world's greatest disc jockey doing his bit for culture by promoting a Haiku poetry contest whose winner will get a trip to Japan, ships from the seven seas neatly filed away for the night along the Embarcadero—their deck lights on as though afraid of the dark . . . Endless odds and ends of the endlessly odd wetropolis under the rainy skies of Drabuary.

\* \* \*  
Stone cold new Hall of Justice standing bare and square against the Freeway running wild with lawbreakers, little old Chinese lady teetering up the California St. hill on once-bound feet to feed bread crumbs to the boundless seagulls, Sterling Hayden's romantic schooner lying tethered to the shores of Sausalito like a free soul brought back to earth, the sea lions back from their mating at last and sprawled in brown blobs on Seal Rocks—every now and then slithering into the icy water to escape the warm tourist stares from the Cliff House . . . Animal, vegetable, mineral in the soaring city built on stone and dredged-up dreams.

\* \* \*  
Well-clipped poodles walking well-polished chauffeurs along the well-manicured pathways of Lafayette Square, Beniamino Bufano doodling a pat of butter into a tiny masterpiece of a statue while

lunching at Veneto's, enchanted natives gazing with ah-struck eyes through the windows of Top o' the Mark while the visitors they've brought along glare around for a waiter, the Zellerbach building looking as delicately flimsy as a house of glass cards as it teeters on its stilts against its concretely staid neighbors, the old men of Union Square sitting rain-soaked on their benches with soggy newspapers over their heads and soggy squabs at their feet . . . Ah, Baghdad-by-the-Bay, where the living is easy for pigeons who get their Square meals from Union men.

\* \* \*  
A bored cashier yawning a gum-sticky yawn in the lobby of a Market St. movie palace festooned with photos of nude ladies who look even more bored, a Filipino barber on Kearny sawing away on his fiddle in the window as though to lure in a customer for a trimming, a few cars parked forlornly on the lot that once held the Montgomery Block's thousand priceless memories, dead seagulls strewn in nightmare profusion along Candlestick Seaway while their more fortunate mates hover in a ravenous cloud over the dumps lining the way to the magic city whose towers shine in the distance . . . Look away, look away from the death and debris—look ahead to the gates of Paradise.

\* \* \*  
*The timelessly San Francisco smell—clean and right—of wet eucalyptus in the Presidio that guards the past, two jet fighters climbing fast into the murky sky to guard the present that is always tense, midnight lights burning high in the downtown skyscrapers as yesterday's trash is cleared away in readiness for the future that will soon rise out of the East Bay Hills . . . What a town. Gee, what a crazy town.*

January 31, 1960



## TO MY VALENTINE

It's not always easy to find new words to express an old love—and I have been in love with you for such a long time, and you have had so many expansive lovers. It may even be that I feel a twinge of jealousy: more and more admirers are flocking around you every year, pouring out their adulation, pledging undying loyalty—and all the while seeking the same favors your older lovers have known. It's not that we feel rejected. You seem to have as much time for us as ever—almost—and, like all good lovers, we are understanding; we know how much you have to do these days.

of Chateau Magdeleine;

The good wood and leather smell of Brooks Bros.—like the interior of a new Jaguar;

The North Beach character who wears a campaign hat turned up on one side (like Teddy Roosevelt's) and marches proudly down Stockton St. to the beat of invisible drums;

Strolling alone through the damp eucalyptus smell of Golden Gate Park, feeling that the city is a million miles away and all the while knowing (with a secret, pleasant smile) that it isn't;

Searchlights waving their skinny white arms through the fog-banked night, in frantic counterpoint to the serene blinking of the bridge towers

\* \* \* \* \*  
Headlines, breadlines, schmedlines—it's still these little things, and they count:

Al Trobbe's foot poundin' piano beat at 6 p.m. (and your first drink) in the Fairmont's Cirque Room;

The old-time candy store next to the Larkin Theater, everything in bulk and on display in proper glass jars. A sample? Of course;

The King Sisters, still singing loud and clear (and modern) after all these 25 years of keeping up with the times;

The old waiters who serve you lunch only if they're in the mood—in the Happy Valley, the last un-Sheratonized corner of the Palace;

The Ralph Stackpole statues in front of the Stock Exchange, reminding you that Big Business, in the proper mood, CAN give a bohemian artist a big job to do well;

The mournful midnight blast of a ship as it heads into the well-worn stream that leads through the Golden Gate to High Adventure; your mind's eye can see its white wake as it clears Fort Point and disappears, gathering speed.

\* \* \* \* \*  
You take the crises and I'll take:

The crazy cruise clothes (even if you're not going anywhere) in the downtown show/windows;

The late movies on TV, especially when they're "For Whom the Bell Tolls" (and was there ever a smile like the young Ingrid Bergman's?);

The dental nurses rushing out of 450 Sutter to lunch, their white uniforms showing beneath their coats—and looking oddly sexy (considering their sensible shoes and thick stockings);

The tourists lined up at the velvet rope in El Prado while the

regulars squeeze past, make a wide swing around the barrier (this is the way the Nazis turned the Maginot Line) and settle down at the tables the tourists are waiting for (you have to Know Your Way Around, especially Around);

Union Oil's pastel storage tanks dotting the otherwise drab countryside on Highway 40 near Richmond—the kind of public relations you'd like to be related to;

The patient, fatherly voice of the cop in the loudspeaker car warning the jaywalking ladies not to do what he knows dambwell they're going to do the second he turns the corner.

