Paddy Six Toes
Straight Back Dan
Mike the Mule
Butte, Detroit — industrial cities with common bonds

By PAT WILLIAMS

Some cities are wondrous things; organisms at once propagating and receding, a single entity with parts living and others dying. We don't often experience whole cities where success and despair are partners, growth and decay side by side, and history's tumult remains visible.

I grew up in such a place — Butte, Mont. Last month I visited another — Detroit, Mich. I had never been there but my friend Brian, who grew up south of Detroit, invited me to visit.

I had earlier shown Butte to Brian and he reciprocated by taking me around Detroit. We both appreciate cities with profound pasts and hopeful futures. Both cities are the products of immigrants, proclaim architecture of the Gilded Age, have ethnic-studied populations and enjoy a history of revolving migration. In almost all criteria, with the ironic exception of numbers of people, Detroit and Butte are urban.

Once dependent upon trade and agriculture, the states of Montana and Michigan had these two cities of excitement and ferment — international centers that were the potter's wheel for much of their state's commerce and production. Both cities were dependent on day laborers and a single industry — automobile production in Detroit and mining in Butte. Their economic heydays spanned most of the 20th century and during World War II both cities were a vital piece of democracy's arsenal: Detroit with its prodigious production of tanks, planes and trucks; and Butte, one of the largest mining districts in the world, was America's paramount copper supplier during World War II. The soft metal was essential to ammunition as well as the sinews of ships, radio equipment, planes and tanks.

Workers built both cities by hand, and organized labor owes much of its early national success to Detroit and Butte. The early autoworkers unions began in Detroit. Butte, "The Gibraltar of Labor," was the home of Miners Union No. 1. Henry Ford revolutionized production everywhere with the creation of the automobile assembly line, and in Butte the development of new and safer mining technologies changed the hard-rock mining industry around the world.

The yesterdays of these two cities are evident in the remains of vacant buildings standing among the new. The promise of their tomorrows shines bright in the resiliency of the people and in the optimism inherent in the greeting of every commercial opportunity. These cities, although far different in size, share those rare characteristics of real cities: a history that sticks to the ribs, an unwillingness to forget and an eagerness to persevere and succeed. Such cities are bastions of both memory and hope, whose residents hold much more than fondness of place — they need their city. It feeds them, secures the memories of their youth and their sense of wellbeing. Although wind whistles through the skeletons of a few of the homes and buildings, the cities themselves are stable and comforting. Hard times, survival and optimism have their uses.

Both cities now have less than half the population of their “once upon a time,” but such places beat both the odds and the obits. Detroit’s recovery — its comeback — I am assured is well underway. As for Butte, those of us who know the old girl, insist on saying, “Comeback, hell, she never left.”

Pat Williams served nine terms as a U.S. Representative from Montana. After his retirement, he returned to Montana and taught at The University of Montana.

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A three-judge panel on the court ruled 2 to 1 that the California ban on same-sex marriage, known as Proposition 8, was unconstitutional because it singled out a minority group and took away a right — the right to marry — that had been granted to them by the State Legislature "without a legitimate reason for doing so."

The judges said the United States Constitution "simply does not allow for" laws that are intended only to "lessen the status and human dignity of gays and lesbians in California, and to officially reclassify their relationships and families as inferior to those of opposite-sex couples."

This is just what the New Hampshire Legislature seems poised to do. The state extended to right to marry to all its citizens in 2009, but right-wingers vowed to overturn the law and now stand a good chance of doing so.

Gov. John Lynch, a Democrat, has said he would veto such a bill, but the Republicans in both houses of the Legislature have veto-proof majorities. Partisan lines on this issue are a bit fuzzy, so it's still not clear whether enough Republicans would balk at so blatantly setting back the cause of equal rights.

It is especially distressing to see this slide in New Hampshire's bill would not affect the 1,900 same-sex couples who have married since 2009, but it would replace marriage with the separate-and-unequal system of "civil unions." There is no "legitimate reason" for this. The argument that same-sex marriages somehow harm marriages between men and women does not hold water. The marriage rate in New Hampshire has not suffered at all since 2009. If anything, it's gone up a tick because of new families formed by same-sex couples.

