



## Up The Valley: Far out

Laura Rafaty | Posted: Thursday, March 31, 2011 10:52 am

One of the downsides for single women moving to the Napa Valley is that it renders them suddenly geographically undesirable as potential dates for the majority of available single men living in the Bay Area (of which there are currently two dozen or so).

Women here wishing to date men in, say, San Francisco, must cope with a Geographic Undesirability Index (GUI) rating of at least 6, spiking to 8 in the summer (when there's traffic). This compares favorably to Sacramento and Santa Cruz women, who have a GUI closer to 10, which is the highest number there is, because any farther and why bother.

Other than Christopher Reeve, who used a time machine to travel back 60 years to date Jane Seymour in a movie, men as a rule are unwilling to drive more than 50 miles to date any woman, 25 if there's a toll bridge involved.

Whenever I hear about gas prices rising, I worry first about the impact on tourism as it impacts my shop, and then quickly shift my sympathies to those who would seek to lure a man up for a quiet home-cooked dinner when the guy has to pay \$3.80 a gallon. I truly believe that many men will choose celibacy, or switch teams entirely, rather than pay \$4 a gallon to drive to a woman's house.

This is why you often observe summer dates involving bicycling. I always wonder how much fun a woman is having as she pedals exhausted 25 feet behind her man in the 100-degree heat, knowing that she's going to have to pull off that helmet in the near future and let him see her hair. Men, of course, look great all sweaty with their hair sticking to their heads, and if they don't they simply shave it off so that the sweat literally beads off their domes like waxed apples in the rain.

But to reach the Sweaty Bicycle Date stage, or even the Dutch Treat at Tra Vigne stage with the hope of eventually reaching the mythic Dinner at the French Laundry Where He Pays stage, a man has to be lured up to the Napa Valley in the first place.

Of course, local women could date local available single men, but I know him and he's pretty booked up these days. So the GUI issue must be tackled head on, and the only way for a woman to overcome a negative GUI rating is to be exceptionally rich or hot, preferably both, with a cellar full of fine wine, access to ungettable restaurant reservations, and a set of balloons that would be the envy of Yountville's Adventures Aloft.

Incidentally, there is no corresponding GUI index for Napa Valley men, because it is a proven fact that women will travel any distance to date. Incarcerated for life, conjoined to a Siamese twin, still living with mother in Antioch, it's all workable if the guy is unmarried, mostly straight and not a certifiable lunatic (this last one is negotiable).

And if you're a single woman living in the Napa Valley, you should prepare yourself to be rejected by the lunatic, conjoined, jailbird whose mother lives in Antioch on the grounds that you are just too darn far from San Quentin for a quick one should he temporarily escape, at least until gas prices go down closer to \$3.

It makes me wonder whether St. Helena isn't having the same problem. As opposed to conveniently-located, reconstructed, unconstrained, open-after-8 p.m. Napa; and lotioned-up, aromatherapied, way-to-a-man's-heart-is-through-his-stomach Yountville; is St. Helena looking at a GUI rating of 6, spiking to 8 in the summer (due to traffic)?

Could the City overcome this GUI rating by demonstrating that it is already both hot and rich? Perhaps it's time for our City to tart itself up a bit, show a little leg, and pass out gas coupons. The Chamber could market St. Helena and its single women simultaneously, publishing a Hot Women Winemakers Pinup Calendar, or the St. Helena Hospital Guide to Women Who've Recently Undergone Successful Augmentation Surgery.

Meanwhile we can hope that the first female president makes it tax deductible to buy gas for dates in excess of 100 miles from one's principal residence, and urge President Obama to implement his gas tax holiday to promote local tourism and to encourage treating a girl to dinner and a movie once in a while.

And that's a stimulus package guaranteed to make the single ladies of St. Helena smile.