\* \* \* \* \*  
Being a big city hick, I still get a kick out of:

A young girl getting her first orchid at a sidewalk flower stand (how soon she'll outgrow the thrill, but now—);

The adroit way Maitre d'Hotel Bill Coleman shuffles the patrons at Trader Vic's—never (well, hardly ever) placing a guy next to his ex-wife, or a married couple alongside the lover everybody knows about except the husband;

Dick Hadlock's superlative discourses on the wandering roots of jazz on KJAZ—a program that never hits a clinker;

The clatter of the streetcars as they circle at the Trans-Bay Terminal, a distant echo (but an echo all the same) of the Roar of the Four around the long-gone Ferry Building loop;

Silly cartoons like the one showing a Princess gazing in horror at the big and ugly frog in her bed at daybreak and gasping, "But you said you'd be a Prince in the morning!"

*The real estate firm of Hogan & Vest at Stockton and Washington in the heart of Chinatown—is this where East meets Vest in this city of laughter on the hills?*

February 5, 1961



## THE SAN FRANCISCANS

"San Francisco," I wrote some time back, "is like a club that isn't quite as exclusive as it used to be"—a statement that seemed to me more sadly obvious than explosive. (I can always tell when I have written something likely to backfire. As I hit the period, the typewriter starts jiggling, the ribbon turns red and bursts into flame, and the shift key begins dancing up and down like a mad thing.)

As I say, the statement didn't seem particularly offensive, but the mail that followed it was—highly. "You are a typical San Francisco snob," wrote a splenetic Sunset District housewife. "You don't

think anybody is capable of appreciating the city except you old-timers who can't look in any direction but back." A gentleman with an educated hand, writing on embossed Bohemian Club stationery, noted a bit more evenly: "Only a Sacramento boy—the operative word is Sacramento, not boy—could write so naively about San Francisco. It's too bad you can't take the city in stride. You are obsessed with socialites, Pacific Heights and Rolls-Royces in your efforts to make San Francisco something it never was."

A third letter was more succinct. "San Francisco stopped being exclusive," said the anonymous vilifier, "when we let YOU in." Touché!

\* \* \*

Like most people, I enjoy getting any kind of mail that doesn't turn out to be a bill, even when it's abusive and aside from the point. But then, maybe the point wasn't quite as obvious as I'd intended it to be, if it could bring charges of snobbery, naivete and a self-propelled lowering of values.

I remember writing once that "When I hear a Texan and a Chinese in conversation, it's the Texan who sounds like a foreigner." I consider that a valid statement that could be called snobbish only in Dallas or Houston, and, being a San Franciscan, I don't care WHAT they think there. The cadences of the Chinese, and their celestial presence, have been a part of the atmosphere since the city's Year One. The Texas drawl is comparatively recent, but, I hasten to add, that isn't the point, either.

I don't think that place of origin or number of years on the scene have anything to do with it, really. There are newcomers who become San Franciscans overnight—delighted with and interested in the city's traditions and history. They can see the Ferry Building for what it represents (not for what it is), they are fascinated with the sagas of Sharons, Ralstons, Floods and Crocker, they savor the uniqueness of cable car and foghorn.

By the same token, I know natives who will never be San Franciscans if they outlive Methuselah. To them a cable car is a traffic obstruction, the fog is something that keeps them from getting a tan, and Los Angeles is where they really know how to Get Things Done. A native San Franciscan who prides himself that his family has been in the real estate business here for three generations placed an avuncular hand on my knee one recent night and asked, "My boy, why do you take off on buildings like the Jack Tar? You can't stop things like that. It's new. It's modern. It's progress."

I don't object to the Jack Tar as such. I can think of a dozen

cities where it would look right at home. Here—well, do you carry a plastic handbag with a sable coat? And speaking of native San Franciscans, a man who signed himself just that way wrote after I seconded a suggestion that the Embarcadero Freeway be torn down: "Far as I'm concerned, they can tear down the Ferry Building and COVER the city with freeways."

That day will come, old man, along with the leveling of the hills and the filling in of the Bay, and we will be indistinguishable from Peoria.

\* \* \*

The San Franciscan, I submit, is anything but a snob. He is clan-ish, yes, but only about his city—every facet of it that delights him. In the old days, he was equally at home in the free-lunch counters of Market St., in Eddie Graney's billiard palace, at the Old Poodle Dog, and in Mrs. Spreckels' big house. He knew Jim Corbett and John L. Sullivan and Oofy-Goofty and Will Tevis, and greeted them all as equals in the egalitarian city. In a later manifestation he could hang out at the Black Cat or Izzy's and feel at ease in Anita Zabala Howard's drawing room.

Today he wears a sweater to Enrico's, a proper suit and vest to the Palace's Happy Valley, black tie to the Museum and tails to the Opera—and knows the best place in Chinatown to get jook, too. He realizes San Francisco has grown larger and stranger and away from itself, dividing into groups that are afraid to stray into the city's unbeaten paths, and for them he can feel only sorrow.

They are missing the far ranging excitement of being a San Franciscan who'd rather look at the Chirardelli tower than the Jack Tar.

