



# Coronavirus in My San Francisco Bay Area Backyard

(Author's Note: Here is a May 11 60-day update of this article. Earlier, I put up a 30-day Easter Sunday 4-12-20 update. Coronavirus became present on March 9 in my own city, Berkeley, CA. And it originated in a place I studied as a travel journalist some years ago, Wuhan, China. I give you a travel journalist's perspective on the developing local, national, and worldwide crisis. I put up the original article when Coronavirus in the U.S. seemed to be a "manageable concern." Then I updated daily for two weeks as the concern became major. As of Easter Sunday, we were in a U.S. and worldwide crisis. At 60 days, the crisis has deepened.)

# **Coronavirus COVID-19 in My San Francisco Bay Area Backyard: A Travel Journalist's Perspective**

By Lee Foster

As I update this article, I do so leaving the original article intact, below the updates. The Coronavirus anxiety and disruption continue to develop exponentially. Who would have guessed, when I wrote the original article, 3-9-20, that within two weeks life in America would be so altered?

My updates show the latest developments on top. My updates were daily from 3-11-20 to 3-23-20 and will in the future be occasional. The updates are a record of how I, as one citizen, in Berkeley, CA, who also happens to be a travel journalist familiar with Wuhan China, witness the emerging crisis, both locally and nationally. The updates will end when the crisis gets resolved.

It is amazing to think of how the “manageable concern” status of the Coronavirus 3-9-20 became a “local, national, and worldwide crisis” by 3-23-20. Our lives will change, going forward.

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## **Updates (Latest on Top)**

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### **Update at 60 Days, May 11:**

It would have been very difficult to imagine our world 60 days out, after I had posted about COVID-19 on March 9. However, quite soon, on March 11, I began to sense a profound change, so I committed to a commentary each day for two weeks. Now I'll comment once a month.

(The original post remains at the bottom. All subsequent posts are sequential, most recent at top.)

My perspective is one of a citizen who experiences COVID-19 in my own backyard, Berkeley, CA. I am also a travel journalist who has been to Wuhan, China, where the outbreak originated. I want to provide, for historical perspective, how this virus affected our world so dramatically.

So, here is a brief update at 60 days. I'll step back in at 90 days.

## **The Troubling Statistics**

Everyone goes to the state-of-the-art John's Hopkins website at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> to get the bad news update of the day. As of May 11, here are the disturbing truths. Everyone understands that these numbers are substantially under-reports, for various reasons:

Cases Worldwide: 4.2M

Deaths Worldwide: 285K

Cases U.S.: 1.3 M

Deaths U.S.: 80K

To these stats, we add each day a reality unthinkable 60-days ago: Unemployment

30M people Unemployed in the U.S. This is also a major under-report, due to the way the unemployment system works. It is projected that Unemployment could reach 25% of the workforce. Nothing like this has been seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

## **Each Family Copes with the Change**

Every individual and family now assess how they will survive, short and long term. The term may be far longer than we suspect.

I am fortunate to be a low-spending senior with savings, who owns my condo. I have

modest monthly cash needs, and I have cash savings. However, many individuals and families are in a different situation. Anyone renting a place in my Berkeley/Oakland area needs to generate a huge amount of money just to cover rent. The homeless encampments around Berkeley/Oakland continue to rise.

I am fortunate that my two boys, Paul and Bart, through their entrepreneurial skill and hard work, have arranged for the financial security of their families. Paul's two young boys, Charlie and Paul Jr, are home from school. I participate some days via Facetime with Charlie on our phones to do his reading and writing. All our lives changed.

Last year I did an [article on the El Paso area of Texas](#). El Paso is a progressive place with a lot of hard-working people, building a better life for their families. It breaks my heart to see two-mile lines of cars on TV in El Paso, with people waiting to receive a charity box of food to sustain their families. Will the social fabric of America survive being ripped apart by this pandemic?

I do my editorial work at my condo and go for a well-masked neighborhood walk each day. I get food once a week at the 7-9 a.m. Tuesday or Thursday Senior Hours at my local Safeway. Usually, supplies at the store are somewhat limited but adequate.

## **My Travel Industry Suffers**

My travel industry providers and journalist/PR colleagues all suffer greatly in this time. The big players and the small-time operators experience stress together.

I think of all the entities I have celebrated in [my California books](#) and in the 500+ articles on my website [www.fostertravel.com](http://www.fostertravel.com) (about 200 of which are on California). For about 60 days now, these entities have had little revenue. What will happen to the mom-and-pop B&B providing that special experience on the Mendocino Coast? Or to that young couple who put all their savings into their dream restaurant in Carmel? Or to the naturalist who devotes his career to guiding people on a nature tour of Yosemite?

Likewise, I lament the destruction of the travel experiences close to bankruptcy in

the 300+ articles I have on worldwide travel. I think of all the airline employees who will lose out as their airlines go bankrupt. Cruise ship crews manning the experience of the big ships were thriving until 60 days ago. Folks who work on cruise ships or own (even as shareholders) cruise ships will experience great losses.

The question in travel will be: do you have the resilience and the deep pockets to survive in the no-revenue period? And how long will that period last?

## **Can We Imagine the Crisis at 90 Days?**

I will be back with a short update again at 90 days. I offer no wisdom, only grief, with a brief report, from a citizen in Berkeley who is also a travel journalist.

An asteroid-level destroyer has hit Earth. However, we did not see the enemy with clarity. We failed to anticipate and prepare for a tiny, invisible-to-the-naked-eye, microbe-size enemy.

Given the rapidity of the crisis development, it would be risky to predict how things will look at 90 days.

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## **Update at 30 days, 4-12-20, Easter Sunday:**

Dear Friends,

This is a brief 30-day Easter Sunday update on my original post of 3-9-20 and then my daily updates for two weeks starting 3-11-20. I will post next at 60 days.

My usefulness in all this is that I give a citizen report, as a travel journalist who was in Wuhan years before the outbreak. I document now how all this affects me as I live in Berkeley, CA.

When I did my original post 3-9-20, it appeared that the Coronavirus would be a “manageable concern.” There was one reported case in my town of Berkeley, CA. Then in the next two days the situation became more worrisome.

No one could estimate that 30 days later we would stand at “reported” cases as  
1,835,373 cases worldwide

including

547,681 cases in the U.S., leading all other infected nations.