That leaves intolerance, fear, and an attempt to impose religious beliefs through the law as motivations, and they have been evident in abundance. Representative David Bates, the Republican who filed the repeal bill, argues that homosexuality is a lifestyle choice, and he even included a sentence that says: "Children can only be conceived naturally through copulation by heterosexual couples." This is breathtakingly dangerous foolishness.

A recent poll by the University of New Hampshire showed that 59 percent of the state's residents oppose the repeal of marriage equality. If Republican lawmakers don't want to pay attention to the federal court, they should pay attention to their own constituents. The ninth state to ratify the Constitution in 1788 should not be demonstrating such contempt for the nation's founding principles.

Undermining State Campaign Laws

On Friday, a federal district judge granted a preliminary injunction against a Montana law, the Corrupt Practices Act of 1912, that bans corporations from making independent expenditures in political campaigns. Earlier this month, the United States Supreme Court, in a separate case from the state courts, issued a temporary order preventing Montana from enforcing that law.

These cases and others in the country show how the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision has upended important state campaign spending laws. As the Montana Supreme Court has said on this question, "Clearly the impact of unlimited corporate donations creates a dominating impact on the political process and inevitably minimizes the impact of individual citizens."

In states where a corporate spending ban is in place, contributions from individuals represent about half of funds raised by candidates. In states that permit unlimited corporate spending, contributions from individuals are about a quarter of the funds raised.

Now even Montana's law requiring disclosure of campaign spending is being challenged in court. As Steve Bullock, Montana's attorney general, said recently, "It's a concerted effort by out-of-state corporations to dismantle our election laws and undermine the democratic process in Montana."

The federal district judge, however, did properly uphold state limits on campaign donations for individuals, political committees and political parties. And showing deference to free speech, he enjoined Montana laws banning knowingly false statements in election materials and requiring that materials disclose relevant voting records.

Montana's campaign spending law arose from a history of fighting political corruption. The suits attacking it have drawn national attention. At stake is whether state elections will be decided by corporations that are allowed to spend unlimited amounts to influence the results.
San Francisco intro

First of all, let me say how glad I am to be back in the Bay area with a novel that luckily opens on Nob Hill--more than that, on a cable car. My temporarily globe-trotting characters, Morrie and Grace, soon are summoned back to another earth--Butte, Montana--but the touch of San Francisco very much felt right to me as I wrote the opening of *Sweet Thunder*. One of my favorite scenes in the list of my novels is the rollerblading scene in *Mountain Time* back in 1999, where my beleaguered protagonist Mitch tries to keep up with his San Francisco daughter on the Friday night skating extravaganza out to the Palace of Fine
Arts---as daughter and father get ready to go, "The horde on wheels kept thickening as more skaters pumped across the Embarcadero and glissaded onto the sidewalk in front of the Ferry Building. Several hundred, Friday-nighted to their pierced eyebrows and gaudy fingernails, already had congregated beneath the building's clock tower and were milling around in various states of balance..."

The skate wheels of destiny turn more slowly than those of that bunch of recreational outlaws on rollerblades, but they sometimes do complete the circle with a kind of mischievous
Like probably all writers since Shakespeare, I'm often asked that hard-to-answer question, "Where do you get your ideas?"

Somehow, "Out of my head" seems like an answer that could be misinterpreted. But with this particular book, I finally have a more classy response as to where I got the stuff of inspiration.

From Shakespeare!

In limited quantities, I should add. The first is the title, taken from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the scene in which Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, harks back to hunting bear in the company of the strongest man in the world and a certain slayer of dragons:
"I was with Hercules and Cadmus once,
When in a wood of Crete they bay'd the bear
With hounds of Sparta...I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder."

Hopefully I'll connect that title to the book in a minute here,
but the second debt to Shakespeare, because he pretty much owns
the property, is the bedrock idea under the story. For each novel
as I work on it, usually across a couple of years, I try to keep in
mind one single word that the book is about. Its theme, its plot
mechanism, its personality, so to speak. For example, I believe
The Whistling Season was fundamentally about compassion,
My central character in all this, the genie in the bottle, once again is Morrie. Morris Morgan, the shall we say “inventive” teacher in the one-room school in *The Whistling Season*, the fortune-seeker at that Richest Hill on Earth, the copper mines of Butte, Montana, in *Work Song*.