\* \* \*

The other midnight, in a Chinatown bar, I met a real San Franciscan. He was a middle-aged longshoreman from the Mission, and he wore a zipper jacket and open shirt. While he quietly sipped a Scotch, he talked of Harry Bridges, Bill Saroyan and Shanty Malone. He was curious about Leontyne Price and Herbert Gold. He wondered if the Duke of Bedford's paintings were any good, he missed Brubeck, and he discussed Willie Mays down to his last spike. He seemed to know everybody in town, by first names—and it was only after he'd left that we discovered he'd bought a round of drinks for the house. For want of a better phrase, he had that touch of class—the touch of a San Franciscan.

March 12, 1961



at Geary and Webster has a graceful fragility that comes as a pleasant surprise in this otherwise brutalized area.

\* \* \*

Staying contemporary if it kills you: a hard role to play in a city with a magnificent past, a restless present and a future whose outlines—square and graceless—are already discernible on a hilltop earmarked for leveling. This could, of course, be a golden age: it's hard to know when you're living in one. But I'd say the odds are against it unless you're so damn contemporary you can find excitement in a traffic jam and poetry in the smog.

*November 13, 1966*



Believe-it-or-noddy: I met Comedian Woody Allen for the first time three years ago, when he played his first engagement at the hungry i. He was shy, unassuming, intelligent, a good listener and completely free of that egomania, bordering on megalomania, that makes so many show people unbearable. Since then he has scored a hit with his movie, "What's New Pussycat?," played a major role in "Casino Royale," written amusing pieces for the New Yorker, opened a successful play on Broadway, written and starred in another movie, "What's Up Tiger Lily?" and become a full-fledged member of the international In Group. Last week, with all fingers crossed, I had lunch with him at Bardelli's—and he is still shy, unassuming, intelligent, a good listener and apparently free of egomania. It's a miracle, folks.

\* \* \*

Bagatelle: "Sorry, sir," said Marian Phillips, cashier at the Marina Chuck Wagon. "I can't cash your check because the boss isn't here." With a groan, the customer dug deep and came up with the cash for two dinners—less 55¢. "That's okay, sir," smiled Marian. "We'll trust you for the rest of it. You have an honest face." And so, with his pockets turned inside out, S.F.'s Gordon Peter Getty, son of the richest man in the world, escorted his wife inside for a prime rib dinner.

*November 28, 1966*



### THE INDESCRIBABLE SOMETHING

Well, what is it anyway—that little touch of class (or style, if you will) that sets people and cities apart from the run of the mill millions? In the old days, it didn't seem so hard to define. "A classy

guy," in the parlance of the Tenderloin, was a flashy dresser with a high gloss on his fingernails, a diamond pinky ring and, again in the patois, the ability "to go to his pocket pretty good." The pocket usually contained a roll of \$100 bills obtained in some deliciously illicit manner, and if he peeled them off in full view, by means of a wetted thumb, he was a check-grabbing four-flusher. If he grabbed the check surreptitiously, and slipped \$100 to the head waiter on the way out, with nobody noticing, he was a bona fide classy guy.

\* \* \*

Today, the standards are more complex, and the manner in which a check is grabbed, if at all, is no longer a criterion. Now the individual with class is more likely to be the quiet one of firm resolve who will stand up and be counted, no matter how unpopular the cause (Joan Baez comes to mind). The subject, in fact, is such a knotty one that a national magazine has assigned a writer to tackle the subject monthly, and predictably, he is going around in circles. His best example of class and style to date has been the always classy and stylish Joe DiMaggio. Style: Joe DiMaggio, as a Yankee, loping after a long fly in center field, seeming hardly to move. Class: Joe DiMaggio, as a man, barring Peter Lawford from Marilyn Monroe's funeral.

\* \* \*

San Francisco once had a great sense of style, which leads me to believe that the key is knowing who and what you are. In the golden era before World War II, there was a sense of belonging that permeated the entire city—all wrapped up in a mystical amalgam of ferry boats and fog, millionaires who weren't ashamed of it, longshoremen who were proud of it, and a vital, grassroots bohemianism that hadn't yet become estranged. The San Franciscans of that day seemed to have a strong sense of time and place, and there was an intermingling without self-consciousness. (The stresses and strains are more intense today; the groups that once mixed have retired to their various enclaves, whence they gaze upon each other with hostility.) I remember a party that Templeton Crocker once gave in his magnificent penthouse on Russian Hill. Among the guests was Henri Lenoir, who now owns the Vesuvio but was then poor and close to starving. As the hors d'oeuvres were passed, Henri stuffed them into his pockets, to stave off the hunger of the morrow. At one point, Crocker approached, took out a cigarette and asked "Do you have a light, Henri?" Flustered, Lenoir reached into his pocket and, to his horror, pulled

out a sandwich. "You are priceless," laughed Crocker. "And also matchless."

\* \* \* \* \*  
Poise, wit, charm, chic—these things are part of style, but only part. And knowing who you are is increasingly difficult as the old standards evaporate, to be replaced by vague new ones. Doing the right thing at the right time in the right place used to be one of the yardsticks of class, but today it could even be square, and can a square have style? The Beatles have it, the New Christy Minstrels don't. Sinatra has it, Pat Boone doesn't. On the other hand, Lucius Beebe might have been a square, by today's viewpoint, but he had great style because he had an unwavering awareness of what was right for him. He wasn't out to impress anybody. He was also unfailingly polite without appearing condescending, class-conscious without being conscious of class (I will venture a flat statement: you can't have class without manners). He even got drunk—"taken by wine," as he put it—with a terrible and laudable dignity.

