

Coolo California

Fock 5: San Fran By Day

San Francisco is a large city -- 13th biggest in the U.S., actually, with just over 776,000 inhabitants. So it must take up a pretty fair amount of room to hold all those people. I should have kept that in mind as I drove into that city.

A couple of years in Rochester can alter one's perspective of what constitutes a city. For most of my life, Boston had defined "city," and all things city were measured on a Boston scale. Moving to Rochester screwed that up for me. I *knew* that Rochester was smaller and all that, but, somehow, things like map-reading even got all outa whack. In Boston, if I wanted to go from, say, Brighton to Waltham, I'd size it up on the map, evaluate distance and degree of difficulty (i.e., traffic, construction, etc.), decree "twenty minutes" and be just about on time.

So, in Rochester, if I wanted to go from Brighton to Chili (no, it's pronounced *chye-lye*, I have no idea why -- probably the same reason that Avon is pronounced *av-on*, instead of *ay-von*) I'd look at the map, assign The Boston Scale to it in my mind, and say "okaaaaay, forty minutes." Then, like a moron, I'd be zooming by the Chili exit twelve minutes later, and wondering how the hell I missed it. Duhhhh.

Three years of Rochester had recalibrated my scale, and now as I arrived in San Fran, I sized up the distance from where I was to Golden Gate Park as being a ten-minute ride. Thirty minutes later, I was still "almost there." But it was cool seeing all the different style of abodes along 19th Avenue, and eventually seeing the towers of The Golden Gate Bridge appear over the treetops. It's always cool to see postcard kind of stuff in person. It didn't look quite as posed and picturesque, but that's OK too, because it's more *my* view now, the one I will remember whenever that Bridge is brought up.

I'll remember making the decision to drive across it, then getting totally porked by the crunch of traffic, and recognizing that all-too-familiar situation of being trapped in a snailish logjam, with no exits or alternate routes available. Seeing a fleeting escape opening, I cut off the car to my right with the old Bostonian's hold-up-a-thank-you-wave-and-go-without-making-eye-contact move, and bailed out into the GGB gift shop parking lot at the last second.

I'll remember getting a look at the underside of the bridge -- it's not as pretty from underneath -- and deftly escaping that bridge jam with a very tight and, I think, illegal turn into the Presidio. I would have really liked to cross the GGB, but I didn't want my primary memory of San Francisco to be a tirade-filled waste of two hours in infuriating bumper-to-bumper traffic, only to have to re-cross it or another bridge to get back into the city.

Not that I always get impatient in traffic jams, mind you. If I'm not in a hurry, I can actually enjoy them for a little while. I sit back and enjoy the tunes, crack open a fresh bev, dig out the dugout, and try to flaunt the fact that I am not made miserable by this experience. The reactions to this strategy are odd: some people take my lead and seem to chill out themselves with a *what-the-hell-ya-gonna-do* attitude; but others just get all the more aggravated and clearly resent me for having the nerve to not be unhappy.

Trouble is, after about fifteen minutes, I can't even fool myself anymore, and, as always, it bothers me that I am not getting where I want to go. Often, it's not the delay itself that is so irksome. If I was told by some hard-hatted, orange-vested worker that *hey, it's gonna be twenty minutes or so, so just sit tight, fella*, then I could deal with that easily: kill the engine, sprawl out in back, and dig some groovy tunes. But traffic jams aren't like that. The constant alternation of edging forward a few feet, then applying the brake, edge forward, apply brake, edge, apply, edge, apply, over and over and over is what is so infuriating. And, of course, if the other lane begins to get ahead of me, that gets me ripped too. If I used to be ahead of that yellow Mustang, but now he's 100 feet farther up the road, I begin to get rankled. Not that I should give a turtle turd about it. Ed used to occasionally admonish, "It's not a race," but, in a way, it was. Getting to work ASAP meant finding the fastest route, and if that yellow Stang was getting ahead, that meant his way was faster than mine.

