



the reactor

by Paul Azevedo

The boarder and the boardinghouse are almost dead. They've been killed, I suppose, by a lot of things. Zoning laws ... affluence ... the laundromat ... hot plates ... marriage ... TV Dinners ... McDonald's ... Take your choice, mix'em or match'em, they are all good reasons.

A man I talked to the other day was reminiscing about a boarder at his grandmother's place. He came to board at age 21, left the house at 65 ... I didn't hear why. Perhaps, death, perhaps retirement. Who knows?

A boarder had his own room, but he ate with the family. He might spend his evening in the living room, or reading in his own room, or out at a pool hall or bar or perhaps a library.

THE BOARDER was sometimes an immigrant. He might be a bachelor, or even a maiden aunt. The boarder was often a distant relative. Boarders were the way a poor mother picked up some extra income, at the cost of a lot of hard work, cooking, washing, cleaning up for more than her own family.

Running a boarding house was the way a lot of widows with small children survived, 50 or 100 years ago, when other job options just weren't open.

The boarding house isn't feasible in Pacifica today, of course. The houses aren't big enough... it would never get through the Planning Commission... and it's too much work for too little money.

SINGLE PEOPLE like to have their own apartments. Boardinghouses and privacy are contradictions. You can't live in one and have the other.

It's been a long time, in fact, since the president of the United States left the boardinghouse where he was living to go to his inauguration, or when "boardinghouse reach" had real meaning at a family table.

There are some other institutions, also, besides a downtown, that Pacifica seems to have escaped by its late start as a city.

THE POOL HALL and the bowling alley are two we are as well off without.

The Sea Bowl, which had both bowling lanes and pool tables the last time I looked, doesn't qualify as an old fashioned pool hall or bowling alley.

For one thing, it's clean. For another, it's run by businessmen catering to people out for fun, but not to a crowd of idlers hanging around, night after night.

IN MY HIGH school days I earned a few dollars, (darn few) setting pins at the local bowling alley in Santa Rosa. It was no loss at all when high school kids were replaced by automatic pinsetters a few years after my pinsetting days ended.

Too many pinspotters were clobbered by flying pins, and the dreaded thought, among all pinspotters, was "double-balling," when an impatient bowler would pick up a spare ball and roll it down the lane while the first ball and the pinsetter were both in the pit. Bowlers who did that were sometimes assaulted by furious pinsetters scared out of their mind by a near miss.

So much for the good old days.

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