And

113, 362 deaths worldwide

Including

21,696 in the U.S., leading all other infected nations.

Moreover, 17 million breadwinners in the U.S. are suddenly unemployed and filing claims, with many more not even able to get through the crashed Internet or jammed phone lines to apply. About a third of renters could not pay their April 1 rents. Long lines of cars now show up at food distribution points for a box of food.

We all know that the “reported” cases in the U.S. are lower than actual. I have personal knowledge of colleagues and friends, especially in New York City and in CA, who are deathly sick at home. They have all the symptoms. Their personal doctors know of their cases, but recommend they tough it out at home, and save the limited testing capacity for others. As a citizen, it remains embarrassing for me to accept that Wuhan and South Korea can test so completely. Yet we, with all our tech competence and production capacity, can’t test robustly.

Here are a few comments on my Local and our National situation.

## **My Local Berkeley Coronavirus**

I now live in my lockdown condo in North Berkeley. With improving Zoom and Facetime skills, I have some virtual-human contact. All meetings, from family to organizations, which would have been in person, are now virtual.

At 3 p.m. each weekday I assist with homeschooling of my grandson, Charlie, using

Facetime on my and his iPhone and our simultaneous looks on our laptops at his Oakland Unified School District lessons. The schools are in catch-up mode for home-schooling. Self-education is now the new pattern.

I go each Tuesday at 7 a.m. for the “Senior Hour” shopping at my local Safeways, actually a large and a small Safeway within 6 blocks. The stores are about 80% stocked, and I just hope that grocery workers do not start to get sick. That would really slow thing down. But I have reserve supplies to survive in an utter crisis for perhaps another 30 days if the food situation became totally dire. The Smithfield pork producers report today their national pork processing shutdown because employees have Coronavirus. These supply-side close-downs of agricultural crop and animal protein distribution are worrisome.

Since my beloved Berkeley Y closed, I dearly miss my 9 p.m. lap swims each night and soak in the hot spa, while absorbing the liberal political views of my fellow and gal soakers. Fortunately, I can walk on a treadmill in my small condo. While some may prefer to exercise while meditating, I like to get on the treadmill and listen to the bad news each night to keep current on things.

My mornings each day include a couple of hours of just getting through the emails and news. As a travel journalist, just about every entity in worldwide travel wants me to be fully aware of their plight. The news is not good.

Everyone assesses how they and their families will survive as economic disruption deepens. I am fortunate that I and my immediate family, my boys Paul and Bart and their families, have the cash reserves and employment opportunities to survive.

## **Our National Coronavirus Situation**

Gavin Newsom of CA and Andrew Cuomo of NY emerge as national leaders willing to address the problems head-on. National leadership by Donald Trump remains problematic, moving from “initial denial” to “it’s under control” to “let’s blame everyone else” to “let’s open up the economy again soon,” regardless of human suffering and death. With spring and summer weather proceeding, the mixed message from the top may cause citizens to lose self-control.



Gradually the U.S. has emerged as the country worldwide with the most outbreaks and death. Since our cases and deaths emerged later than in other nations, the lack of swift national response becomes more worrisome.

The disruption of the economy becomes more acute with each day. In my own sector of travel, tourism, and hospitality, as one might imagine, the losses are extreme. Restaurants close, hotels empty, and airlines fly at about 4% of the traffic they experienced just a month ago. How will economic structures, large and small, survive? Every worker lost to an enterprise also incurs a “re-training” cost for a new worker in the future.

In conclusion, Coronavirus has moved from “manageable concern” to “national crisis” in 30 days.

I’ll check in a month from now, on May 12, with a further update.

I draw some strength, as I mention in a parallel article, in dealing with my own adversity, from a special source. My source is the example of adversity in the lives of three great leaders in California history. First is Junipero Serra and his Carmel Mission. Second is Manager Rotchev and the Russian Fort Ross he was charged with liquidating. Third is John Sutter, whose Sutter’s Fort agriculture dream ended with the California Gold Rush. Adversity experience occurs in every generation. See my article at

<https://www.fostertravel.com/dealing-with-my-coronavirus-adversity-the-strength-i-gain-from-three-historic-californians/>

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## **Earlier Updates:**

# **Two Weeks That Changed Our Future**

3-23-20: Not since the Cuban Missile Crisis, when I was a student at Notre Dame in October 1962, have two weeks in American life thrown me and the country into such



stress. Only the measured and firm guidance of leaders such as Gavin Newsom in CA and Andrew Cuomo in NY give some direction to a troubled populace. The “concerned” status of the Coronavirus 3-9-20, when I wrote my original article, became a “worldwide crisis” by 3-23-20.

## **Local/Berkeley/California:**

Our local parks in Marin County close because the concept of getting out in Nature for mental and physical health proved unworkable. Crowding throngs on the trails and beaches were disastrous, making Social Distancing impossible. Possibly, the massive East Bay Parks System in my East Bay area will close also.

Economic hardship looms for many. Everyone assesses where they are and where their family stands financially. Do folks have the cash reserves to ride this out? Many will not. 3 in 5 American workers are hourly. I went to my local Andronico’s Safeway this morning at 8 a.m. and was able to purchase fresh produce for the coming days. The store, stripped bare a few days ago, now presents itself relatively stocked. Many hotel workers and restaurant workers now lack paychecks. Unemployment claims skyrocket. April 1 rents, mortgage payments, and property taxes fall due in California.

Our local BART transit system cuts back its schedule, indicating its ridership is down to 10% of normal.

## **National/Worldwide:**

Folks who want to know the latest, rather than look away to keep calm, check daily the respected John’s Hopkins website at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>. The daily news is not good today and will likely not be good for a long time. The site records only the “reported” cases. A Columbia University projection argues that the actual number may be 11x. But for recorded cases worldwide, we are now at 372,563. Both Italy and the U.S. numbers rise quickly, and may soon overtake China. In deaths, we are at 16,381, with Italy way ahead of China and other countries at 6,077.