Yeah, right, his 2.6 mph is really kicking butt on my 2.5 mph. I was really just mad because he was beating me, and laughing about it! *Damn this jam*, he was saying, *but at least I'm ahead of that van!! Woo-hoooo!!!*

So I need a better plan for long tie-ups. I'm working on it.

Anyway, the metropolitan feeling of SF was enhanced by having just spent so much time in empty spaces for the previous ten days. I can't count Las Vegas as a city. That place is more like a giant

amusement park rather than an urban center of commerce and real life. I'm sure some of the people who toil in day-to-day living in Vegas would take issue with that opinion, but hey, they can go write their own book and bitch and whine about the self-righteous, tree-hugging tourists in their fucking vans.

Besides, LV is so totally surrounded by that Great Void known as Nevada, I don't see how you could ever feel hemmed in there.

But driving into San Francisco gave me a curious feeling. I pictured the SF map as an anatomical diagram, and envisioned my van as a little blue pill being swallowed into the life systems of the city. I would circulate through its various veins and arteries and organs, leaving little microns along the way (my money and my karma), and withdrawing metabolites from the body for my own sustenance (beer, scenery, local flavor, fun), before being excreted out the next day.

Yeah, I do picture mucked-up stuff sometimes, thanks for asking.

Bite me.

Well, at any rate, Golden Gate Park was damn popular when I found my parking spot there in the early afternoon. People were jogging, walking, riding, lying in the sun, reading, and just enjoying life. It was perfect summer weather. Perfect summer weather can even make a place like freaking Brooklyn look pretty cool, so this huge garden of fertile lawns and ubiquitous floral colorbursts was spectacular.

My eyes were gulping in the botanical gardens and displays and such, and life was just plain fugging good, *until*... I got that goddamn stupid urge to RUN.

Why the hell does this irrational passion still overtake me? Haven't I figured out yet that it is NOT FUN?? Especially on a hot summer midday, when my body has dangerously more alcohol than water coursing through it.

Any normal person would have grabbed a towel, a cooler, and maybe a tune supply, found a small berm at the edge of a floral garden, or some lush grass in the cool shade of a deeply leafy tree, and just melted into the park for a while.

Not me though. Fucking addict. Gotta RUN. Jeez Louise (as Joel would say). How many times am I gonna lace up these shoes and take an exaggerated walk around a park. Too many of these runs SUCK these days.

But the good ones – the *rare* good ones – are worth it. And you have to do the crappy ones in order to get fit enough to pump out a good one.

When you *do* get a day that clicks, you gotta cherish it, and squeeze every ounce of satisfaction out of it. You truly do feel like Cock Of The Walk when you kick the living shit out of an 8.6-mile run, charging up the final sidewalk with your wide-open lungs powering your body-machine with O₂, your churning stride eating up the concrete, your blurred feet clawing the ground and throwing it off behind you, your nostrils flaring, your focus dead on, and the little insidious ferrets of Fatigue cowering in the back recesses of your mind, rapt in awful horror as you spit a soul-emptying laugh in their impotent furry faces.

Or, ummmm, something like that.

☺

So, yeah, I went for a run. Bet I impressed approximately nobody. I was in good shape, overall, but it's not the same as being in good running shape. With the usual Coke Classics for breakfast, last night's beer gleefully slaying every ounce of hydration, and the Bulldog Burger still clogging my arteries and capillaries, the effect was akin to oiling the fan with glue, and then wondering why the freaking thing won't spin.

The standard run strategy was adopted. All of you aging or otherwise out-of-shapers will recognize this plan of attack:

- Pick narrow paths, with few people. The more shade the better, the more twists and turns the better.
- When people appear, straighten your posture and make a brave show of it. Hope you saw them before they spied your sorry self.
- When they get far enough behind you that they won't be turning around to look at you, put your hands on your hips, wheeze, and slow the fuck down to jog pace.
- When street crossings are unavoidable, politely wait for the traffic to pass, even if it's 200 yards away when you see it. That dumb little shuffle-footed jog in place is optional. I don't do it any more. I just stop. Stopping your watch, and restarting it as you recommence your "run" is a nice touch. Might fool some people.
- Do not try to outrace traffic anyway; that was for when you were in your prime. Now, the only thing that that will accelerate is your demise.