\* \* \* \* \*  
Well, in his own way, Lucius Beebe was courageous, and maybe you can't have class without courage. I'm a little tired, too, of Hemingway's "Grace under pressure" definition, but we've seen some stirring examples lately. Could anything have been classier than Pat Brown's graceful, pressure-packed speech of concession? The ability to smile and remain a whole man when your world has just crashed around you is a superhuman achievement; certain other politicians, in the same position, have proved all too human. Sandy Koufax, graceful in victory, was equally graceful in acknowledging defeat at the hands of fate. A lot of us, Pat Brown included, will be forever haunted by Caryl Chessman, who won in death what he fought for in prison: respect. No matter how he lived, he died with unbelievable courage and coolness. Minutes before he went, he consoled a distraught reporter. "Take care of yourself—don't worry about me, I'll be all right."

\* \* \* \* \*  
Class and style—you can have one without the other, and those who have both are the singularly blessed. Jack Shelley might be a fair example of a man who has class but no style, where a certain famous lawyer who shall be nameless has style but no class. Harry Bridges has both and so does Robert Watt Miller: neither has ever wavered from his particular, special view of life, and both have conducted their lives without phoniness. Thanks to an unquenchable *jeu d'esprit*, William Saroyan has class and style. While other

and lesser writers receive the acclaims and awards that once were his, he goes on doing what he does best, laughing at life and enjoying it hugely, never once denigrating the work of others.

\* \* \*

Maybe, all I've proved is that class and style are hard to define, which is why I titled this piece "The Indescribable Something"—to get myself off the hook. No class, all the way down the line.

*November 30, 1966*



Wondering muse: I keep thinking about Post-Deb Melinda Moffett's statement last wk. that 17 out of 25 Cotillion debutantes (in her coming-out group) have used marijuana. It sounds like a radio commercial: "Seventeen out of 25 debs smoke pot!" And it was splendid of her to reveal that she has rec'd marijuana from escorts at the Burlingame Country Club, "but you can't buy it there," she added. Apparently the Club isn't as square as some people think, although Fran Martin admits to being naive: "I've been getting my grass from the gardeners and groundskeepers" . . . Anyway, maybe all this will stop subscribers from writing in to complain about society page photos of under-age debs with highball glasses in their hands. According to Melinda and her pals, drinking booze is nowhere, o-u-t, forGET it. I guess it's those kids who DON'T have a glass in their hand that you should wonder about . . . Actually, the pot puffers and LSD trippers are probably healthier than the rest of us. It has yet to be shown that marijuana, even without filters, causes lung cancer, and I doubt that you could take enough LSD on a sugar cube to cause diabetes. The only thing these kids have to worry about is bad prison food, and even that's getting better.

*December 12, 1966*



Add crises: There's sort of an unemployment problem out there in the Hip-Ashbury District, so a nice girl named Sharon Sweeney has opened "The Hip Job Co-op" employment agency. "You know," she says earnestly, "a lot of the hippies around here have college degrees, great ability and the desire to work. But the people in the square world just don't like to hire a young man who wears a beard and maybe doesn't bathe every week." (Every WEEK? Why, a guy could catch his death.) At the moment, she's trying to rent out "psychedelic hippies" to read poetry or otherwise



antecedents in the North Beach of the '50s. They are coming on the way they thought we were. Distorted. Ten years later. Like in the last days of the Bagel kids, when they were acting like characters out of Kerouac. Does a writer take from life or does life take from a writer?

"I have tremendous empathy with the young ones in the Haight-Ashbury but at the same time they anger me. Maybe because in them I see myself a little. Like them, we were searching for the truth and to find ourselves, but for most of us the ends became the means and very few of us found the freedom to be ourselves. I don't think anymore it's either be hip or be square. There's good in both worlds and the existential problem is to choose the good from both worlds and discard the bad.

"Granted life does look absurd, but I don't believe one creates meaning by becoming more absurd." Eric Berne, si, Tim Leary, no? It was Dr. Berne who said "To live in a world in which there is no Santa Claus, one must face the existential problems of necessity, freedom of choice and absurdity."

And what of Officer (now Inspector) Bill Bigarani, the Beater? The other day he was quoted as saying, on the subject of repeatedly throwing drunks in jail: "Drunkenness is definitely a medical problem. It's not a police problem. Or at any rate, it shouldn't be. Many people don't realize that the police don't arrest the drunks on Skid Row just to be mean."

Maybe he learned something in the crazy Beat World he knew so well. Maybe we all did.

*February 16, 1967*

The leader strikes again!: Bit of a flap over at Travis Air Force Base last Fri. night. Nancy Sinatra, pooped right down to the soles of her walkin' boots, returned from Vietnam, where she'd been entertaining the troops, and asked for a car to take her to S.F. Airport. "Sorry," said the protocol officer. "No car. But we can send you over there by bus." That did it! In tears, she phoned her father in L.A., and in a surprisingly short time, Frank Sinatra's personal jet was landing at Travis to whisk her home. So much for protocol.

