



Paul Azevedo

## The Reactor

### A Much Closer Look

I like fairs. I enjoy the familiar sights; the demonstrators in the commercial booths romancing blenders and knives; the animals on display that remind me of my early childhood on a dairy; the carnival rides I never go on; the displays of prize-winning canning and bakery goods; the pride that so obviously went into the floral displays.

But what makes each fair I visit particularly memorable is some new display, some thing I didn't expect to find. One year at the San Mateo County Fair it was the demonstration that showed me how to make an omelet.

This year at the state fair in Sacramento it is the display of photos of R. I. Gilbreath, who lives down the Peninsula from us.

Mr. Gilbreath has discovered a new world that most of us never see. Now he's shared it with us all. He went to the desert for some of his pictures, but for many of them, he's simply gone to his backyard, and he could find treasures in your backyard just as easily.

Gilbreath takes magnified color photos of perfectly formed flowers and plants so tiny some are about the size of the letter "O" you see here. He pictures flowers from different species, many close relatives of much larger flowering plants.

The flowers are tiny, but there are many different varieties, and the flowers are just as beautiful and precious as their larger relatives. A bouquet of these miniature gems would fit into a pill bottle and you would need a magnifying glass to appreciate them, but I'm sure that their insect pollinators find them fully as attractive as their larger cousins.

They are also a reminder of a world all around us we don't fully appreciate because we overlook it, a tiny world of miniscule insects, micro-miniature-sized plants, and multi-celled animals at the borderline of invisibility.

Perhaps, instead of looking for the largest flower, or the largest game trophy, we should instead learn to appreciate the tiny worlds growing in the pockets of rocks or in puddles after rainstorms.

I think I'll get a magnifying glass one of these days, take a hike in the hills or San Pedro Valley Park, and try to learn to appreciate what I have spent most of my life overlooking, a world of living plants and animals so tiny that most of the time I simply don't know they are there.

8-31-83