

The 6-11-86 Reactor

Paul Azevedo



A Simple But Successful Idea

One of the most satisfying things I've ever gotten myself involved in is the Jail Outreach program of the Peninsula Library system. It involves getting magazines and pocketbooks for prisoners of the county jail system.

It started several years ago when the system's outreach librarian of the time asked Pacifica Friends of the Library for some donations. She included a list of the most desirable magazines and pocketbooks, and I wrote a column that started what has become an ongoing program. With the help of a little Tribune classified ad, some very nice people I've never met have shared their magazines and pocketbooks with the prisoners. I stop by the library most Saturdays, and usually there is a bag, or three or four, of magazines and pocketbooks that someone's brought in. In 10 or 15 minutes I sort through the donations and eliminate the Sunsets, the Family Circles, the Harlequin romances, and similar materials. I box and label the rest, and the library system sends it all to the outreach librarian. It stretches a limited materials budget, gives prisoners a wide choice of materials to select from, and it recycles a lot of magazines and pocketbooks which might otherwise never again be read.

Since the prisoners themselves request what they want

to read, some material is in great demand, and other kinds never get a tumble. My tastes and those of the prisoners coincide in some areas, but some of the stuff I ship I would never read, and some the materials I would choose I nevertheless delete from the shipments.

Incidentally, except for old catalogs or obvious junk, what I don't ship I put in the downstairs alcove of the library, where people can select free magazines to take home. That's where the Sunsets, the Good Housekeepings, the Modern Maturitys and similar magazines go.

Highly acceptable paperbacks and magazines include crime and mysteries, love poetry, astrology and the occult, adventure, suspense, psychology and self-help, crafts, such as calligraphy and crochet, science fiction, games, and publications which help career and job skills.

Kahlil Gibran's "The Prophet" is popular. So are dictionaries, almanacs, the Guinness Book of World Records, and Hoyle.

On the original list of favorite books was Robert Heinlein's "Starship Troopers." Also popular are western authors like Louis L'Amour.

Magazine favorites include Jet, Ebony, recent news magazines like Time, People, Playboy and Playgirl, gossip mags, Sports and car magazines, fashion magazines, etc. Because no one ever throws away a National Geographic Magazine, there is currently an oversupply.

Spanish Language magazines are always appreciated, and reference materials such as encyclopedias are used in the three jail facilities which have separate library areas.

If you have magazines or pocketbooks you would like to donate, bring them by the Pacifica Library on Hilton Way, labeled for the Jail Outreach Program. And my sincere thanks to the many people who have made this simple idea a success.