- If prolonged public exposure is inevitable, stop to tie your shoe. Might as well tie them both while you're at it. Act peeved about the interruption of your precious momentum.
- Wear sunglasses. The eyes show pain too much. Besides, reducing squint reduces facial muscle tightness, and hence, neck muscle tightness, and shoulder muscle tightness, and so on. It's a nice in-the-know excuse. Of course, boozing less reduces tightness too, but let's not get ridiculous.
- Stop at every drinking fountain you come across. This could well save your wretched life. Stopping at every bar you come across just might be counter-productive.
- Wear or carry a bandanna or some other sop-cloth. And wring it out with pride; just don't take a good whiff of the damn thing. I use a rebel flag do-rag sometimes – after all, the only thing better than sopping up my stinky sweat with the Stars And Bars would be wiping my ass with it. And if that comment bothers you, lick me – that stupid war has been over for quite a few weeks now. Get on with present day life, please.
- Don't run upwind of any sexy passer-by that you might want to make a feeble attempt at impressing. Lying in the sweet sunshine on a towel, with a cooler and tunes, would have made a better impression anyway.
- Probably the only thing you will easily pass is gas, and do so prudently, to avoid surprises. Nuff said.

Well, I got through it OK, I reckon. It was just a conscience-clearer, of course: get the physical fitness obligation out of the way, and now you can cut loose. Let the buzzin' commence!

There were a few spots I wanted to check out in this city, but for a while, I just drove randomly around, taking a left here, a right there, following whatever whim whimmed me. It's a good way to get the feel for what the city really is, instead of just taking the guided tour of the highlights. I've stumbled across some pretty cool things that way.

Once, in Montreal, on a similar random tour, I stopped to watch a little kids' baseball game. As it happened, I arrived just in time for the climactic final half-inning. Most of the kids seemed into it, but there were still several who were kicking at small rocks, or tugging on their leather strings of their gloves with their teeth.

The coach called encouragement to his pitcher: "I want a strike, *oui, monsieur!*" Huh?? I had never heard bi-lingual chatter before. It was weird. Then I began to try to listen in to what the kiddies were saying. It sounded like some were speaking English, and others French. I swear one kid on the bench asked another kid a question in French, and the second answered "no way." I'm sure they were not discussing the game. I don't think they even looked at the field the whole time I stood by the fence behind them

Now, I learned French. Well, I should say that I *was taught* French in grades 7 through 12. To be even more accurate, I was taught something vaguely similar to French in Grade 7, but Sister Helen Patrice kinda messed up. She was a cantankerous old nun with a limp, and my very compassionate predecessors (including big brudda Bob) had nicknamed her Woody. It was also her first year teaching French, and her pronunciation was, well, a tad off. We zoomed through ALM French 1, Level One with confidence, acing tests and such along the way, and went into eighth grade ALM French 1, Level Two with alacrity. BUT, once our new teacher heard the way we all spoke, she regretfully proclaimed that we had to go back to square one and take Level One all over again. Yup, same book, same tests, same workbook, but with different pronunciations here and there along the way. It was pretty much a waste of time. I think we could have adapted. So what if we *sounded* stupid? We all knew the grammar rules and such. It wasn't like we'd be going to fucking France anytime soon.

So now when ninth grade came along, and a foreign language was required, the six of us from St. Bart's faced a dilemma. Were we ready for ALM French 2, which required completion of ALM French 1, Levels One and Two? It was determined that the vocabulary gap would be too wide, so we were all placed in ALM French 1, Level One for the third straight year. It was an easy A, but it was godawful boring. If my teacher, Br. John Malloy, hadn't been so damn entertaining, it would have been intolerable. As it was, it was a total blowoff class with a stand-up comic as a teacher.