*February 21, 1967*

Herbert's sherbert: Well, the mystery of our "Mystery Lady"—she who parks almost daily by the Park's Portals of the Past in her

chauffeured Rolls-Royce, to stare into space—has been solved from several sources. She's Lily Zellerbach Drake, who is pushing 80 in the most elegant manner, lives alone at the Palace, and prefers to be addressed as "Miss Drake." Although she's a sister of the late Isadore Zellerbach, the paper king, she sees little of the family these days. Gone past the Z's? . . . *March 22, 1967*

Culture west: "Powerful passions crept in this fabled romance of forbidden love South of Bangalore! . . ." "Hot blooded romance, illicit love and violent vengeance! . . ." "Earthy, passionate life in the raw! . . ." "To his fellow students, a poet related the story of his three strange loves" . . . Are the foregoing teaser ads for a Market St. porny house? Nope. They're from a brochure for the S.F. Spring Opera season, opening June 2, and the purple prose refers to "The Pearl Fishers," "Cavalleria Rusticana," "Pagliacci" and "Tales of Hoffman." The company is also doing "La Traviata," that pulsating expose of heartbreak and unbridled sex. I believe the police should look into this, since all these dirty shows were written by foreign agitators.

*March 27, 1967*

. . . Paul McCartney of the Beatles flew out to N.Y. yesterday after spending a couple of days at the Fairmont under an assumed name (Nathan Weiss??). Jane Asher of the Old Vic was his prime target, of course, but he also found time to work out with the Jeff Airplane at Fillmore Aud., performing so well on the guitar that Marty Balin said: "If you're ever out of a job . . ." Wearing his hair shorter and his moustache longer, he fired his camera around the Haight-Ashbury, where, of course, he looked positively square. He had a ready explanation for the fact that hardly anybody recognized him: "That's what is so great about this city—the straights don't stare at the hippies. They're accepted as part of the community." By some, by some . . .

*April 6, 1967*

## I HAPPEN TO LIKE IT —

San Francisco, I mean—even though it seems to be losing some of its symmetry. But this could be all to the good, since the only

perfect symmetry is death ("Death," "symmetry"—there's a tiny pun there audible only to dogs and other caenines). In writing about the city, I used to be able to toss off such gliblets as "Ah, San Francisco: the more it changes, the more it remains the same!" thereby demonstrating that it's easier to turn stomachs than phrases (and also that youth and truth have little in common except their rhyme). What we know now, for a fact, is that the more the city changes, the more it changes—it's as simple and complicated as that.

\* \* \*

These clanking thoughts occurred to me the other night as I was driving aimfully around, trying to zero in on the city I once thought I knew so well. From time to time it all seemed blessedly familiar: the heavy overhead trolley and phone wires, redolent of the Naughty Oughties, and the block after block of wooden houses that escaped the Ought Sixquake. It's really quite amazing how many of those pre-fire houses have survived, and how balefully charming they look in the street lights of midnight; even those that are more tenemental than sentimental on the inside preserve a certain dignified facade—a cock-eyed extravagance that once was the warm face of a city. That face is now seen more clearly in profile, cold and angular.

\* \* \*

Driving alone in the wakefully sleeping city, along freeways where spring flowers once grew, past row after row of stucco houses whose occupants I would never know but forever wonder about (who are they, what are they like, how do they feel about the city that has thrown us together and kept us apart?). Down Fillmore, with its immemorial Negro bars and the shadowy figures talking—about what?—on the corners. The big cars, the pretty girls, a vague smell of bar-b-que ribs: the old pre-integration colored section. "Whitey Go Home" is chalked invisibly on every wall and I thank you for your hostility. Even when I don't anticipate it, I think I understand it.

\* \* \*

The autumnal chill of springtime, tulips growing unseen in secret gardens. You can't see them as you drive around, but you know they are there—the hidden green belts behind the cold shoulders of Pacific Heights houses (from a low-flying helicopter, the sight of all these gardens comes as a surprise). Sacred Pacific Heights, where the movers and shakers live, and are they moving or shaking? Do they roll up their windows and lock the doors when they

drive through the Fillmore? Have they ever even BEEN in the Crocker-Amazon, can they find Hayes Valley, have they visited Visitation? Pacific Heights, a state of mindlessness, where happiness is just a thing called dough, and don't knock it, buddy; we all knead it, sour or otherwise.

\* \* \*

San Francisco, the gorgeous mess—wooden yesterdays mocking steel tomorrows, or is it the other way around? Haight Street, that graight street, where the name Spreckels means nothing more than sugar cubes, and little care the hippies that some of the finest families of Old San Francisco used to live where now they dream their vagrant dreams. Past the sagging ricketies and along Skid Road—East Indian maidens in dirty saris, Tugboat Annies, the drunks sitting wine-sogged against walls, heads down between their knees (Skid Road always looks like a grainy documentary titled "The Shame of the Cities"—but here there is a hipless hopelessness, the last drag on the bummed cigarette).

\* \* \*

In the Tenderloin, the bars closing, throwing more flotsam than jet-setters into the streets. Soon the cafeterias would be filling with people trying to sober up before it's time to go to work. I drove through the deserted financial district to the Golden Gateway—the new thing ("The NOW Thing!") in the city of too many pasts. Now I felt like a character in an Antonioni film, walking across clean-cobbled courtyards, through endless neat passageways and lobbies, rising in a sterilized elevator to the apartment of Night People whose door is always unlatched. Unhinged, I looked down from the balcony at the Gateway's planned mosaics, the gleaming tiles, the tiny trees just so, the bridgeways and breezeways. This, too, is San Francisco—and as I looked up and out, it was the Bay Bridge, the Ferry Building and cluttered old Telegraph Hill that suddenly looked out of place, distorted and dimly seen, as in a dream or nightmare. "Make that a double," I said to my host, a living person.