Our Surgeon General asserts today that there is worse news ahead. The lockdown of

California and the stay-at-home encouraged by political leaders such as Andrew Cuomo raises concern with Donald Trump. He tweeted today that the inconvenience of lockdown may be worse than the medical problem warrants. A mixed message from the president will require review later. I suspect that Donald Trump, as the suffering increases, will regret his comments of 3-23-20 that, "We cannot let the cure be worse than the problem." The "cure" is the stay-at-home that 11 states have in place as of tonight, for the "problem," which is 46,332 Americans sick and 540 Americans dead, with the numbers moving up sharply. Donald Trump continues, "Our country was not built to be shut down."

New sectors of first-responder infections worry many. 98 NYPD officer are now positive. A reported 111 Defense Department people now test positive. Worldwide, new infections in stressful places add to the record. Syria reports its first infection. One can only hope that the infection does not reach the refugee camps of Syria and the bombed world of Yemen. Afghanistan notes its first death from Coronavirus.

## **The Economic Slowdown**

Everywhere, the economic slowdown shows itself in the travel sector that is my specialty. Just about every entity in travel that has me on their email list has alerted me to their slowdown. Typically, Hawaiian Air today wrote me that they now cancel numerous flights in their schedule. Fly into Hawaii today and you will face quarantine for 14 days. India's 750 million people now proceed into lockdown. Boris Johnson puts Great Britain on lockdown. Boeing suspends all production for two weeks. Each day it appears that we are closer to a postponement of the Japan Olympics. Bed Bath and Beyond closes all stores. A parade of economic and social slowdown marches past us each day.

One can only speculate where we will be in another week, or another month, or another year. The only encouraging news seems to be that Wuhan and China appear to have cut down their new infection rate, assuming they are reporting truthfully. A couple of years from now we will assess whether "free" societies (such as Italy and the U.S.) could marshal the citizen cooperation that an "authoritarian" government (China) could order to reduce virus spread.

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# **Nature Trails Overwhelmed by Coronavirus Escapees Longing for Social Distancing**

3-22-20: The idea of stay-at-home but get out for a walk in Nature for mental and physical well-being and fresh air has thrown thousands together in Nature. The desire for Social Distancing has produced an unintended opposite consequence.

## **Local/Berkeley/California:**

Ironically, the stay-at-home order has packed thousands of people together in an escape to Nature. Friends went to Inspiration Point in Berkeley's Tilden Park yesterday and said the parking lot was jammed. Stinson Beach in Marin County was a traffic mess as folks tried to get there for fresh air, a walk, and impossible Social Distancing on a crowded beach. Point Reyes proved so popular as an escape that the authorities may now close it down.

One constructive step is that communities and businesses are setting up their "relief funds" to help with survival. My city of Berkeley City contributes \$3 million and asks government agencies, philanthropic organizations, and the community to pitch in at [www.BerkeleyReliefFund.org](http://www.BerkeleyReliefFund.org). Money will go to those distressed. In my neighborhood, Alice Waters, who has perhaps the most successful restaurant of all time, has sent me and all her other friends, patrons, and media folks a request that we chip in for a fund for her staff, who are now out of work. A month ago, all was well.

Each of us, as individuals, families and communities assess where we are, whether we will survive, and where this going. In my own case, I hang out in my condo in Berkeley and improve my "almost live" communication skills with Facetime, WhatsApp, Skype, and Zoom. Each day I experience some "almost live" visual communications with friends and family, sometimes with a glass of chilled Chardonnay in hand. Tomorrow I will go to my local Safeway in the early morning and hope the shelves are not stripped.

## **National/Worldwide:**

Possibly the most informative site about our Coronavirus situation for folks who want to worry with accurate actual information is the respected Johns Hopkins site at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> Look at it with caution if you prefer to look away from our troubled world. The data is only what is “reported,” of course. Some experts say, even for our own U.S. situation, that “reported” is only 10% of the actual story in our “un-tested” scene.

Each day I look at the Johns Hopkins data to get a snapshot of where we are. The site shows me, as of this moment, that we have 328,275 reported cases worldwide, with the U.S. #3 worldwide with 31,057 reported cases. We have 14,366 reported deaths worldwide, with Italy surging ahead at 5,476 deaths. Tomorrow the numbers will go up. Months from now, the debate will center on whether “authoritarian” China was in the better position to deal with this crisis than “free and democratic” Italy, U.S., Spain, and France. Let’s pause on this discussion until we are beyond the crisis. But when will that be?

Sen. Rand Paul now reports that he has Coronavirus and is in self-isolation. Out of an abundance of caution, I promise not to comment on his condition in the next 14 days. I would not want to adversely affect his health with any observations on his absence of leadership in the entire Republican establishment, which supported the deniability of Donald Trump that we even had a problem, as of January. I can only offer Rand Paul the assurances of Donald Trump, who said, “One day it’s like a miracle, it will disappear.”

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## **How Our Lives Are Changing!**

3-21-20: The full range of how our lives are changing because of Coronavirus becomes more apparent every day. Our personal response requires resilience rather than panic. There is even humor, albeit gallows humor, that I have overheard. Example: As in biblical times, when eras were seen as BC and AD, we will now remember our lives as BC and AC, meaning Before Coronavirus and After

Coronavirus.

## **Local/Berkeley/California:**

The national lack of testing becomes personal when a nurse at my Oakland Kaiser facility becomes sick with “flu-like symptoms” and can’t be tested because test supplies are too sparse. A friend’s daughter is a 30-year-old nurse at Oakland Kaiser. She is sick with the flu. She asks here Supervisor to be tested for COVID-19. But she is told to stay home and rest, there are not enough test kits. Only more acute cases can be tested.

How can this be acceptable? We are the most innovative and productive country on Earth. Yet, we don’t have the tests, N95 masks, protective gowns, and ventilators needed. Many citizens are angry and hope this can be improved soon.

## **Yosemite Closes**

Yosemite totally closes, as does Sequoia Kings Canyon. As of yesterday, the national parks and state parks of CA were open, but visitor centers and campgrounds were closing, as at the Presidio and Lands End in San Francisco. Now Yosemite, the crown jewel of the National Park system, totally closes. All CA state park campgrounds officially close. Big attractions, such as Alcatraz, close.

Cultural events of major importance in my “neighborhood” continue to cancel. The Bay Area Book Festival, a huge event in Berkeley and the Bay Area in May, cancels. Gilroy’s Garlic Festival, an immense agricultural celebration, cancels.