French 4, my senior year, was even more of a blowoff. Br. Joe Furio must have just been giving a break to us seniors who were loyal enough to keep taking his beloved French language. We took a month to read *Le Petit Prince*. All 100 pages of it. I, like my eight classmates, went out and got the English version of *The Little Prince*, skimmed through it in one night, and sat in class for four weeks and listened to Brother Joe read it to us in French.

Between Br. John's antics, and Br. Joe's method, I think I had begun to make up my mind that teaching might be a pretty good job for me. It was like: hell, if they could get away with that stuff and call it education, then how hard could the job be?? Maybe what really sold me was Miss Murphy's sophomore English class. She was a knockout (we all mourned when she got engaged), and it took guts for her to teach in the hormonally supercharged atmosphere of an all-boys' high school. The concept of analyzing song lyrics and calling it an English class really sang to me (pardon the pun). I always wished I could have taught a class where that was all we did every damn day.

It was interesting to learn a new language in high school, but it was mostly memorization and translation. These Montreal kids, at half that age or less, both spoke and thought fluently in both languages. They spoke whichever had the easiest delivery, or whichever jumped from the brain to the tongue quickest, or maybe just whichever one gave the best emphasis or sounded the coolest.

Maybe "I want a strike, yes sir" would have come across as just insincere chatter, but the more formal "*oui, monsieur*" gave the coach's words a little more urgency. I dunno, but it was an interesting study.

It was also a very short study because the game was over after about six pitches. The scrawny kid on the mound arced a twenty kilometer-per-hour fastball somewhere near the plate, and the chubby kid with the helmet the size of a circus tent waved his 400-gram piece of aluminum somewhere near the dirty horsehide sphere. No collision occurred, and a celebration began. St. Bruno's had defeated LSL, dix-neuf to onze. Gloves flew skyward and there was great rejoicing.

The two kids that I had overheard got really into glove-tossing. No sooner would their seldom-used mitts plop into the dust, than they were tossed up towards the tree branches again. The rest of the team had gone onto the field, but these two kids were oblivious to that; they kept laughing and throwing, laughing and throwing. One time, the smaller kid's mitt plopped down just a couple of feet from me. He raced over, gave me a huge grin, and picked it up, immediately threw it high in the air again, and ran off to retrieve it again.

Ahh, the simple joys of youth. I hardly ever toss my glove in the air any more...

So, next thing I knew, I was back in San Francisco in July of 2000, at the corner of Haight and Ashbury. Damn, I thought! This place is famous! I parked and went for a walk. Not a great neighborhood, Haight-Ashbury. My cavalier demeanor began to darken as I walked.

For a place renowned for the late-60's hippie movement and alternative-lifestyles, these few blocks were quite inhospitable. Instead of a feeling of welcome and relaxed life, I felt more and more tension. People's faces looked distrustful of me, nobody smiled, and everybody looked like they were just a nosehair or less above the poverty line.

I changed my mind, and headed back to the van. As I got there, a domestic squabble was taking shape. A tall, thin, but very lean and very well-muscled black man, and his shorter, braided, tight-bodied bitch were getting in each other's face "4 all 2 c" (as my online buddy Jase would say). They were both mid-twenties, and were not shy about attracting an audience. Other people began to step out of doorways to watch, and the more people came out to watch, the more the argument gained momentum.

Physical fitness aside – because he was a splendid specimen – the man looked ridiculous. He was shirtless and shoeless, but that part was OK. What was ludicrous was his pants. Taking the Marky Mark show-us-your-undies fashion to an extreme, this guy had his white Hanes boxer briefs pulled up way over his waist, like up to his navel, and his blue jeans belted **under** his butt. I can only speculate what was holding them up in the front. I'm sorry, but that just looked fucking dumb. Especially when he was trying to be all big'n'bad in this argument, and his underwear is beaming like a white cotton beacon.