\* \* \*

The City: all things to all people, or perhaps too much for some, not enough for others. Or is it just Too Much? *April 9, 1967*



Speaking of the garbage problem (and the same to you), Ingie Shankel has a friend who lives in a glorious new high-rise over-

beautification can't afford trash receptacles. How much can they cost?

\* \* \*

A terrific October dusk, with just enough smog to make the sunset fiery, cataclysmic, dangerous. The craggy top of Bank of America's World (Yet) Headquarters caught the rays and turned into a pillar of gold. Is this a golden age for the golden city by the Gate? Will somebody look back someday on San Francisco October 1972 and say "Wasn't it great?" or "You should have been there?" The lights brightened on the great bridges and I stepped into a bar to ponder the problem over a martini. It was a fine martini, of course. They've always made good martinis in this town. After two I agreed with myself that yes, this is a golden age, and watched the cool blondes and the young bucks appraising each other. October night, and the city coming to life as it has through all the Octobers . . .



October 8, 1972

Add ceteras: Penny Patterson, a graduate student in psychology, is embarked on a fascinating project at the S.F. Zoo, teaching deaf mute sign language to Koko, the zoo's youngest gorilla. After three months, Koko can give clearly the signs for "Food," "Drink" and "More"—vocabulary enough for a full life, wouldn't you say? . . .

\* \* \*

Bagatelle: William Randolph Hearst Jr. dropped into the Post-Powell Roos-Atkins the other day and bought a suit from Dave Falk, who said "Y'know, I sold your father an Inverness cape for the opera opening in 1939, down at the old Roos store on Market." At this, Hearst Jr. turned to his son, William Randolph Hearst III, and grinned "Billy, buy yourself a suit so Mr. Falk can go down in history as the only salesman who sold clothes to three William Randolph Hearsts." Done and done.

November 20, 1972



\* \* \*

1973

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Here in Action City West, Rudolph Nureyev is still going strong on the post-midnight scene but he's wearing everybody else out. At 3 a.m., he is in Bali's, his favorite hangout, looking like a Tartar prince as he chews on lamb bones and tosses them aside. He dances on a table, then grabs his dear friend, Armen Bali, to whirl her around to a wild Armenian tune. Worn out: Impresario John Kornfeld, who is napping in a tiny room above the restaurant. A policeman pokes his head in: "What's going on?" "Is private party!" snaps Armenia's Armen. "Join it or get out!" After a moment's thought, the officer gets . . . Rudy's top-secret retreat, by the way, is the Ritch St. Health Club. The tales they tell!

February 23, 1973



## I HATE THE SUNDAY COLUMN

Quite a few polite people ask me why the Sunday column is different from the daily one. Being polite, they don't say it's better or worse, just "different," and of course it is. That's because it's written on the preceding Tuesday, for technological reasons I've never understood, and goes to press on Wednesday, so by the time it lands on your doorstep it's flat as a flounder and twice as smelly. I wouldn't be caught dead reading it. Writing it is bad enough. I use the time-honored hunt 'n' peck system and the hunting hasn't been all that good lately. Ditto the pecking.

\* \* \*

With this five-day lead time, or whatever it's called, I can't stud the column with those red-hot last-second one-line zingers that for

years have caused presses to stop and editors to pale. Especially our own presses as the editor barks "Get that dumb zinger out of the paper!" All editors bark, in an effort to command doglike devotion, but mine has been known to barf, especially at my attempts to play Charlie Baxter, Cub Reporter, phoning in a story that will rock City Hall. (Cub reporter is a silly phrase, come to think of it; what can a cub possibly do that's worth reporting?) Anyway, now you know why I hate the Sunday column. Deadline Dick, working five days in advance.

\* \* \*

The old bag of tricks, getting older and baggier. Some kindly types suggest: "Why don't you write more about the old days?" but there's no future in it; those who care to read about the San Francisco of yesteryore are dying in droves and winding up in Colma while their friends toast their demise at Coattail Molloy's, one of the great lugubrious saloons. Besides, it's a fact that not all old-timers are interested in reading about old times. Even the seldom-discussed story that Sunny Jim Rolph, saintly Mayor, had a Hollywood actress, Anita Page, as his lady friend is of little interest today. Mourn the passing of Bay shrimp and Hangtown Fry and every eye remains dry, even rheumy ones. As Vincent Hallinan said just the other day, "I've been reading your column lately and let me say one thing—you've got to stop living in the past." When a 78-year-old, which Hallinan is, says that you had better listen.

\* \* \*

Baghdad-by-the-Bay, that's what we used to call it in the first flush of puppy (or cubby) love, but there may be a diminishing market for that, too. The symmetry of peopled hills, the gracious relationship between tower and sky, the foaming wakes left by crisscrossing ferryboats, these things are gone. There is still poetry under wet eucalypti and dreams at the end of leafy streets opening on uncluttered views, but now you have to squint a little to shut out reality (desperation grows noisier, reality uglier). When you see a photograph of the downtown skyline today, it looks like a photoquiz that asks "Can you find the Ferry Building?" As far as some of our leading architects are concerned, the answer to that is "Who cares?" For some of the rest of us, the Ferry Building is where we draw the line. We could both be wrong.