*(Laura Rafaty is the owner of Pennaluna on Main Street, a resident of St. Helena, a former attorney and Broadway theatrical producer and an author and columnist.)*



## Up The Valley: I Like Mike

Laura Rafaty | Posted: Thursday, May 12, 2011 9:57 am

It's amazing how a person's appearance can cause a visceral reaction. Take Timothy Geithner, secretary of the Treasury. He seems calm and tidy, and certainly lots of people like him, and by people I mean large multinational corporations and global financial institutions. But for me, he will always suffer from being a dead ringer for a namesake boy who sat behind me in elementary school.

Timmy always smelled like sour milk, was an accomplished nose-picker, and whined incessantly. So even if Timothy Geithner did not ignore small business, negotiate sweetheart deals for financial institutions, and fail to pay his own taxes, I would still feel an almost irrepressible urge to take him out behind the auditorium and smack him around.

Many Americans who share my feelings toward Mr. Geithner are now looking for a presidential candidate who can not only run the country, but who can also outrun a Wall Street coup d'état. Desperate Americans seek a leader who combines Warren Buffet's strategic savvy and Tony Soprano's crime boss bravado with hair every bit as high as Ronald Reagan's. Quite naturally, they have turned to Donald Trump.

Much as I relish the image of The Donald sitting across the desk from Geithner, pointing his finger and saying: "You're Fired," I'm not quite prepared to see the White House columns plated in gold and the Capital Rotunda repurposed as the new home of the Miss Universe Pageant (unless he decides to put that global event in the hands of Hillary Clinton, who would allow chunky contestants with glasses, add pop quizzes about the Treaty of Versailles, and employ Bill as an enthusiastic judge.)

But honestly, haven't we had enough of financial insiders in government for a while? Is there any difference, other than stylistic, between the Wall Street Bulls and the Trump Tower Toucan? I'm sure we could come up with a leader to challenge a Trump presidency with less East Coast flatulence and more West Coast flair.

So who can we get to challenge a world-famous, competitive, ambitious, self-promoting, media-savvy, empire-building, TV-hosting, bestselling book-writing, ornate taste-leaning, winery, vineyard and landmark restaurant-owning entrepreneur from New York? How about our own world-famous, competitive, ambitious, self-promoting, media-savvy, empire-building, TV-hosting, bestselling book-writing, ornate taste-leaning, winery, vineyard and landmark restaurant-owning, entrepreneur from Napa Valley? That's right, let's dump The Donald and vote for The Michael — Chiarello, that is.

The Michael has a leg up on The Donald in a number of respects: First, The Michael is more attractive than The Donald, and I say this having seen The Michael not only in person, but from behind while he was wearing bicycle shorts. Between Fifth Avenue, Yountville and my mailbox, I have observed countless photos of them both, not to mention the live specimens, and I can categorically state that we must avoid a Trump visage on Mount Rushmore at all costs.

The Michael's photos are not only less frightening for the children, they almost always include some kind of food — a subliminal message that a vote for The Michael means the Bolognese will be flowing across America.

And The Michael is not going to have a "birther" problem, as I understand him to hail from Turlock, which I am informed is a city somewhere in California and not, as I originally thought, a device The Michael sells in his NapaStyle catalog to keep rival chefs from boosting the best Thanksgiving turkeys from the freezer.

His election would be historic, as it would make him the first Italian-American to occupy the White House, since Rudy Giuliani's attempt to achieve that distinction fell short when he declared himself a candidate in 2008 then forgot to actually run for office.

The Michael would prove a formidable adversary for foreign leaders, as he could manipulate their blood sugar levels during negotiations, achieving peace in the Middle East through strategic application of cannoli. And to ensure America's world domination, he could appoint Padma Lakshmi as Ambassador to the U.N., since she can get any man, and probably many women, to do whatever she wants.

And he comes equipped with his own body doubles just like Saddam Hussein (he cannot possibly be in New York, Hollywood, Positano and Yountville simultaneously).

Plus, the Oval Office would boast the first presidential desk made entirely out of wine barrel staves, lovingly made to Nonna's specifications and available for purchase at [napastyle.com](http://napastyle.com).

And that's capitalism Americans can believe in.

