



Paul Azevedo

## The Reactor

### An Intimate View of Access

When you hear that someone has been butted by a ram, you laugh. It is funny. Except when my son reported that my wife, Lydia, had been so butted, he was calling from the doctor's office. That eliminated much of the humor.

Lydia had been doing some volunteer work on the Elkus 4-H ranch when this ram, his macho feelings running high, decided to be rambunctious.

Lydia wound up with a badly sprained ankle, a bone chip, and a cast on her foot.

We rented a wheelchair at Linda Mar Pharmacy and plunged instantly into the world of the handicapped.

I have written in the past about the problems of the handicapped.

I favored the elevator to the City Council Chambers. I've approved of curbcuts and handicapped parking, but never before have I had such close personal reasons.

Attending a family wedding in a fancy East Bay restaurant, we got a scenic view of the bay, the San Francisco skyline and windsurfers. We also had a close-up view of the dirty dishes in the service elevator, the only way that particular restaurant can get a person in a wheelchair from the first to the second floor.

This same new, modern restaurant has some decorative steps which make it impossible for a lone person in a wheelchair to get into the place. Only a couple of steps, mind you. Just enough. My son and I had to lift the chair over the steps.

A person in a wheelchair, we found, often can't just roll the wheelchair someplace. She (or he) can't get through some tight corners without a helper.

When that pusher was me, it became a real problem getting Lydia into a lady's room not designed for handicapped use. Makes you happy there are places like the Pacifica branch library, with its specially designed facilities.

Of course, Lydia is used to doing things for herself, like driving her own car. When you can't run the simplest errands without help, it can be mighty frustrating.

Getting around in my subcompact B-210 is another problem: The wheelchair, even folded, won't fit into the closed car trunk. A bungee cord helped, but it is hard on the car. If we tried to put in the back seat, we tore the upholstery.

As houses go in Pacifica, Linda Mar ranchers are pretty close to the ground, but even they are a problem. Two steps down on crutches, and you are in danger of pitching forward on your face.

I'm surprised more people on crutches don't end up breaking new bones as they heal old ones.

Lydia discovered a nice, clean elevator in Tanforan Penneys, and was so happy she wound up buying most of our son's back to school clothes there.

We talked to a friend of ours, a 50-year old, rather dignified gentleman who will be on crutches for the next six months. He has learned to scoot up and down stairs on his bottom. Safer that way.