\* \* \*

City of St. Francis, less gentle than it once was, but still mysterious as we contemplate it for a Sunday column, five days from deadline. "There used to be magic here," an old friend, R.L. Duffus,

once said, "but we're no longer sure where it is." I wander the hard new plazas, the rooftop restaurants, the pop-plastic lobbies, feeling like a stranger. Most of my contemporaries live in an alcohol-hazed glow, snapping their fingers to songs nobody remembers; tapping their toes to a ghostly beat, turning their back on the present tense. To the young people, this may be just another city, who can tell? They don't appear to react to San Francisco the way we did, all rapture and adoration, terribly pleased with ourselves for having the exquisite taste to be San Franciscans. Perhaps I underestimate them; maybe they do know this is a special place and that they are among the favored few in a world growing cold.

\* \* \*

The Sunday mood, five days in advance, mind's eye roving about the familiar outlines of the city, floating over snaggle-toothed piers that now stand rotting and empty (how can this be?) and across Candlestick Park, where millions have been squandered to transform the third-rate into the second class. City of bikes and bagels, the noisiest buses anywhere (and the quietest streetcars), headstones from long-gone cemeteries in the curbstones around Buena Vista Park, and the Haight-Ashbury slowly stirring back to life after the death of summer love so many eons ago, back when Pig Pen was sassy-young and fat and the answer to all questions rose in the smoke of the good grass that turned bad and finally evil . . . Out at Playland, seagulls swoop vulture-like over the debris where laughter once ruled. The fog lies offshore like a beast, crouching.

\* \* \*

Sunday in the city, the paper fat, red, pink and blue, this column written by a stranger who was me five days ago, trying to find answers in deadlines and failing. Again.

March 18, 1973



## RUNNING AROUND IN CIRCLES

It was a sentimental weekend or a weekend filled with sensations, whichever comes first. Blame it on the full moon. Police, bartenders and other observers of the human condition have always been aware that the full moon brings out the loonies, that being a corruption of the term lunatic, which itself is derived from the Latin "luna" meaning moon. But you looniebirds already knew that, correct?

So at last it has come to this, the end of the long journey through lies and duplicity, Ike and Jack, hell no we won't go, a new vocabulary called Pentagonese. Christmas bombings, Cambodian "incursions" and Herr Doktor Kissinger's "moral commitments" that turned out to be not worth the paper they weren't written on. War without heroes, as David Douglas Duncan termed it, a war without even a good song, a good joke or a good story. A war that dirtied everyone who touched it, and now The Sentimental American, direct descendant of The Ugly American, is fondling babies, washing diapers and guile and still, with indifferent arrogance, making the same mistake all over again: trying to tell other people how to live and die, fighting to the last Vietnamese.

\* \* \*  
San Francisco is a long way from Vietnam—San Francisco is a long way from anywhere, fortunately—but it is a city with sound instincts. San Francisco smelled something sour about this "crusade" early in the going. By 1965, there were marches and demonstrations. The first really big one was here, at Kezar in '67, and the ripples were felt in Washington and New York. The driving force came from the young and the hairy and the unwashed, from the rock musicians and the "radical" politicians, from old lefties and bohemians, from the labor guys (not the big names, interestingly) who were not afraid to stand up and be counted—by the FBI and the CIA, as it turns out. The real radicals were the limousine conservatives with their cocktail hour talk of "beking Hanoi." Why is it they knew so little, these Adleppates with the martini brains, when even the street people could foresee what is now in sight, a unified Vietnam run by Hanoi?

\* \* \*  
Ho-Ho-Ho Chi Minh, with the goatlike whiskers on your chin-chin . . . A sad irony you're not around to take over your wounded nation, though you would be heartsick at the plight of so many of your people. Thieu and Ky, it is useful to remember, fought with the French against their own people, but let us not indulge in recriminations. No blame, no blood baths, no purges. Maybe Gerald Ford, who so loves infants, can find it in his heart to love grownups, too, even those who were right in the first place about the war. Let the boys come home from all over the world, let there be peace, let there be amnesty, let us even forgive Dean Rusk and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and let there be an end to the hawklike croaks of the Reagans and the John Waynes, who love to watch other people fight. From a safe distance. Strange people,

these: they've never been bombed (except by booze), never been burned out of their houses by an enemy, never been refugees, and yet they hate those who have suffered through all that while fighting for their own land IN their own land. Why?

\* \* \*

The Bicentennial year is almost upon us. In our short history, there is much to celebrate, much to lament. Flags, parades and cannon are all very well, but a little silence and humility might go good right now, too.



April 13, 1975

Walk softly and carry a big salami!: After leaving the North of Market Senior Center's press conference to publicize assaults on oldsters in the Tenderloin, 79-year-old Eva Heartman stopped at a grocery store for a bit of shopping. Then, heading for her hotel room, she was grabbed by a young mugger who attempted to rip off her handbag—at which she whipped a salami out of her grocery bag and jabbed it into his groin (OH, how that smarts) . . . As he doubled up on the sidewalk, four large locals sat on him till the police arrived. Salami: intact.