One prediction is that half of San Francisco’s hotels will close in two weeks because of little patronage. Will this happen?

United suspends flights from SFO to 20 U.S. cities. No one wants to fly.

## **National/Worldwide:**

The New York outbreak continues today. NY now has 10,365 reported cases. The U.S. has more than 23,000 cases, with more than 300 deaths. WA state plans to

ration available beds, with doctors choosing who will live and who will die. Variables such as your likely years of life ahead will be considered.

A record number of 2.25 million people filed for unemployment this past week. This is the largest number ever.

Worldwide, we are now up to 300,000 cases reported, with 12,944 deaths. The numbers go quickly out of date. Every country likely under-reports.

Italy has another bad day, with 793 deaths reported.

Friends of mine who manage Florida Keys tourism report the area shuts down.

Trump's Mar a Lago closes in Florida.

## **Stay-At-Home Orders Increase**

The "stay-at-home" order that started in CA yesterday now spreads to NY, CT, IA and other states. About 75 million Americans are today on "stay at home" orders.

The "rescue" package number in Congress now moves to \$2 trillion, about 10% of U.S. annual GDP. Money invested and interest paid on that money will have to be repaid, of course, by some generation.

Folks are beginning to use the phrase Worldwide Depression rather than Worldwide Recession. Where will the Dow go when it opens again on Monday? Will the 35% drop just continue?

As a citizen, I continue to hope for the best. But, like Dr. Anthony Fauci, I will just observe the facts.

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## **40 Million Californians Now Ordered to**

# Stay-At-Home

3-20-20 A mere 10 days after I wrote my original, hopeful-but-concerned, post regarding Coronavirus, we have reached an amazing reality: 40 million Californians are now on lockdown.

## Local/Berkeley/California:

I've always known Gov. Gavin Newsom to be a straight shooter rather than an alarmist. I first met him when he was mayor of San Francisco. Perhaps his order to stay-at-home will be seen, retrospectively, as exactly the firm leadership needed. I shudder to think that his speculation, that 56% of the state's residents, or 25.5 million people, might get Coronavirus in 8 weeks is correct. I hope that mitigation can keep this down to less than 10% correct, which would still be a disaster. We can only wait and see if our mitigation efforts are successful.

The numbers in CA continue to rise and quickly go out of date: 1093 now reported as infected, 491 in my Bay Area, 20 dead. In the U.S. 15,771 reported infected, 204 dead. More than 3,000 new cases reported in New York City.

## National/Worldwide:

A person in my own family experiences the State Department recommendation that Americans return to the country. My sister, Colleen Foster, is a Professor of graduate business entrepreneurship at the American University in Kabul. She and other faculty were on a scheduled break period, when they, typically, fly away for a week from Kabul to Dubai or other places for medical, dental, R&R, and shopping.

The college president sent all faculty an emergency email, recommending that they not return to Kabul. All classes, going forward, will be online. Kabul does not have the medical facilities to deal with Coronavirus if they get sick in Kabul. Kabul might also be totally closed down for getting a flight out.

Colleen weighed her options: Return to Kabul, remain in Dubai or elsewhere nearby, or return to the U.S. She decided to get on a packed Emirates flight back to the U.S. and her condo in Minneapolis for the duration. She passed the health screening test



as the airplane readied for takeoff to Chicago.

The numbers worldwide continue to rise, especially in Italy, a symbol of the non-Chinese world of free democratic movement. As I write this: 254,653 worldwide reported cases, 10,450 deaths. Italy now reports 41,035 case, 4,032 deaths, far more than China's 3,249 deaths.

U.S. closes borders with Mexico and Canada to non-essential travel.

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## **Shopping Hysteria Calms Down in Berkeley**

3-19-20 The shopping hysteria seems to have calmed down in Berkeley. I went to my nearby Safeway to get a few things. About 80% of what I wanted was there. Three days ago the store was stripped bare.

### **Local/Berkeley/California:**

I patronized my local Andronicos Safeway during the "Seniors hours" between 7-9 a.m., Tuesday and Thursday, to shop and found the store now stocked and the scene relatively peaceful. That was a sharp contrast with the chaos of three days ago, when the store was stripped bare.

I had a 2 p.m. Facetime education hour helping my grandson, Charlie, with his home schooling. Then I had a 5 p.m. wine time Facetime get together with a friend. Virtual get togethers are the new normal.

Our local BART transit system reduces its services.

A Burlingame Bay Area nursing home reports 3 Coronavirus cases, suggesting worries parallel to the Kirkland WA nursing home scenario.

### **Gritty Humor of Napa**

A gritty humorist in Napa describes the new four seasons there: Virus, Flood, Fire, and Repairs. Napa closes public tasting rooms at its wineries.

Lake Tahoe discourages visitors. Visit Truckee says on Facebook, "Now is NOT the time to visit Truckee."

Gov Gavin Newsom authorizes 1,300 trailers to help get more of the 108,000 "unsheltered" people in CA into some kind of housing.

The numbers of coronavirus cases appear to spike, due to increased testing. CA as of today has 917 cases, including 175 near me in Santa Clara County, plus 17 deaths. My Bay area has 431 cases. U.S. reported cases spiked 40% in the last day, due partly to more testing. U.S. cases now reach 10,775, with 154 deaths. The reported cases in New York City doubled in the last day.

"Social distancing" is the new vocabulary word now widely understood.

Palm Springs issues shelter-in-place.

## **National/Worldwide:**

The State Department urges all U.S. folks abroad to return home or be prepared to remain in place for a long time where they are. The State Department warns against all foreign travel.

Two congressmen test positive for coronavirus.

Medical specialists wonder if Donald Trump's prediction that coronavirus will "wash through" could become a "tsunami." Much fretting proceeds on lack of testing, lack of protective masks and gowns for medical workers, lack of fever checks, and lack of hospital preparation. How could other countries, such as South Korea, do this so much more effectively than the U.S.?

American Airlines grounds half of its planes, seeks a \$1 bil loan to assure liquidity. Delta drops 70% of its flights.

The CDC issues a report saying the pandemic might be with us for 18 months.

# **Will Businesses Survive?**

There is increasing concern about just how many U.S. businesses can survive a 60-day lockdown without closing or going bankrupt.