The new book takes place about a year after Morrie and his dimpled bride, Grace, set off on their honeymoon, the final chorus of *Work Song*, I suppose. The holiday season of 1920 finds them landed back in Butte because of a highly unusual gift, and in no time Morrie is drawn right back into the central conflict of that copper-rich, copper-cursed city—the miners versus the
Anaconda Company. This time, Morrie enlists as an editorial writer for the union-backed newspaper that is taking on the Anaconda corporate colossus—the company owns all the other daily newspapers in Montana, including its local mouthpiece, the Butte Daily Post. And it’s Morrie, that wordslinger, who names the feisty journalistic newcomer from that bit of Shakespeare—the Butte Thunder. The scene I’m going to read very much involves the newspaper war that Morrie helps to ignite, so you need a few dabs of background, some names you’ll be hearing and so on:
--At the newsroom, there's Jake Armbrister, a classic oldtime editor; I've even given him a green eyeshade. The reporter on the labor beat, covering the mines of the Butte Hill, is Cavaretta.

--The miners union shift representative up there on the Hill, and indeed down there in the mineshafts nearly a mile deep, you'll hear mentioned, is Pat Quinlan. He's a colorful personality in Dublin Gulch, the shanty neighborhood of Irish miners and their families gullied right into the Hill amid the slag heaps and under the smokestacks. Quin, as he's known, is a leader of the more radical faction of the miners union, and his hardnose qualities have landed him at the negotiating table as the eternal
issues of wages and mine safety are fought out with the Anaconda Company.

-- The Company runs its mining operation, and indeed pretty much runs the state of Montana, from the sixth floor of the Hennessy Building in downtown Butte, and you'll hear that aerie of power and influence referred to as "them downtown."

-- The final name you need to know is Jared Evans, perhaps best described as the careworn, slightly shot-up, dedicated leader of the miners union, again here as he was in *Work Song*. But by now, Jared also has become the state senator for Butte and Silver
Bow county, in an attempt to bring pressure on the Anaconda Copper Company from the political side.

And we start with Morrie, at his typewriter in the Thunder newsroom, where he is known as Morgie because the new newspaper lacks a morgue—the clippings file, the library to look things up—and the staff instead relies on the encyclopedic contents of Morrie’s head.

Here we go, back to early in 1921, with Morrie as our narrator:
Sweet Thunder reading

On the unforgettable day, I was fashioning the next editorial lambasting the lords of copper in their downtown aerie, my typewriter thwacking at a measured pace in the traffic of clatter in the newsroom, when Mary Margaret Houlihan, the society reporter evidently desperate for a lede sentence about oncoming social doings, called out:

"Remind me please, Morgie, what the Ides of March were about?"

"Glad to. The Roman occasion derives from idus, the Latin for middle," I warmed to the task of walking encyclopedia, as I sometimes do. "And so, the middle of March, the fifteenth, was traditionally a festive holiday, but thanks to Shakespeare, we now think of the Ides of March as the fateful day when Julius Caesar--"
I was interrupted by a shout of "Jake!" Across the room, Cavaretta was on his feet, still clutching a telephone. "Accident on the Hill. Five whistles." Everyone in Butte, myself included, knew that was the signal to send stretchers.

"Which mine, Cavvie?" Armbrister called back.

"The Neversweat."

"Get up there, now," the editor bawled. "Take a shooter, make it Sammy," he specified the chief photographer. Snapping out orders left and right, the aroused master of the newsroom spotted me sitting in my corner where, Mary Margaret and the Ides aside, I had been trying to think with my fingers as usual. "Morgie, go with them, see what you
can pick up for your page.” His green gaze met my startled one. “I have a hunch.”