As the confrontation escalated, they moved around the corner, expanding their audience, and I took that as my opening to depart in search of friendlier zones.

I had not planned to go to the baseball game. I was sitting in a very nice, upper-crusty bar down by the Wharf, enjoying a locally-brewed Gordon Marten-Beirzen, and the local six o'clock news was hyping the game. It was to be an inner-city rivalry, of sorts, between the Giants and the A's from across the Bay in beautiful Oakland. That didn't spark any interest in me, but the fact that the Giants were in their first season in their brand new Pacific Bell Park did appeal to me.

Like I said, it's more often the ballpark than the ball game that I go to see. Pac Bell was nice. Cold, but nice. I mean, here it was, early July, and I was wearing a tank top, a t-shirt, and a sweatshirt,

and I was still sitting clenched against the raw Pacific breeze, with my hands in my sleeves. The woman next to me had a goddamn knitted hat on.

Mark Twain's quip about "The coldest winter I ever spent was the summer I spent in San Francisco" was ringing true again.

I had memories from the famed 1984 trip, when Richie and Kevin and I posed atop Twin Peaks overlooking the city while Chico took our picture. Woefully unprepared in our thin hot weather attire, we were reduced to shivers by the mid-summer wind.

Chico had warned us too. Richie and I had traversed Nevada on a very stark route, and had entered California in the dead of night. Naturally, we celebrated. Richie gleefully exclaimed, "This state has a coast!" Well, we weren't far inside the border, and the buzz was still reeeeeaal fresh when a checkpoint suddenly loomed up ahead. The word "INSPECTION" was all I could initially make out, so I panicked appropriately. I stashed this, and stuffed that, and hid this and closed up that, and attempted to muster some degree of respectable demeanor as we rolled under the roof.

The only person there was a tall thin, long-haired, pony-tailed, Freewheelin' Franklin type dude who was leaning against a barrel, rolling a cigarette of some kind. He barely looked up from his task as he asked in a slow voice, "Do you have any fruits or vegetables?"

"Just us!" Richie exclaimed.

With a nod, the man let us be on our way. With a hoot and a holler, we welcomed ourselves into California.

We reached Lodi, in the central valley, near Sacramento (!), the next afternoon, and met up with Chico, who was living there at the time. Properly named Raymond Leone, nicknamed *Romero la Chiclero* by our Boston College cross-country teammates, and officially renamed Ramon Leone in an attempt to collect monetary or employment benefits as a minority, Chico was quite a character. Small in stature, he had tried to become a jockey, but could not lose any more weight off his 109-pound frame, and thus was a tad too heavy to be anything more than a stable boy or training rider.

His lasting legacy from that career attempt is an impressive circular scar on his left chest, halfway between his armpit and his nipple. Seems that he was on foot, leading a horse out to the track one morning, and the horse turned its head, opened its mouth, clamped its teeth down hard on Chico's chest, and refused to let go for quite a while. I imagine that was part of the reason that Chico sought another line of work.

Chico was also a member of our HFC 24-Hour Relay Team in August of '76. He had run in the Boston Marathon and done pretty well (2:51-and-change in his debut 'thon), so he was a logical candidate for the squad. Trouble was, he hadn't run a step since.

He was a trooper though, gutting out his miles through the day and night. He survived 22 of them, but when it came time for his turn on the 23rd go-round at about 7 a.m., we could not rouse him from his sleep. We were pretty sure he wasn't dead, but he just wasn't wakin' up for nothin' no how.

Anyway, enough character development.

We picked up Chico in Lodi, and headed west for San Francisco to visit Admiral Kevin, who was in the Navy and stationed in Oakland. It was about 102 degrees in Lodi and the valley, and we were attired appropriately for my non-AC van (i.e., shirtless and shorts). But as we drove up the east side of the mountains and headed for that tunnel that would pop us through into the Bay Area, Chico began to put on not just a shirt, but a light sweatshirt as well.