The DOW drops about 33% from its recent high, down to a level from before Donald Trump became president.

Crude oil falls to \$20/barrel as the world economy shrinks.

About 3 in 5 U.S. workers are hourly. Many have no benefits.

It appears that an emergency bill might send me and every individual \$1,200 soon and \$1,200 in another month or so.

Italy's deaths rise to 3,405, surpassing China. Italy reports an alarming 475 deaths in the past day.

China reports no new cases.

Stores close worldwide for big chains TJMaxx and Marshalls.

The worldwide number of reported cases is now about 218,000, with 9,000 deaths.

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# **Pacing Myself with the Bad News**

3-18-20 It seems to me prudent to absorb only so much bad news in one day. It's important to me to learn the truth, but keep positive.

## **Local/Berkeley/California:**

I assist now with Facetime the home-schooling of my grandsons. We have a 2 p.m. remote session with Facetime, since we all have iPhones. I help them with their writing. This gives their mom a break. Gov. Newsom projects that CA schools may now be closed until autumn. Self-education and home schooling are now the norm.

CA state parks close campgrounds. The National Park Service closes the Ahwahnee in Yosemite and many other facilities. Visitor Centers in parks close.

## **15 Deaths in California**

The 15<sup>th</sup> death in CA occurs near me, in Santa Clara. Since we are now testing more, we are up to 612 CA cases. Today there are 5 new cases in Santa Clara, 8 in San Francisco. Nationally, we are now at 120 deaths, more than 7,000 cases.

The 401-room San Francisco W Hotel closes due to lack of demand for rooms.

Sonoma County adds itself to the shelter-in-place Bay Area list, which now includes 9 counties, meaning 8 million people.

Grocery stores, such as Whole Foods and Safeway, now have special hours for Seniors to get food without the full jostle of the populace.

## **National/Worldwide:**

The Big 3 Automakers close all U.S. plants. Disruption of our economic life is complete.

The stock market closes to lower than when Donald Trump was elected. The market is now off about 30% from its recent peak.

Hawaii says to worldwide tourists, its lifeblood: stay away until this is over.

Italy had its worst day yet. 4,207 new cases, now up to 35,713. 475 new deaths, now up to 2,978.

UK closes all schools.

The U.S./Canada border closes to all but essential traffic.

## **Johnny Jet on Donald Trump**

Donald Trump today calls the virus the "China Virus," which is not helpful regarding

racial and national blame for pandemics. I am reluctant to express my political preferences here, but I hope we will have new national leadership from an alternative to Trump in November.

Donald Trump said today, about the virus, something that is total false. He tweeted today:

“I always treated the Chinese Virus very seriously, and have done a very good job from the beginning, including my very early decision to close the ‘borders’ from China – against the wishes of almost all. Many lives were saved. The Fake News new narrative is disgraceful & false!”

This Tweet is false. I hope that voters on November 5 will recall Donald Trump’s actual record of comments on this Coronavirus matter. My travel journalism colleague, Johnny Jet, has compiled this accurate record of Trump’s actual comments. Will these Trump comments, retrospectively, look to voters like an executive who comprehended the gravity of the situation?

## **Johnny Jet on Trump Record**

January 22: “We have it totally under control. It’s one person coming in from China. It’s going to be just fine.”

February 2: “We pretty much shut it down coming in from China.”

And February 24: “The Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA... Stock Market starting to look very good to me!”

Then February 25: “CDC and my Administration are doing a GREAT job of handling Coronavirus.”

Moreover, February 25: “I think that’s a problem that’s going to go away... They have studied it. They know very much. In fact, we’re very close to a vaccine.”

## **More February**

And February 26: “The 15 (cases in the US) within a couple of days is going to be down to close to zero.”

Plus February 26: “We’re going very substantially down, not up.”

And February 27: “One day it’s like a miracle, it will disappear.”

Finally February 28: “We’re ordering a lot of supplies. We’re ordering a lot of, uh, elements that frankly we wouldn’t be ordering unless it was something like this. But we’re ordering a lot of different elements of medical.”

## **Trump in March**

March 2: “You take a solid flu vaccine, you don’t think that could have an impact, or much of an impact, on corona?”

And March 2: “A lot of things are happening, a lot of very exciting things are happening and they’re happening very rapidly.”

Plus March 4: “If we have thousands or hundreds of thousands of people that get better just by, you know, sitting around and even going to work — some of them go to work, but they get better.”

Then March 5: “I NEVER said people that are feeling sick should go to work.”

Finally March 5: “The United States... has, as of now, only 129 cases... and 11 deaths. We are working very hard to keep these numbers as low as possible!”

Johnny Jet’s list cuts off at March 5. He misses one Donald Trump quote from a few days back, which I heard:

“We have this under tremendous control.”

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## **My First Day of Lockdown**

3-17-20 As a citizen who is half Irish, this is certainly the most somber St. Patrick’s Day in my memory.

### **Locally/Berkeley/California:**

California now reports at least 11 deaths, 614 cases, 297 in my immediate Bay Area. Nationally, the toll is 105 deaths, more than 5,838 cases.

Kevin Durant, the beloved former Warriors basketball player, now playing for the Brooklyn Nets, tests positive.

As someone over 60, I am heeding the advice to stay indoors. About 7 million of us in the Bay Area of CA are on “shelter in place” lockdown in 6 counties.

My two grandsons, Paul Jr and Charlie, are among the 6.1 million students out of school in California. That’s about 99% of the school population.

The PGA golf tournament scheduled for Harding Park in San Francisco cancelled.

California’s largest mall, South Coast Plaza in Orange County, closes.

## **National/Worldwide:**

The White Houses urges no meeting beyond 10 or more people.

Saint Patrick’s Day cancelled in America.

All 50 U.S. states now report cases of coronavirus.

Much of Europe is in lockdown.

Macy’s, Footlocker, and Nordstrom’s close all stores. Marriott lays off thousands of workers.

22 states now call up the National Guard to help out.

About 7 million people work in U.S. restaurants. As restaurants close, how do they survive?

Airlines say they will go bankrupt without maybe \$50 billion in support.

Italy reports a new 345 people dead and a new 3,526 cases, bring their total to 31,506, the highest outside China. Italy is now the surging example.