The three of us piled out of the building and into a taxi outside one of the Venus Alley establishments. The driver was used to urgent requests, apparently, and sped us through the business district, honking everything but a streetcar out of the way, until our jitney wound its way through Dublin Gulch toward the landmark mine atop the Hill, the Neversweat with its line of smokestacks billowing, as had been written, “like the organ pipes of Hell.” The storied seven stacks of the ’Sweat, which, legend had it, were address enough to deliver a miner anywhere on earth to this colossus of copper deposits. As the taxi roared toward the mine gate, Cavaretta, who was young but enterprising, leaned from

As the saying was, “Don’t even stop in America, just come to Butte.”
beside me in the back seat to consult with the photographer, crammed with his gear next to the driver. "What's best, Sammy, split up or stick together? I haven't covered one of these--"

"Yeah, you might not this one either," the photographer let out wearily, "from the looks of that ape at the gate." The taxi driver practically overlapped that utterance with his own exclamation, "Hell, it would have to be Croft, he'd jump off a cliff if they told him to."

The rifle-toting guard had stepped into the gateway, holding up a meaty hand that definitely meant Stop.

"No soap, coming in here. I got my orders," he declared as he came to the driver's window, one denizen dependent on the workings of the Hill to another. "Better turn this buggy around."
The taxi driver was not swayed. "C'mon, let me make a buck by getting my fare where they want to go. What's the big deal all of a sudden?"

"New policy," the guard stolidly recited. "Nobody not connected to the mine is allowed in until I hear from them downtown."

Out the side of his mouth, Cavareta implored: "Can't you do something, Morgie?"

I thrust my head out the car window. "It's all right, Croft, that's where we're from--didn't they tell you? These gentlemen of the press are on our side. They're with me."
Whether the beard did it or my oratorical approximations which were not exactly untrue, the gate guard straightened up in instant respect.

"Yessir. I didn’t get the word to expect you."

"One more thing," I intoned before the taxi started up. "If anyone shows up claiming to be from the Post, turn them away. We don’t want the wrong kind of people in here."

"I gotcha," he all but saluted. "Any fakers, I’ll give them a hard time."

There was no question where to go in the huge mine yard, everyone gravitating to the towering headframe and its elevator shaft, where the taxi driver let us out and was generously bribed, my role again, to stand by. Cavaretta, Sammy, and I turned as one to the commotion beneath the
headframe's steel strutwork. The scene has been played at mine mouths probably since Roman times, the crowd drawn to disaster, those in authority pleading for order, rumors flying every which way. Sammy, a short but authoritative man, immediately set up shop with his tripod and other camera gear, aiming at the starkly silent shaft for whatever its elevator cage would bring up. Over there a besieged florid-faced individual who was obviously the mine supervisor was trying to settle down a thick circle of agitated miners and other employees. This was the mine where Quinlan worked and I thought I spotted him in the midst of the turmoil, but under the helmet and grime it was hard to be sure from any distance. Fast earning his reporter's stripes, Cavaretta sized up the
situation. "No bodies in sight yet. This may be a while. Morgie, can you find a phone and hang onto it for me?"

It took no great divination to guess that if the person in charge was caught up in the stormy scene surrounding the mineshaft, his office might well be vacant. Head down as if I had urgent business, I strode across the mine yard to the appropriate building and brazenly walked in.

I was in luck. Everyone in any office down the long corridor was caught up one way or another with the mine accident and the stoppage of production, and those who did glance at me as I passed presumed from my topcoat and hat--and beard--that I must be someone important sent up from the Hennessy Building headquarters downtown. At the office marked Supervisor, I ducked in.
Aha, unoccupied. And sitting right there on the desk, a telephone. I at once appropriated both, clapping the receiver to my ear and hurriedly tapping the switchhook for Operator, to place the necessary call to the rewrite desk in the newsroom. Only to be intercepted by a prim female voice at a switchboard somewhere on the Neversweat grounds, "Sorry, what department are you ringing, please?"

I was struck wordless. The telephone system was internal to Anaconda; was there nothing the damnable company did not control to the very last detail?

Swallowing hard, I said with forced casualness, "I'm calling to downtown," gave the Thunder's telephone number and hoped.
After forever, a familiar raspy intonation came. "Matthews here, what've you got?"

"Matt, it's Morgan, at the Neversweat," I spoke fast and low to the rewrite man. "Don't use my name or Cavaretta's on here, I'll explain later. I'm holding the line open for him, he's still at the mineshaft getting the story."

"Sure thing, I'll stay on. But he'll need to go some to make deadline."