April 30, 1975



### BAGHDAD - BY - THE - BAY

August foghorns at midnight, misty puffs drifting across Nob Hill as though plucked from a vast box of cotton just over the horizon, a human sandwich wrapped in old overcoats Sleeping It Off on a discarded sofa outside the Eagle Cafe on the waterfront, shadowy figures in doorways on Polk and on Eddy whispering "Wanna have a good time?" in joyless voices, a fat raccoon dragging itself up and over a garden fence in Terrific Pacific Heights, its cheeks and belly puffed out with a flowery feast of petunias and geraniums, and always the sirens making white fingernail scratches across the blackboard of another bloodstained night . . .

\* \* \*

In his apartment in the Fontana, overlooking Ghirardelli Square and bay and bridge, Scott Newhall, the one-time S.F. newspaper editor, is pounding out an editorial for his L.A. county paper, the Newhall Signal. Like many a native of taste and background, he finds himself obsessed with and disenchanted by Mayor Alioto, whom he describes variously as the Grand Duke, His Eminence, the Dodge, Il Magnifico.

At the moment we are concerned with, Newhall is typing "While 'Il Magnifico' held court in his City Hall fortress, skyscrapers rose like giant sequoias and towered over San Francisco and the waterfront crumbled into ruin. He provided jobs for his blue-collar workers by digging holes and trenches in the city streets, until much of the downtown area was cratered like the moon. The streets filled up with gypsies, fortune-tellers, vagabonds, drag queens, cutpurses, muggers, homicidal maniacs and old-fashioned beggars. Street crime is a common pastime."

At this very point, the doorbell rings. Newhall opens the door and in walked a man and woman, armed, who proceeded to rob him and his secretary of all the valuables in the apartment. The bandits then placed pillowcases over the heads of their victims, "which," says Newhall, "convinced me they were going to kill us." But they didn't, of course, and Newhall was able to complete his chronicle of his beloved city's decline and fall under "the reign of this fastidious garrulous master of political fakery."

\* \* \*

Baghdad-by-the-Bay: candlelight and red checkered tablecloths in good little restaurants along Clement and on Chestnut, folksingers entertaining crowds waiting under Golden Gate Park trees for their turn to gasp over the Asian Art Museum's treasures from Old China, the morning paper hitting your front door simultaneously with the age-old "karrtrump" of the Presidio's 6 a.m. cannon, deep-throated blast of a ship's horn outward bound, thousands of shoppers thronging the "new Hong Kong" markets of Stockton near Broadway, where the smell of fish and ducks and foreign bodies makes your nose hold its breath.

\* \* \*

What we need, writes Kenneth Rexroth in San Francisco magazine, is "a new Golden Age here." Mr. Waxroth, who spends most of his time in Santa Barbara when he isn't in Japan, is the closest thing we have to a resident philosopher, which tells you how tough things are. I'm not quite sure what old Golden Ages he has in mind, unless he means himself reading poetry to jazz. He demonstrates a fondness for Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Enrico Banducci, the old hungry i, and Broadway when it consisted of inexpensive "family" cafes, and who can argue with that.

But one man's golden age is another man's dross, and I would think that for a lot of San Franciscans—Jann Wenner of Rolling Stone, Bill Graham and Mr. Coppola come immediately to mind—THIS is a golden age. Besides, the Great Days of Yesteryore are all

mixed up with one's youth, and maybe the kids of today are having every bit as much fun as Rexroth and I had, even though the six-bit full-course Italian dinner is now ten times six-bits and there is no Big Dipper to ride screamingly at Playland—no Playland, in fact—and the Fillmore jazz scene, where even ofays were welcome, comparatively, is as dead as Billie Holliday.

Come to think of it, have you seen the Fillmore lately? Once, in a brassy if not precisely golden age, it was alive alive-o with singing and dancing and growling trumpets and well-honked tenor saxes and all the little eating and drinking (and pawn-broking) joints that make up what they call a "community." Now it is a city of the dead, a fenced-off world of dusty lots, a cold place where danger lurks without even a landmark to warm the heart.

Baghdad-by-the-Bay: don't get us wrong, we love it come hell or high taxes. It is still the best of all possible cities, am I right, Dr. Pangloss, you old fraud? Belly dancers gyrating at the Powell St. turntable, the small change still washed all new and shiny at Hotel St. Francis, tourists clinging to cables and little houses clinging to hillsides and a dwindling number of us clinging to dreams of golden ages past, present, and maybe even future.

August 3, 1975



## THOUGHTS ON INTERSTATE 80

Roadside signs. "Reduce Speed When Wet." What's that for, drivers who wear diapers? Reduce speed when changing diapers. "Slippery When Wet," with a nice drawing of a skidding car. What isn't slippery when wet? A blotter, maybe. Strange little satellite communities just off the road, "Easy Access to Freeway." Smoggy world of Denny's, A&W Root Beer stands, three kinds of service stations, liquor store, and back to the freeway. "Eat Here and Get Gas." People have been sending me sightings of that sign for 30 years. Scatological humor. America's finest. "We Buy Junk and Sell Antiques." That sign has been around 20 years. Still cracks people up.

\* \* \*

End of summer. Hot in the valleys of our life—Vaca, Sacramento, Napa, Sonoma, middle age—but you can tell another summer is dying. Where now the promises of spring, a pennant for the Giants? Gone with the gas. Green hills of summer now tawny as Hemingway's Africa. Fall approaches, teetering on high heels after a season of loafers. Bobby Short, the Hildegarde of our time, open-