Steven Mnuchin says unemployment from this coronavirus crisis could go to 20%.

Enough for one day.

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# **My Berkeley Goes into Shelter in Place until April 7!**

3-16-20: Our California lifestyle in the most populous and wealthiest state in the country undergoes rapid change. We must now shelter-in-place until April 7.

I have not experienced this amount of social disruption since my junior year at Notre Dame. The Cuban Missile Crisis was in full effect, and the decision was stay and die in Indiana at Notre Dame University or take the train home to Minnesota to be with your family for a day or two before the bombs dropped. Of course, you might never get home. Bombs could disable the rails and you would be left in the October cold in a cornfield along the route. I chose to remain at Notre Dame, and somehow we muddled through.

The hysteria that now grips Berkeley, the Nation, and the World is unprecedented.

## **Local/Berkeley/California:**

The day begins ominously with the email of last night from the Berkeley Y that they are now closing for the duration. My nightly laps swims of recent years are now past tense. I will work out on my treadmill in my condo.

Gov. Gavin Newsom says bars, clubs, wineries, and brewpubs should close. As a travel journalist, I wonder what more could be declared off limits. Gov. Newsom later says restaurants should close or resort to wide-spaced seating and takeout.

Gov. Newsom, whose decisions I support, says Seniors should remain in self-isolation. At 76, I am a healthy Senior, but I am definitely in the risk group.

I am fortunate to have my two boys, Paul and Bart, and Paul's wife, Sabrina, watching over me. Sabrina asks: Need anything? Well, I went to the Safeway yesterday and all the bananas, spinach, and dishwasher detergent packets I needed were sold out. The shelves were bare.

Sabrina says, "I will source these," and delivers a couple of hours later. I walk out to the car when she arrives, and say a wavy hello from maybe a safe 10' to the

grandboys, Paul and Charlie, who are, of course, out of school.

## **Lee on Lockdown**

As the day progresses, the “lockdown” orders become more intense. My county, Alameda County, and San Francisco, and six other Bay Area counties, order a “shelter in place” as of midnight. I already have a stock of supplies, so I will not starve. But I decide to go to my local Safeway, at Shattuck and Rose, to get a few more things. I walk in and see the store mainly stripped of good. The checkout lines are about 20 people deep. I return to my car without buying anything.

## **National/Worldwide:**

The national news is not good. The stock market does a big drop, about 3,000 points, so my modest savings accumulated for retirement take a hit. This drop is in spite of the Fed’s reduction of interest rates to near zero.

What more could possibly go wrong? Only yesterday Donald Trump asserted the situation was “under tremendous control.” Today he gave the federal response a “10 out of 10” rating. Thank god for Dr. Anthony Fauci and a more troubled assessment. Maybe we will get “testing” finally organized so we can get started to control the pandemic with information on who is infected. Our CDC recommends no meetings, nationally, with more than 50 people.

Around the world, the news is equally concerning. Some 30K Brits at French ski resorts are told to leave and go home.

Enough for today.

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## **Lake Tahoe CA Ski Resorts Close**

-3-15-20 Ski resorts close in California as snow falls.

## **Local/Berkeley/California:**

My local Safeway, Shattuck & Vine Berkeley, sells out of spinach leaf and all lettuce, bananas, milk, and most meat. That's besides toilet paper. The Manager mentions to me, "Sooner or later, maybe folks will get stocked up enough, and we'll get back to normal. We can't stock fast enough."

The major Lake Tahoe Ski Resorts close, including Heavenly, Squaw, Northstar, Alpine Meadows, and Kirkwood. In the Eastern Sierra Mammoth closes. Ski resort owners pause to assess their immediate future. After a dry February, snow finally falls this weekend.

My county, Alameda County, recommends that all people over 60, the high-risk group, stay home. Avoid all large-group experiences.

San Francisco bans all group meetings of 100 or more.

## **National/Worldwide:**

49 states in the U.S. now report coronavirus cases. West Virginia is the lone holdout.

Sift, a publication commenting on the travel industry, calls March 14 "The Day the World Stopped Traveling."

Travel Weekly, a trade publication in travel, projects that 50 million jobs around the world are now at risk as travel slows down.

Italy reports 368 deaths today, increasing its total to 1809. Germany closes its borders. Western Europe heads to a shutdown.

A cruise ship in the Caribbean has guests with coronavirus. Can it dock somewhere? More cruise companies close down. More cruise ships report with coronavirus cases.

Federal Reserve cuts interest rates to near zero and will buy government securities. There is not much more that they can do to shore up the economy in this crisis.

All schools in the nation's largest public school system, New York City, close.

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# Keep Calm and Carry On

-3-14-20 Keeping calm and carrying on reached new levels of strain today in Berkeley CA and in the Nation.

## Local/Berkeley/California:

I went to the Berkeley Y last night for my usual nightly lap swim and found most lanes open. Few people were coming to the Y. After my swim, I hung out in the hot tub. A highly-skilled “trainer” was there with me. He said 22 people came to his “high intensity” class Monday, but only 4 on Friday. As of Friday, no person in his class was allowed to touch the equipment, such as barbells.

As of Saturday morning I would normally go to my monthly “independent-publishing” group event in Novato. This group is [www.baipa.org](http://www.baipa.org). In past months, about 75 would be the likely number of new-age independent “publishers” in attendance. Today there were about 10 people physically in attendance. I was not there. I decided not to go, considering also the commute and the rain. But I dialed in with the “new” meeting mode, Zoom. Those of us on Zoom (about 15) exceeded those physically present, for the first time. Could this be a sign of the times for meetings?

Ridership of our local public transit mode BART drops to 50% of normal.

The San Francisco Chronicle newsroom officially closes as a physical place. All journalists now work from home or from their cars when on assignment.

San Francisco bans “non-essential” gatherings of more than 100 people. Israel bans gatherings of more than 10.

## National/Worldwide:

The “travel ban” now extends to England, as Mike Pence mentions. The wisdom of this travel ban for Europe EU and now Great Britain sparks debate. Will Trump next

require a travel ban to “blue state” California? The unthinkable now becomes thinkable.

Spain and France appear to go on an Italy-style lockdown.

Apple shuts stores worldwide to address the coronavirus issue.