"He will, we will. Sammy's set to shoot when they bring the victims up, let Armbrister know for the front-page layout."
Just as I finished speaking, the red-faced man from the din around the mineshift barged into the office, charging toward what was unmistakably his desk, his chair, his telephone.

He stopped short at the sight of me sitting there, dressed to the gills and hat still on, hugging the phone to myself. "Do I know you?"

With deliberate vagueness, I said, "I’m new at the newspaper."

"Reporters," he said as if the word left a bad taste. "Tell your yobbos at the *Post* to be damn careful how they handle this one, understand?" He jerked a thumb. "Out of the way. I need to use that."

My heart skipped as he rounded the desk and reached for the phone still in my possession.
"No," I startled both of us, holding the instrument away from him.

"You can't, right now, this in use. I'll explain later."

"Can't?" Knocked back a step or two by my effrontery, he was turning apoplectic. "Who do you think you are? Get up from there! This is my office, my--"

Before he could finish, a storm burst in the room. No gate guard could keep Jared Evans out. "What's going on, Delaney?" he demanded as he hurtled in, angry to the point of bursting, to confront the man in charge of the Neversweat mine. "Five whistles, and you don't let us know at union headquarters, we have to find out for ourselves? That's a new low, even for your bunch of snakes." Throwing a look my way for an additional target, he did a slight doubletake at my still presence.
Something told him what I was at, maybe the white of my knuckles in my deathgrip on the phone stem and receiver, so showing no hint of recognition, he spun from me to the mine supervisor. "Don't stand there like you've lost your tongue, let's hear the accident report."

"It—it happened in the Chinese Laundry, that's why it's taking so long." Listening for all I was worth, I blanched. The hottest, sweatiest level of any mine, in this case nearly a mile deep. Delaney hesitated, caught between being cowed and in authority. Jared's shrewdness in entering the political realm was proven again; an incensed union leader who was also a state senator was obviously more than a mine overseer wanted to face. Delaney licked his lips and fumbled out, "It's a nasty one, see, and we--"
"I gather that it is," Jared snapped. Like me, he was dressed nattily, but in the tension of his body and the set of his shoulders, he was once again all miner underneath. "Now will you quit beating around the bush and--"

"The pair of them were getting set to blast a fresh run of ore, and the charge must have went off on them," Delaney reported in a rush of words. "It's taken some digging to get them out. They're both gone. I'm sorry as hell."

Jared looked like he wanted to throttle him. "Two men dead and you don't even have the union shift rep in here to start notifying the families and the rest? It's in the contract, you know that--you're
supposed to get our man on the first fast cage, for this.” He shot a look out into the corridor. “Where the hell is Quinlan? Isn’t he up yet?”

Blindly defensive, the mine supervisor blathered, “They’re bringing him up as quick as the stretchers could get there, I told you it happened in the deep shaft and it takes---”

“Bringing--?” Jared turned pale, and no doubt I did, too. “It’s Quinlan, in this.” It was an accusation, not a question.

No sooner had that truth crashed into the room, while I was still sitting paralyzed, than a voice trilled in my ear:

“I’m so sorry, but has your party spoken with you yet?”

“No, I mean yes, he’s there, he’s merely occupied.”
"I'm awfully sorry, but other departments are waiting to use this line."

"Things are delayed," I said tersely, hoping that would sound like official business to the switchboard operator and newspaper business to the mine overseer.

"I'm just terribly sorry, but the company rule is that an outside line should be used no more than--"

"I am sitting at the desk of the supervisor of the entire mine," I said slowly and distinctly. "Does that tell you enough?"

The voice went away without even saying it was to any degree sorry.
More shaken than I had ever seen him, Jared was hearing out Delaney's pleading try at explanation. "God's truth, Jared, I wish it had been anyone but Quin. I know how this looks, but it was a total accident, it has to be."

"Then it's a sonofabitch of a coincidence, isn't it," Jared said savagely. "The one man, after me, that Anaconda would be glad to be rid of. What's the company trying to pull? Pick us off, the way the goons did outside your gate and--"

Frantic, Delaney interrupted and pointed at me. "Is it all right for him to hear this? He's one of those, you know."

