

4/20/77

The Reactor

Friend Who'll Be Missed



by Paul Azevedo

"Like a bar with a key, spelled the same way." I must have heard Ralph Barkey give that Mnemonic description of his name a hundred times or more.

Ralph was ad director of the Tribune. Most of the years I've been with the Tribune he was my immediate superior. I never thought of him as boss. He was a good friend.

Most people who ever operated a Pacifica business, dealt with the water board, were involved in Pacifica's incorporation, or attended the Pacifica Peso Auction got to know RB. What's more, almost everyone who knew him liked him.

RALPH DIDN'T preach positive thinking. But he practiced it, every day. He was always cheerful. He smiled, jaunty even when everyone knew he had been bouncing in and out of Kaiser emergency like a tennis ball. He wasn't a pollyanna. He'd make wry jokes about his health. He knew. He was just not going to let himself, or anyone else, down.

Even a plastic heart valve couldn't slow him much. I noticed that he didn't whistle quite as frequently when he

came in the door. It was his trademark, that whistle.

But even drawn and tired, he smiled. He was easy to work with.

Ralph got involved in civic affairs early on. Perhaps he got interested in incorporation when he and a neighbor listened to a burglar stumble around in another neighbor's home for two hours. The sheriff's deputy finally came, too late.

RALPH WAS proud of his years on the water district board. The water board in the last 10 or 12 years has been a low profile job, perhaps because Ralph and his fellow directors have been so conscientious and non-controversial.

People trusted Ralph. When his opponent in a water district race needed an ad, he came to Ralph. Ralph conscientiously helped him lay out a good, attention-getting ad. He always helped his customers.

Ralph grew up in New York. One of his first jobs was as an NBC page. We think of those days as the golden age of radio, in the same way that perhaps we are living in the golden age of TV, heaven forbid.

RALPH WAS there the day a network vice-president got fired, practically on the air. As Ralph told it, the VP was inordinately proud of his first venture into carpentry, a broom closet.

This nettled Fred Allen, who hated vice-presidents on principle. Allen made a caustic on-air reference to the "vice president in charge of broom closets."

The VP, watching in the control room, was furious. "Insubordination," he said. He ordered the live show taken off the air immediately.

WHEN THE network's president, an Allen fan, called to ask the problem, Ralph handed the phone to the VP, who turned white as he was terminated on the spot.

Ralph died young. At 52 he was vitally interested in his family, his adopted home town, "his" water district. He was still concerned for the merchants he had helped promote and advertise for 15 years. Being retired didn't change that.

I can only be grateful that the surgeons kept him alive for a few years longer than might have been. We need all the RBs we can get.

He designed the city seal. Every letterhead the city uses, every police car with that design on the door, even the sign on the streetsweeper, is his memorial.

But the memorial that I cherish most is the memory of a cheerful whistle, a never-say-die smile, and a "bar with a key, spelled the same way."

Letters to the Editor

Spirit Is Not Enough

Editor:

The attached set of requirements is self-explanatory.

For a public school to initiate these requirements, in particular numbers 11 and 12, is uncalled for at a time when the cost of living has escalated to the point

Editor's note:

A letter sent by the school to parents of prospective spirit staff members lists the following requirements:

"1. They may not