A wealthy Chinese businessman pledges to donate 500,000 test kits and 1 million masks to the U.S. It is of some concern that we in the U.S. are now seen as a “third world” country in need of assistance

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## **Our Local Schools Close**

-3-13-20 Again, the developments of the day, locally and nationally, are stunning.

### **Local/Berkeley/California:**

All San Francisco public schools close this morning. I wonder when my grandkids in the Oakland schools would get a similar stay-at-home directive. This afternoon the Oakland schools close. My son and his wife will now have to manage their two boys, plus their jobs.

No Major League Baseball for the San Francisco Giants for a while. No hockey or soccer from the major U.S. professional teams.

ACT and other major theaters in San Francisco close. No more *Gloria* and *Toni Stone*, the latest shows. Broadway theaters close in New York City.

Feinstein’s at Nikko, a San Francisco music venue, cancels all performances.

Winchester Mystery House in San Jose closes.

Disneyland in California closes. Later Disney World in Florida closes. Disney closes its cruise line.

## **National/Worldwide:**

About 5 millions kids in the U.S. are now out of school. France closes all schools. Ohio and Maryland close all public schools.

Stock market has worst day since 1987. I remember that 1987 worst day distinctly. I was in New Zealand as a young travel journalist in a group of travel journalists. Since I did not have significant cash assets, with 3 young kids needing financial support, I was not personally affected. But two of my colleagues were elders from New York City. I remember them desperately trying to find a phone in a panic. They wanted to call their broker in New York and instruct him, "Sell everything, while it still has some value."

Israel's El Al airline closes down, except for a few select routes.

NCAA cancels March Madness basketball.

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## **Gatherings Beyond 250 People Forbidden**

-3-12-20: Much new disruption occurs today, in Berkeley San Francisco Bay Area and in the World.

The play Hamilton closes in San Francisco.

Gatherings of more than 250 people are discouraged in San Francisco and in Santa Clara.

The college kids who live next door and go to UC Berkeley are going home. All their classes are now virtual, so might as well go home, no need to be here.

Princess Cruises, one of the great travel companies, closes down and brings its 18 ships back to their home ports for an extended period.

Viking Cruises cancels its Europe waterways trips.

The Met closes in New York.

“Lockdown” is the new worry word. Could my Berkeley go into “lockdown,” as now in Italy?

## **Presidential Address**

-3-11-20: President Donald Trump addresses the nation and revises his earlier position, which was, “It will go away. Just stay calm.”

All travel and cargo from Europe will be suspended for 30 days. This is a major development for me, a journalist reporting on travel.

WHO declares the coronavirus a global pandemic.

The NBA suspends all games for the rest of the season.

Life in the USA now changes towards a period of major disruption.

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## **Basketball With No Audience?**

-3-11-20 a.m.: The Golden State Warriors will play their Thursday night game “without a live audience.”

San Francisco and Santa Clara now allow no large audiences beyond 1,000 for events.

The immediate future of sport events and all gatherings of all kinds remains in doubt. One wonders: How long? Business event meetings in San Francisco continue to cancel. For how long?

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## **Book Passage Cancels Events**

-3-10-20 Book Passage, the beloved bookstore in Marin, “postpones” its March in



person events. So far, my June 20 at 4 p.m. event, a slideshow celebration of the joy of California travel, for my new travel book, is still a go. That book is [Northern California History Travel Adventures: 35 Suggested Trips](#). Cultural events large and small, through the country, continue to cancel.

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## **My Original Article as of 3-9-20**

The coronavirus matter as of 3-9-20 continues to become more concerning, day by day. I realize that anything I say will be overtaken by evolving reality.

Future criticism of me could come from two sides, a month from now.

My preferred legacy:

“Lee, you were fretting too much. Thankfully, this matter got contained.”

However, I suspect my likely legacy will be:

“Lee, you projected correctly, but you didn’t even begin to understand the complexity and damage that this illness would create.”

## **Coronavirus in My Hometown: Berkeley**

Coronavirus begins to hit home when it shows up in a citizen within a mile or two of your house.

That happened 3-5-20 when the first infection in Berkeley became a statistic.

Also, on that day the “mortality rate,” as deaths climbed, reached more than 3,000 worldwide as the total infections reached 100,000 worldwide. This means that 3 people died for every 100 infected. That’s a lot of people. By contrast, the yearly flu, a troublesome matter, kills about .1 of all those infected. That’s 10 people per 100,000. Coronavirus COVID-19 is 30x more deadly than the common flu.

Statistics on coronavirus will update and are imperfect. Possibly, the death rate will go “down” as a statistical matter if more past cases become identified. However, this possible readjustment is not comforting.

I am so fortunate at age 76 to be lucky enough to be in excellent health. This is a genetic gift, but I work at it also with good nutrition and my nightly lap swim at the Berkeley Y.

However, the 3 in 100 who die are definitely in my group of elders, so the coronavirus may intensify underlying worry of mortality in my population group.

## **As a Travel Journalist, I Have Been to Wuhan**

One of the joys of my life has been the opportunity to make several travel trips to China, between 1990 and now, and publish about China in US magazines, newspapers, and travel books. A little of this content is now residual on my website if you Search “China” at [www.fostertravel.com](http://www.fostertravel.com).

On one trip, years ago, I flew to Shanghai, studied that city, and went on the Wuhan and the Gorges. My photo of kids in a day care center is from Shanghai, on the way to Wuhan.

Wuhan is on the magnificent Yangtze River in China. I rode a bus from Shanghai to Wuhan and onward to the Three Gorges area of China. The new dam on the Yangtze, above Wuhan, changes life in Wuhan forever. Before the dam existed, the Yangtze frequently caused catastrophic floods in Wuhan. After the dam, Wuhan is safe and more productive. There I saw photos of how Mao used to swim in the Yangtze at Wuhan. Wuhan has some major ancient Chinese cultural sites.

I marvel today at how rapidly China has developed, in the period of my trips, from 1990 to the present. The development has made possible the costly Chinese efforts to contain the coronavirus.

# The Cruise Ship Off San Francisco, Finally Offloaded in Oakland

I have reported often in the past on the joy of worldwide cruise travel, as anyone can see who searches "Cruise" on my [www.fostertravel.com](http://www.fostertravel.com).

