

# Sargeant Potts's Lonely Face Club Band

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## Friday

Wow, what a difference *another* week makes.

I'm sending this issue out a few days early, on Friday evening, because I want to try to spend the weekend unwinding a little bit. I won't have an opera to review, unfortunately, as the rest of the Metropolitan Opera's season has been canceled. I called to ask them if they would do a special live-stream performance for me, so I could review it for my newsletter, but for some reason they hung up the phone. We won't be going out to see a movie any time soon, although we have some movies to watch at home, including a few we haven't yet seen, so I might have some reviews next week

I may try to do some sort of live stream with Grace on a platform like Twitch, or possibly Facebook. If a lot of us wind up confined to our homes I think we will want to lean into the live-streaming social media — I'm imagining a Lonely Faces show, since we will be trying not to touch our own faces, and not able to see our friends' faces.

If I really wind up stuck at home, I could record a four-hour daily podcast, and invite other podcasters to call in as guests, while they invite me to be a guest on their shows; we could create an interlocking meta-podcast, potentially of nearly infinite boredom.

If I do such a thing, I'll announce it on Facebook — although I am only rarely on Facebook — and on Twitter (I'm **@paulrpotts** on Twitter).

## News

Things have settled down. My heart rate has gradually come down over the course of the week. After I made my frustrations known last week at work, I was basically told that I needed to make nice. So I've done what I could to make nice. Apologies don't actually cost me anything, so I've apologized. We've basically told the team in China that we're going to solve the serial bridge chip problem and get back to them. So I've scaled way back on communication with the team in China this week and focused on some design work. I've ordered evaluation

boards for several different parts and I've been testing them and figuring out the pros and cons. I've also been doing what I can to solve a tricky bug involving corrupted serial data. But this one will probably need my co-worker's help, and he's been at a conference in California all week.

I had gotten quite emotionally involved in this project, in part because I have advocated and pushed for it for almost a year, as a way of justifying my continued employment. A year ago, I really didn't have enough to do, having succeeded at the last few major development projects, but lacking new ones on the horizon. So I needed to figure out a way to apply my skills towards making money for my employer. Any day when I'm not doing that leaves me feeling nervous, because I realize just how easily someone might decide they don't need my high-paid ass in their chair anymore.

I usually get the big anxiety hit *before* a thing happens. When I got married, I was actually nervous meeting the priest and doing the paperwork, but I was not at all nervous on my wedding day itself. I knew what was happening at the meeting. By the time the wedding day came around, I was completely used to the idea. Similarly, I had a deep sense last week of what was coming to America — not every detail, but an overall sense of the severity of what was, at that point, inevitable, but still not widely recognized. It kind of sucks to be a Cassandra. It's hard on the heart.

I've done a little bit of time on the treadmill. It was an odd experience with a heart rate elevated by stress, because I started out at 120 beats per minute, twice my usual resting heart rate. After ten minutes at one mile per hour, it was still 120 beats per minute. After another ten minutes at two miles per hour, it was still 120 beats per minute. I had to go past three miles per hour for a while to actually get it above 120. That was weird. But I felt better afterwards, and slept better.

I've also realized that a global pandemic and a crisis at work and coffee don't actually work well together. Just reducing my coffee intake did not seem to be enough. So I have switched from a big morning hit of coffee to a big morning hit of black tea. I'm still adjusting to the change — I've been sleepy by late afternoon. Until further notice I'm the Tea Underachiever.

Finally, there is a big factor that has been missing. On Wednesday night I showed the kids the film *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* from 1989. This is one of the rare perfect films. It's dumb and ridiculous, but funny and warm-hearted. The kids loved it, and I found myself laughing along with them like I haven't laughed in a long time. And I felt so much better afterwards. It turns out that a life fixated on work, and nervously obsessing with current events, without taking any time to do the things that are fun and soothing, is not very healthy. That's pretty much where I've been for a long time — working long hours, coming home late to kids that are already melting down, and spending the last few hours of the day doing only unpleasant and stressful things with them, like arguing about chores, listening to them fight, breaking up the fights, trying to keep them

focused on chores, and changing blown-up diapers.

I need to have more fun, and on a regular basis.

