

The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



Life Never Seems to Get Simpler...or Cheaper...

Have you noticed how life seems to get more complicated and more expensive with every passing day. Life would be simpler for automobile drivers if some people would not stop roads from being built, and if other people would quit using drivers as financial patsies to subsidize bus, boat and train commuters.

Then there is unleaded gasoline. We use unleaded, not because it benefits us directly (not even our tempers) but because it cuts down on smog. That's a worthy goal, but why should I have to pay a premium for the privilege of cutting smog. Let's pass a law requiring gas stations charge as much for leaded as unleaded gas. That would provide incentive for regular gas users to switch to unleaded, and competition might then force down the cost of unleaded. Since regular leaded users pollute, why shouldn't they subsidize the rest of us? As it is, they pollute and the rest of us subsidize them. Is that fair? I think it makes about as much sense as subsidizing tobacco farmers.

Like unleaded gasoline, unleaded coffee carries a premium. To avoid caffeine with your coffee, you have to pay out substantially more. After they leach out the caffeine and increase the price, I understand they then sell the caffeine to the cola people. That's a bit like the scavengers who charge you to take away trash, then recycle parts of it at a profit. If I were them I'd do the same, but since I'm not, I feel a bit exploited, especially since I have no choice about receiving scavenger service.

As you get older, you discover that salt is a no-no for health reasons. Ditto sugar. But it costs more to buy unsalted canned vegetables and unsugared canned fruits than the salted, sugared stuff. It's a bit like a bikini. The less there is, the higher the price. The price of nudity hasn't increased, however.

When I was a kid I had a simple address, 653 Oak St., Santa Rosa, California. The phone was 3538J. Post office boxes were mostly 3 digits. Today in Montara every post office box has 6 digits, say "370999," followed by Montara, CA and nine more digits that they call Zip+4. It would be a lot more zippy if it did not exist. To call the Governor's office in Sacramento you used to call the long distance operator and ask for "the Governor's office" and she would get it for you. Today you may have to dial a local South City number, followed by a six digit access code, then ten more digits to get the governor's office, for a total of 23 digits. Get every one of them right or do it all over again. If you misdial you may wind up paying for a toll call to Hawaii. The phone company used to give names like ELMwood and FLanders and TUxedo and DELaware to telephone prefixes. It was easy to remember a phone number like Elmwood 9-6666. The associations and mental imagery were built right in. I joined that ill-fated group, the Anti-Digit Dialing League, when the phone company forced us to give up the comfortable crutch and forced us to accept all digits. That battle seems so naive and so long ago. Now I just wish they would give us back our telephone company as it was before it was broken up. All is forgiven, Ma.

4-1-87