



Paul Azevedo

# The Reactor

## Social Benefits of 'In-Laws'

I don't know about you, but I am getting older. My hair is thinning steadily. The youngest in my family was talking about voting the other day. The census bureau tells me this is happening all over Pacifica. Your neighbors and mine are aging. In 1970 Pacifica's families were young, large and growing.

Today lots of heads are thinning out, like mine. And a lot of families are thinning out, too. Houses that filled the needs of five, six or seven people now are being used by one or two older people.

In my neighborhood the 15 kids that used to live next door and across the street are now two kids.

The only reason Pacifica's population stayed almost even from 1970 to 1980 is that we gained 25 percent more housing units, (mostly apartments) in that time.

The houses that served large families can still serve several people, rather than one or two, but it will take some redesigning. A single person or a couple renting out a so-called "granny unit" or in-law apartment in a single family home is not really adding a new burden to the neighborhood. It's a kind of infill. The renter is using the "infra-structure" that is already built into the area. The renter is not adding a new burden to the area, but instead is just replacing the children of the family who have left for other places.

In some cases the children themselves will be there, living more independently than they did as children, but still close enough to give support to parents as they grow older.

A rental unit within a single family home benefits the owner with a small income that pays taxes, and a little extra security. We have the capacity to house more people within the existing housing inventory, simply by adding an extra bath here, a wall or a door or tiny kitchen there. The benefits are great.

It also means a more personal, friendly relationship with a landlord, as I have reason to know. While working at my first job after college, I lived in what was humorously called a "garden apartment" in Walnut Creek. The property was an old chicken ranch overtaken by the growth of Walnut Creek and the aging of its owners, the Millions. The apartment was in the basement of the Millions' old farm home, which was built on a slope. It wasn't fancy, but it was cheap. Mr. and Mrs. Million turned out to be delightful people, and we would often sit and talk on a warm summer evening. Mrs. Million was the first white child in Cripple Creek, Colo. during that area's gold rush. I got more than just an anonymous cubbyhole in a huge apartment complex. I had the opportunity to meet people who became friends. These are the kinds of benefits that planning commissions seldom take into account. Yet knowing the Millions was something that enriched my life. Too bad they can't teach that in city planning courses at the university.

The installation of in-law apartments in Pacifica will not add burdens to an overburdened area. It will instead bring many homes in Pacifica back to the capacity for which they were originally designed.

Don't deny today's young singles the benefits that "in-law" apartments gave people like me when we were young. Three cheers for "In-Law" Apartments.