*(Laura Rafaty is the owner of Pennaluna on Main Street, a resident of St. Helena, a former attorney and Broadway theatrical producer and an author and columnist.)*



## Up The Valley: Most alarming

**Laura Rafaty | Posted: Thursday, February 3, 2011 12:00 am**

Just before Christmas, I tried to reach City Hall but was informed that the government employees had been furloughed.

From a pure public relations standpoint, I think this looks bad in front of the holiday visitors because it might lead the uninformed to conclude that the city of St. Helena has no money. Instead of calling them furloughs, why not call them Extended Lunchbreaks Without Pay, or better yet, Congés Non Payés, since everything sounds better in French.

We can then create a list of dubious municipal holidays to invoke whenever we're worried that the payroll checks might bounce, like Bank President's Birthday or St. Mondavi Day.

The city will need to keep the citizenry apprised of this fluid holiday schedule, but unfortunately, local government is slightly clumsy at the dissemination of information. Officials mail out nondescript white envelopes or undersized beige postcards whispering in tiny typeface that something big is about to happen, which we ignore as junk mail.

If the city really wants our attention, it should print notices on bubble-gum-scented, neon-colored paper including valuable coupons people will read and save, like: "We're considering raising local sales taxes, meanwhile please enjoy a free scoop of ice cream at the Big Dipper" or "You are being fined for excessive water usage, so take 10 percent off dry-cleaning at Klass Cleaners."

I always chuckle when the City Council suggests that the full text of its abbreviated communications can be viewed online, not realizing that a significant percentage of local residents who received a computer from their grandkids for Christmas have tossed the electronics in a closet and utilized the box it came in as a nice new litter pan for the cat.

Let's face it: We need to get this communication thing sorted, because local, county and state governments have much critical information to share with us, what with the water rationing days, the Spare the Air days, the homeland security levels, the government slow-downs and shut-downs, the pollen levels, the pesticide sprayings, the heat and frost warnings, the power outages, the leafy sharpshooter spotting, the food recalls, the Caltrans road improvement delays, the public hearings in anticipation of tree removal, and the public hearings in anticipation of faux Tuscan villas being constructed next door.

We could activate our police department telephone emergency warning system, which has proven so effective in alerting residents to the color the police department is thinking of repainting its squad cars. Or we could distribute updates on television during daily tests of the emergency broadcast system, although this might increase the frequency of citizens punching their fists through the screen as they miss the last 10 seconds of whatever sporting event they were watching or Erica's latest wedding on "All My Children."

I was going to suggest that we somehow piggyback onto that eardrum-splitting volunteer firefighter alarm, which sounds with such frequency, but I am informed that this is one of those local sacred cows I'm not supposed to tip over.

I certainly cannot deny the twisted pleasure residents derive from observing visitors' reactions to hearing the siren for the first time. Hapless day-trippers run toward nonexistent bomb shelters, assume the duck-and-cover position, or stand stricken like deer in the headlights shrieking: "Is it the Big One?"

But seriously, is it good business to scare the tourists like this? I know we want to drive them to drink, but couldn't we rally the volunteers with a sound that's more conducive to being on vacation, like the blowing of Hawaiian conch shells or perhaps a chorus of bagpipes playing "Amazing Grace"?

My dream warning system would be our own 24-hour radio station called Radio Free St. Helena. An alternative to the Spanish-language and religious stations currently holding a monopoly on my radio antenna, our city station could provide entertainment for visitors while conveying essential messages to the locals.

Imagine families huddled together around their tuners, like resistance fighters awaiting the signal that allied paratroopers have landed in the shrubbery. Alerts could be tucked in between local programs like Jazz from Vineyard Valley with Mike &

Wesla, or Craig Bond's Hour of Many Choirs.

Chilly winter evenings that do not fall on Spare the Air Days would be signaled by the Doors' "Light My Fire," unsafe summer temperatures announced by Martha Reeves & The Vandellas singing "Heat Wave," and of course, government furloughs heralded by the tune "Take This Job and Shove It."

And that's a message we can all hear loud and clear.

(Laura Rafaty is the owner of Pennaluna on Main Street, a resident of St. Helena, a former attorney and Broadway theatrical producer and an author and columnist.)