

Friday 1 July 2022

Private jets and moral panics. The road to insanity.

Dear everyone,

Struggling with worry about fuel costs and transport issues? You're not alone.

The demand in the private jet market has shot up at least 30% over 2021, and pilots are in short supply. Entry fees for fractional ownership of private jets start at around \$80,000 with some spending in excess of \$500,000 a year for what the *Financial Times* dubs 'call-your-own-shots convenience.' For UHNWI (they are a category, Google it if you've not heard of them), time is the most precious commodity, and since COVID, the urge to reduce 'touch-points' with other people has sky rocketed. But, patience is a virtue, and with wait times for the newest Gulfstream G800 private jet extending, delivery isn't expected until well into 2023. At \$72.5M a pop, it's probably worth ordering a fleet to secure your standing. Accretion of wealth among the few on this scale is only set to increase, so get in early.

Meanwhile, global food security is perilous. Not so if you're a *Pringle*, one of the most successful savoury snacks in the world. 'Clearly not a wellness brand', according to Kellogg's CEO, *Pringles* enjoy an unnervingly long shelf life and are reassuringly exactly the same all over the world. They are also used in science experiments in school to determine calorific output – you can heat water with them. Their utility in the lab under controlled conditions is enhanced as each saddle is exactly uniform in composition. They make very effective fire lighters for summer BBQs, too.

Harmony beat Serena at the beginning of the week in what could hardly have been called a peaceful or calm game on Wimbledon's centre court. It was exciting edge of the seat stuff, and the final of *The Great British Sewing Bee* was utter joy. Dawn and I will miss our Wednesday appointment with our imaginary telly family. The *Tour De France* starts with time trials today in Copenhagen, Denmark and that's us sorted for the next couple of weeks, no doubt stuffing our faces with savoury snacks while we watch from the sofa.

The PM has been selective with the facts around employment statistics from the ONS for some time, G7's male members (that's most of the G7, then) have abandoned the wearing of ties which is such a nuisance when you're trying to uphold dress code standards in school, and, as the saying goes, hell is only a hand cart ride away with all else that is happening. Let's hope not.

In all this anxiety, there are various agenda circling around schools, and the noise from their beating wings is growing. The Wellbeing agenda, for example, has been perching onto telegraph wires for some time, and is now pecking and squawking its way across statute.

Schools are being asked to take on more and more of the curing of society's sicknesses. We've atomised children and pathologized them as units of economic measure who are then invariably deemed unwell by one definition or another. Some *are* unwell. There is a clear increase in anxiety among the young (and their parents), for example. Some are also being undermined in their ability to be resilient in the face of an increasingly suspect neoliberal agenda which, for four decades at least, has promoted self-interest and marketisation above all else. Post lock down the cracks are showing. It will be interesting to watch how the Equality Diversity and Inclusion agenda works in such an environment which is, beneath the surface, ideologically oppositional.

I worry about this a great deal, and I hope it's not making me ill. It is certainly turning me into one of those earnest fellows that people avoid at dinner parties. What this all does highlight is the need for schools to work even more closely with parents to find better ways of living and, to some extent, pushing back against the policy wonks.

Caroline Heylen, Deputy Head, and I have been talking about our pastoral care for some time. It's pretty good, on the whole, and as you might expect, there are apps and online blogs that we could buy for you to look at to help you be, er, better parents. We're trying to find the best that are out there. In reviewing these things, we need to be careful. People can feel bad enough, and who needs or wants more stuff to stare at on screen that point out our failings? Like many self-help guides, some start from the premise of benchmarking what is lacking in us, and what we must therefore 'do' to improve. Like some tooth paste adverts, the presumption is that it's our breath that's smelly. Sometimes, good enough is good enough. Where is Aristotle's 'mean' these days?

A friend recently gave an account of sitting through three hours of Mental Health training on-line, and was fit to burst with irritation by the end of it. Thank you who ever invented the standing desk – at least they could jig about and kick things while being talked at.

What seems to me to be much more useful is to adopt the more communitarian view of being together and talking, plus that old-fashioned virtue of having something meaningful to do: a purpose outside of oneself. In short, how we build a stronger sense of community, and avoid what an American headteacher described to me recently as a divisive category culture that is dissolving community spirit in some US schools.

So, and I don't know the answer, how do we have good conversations about successive moral panics that morph into policy agenda that purport to do good, but also do harm, together as a school? These are not rhetorical questions, I really would welcome your thoughts.

I know that schools can't operate alone, and I know that none of our parents think for a moment that abrogating responsibility for their own child's settlement in the world rests instead entirely with schools. That really would be madness. You can have your say with the Independent Schools Inspectorate here on its new framework that aims to address some of these questions: <https://framework.isi.net/>

I also know that it doesn't help my mental health to aspire to that Gulfstream G800 that I clearly could never afford to buy, let alone fill up with fuel. I'll settle for setting fire to *Pringles* in the science lab.

I hope to see very many of you at the Saturday fair, and in the meantime, while I dream of fast jets, here's a number of recordings of one of the very best big band tunes, *Skyliner*, by Charlie Barnet.

The original Neal Hefti arrangement is here (Hefti wrote the Batman theme)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rovAmKujeX0>

For a cleaner sound, tight as you like, here is Chris Dean's Syd Lawrence Orchestra in concert, with a deliciously squirty trumpet:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jvtKjE59Fk>

And an arrangement by the great Sammy Nestico, here, which has less clip and cook to it, but a distinctive style and is lovely to play.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbLqnERB2Og>

Best wishes

Simon