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**The  
Reactor**

There are certain key dates in my life...watersheds. There was the Sunday afternoon (I was two) when my mother discovered my pillow covered with blood. My mastoid had burst. There was the day Roosevelt died. There was the day that same June, when, with my arm in a sling, I graduated from eighth grade. There was VJ day.

A week ago yesterday was another memorable day. My daughter Joan graduated from the Laguna Salada Alternative Class at Cabrillo School, ending 12 years in which all four of my kids have participated in a unique experiment in public education.

The LSAC has survived two different schools, many different teachers, some problem children and some problem parents, to become one of the oldest surviving programs of its type.

By tapping a school district's greatest resource, concerned parents, the LSAC has proved that even a financially strapped school district can give children high quality, enriched education.

Many graduates of the program are doing well in high school and college. An impressive number have been accepted by schools with very strict academic standards. It doesn't take a crystal ball to foresee alternative class alumni as a nucleus of leaders in many areas of life.

Who's responsible? Certainly the small group of

parents who worked out the concept. Certainly the school board which was so willing to listen when they could have dismissed the whole idea. Certainly a school administration which has cooperated and helped. Certainly the teachers, who had to work far harder than most teachers, who had to be directors as well as teachers, who had to organize and focus the work of the parent-volunteers. But most of all, it has been the parents who have been the heart of the program. It has been the parents who staffed the clusters, dividing classes into Educatable small units.

It has been the parents who plotted out the intricacies of scheduling the "commitment" of time and energy which is the engine that drives the program. It has been the parents who met nights to improve the program, solve problems, and resolve the inevitable conflicts. The objects of all this work and concern, the pupils, could learn democratic cooperation just by observing what was happening in their own classrooms.

Sooner or later even the most recalcitrant learner had to realize how important he was, if his parents were willing to expend so much effort to educate him. After all, this is a voluntary program.

Thanks to family volunteers who teach particular classes, who help one group with reading or another group with math or a third group put on a play, or drive kids on field trips, "Alternative" kids have enjoyed many "frills", field trips, extras, (at no cost to our strapped school district) yet they excel in the three "Rs" for the most part.

The lesson I've learned from 12 years involvement with the alternative class (my wife was the worker, I mostly the observer) is that the most important key to successful children are concerned parents. They don't have to be rich. They don't have to be brilliant. They do have to want very much that their children be the best they can be.