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## the reactor

by Paul Azevedo

Let's say your kids have been bugging you to **DO SOMETHING** over Easter vacation. They want to do something (1) fascinating (2) absorbing (3) fun.

You want something (1) nearby (2) cheap (3) educational.

Try the newspaper room at the San Francisco public library. Your kids (or you) can look back on the day you (or they) were born, or they can go back 20, or 30, even 80 years.

**I FIRST** learned of the fascination old newspapers can have for kids while I was researching the history of Sharp Park golf course. I took my kids along, and while I was looking through Chronicles and Calls of the early 30s (the golf course will be 48 years old April 16) my kids were looking at 1930 vintage comic strips and depression corned beef prices.

(Corned beef was six cents a pound in the thirties, 37 cents a pound in Pacifica in 1960, and anywhere from 1.79 to 1.99 lb. earlier this month.

Your intelligent 10 or 12 year old knows that food costs money. He will be fascinated by the changes in grocery prices, and he will learn more about inflation in a few minutes than hours of classroom generalities will teach him.

**BUT YOUR** child may not be interested in grocery ads or who was elected to office in 1933.

In a few hours he can go through many years of comic strips. It is more than just nostalgia when I say that '30s comics were better.

The strips were larger. The artists were younger.

Newsprint was cheaper, and publishers were willing to devote more of it to comics, which allowed artists to do a better job and include more detail.

If they don't care to check out the comics or the price of corned beef, they'll find some excellent writing in the columns of the day.

**WARS AND REVOLTS** have a dreary sameness that hasn't changed in 50 or 60 years. The fun is provided by trivia. When reporters have fun with a story, it's likely to be fun to read even 40 or 50 years down the road.

What's most fun, of course, is to find a story about some young unknown athlete who went on to local or national fame.

The Tribune provides a weekly taste of our old files with "Peek at the Past."

**"PEEK" TAKES** advantage of the files of the Coastside Tribune in the '50s, and the Sharp Park Breakers even before that.

There wasn't much to this area then except Sharp Park, and not too much of that.

"Peek" is always fascinating, but it's news oriented. When I look back in our old files, I read the ads. I like to be reminded for example, that in 1960, (not all that long ago) you could buy, in Pacifica, various cheeses for 49 cents lb., mackerel for 29 cents lb., rib steak for 69 cents lb. You could have your choice of hamburger, hot dogs or bacon at three pounds for a dollar.

In 1960 it was harder to get into San Francisco to read old newspapers. These days you can take Sam-Trans to the BART station, get off at Civic Center and spend the day learning what it was like around the Bay a few years ago.