



Paul Azevedo

## The Reactor

### Tales of Whales and History

My thanks for the bundles of magazines and pocket-books that generous Pacificans brought into the Pacifica branch library last week. I boxed and labeled everything that came in by Saturday. By now, some of the county jail inmates may be reading your donations.

This project is an ongoing kind of thing, so if you have any magazines or pocketbooks that you want to donate, bring them to the Pacifica branch at any time. They are always welcome.

Someone called the other day to ask about a beached whale that had made the news a number of years ago, and it brought back memories. I was able to tell the caller that the whale came ashore (in deplorable condition) in March 1969. Since that's more than 15 years ago, many new Pacificans, and many young people won't remember it. It was a horrific sight, and smelly. The big gray whale had to be hefted by a crane, and the dramatic color photo made LIFE magazine.

This was only three years after the U.S.S. Johnson beached itself at Mori Point. This was before the days of environmental impact reports. I suppose that now before a ship would be allowed to wreck itself on our beach, someone would have to hold a hearing and a report would have to be filed in triplicate.

The funniest part of the whole Johnson incident was how the San Mateo Times and the San Francisco Chronicle reported the beaching.

One paper referred to Mori Point, which is centrally located along Pacifica's coastline, as being "near Pacifica" and another reported the ship as being a "mile and a half south of Pacifica." I hope they've figured out since just where Pacifica is. Maybe that's where someone got the idea for the bumper strips that said "Where The Hell's Pacifica?"

Speaking of whales, I hope you are going to take your kids out to see the gray whales. The whale-watching boats of Huck Finn tours and other whale-watching ships should be beginning their annual trips soon, and it's a sight that is worth seeking out.

Two hundred years ago, before the Yankee whalers had decimated the gray whale population almost to the point of extinction, beached whales were common along our coast, and the grizzly bears, which were also common, would feast on the huge creatures along the shore. Bears would gather from miles around for the event.

We can be sure that the baby elephant seals now being born on the mainland at Ano Nuevo Point are the first successful such births there. The bears would have decimated any attempts before 1800 or so, and after that both populations were destroyed by hunting.

As devoted as the rangers are to restoring the lands of San Pedro Valley Park to its native condition, removing all the exotic plants like eucalyptus, I don't suppose that they will be restoring the grizzly any time soon.