

9-30-81



the reactor

by Paul Azevedo

I have inadvertently gotten a small dose of what it's like to be a college student in 1981. He's pushed around. He stands in line for the opportunity to stand in other lines. He's regimented, computerized, and for all I know, folded, spindled and stapled. By the standards of my college years, he's charged outrageous prices for books.

I discovered most of these truths because I thought it would be nice to take one of the TV courses given over KCSM, the college TV station.

My wife and I have been wanting to learn more about computers, and there is this course, part of the "College of the Air."

It's called "Data Processing 680." I stopped in the college bookstore a couple of weeks ago, before school had started. Where is the text for DP 680? "Just go to Aisle 3B." Sure enough, there was the small text for DP 680. I paid cash, congratulated myself on the ease of the transaction. It was so easy, why not register for the course right now?

I went to the right building, filled out the registration form ("what is your ethic (sic) background?" it asked. Naturally I wrote "very ethical." Once a proofreader, always a proofreader.)

The woman in charge was very helpful. She took my

app, gave me some information on the course.

The textbook on her list didn't match the book I had bought. She phoned the bookstore about a refund. That began to sound impossible. Something about not having their refund fund funded yet.

I finally got my money back, asked for directions again and asked why they hadn't given me the right directions before.

"You didn't tell us you wanted the TV course." I didn't think I had to. Why would a college have two different courses with the same name and number? No explanation.

Back to the hallway where the TV books are shelved. \$22.65? For a paperback? I hadn't enough cash, and I didn't have my checkbook. I decided to try another day. That was a mistake.

The next time I got back to San Mateo, school was in session. Parking lot jammed. Cars up and down driveways, jammed in every cranny.

Parked a quarter mile from the bookstore. Stood in line to be allowed into the bookstore. That took 15 minutes. Leave all packages outside. Pass through gates. Noticed clerks demagnetizing all purchases. Obviously a difficult place to shoplift. All kinds of rules and regs. A minute to find the text. Then stand in line to get my check approved. Then the third line of the morning, and the book was paid for. Forty five minutes for a three minute transaction. About like buying meat during wartime.

I think I'll enjoy the course on computers. It'll be intriguing to get up at 6 a.m. Fridays, sit in my dining room in my bathrobe with a cup of coffee in my hand learning about the ins and outs of the subject.

Next time, though, I think I'll order my textbooks by telephone. I haven't the patience to be a college student, 1981 style.