Of course Jared waved that away and went on with his tirade. But that was the moment I truly realized I was one of those. A
newspaperman. Fresh to me, the hunger of the newsman to be first with the story, but oh, how I felt it. The same appetite raged in Cavaretta, Sammy, Armbrister, Matthews hunched ready at his typewriter on the far end of the line, every man and woman of the Thunder, I knew: To tell the reading public this story of the Hill, before the Post could bury it away on page eight in the death notices. If we could only get the news out. The time, the time.

How I did so with both hands engaged with the telephone, I don't know, but I fished my pocket watch from inside my topcoat, suitcoat, and vest pocket, and looked. Deadline was not that far off.

Meanwhile Delaney was still maintaining that Quinlan's fatal accident was only that, sheer chance, until Jared coldly broke in on him.
"Just tell me this. Will you swear to me, man to man, the company didn’t have anything to do with it?"

Delaney’s face froze. "Them downtown, you mean."

Jared and I realized in the same instant. The Neversweat overseer was frightened. Nervously he rattled out, "I don’t see how they--anybody--could have set this up to happen. I make every shift boss inspect the blasting supplies for short fuses, powder leaks, all that. You raise such hell with us anytime anyone’s hurt, I come down hard on handling explosives. I swear to you, that’s the honest truth."

Still incredulous, Jared asked: "Then how do you explain it? Two drillers, as savvy as anybody on the Hill, get blown up just like that?"
Delaney mustered himself. "You know what Quin was like. He never saw a corner he couldn't cut. How many times did I get after him for chasing into new rock ahead of the timbering crew? He'd laugh in my face and tell me he'd never yet heard the undertaker's music in the rock, he'd back off when he did." He stopped, his jaw working as if deciding whether to say the next. "Jared, you had better know. He was drinking, some. On the job, I'm pretty sure, although I couldn't ever catch him at it."

Jared winced, but shook his head. "I can't buy that entirely. Quin could hold his whiskey, he had a hollow leg." I watched Jared reach his decision. "Whatever the hell happened, no matter whose fault, I'm calling the men out."
Delaney cursed, then pleaded. "How's a wildcat strike going to help matters any?"

"Nobody said 'strike,'" Jared made the terms plain. "Just this shift, a walkout. We owe Quin that much."

"Do what you must," the supervisor gave up. He glanced uncertainly at me jealously guarding the phone. "I--I'll let them downtown know, whenever."

No sooner had he said that than a sudden wash of light through the office window startled the three of us, before we realized it was photographer's flash powder going off like daylight lightning. Delaney drew a breath. "I suppose that'll be the cage with the bodies."
Cavaretta came racing in, puffing from sprinting from the minehead and searching the corridor for me. He drew up momentarily at the sight of Jared and the mine superintendent, but swiftly stepped around them. "Don't mind me, just borrowing the phone. Thanks, Morgie." He began dictating: "Two veteran miners perished in an explosion of unknown cause deep in the Neversweat mine earlier today. Patrick Quinlan, mineworkers union representative on the afternoon shift and a well-known figure in the Irish community, and his drilling partner, Terence Fitzgerald, were said to be setting a dynamite charge in the four-thousand-foot level when--"
"--history repeated itself as tragedy," my editorial picked up the story the next day. It went on in this vein:

In rough numbers, the mining operations of the Hill kill a miner a week. This week it was two, one of them the combative presence across the bargaining table from the Anaconda Company in wage and safety negotiations. Pat Quinlan died, insofar as is known, because something went terribly wrong in a routine blasting of a wall of ore. Whatever happened, it fits on the list of mining conditions terribly wrong in the copper monopoly's empire of mines:

Is there enough ventilation at the extreme depth Anaconda has pushed its mineshafts in, say, the greatly misnamed Neversweat, so that a
mineworker is not blinded by his own sweat as he handles dangerous materials? No.

Is there medical help, even of the first-aid sort, in place and prepared when the dreaded signal of five whistles goes off? No.

Is there a change of course in the company's administration of its mines since the Speculator fire, when the escape doors that were supposed to be in the tunnels' cement bulkheads somehow were not there and one hundred sixty-four miners died? No.

That's Anaconda history for you. That's tragedy.