To our protests and guffaws, he just replied, "You'll see...It's forty degrees colder on the other side of this tunnel." He was right.

Kevin got the Admiral nickname when he flew back to Boston once to visit his home and homeys. Video cameras were still a bit of a novelty in those days, but being the gadget man that I always was, I had one, and we decided to use it to embarrass Kevin.



We hung out at Gate B21 of Logan Airport as his flight de-planed (what a dumb word that is), and as we saw him come through the doorway from the jetwalk thing, we pounced. With camera shouldered, lights beaming, and microphone in hand, Richie, Danny Mac, and myself rushed up to Kevin, grilling him with questions: "Admiral Bohmiller, can you tell us anything about the situation? How many people were killed? Is it true that you had sexual relationships with sheep?"

Reacting quickly, Kevin broke into a brisk race-walk stride, as we pursued him up the corridor, "Admiral, the people have a right to know! Do you have a statement for us?"

He ducked into the nearest men's room, and, of course, we followed, camera and lights still running. As he settled into a center urinal, with startled travelers on each side, our interrogation continued. The Admiral finally acknowledged us and gave us a statement: "You guys are assholes."

The coolest thing about that '84 SF tour was actually in Berkeley. Having chanced down a small street to grab a slice of pizza, we sauntered towards a small park where we heard some conga beat. One guy was calmly slapping away at his congas, and another was just setting up to join him on some bongos.

We leaned against something and lingered to listen for a while. Soon, another percussionist arrived and joined in the flow, playing off the conga's lead. Then another.

And in the next quarter-hour, several musicians with a variety of instruments – clarinet, flute, mandolin, and diverse percussion add-ons – had flocked into one mellow but lively jam session. Conga Man set the pace, and occasionally one of the others would kinda take the forefront with his/her own special touch for a cuppla minutes, then blend back into the mood. It was excellent.

Little did I know, at that time, that I would end up so many years later in San Francisco, in the middle of a 10000-mile roadtrip, shivering the night away at a Giants-A's game.

Pac Bell Park is, I guess, a step up from the Giants' old haunting grounds at Candlestick Park. I had heard how this new stadium, which faced in such a way that the chilling winds from the bay would not be so chilling, was much more fan friendly. Goddamn, man, if that's the case, then The 'Stick musta been built by Frigidaire, because this new stadium was c-o-l-d *COLD*.

But the game was OK. I sat with Hat Woman and watched a few innings in my seat near the left field foul pole before taking the full walking tour. Barry Bonds had a good game. I think he had a single, a long fly out, a triple, a home run, and a few nice catches in the field.

VISA ran a promotion in the middle of the game. They picked a fan deep in the center field seats, and gave him this big VISA sign to hold up. They announced his name – Gordon Sweeney – and said that if any Giant hit a home run in the upcoming inning, Gordo would win \$3000.

Well, Barry Bonds had been up at bat in the previous inning, but a teammate had been thrown out trying to steal second for the third out, so now Barry was leading off this inning.

Old Gordo was out there like dork, proudly waving the big VISA sign, and Barry tattooed the very first pitch. The ball soared through the chilly night sky, and landed about ten seats to Gordo's left, almost as if he had been holding up a bull's eye and Barry just missed it. One home run: \$3000, thank you very much, Mr. Bonds. And you can bet that Gordo will NOT take American Express.

On my walk, I took a look over the back wall of the right field grandstands, and shook my head at the handful of morons floating around all bundled up in their dumb little coats, waiting to go splashing after home run balls. Get a damn life, would ya please, guys??? Yeeeesh.