## Election Thoughts

It wasn't a great week for Sanders supporters. On Tuesday morning I put on protective gloves and stood in line for all of thirty seconds to vote. (Meanwhile, elsewhere in the state, students had to stand in line for hours). This isn't my first rodeo and I knew there was a good chance Super Tuesday wouldn't go well for Sanders. And it didn't go well, although once again the exit polls have showed huge discrepancies, and California took so long to process votes that the *narrative* kept him from clearly winning California before the news cycle had moved on. And now the pundits and wonks are all insisting that Sanders should drop out immediately.

I would like to point out that at this same point in the election cycle in 2008, Obama was twice as far behind in the delegate count as Sanders is now — and he *lost* California. So pundits claiming that it is now impossible for Sanders to win are ignoring precedent and arguing in bad faith.

I would also like to point out that if Sanders dropped out today, the voters in 26 states and Puerto Rico would effectively have no influence whatsoever on the Democratic primary, which would be a particularly demoralizing form of disenfranchisement for those voter.

I was feeling defeated for about a day and a half, but then I reminded myself that this struggle is about far more than one candidate in one race. I made another donation to the Sanders campaign and resolved to continue the fight, both in the small, over-hyped realm of electoral politics, and in the real world.

## Coronavirus News

Today employees of my company finally got some official guidance from management in the form of a “town hall” video. It's not bad response as far as it goes, but the problem is it doesn't go nearly far enough.

My company's headquarters and main manufacturing facilities are in Newton, New Jersey. This afternoon, the first COVID-19 death in New Jersey was reported. The New Rochelle “hot zone” is just about an hour away.

It's quite likely that there are already employees working in the buildings in Newton that are infected with COVID-19.

They are rolling out a thorough cleaning regimen for surfaces likely to transmit disease several times daily. That's great. But they are still rolling out plans to ask workers who can work from home to do so. And those employees, such as engineers, don't tend to need to work shoulder-to-shoulder as workers do in some of the manufacturing spaces.

They are “studying” social distancing measures.

They haven’t rolled out any sort of additional sick time over and above the existing paid time off, which combines sick time with vacation time. If they have to close manufacturing facilities, which they said was “unlikely,” they are advising employees that they will be eligible to collect unemployment, and if they get sick, they have some protections against losing their jobs because of the provisions of the Family Medical Leave Act.

I wrote the engineering staff and managers in our facility a note:

I am risking annoying everyone by sharing my personal advice on what to do outside of work.

I included the link to the Flatten the Curve web site, and wrote a bit more about social distancing:

The majority of the population will probably eventually be infected, but the idea is to slow down the rate of transmission enough that the sickest people who need urgent medical attention won’t overwhelm the system all at once, which is happening in Italy.

If everyone does really well at the “social distancing,” the best-case scenario is that we all look a bit foolish for doing something unnecessary. That’s called the “prevention paradox.”

I cited an article that cites G. Rose’s definition of the “prevention paradox,” as:

A preventive measure which brings much benefit to the population offers little to each participating individual.

And goes on:

This has been the history of public health — of immunization, the wearing of seat belts and now the attempt to change various life-style characteristics. Of enormous potential importance to the population as a whole, these measures offer very little — particularly in the short term-to each individual; and thus there is poor motivation of the subject.

Then I continued:

Most of us are low-risk, but we all know people who are high-risk. The motivation shouldn’t necessarily be “keep myself safe from the virus,” it should be “keep myself from becoming a vector and putting more vulnerable people at risk.”

Grace and I are curtailing all activities outside our home for the immediate future, pulling the kids out of choir and religious education. I’m not going to any restaurants, even drive-through. When I go out to buy something, I wear gloves and dispose of them afterwards.

I am also periodically wiping down the parts of my car I touch — steering wheel, controls, etc. — with Clorox wipes. Masks do not seem to be currently recommended except for infected people. I'm sure you've already heard the handwashing recommendations. You don't have to stay locked up — we are taking the kids out to walk on trails. But we are keeping them away from people outside our household.

If the “social distancing” works as intended we will have some frustrating, boring times at home, especially with kids. But if that's all that happens, we did great.

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