However, cruise travel will now suffer because of the current situation. Do you want to be trapped like sardines in a can? Is a cruise ship the best modern petri dish for infection?

Imagine the anxiety experienced by 3,500 people who hovered 6 days in their cabins off the coast near San Francisco as their fate remained uncertain. Many were reported to be "showing symptoms." When tested, 19 of the 21 "positives" were crew. Princess said the ship had 2,422 passengers and 1,111 crew members, called "teammates." The ship docked in Oakland, finally, but then the American passengers were sent for 2 weeks of confinement at Travis Air Force Base, near Sacramento.

I think it is very difficult to approximate the stress that passengers felt, when trapped on this Princess ship floating at sea, unable to dock. Once docked, consider the stress of a 14 day quarantine confinement.

This is not the fault of Princess. All the great cruise companies put considerable energy into keeping their ships clean, fearing an occasional norovirus outbreak. Health inspectors from various agencies keep them on their toes.

But this new coronavirus outbreak is unprecedented. With both the State Department and the CDC now recommending against cruising, one wonders how the cruise industry will survive. Importantly, the cruise audience is mainly the elderly, the main vulnerable group.

## Confined Against My Will

Have you ever been confined against your will? This happened to me once, and it was stressful. I would not be cheerful if confined on a cruise ship and military base for 20 days.

My confining event was after the 9-11 attack in 2001. I was with my tribe of travel journalists, my Society of American Travel Journalists colleagues, for our annual meeting, that year in Bermuda. When the hijacked jets hit the World Trade Towers, we could see it on TV. The aviation world shut down. We couldn't get off the island for several days.

All flights out were cancelled for an unknown future time, which became a few days. I had to fund my additional stay at a hotel. No one knew when we could get out. I bonded with my colleagues who were also stranded. Finally, I got out and was thankful just to be "home" in California.

Would I have the resilience today to deal with a 20-day cruise and military base confinement experience? I'm not sure.

## **Total Economic and Social Slow Motion Coming from Coronavirus?**

As of 3-9-20 in my Berkeley and Bay Area, we are moving towards a major economic and social slow-motion future.

-It didn't help to learn that the New York Stock Exchange hit a 7% "circuit breaker" drop today, requiring that the market close for 15 minutes to calm nerves.

-Schools and offices are closing, at least temporarily, such as Lowell, largest high school in San Francisco. The largest school district in Northern California, Elk Grove, near Sacramento, has closed. Stanford and UC Berkeley require that all classes occur online rather than in person. Major companies, such as Facebook, Google, Salesforce, and Twitter, now encourage their people to "work from home."

-Meetings, sporting events, and celebrations are cancelling. Huge tech meetings in SF are now postponed. SXSW has cancelled in Austin TX. The largest travel conference in the world, ITB, has cancelled in Berlin. Santa Clara County in Northern California now officially recommends no large gatherings of human beings for any purpose. Sports events discourage participants, such as Stanford selling only 1/3 of the tickets to fill an auditorium. The St. Patrick's Day celebration in San

Francisco has been called off.

-“Social Distancing” is the new word in our vocabulary. Stay between 1 and 2 meters from your next closest human being. How far can we take this and still maintain economic viability and cultural activities? The future uncertainty is palpable.

-Are “lockdowns” coming to the U.S.? As of today the entire country of Italy is under an official lockdown, restricting the movement of all citizens.

## **Economic Losses May Be Major**

Economic losses may become major and may be difficult to recoup.

Firstly, every person with a dollar invested in retirement will see some loss as the stock market goes down. All hope their investment fund managers have been diversified and haven't put too much equity into Princess Cruises etc.

Almost everyone involved in travel, my sector of expertise, experiences significant losses. If people won't travel, the destinations, attractions, hotels, restaurants, airlines, cruise companies, etc, dependent on them will experience major economic losses.

## **“Transmissibility” and the Spanish Flu of 1918**

Possibly the most worrisome unknown about coronavirus COVID-19 is how successful it will be regarding “transmissibility.” How readily will this disease jump from person to person?

It is a bit worrisome to look in Wikipedia at “Spanish Flu” and realize that this 1918 pandemic killed about 2% of those infected, parallel with the current reported 3% for coronavirus COVID-19. The Spanish Flu had both a first and second wave, over two years.

Spanish Flu had an uncanny ability to jump from person to person around the globe,

even though travel was fairly primitive, from our modern perspective. People traveled slowly with only ships, railroads, and a few cars. However, there was elaborate wartime movement of people.

Spanish Flu was successful in its infections. The disease infected an estimated quarter of the earth's population, getting somehow to the far reaches of the planet.

A mortality rate of only 2% from Spanish Flu caused death for an estimated 50 million people, an incredible loss.

How did this infection get the name "Spanish Flu"? In 1918 the outbreak was occurring in the US, England, and France etc. But we were at war. Wartime censorship prevented the publication of any information that might adversely affect "morale." Reports of the illness within the allied nations and Germany, which allied forces were entering, were suppressed. But the flu outbreak was also occurring in neutral Spain. Problems in Spain could be reported. The worldwide flu became the "Spanish flu."

## **Spanish Flu Hits San Francisco**

The Spanish Flu reached San Francisco in 1918. A recent San Francisco Chronicle newspaper article summarized a retrospective on that era and illness.

The deadly virus spread quickly through the Midwest. It was believed to arrive in San Francisco on September 23, 1918, when ill Edward Wagner of Eddy Street arrived by train from Chicago.

Within the next three weeks, there were more than 500 cases and nearly 50 deaths in the city. By the end of October, 15,000 were ill and 500 had died.

By the end of 1919, 6,000 had died in the San Francisco Bay Area. About 675,000 had died throughout the U.S.

See the full article at

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/oursf/article/Long-before-coronavirus-SF-faced-the-1918-15109879.php>

# **In Conclusion: How Damaging Will Wuhan Coronavirus Covid-19 Become?**

I make these comments as an interested observer, an elder, a father, and a grandfather in Berkeley, California. This problem affects me and my family adversely.

I also advance this article in my role as a lifelong travel journalist, with about 50 years of travel reporting experience. In all my experience, I can't recall any situation with this much potential to affect badly both regional travel (California, my current emphasis) and worldwide travel.

I hope for the best, but recommend planning for the worst.