Out behind left field was the coolest thing I've ever seen at a stadium: The Tot Lot. It is a 60'-by-60' mini-field, marked with a small infield diamond on artificial turf, and walled in with high fences that were painted with crowd scenes and such, and any young kids who want can go there and pass the time throwing, batting, and fielding wiffle balls (the solid kind, not the kind with the holes that make them curve). That's cool, but what makes it *really really* cool is the big 10'x10' Jumbotron screen on the centerfield wall, with a non-stop live feed of the pitcher and batter! The first pitch I watched, some tiny blond kid smacked a dinger right over that screen, and grinningly circled the bases to high-fives from all.

I didn't like wiffleball too much as a kid, but I came to love it as an adult. In my kid years, it just seemed dumb because nobody I knew could throw the thing worth a damn, so of course nobody could hit it either. All my baseball buds thought you had to throw it as hard as you could, and the result was these wildly careening pitches that would either bounce four feet in front of you, end up way behind you, or be so far out of reach that you couldn't have hit it with a flagpole. Borrrrrrrrrrring. "Games" usually fizzled out after about an inning.

But somewhere around the mid-80's my cronies and myself found the love of the wiff. I credit Dash and B and Ban with opening my eyes to the fun of Home Field Rules, and a bizarre home run trot. The backyard at the Ashe abode wasn't huge, but it had a deep left field with a six-foot fence, and one tall-ass two-story house looming in center – well, “center” pretty much meant at the pitcher's back.

Between the pitcher's “mound” and home “plate” was the unique feature of Ashe Stadium – an in-ground swimming pool. And if you swatted a dinger, either way up on the roof, or over the left field fence (there really was no right field), you had to consummate the feat with a dive into the pool. If you didn't take the plunge, the run(s) didn't count; it would be scored an out. That was not an issue on a hot summer day, but not every good wiffleball day in the suburbs of Boston was a good swimming day.

It was at that venue that I discovered My Pitch. Having experimented with many different grips and releases, I hit on one that made me almost unhittable. It works indoors OK, but in outdoor breezes, it's amazing. The funny thing is that, in a game where pitches have big bends and breaks, My Pitch went dead straight. Yet, batter after batter, all with eyes widened and swinging mightily, would swoosh their thin yellow bats through empty air while My Pitch would float right by them. It was so much fun!!!

And it certainly wasn't speed that made it successful. This is one lazy-ass toss. The batter has more than enough time to prepare. I could throw it harder if I wanted, but I usually threw it pretty easy. It was more satisfying that way.

Though I'm loath to reveal the secret of My Pitch, it's probably not likely that I'll be playing much wiffleball any more. It's even less likely that anybody will be paying attention at this point: you're probably all flipping pages by now, rolling your eyes in exasperation, saying “What the holy hell does this have to do with San Francisco??”

But, I'll tell you anyway. Perhaps it is my own execution that makes My Pitch so special, and maybe you couldn't duplicate it anyway. Nyeahhhhhh.

The ball is held with open ovals facing directly down, with the index finger cradling the smooth plastic equator, and the second finger (does that have a name? I mean, other than the “fuck-you-finger”?) pressed closely, but not suffocatingly across three or four ovals, with the meat of the fingertip barely curling itself into the final opening. The Pitch is then delivered with an unfurling sidearm motion, letting the ball roll off the hand, with a flowing wave of the wrist, and an extended fuck-you-finger follow-through.

The ball will follow a path that is alarmingly straight and true. The batter licks his chops with eager anticipation, having been so accustomed to stupid twists and bends, and tightens his hands on the skinny grip of the bat. The ball approaches the contact zone looking as tantalizing as a frosty beer just poured from the tap. The would-be hitter coils for the attack, and begins to unleash.

Then a curious thing happens. The ball **s l o w s** down and waits a sec. The bat whooshes by like a bus on Main Street, and then the ball walks calmly by on the crosswalk. It's beautiful.

Sometimes, outdoors, when the breeze is right, it does another remarkable thing. As it slows to look both ways, it lifts itself on the breezes and rises over the bat, grinning like Peter Pan.

Ahhh, I love wiffleball now. Funny how the joys of a boy's game so often set in much later in life. Maybe you just have to hang on to the boy inside you. ;-)