

the reactor

By Paul Azevedo



If you were like thousands of other Pacificans, you recently spent eight evenings glued to your TV set. In that case, "Roots" may have awakened your interest in your own family history. Follow it up. Genealogy is fun, and illuminating.

If you are like most of us in Pacifica, your local roots are shallow. You'll have to refer back to another state, or another country, or another city, to find out more about your family.

Keep in mind that Alex Haley confined his search to one, only one, of 128 ancestors who were his great-great-great-great grandparents. Each of those 128 had a story, but most are irretrievably lost.

HALEY VALUED and used the oral history that had come down in his family from "the African" who had arrived unwillingly from Gambia on a slave ship.

He followed the clues, and discovered that Mandinka Griots, or story tellers, were able to take up the story where he lost the thread.

If you are white, you can follow written records. Start by visiting the Pacifica and Sanchez libraries. Check the "929" classifications for "Searching for Your Ancestors." It will give you a general idea of how to learn more about your family.

'Most of Us Pacificans Have Shallow Roots...'

YOU CAN LEARN a lot without ever leaving the Bay Area. Letters to older relatives, asking questions, tape recording the answers, all can be helpful. Some nearby sources can provide a surprising amount of help.

Did you know that a branch of the federal archives is just over the hill? It's located near Bayhill shopping center in San Bruno, just off San Bruno avenue.

It has microfilms of government documents, including censuses which often are treasure troves of valuable clues. Plan to take a look.

YOU MAY FIND yourself so fascinated by the material you find that you never get around to your own family. Don't forget why you are there.

The search will be slow. Allow lots of time. Think like a detective. Be prepared to read a lot of handwritten material.

You can also visit the Sutro library. It's at USF, though it's a state institution. Records and books from all over the country are on its shelves. State and county records and lineages of individual families are on file.

FOR INFORMATION about old-time Californians, try the San Francisco public library, the Bancroft library at UC Berkeley, and the California Historical Society in San Francisco. For 49ers, check with the Society of California Pioneers, but only if your goal is someone who arrived in California before the stroke of midnight, Dec. 31, 1849. None other need apply.

The SF library has city directories from 1870, and in the history room you'll find a Great register of voters for 1876, which contains many clues to San Franciscans of that day.

No matter where your search leads, you'll find it endlessly fascinating. After all, it's about you.

May you have as much success in your search as Alex Haley had in his.

11-6-77