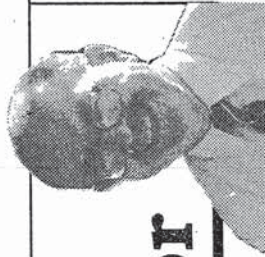


The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



We Should Have Known

In 1969 two men escaped from the San Francisco County Jail. That imposing lockup, in the hills between Pacifica and San Bruno, was built in the 1930's. It's ringed by plowed fields, miles from San Francisco. Sixty years ago it was isolated, surrounded mostly by cow pasture and farmland. In 1969 subdivisions had grown up around it, San Bruno's Portola Highlands on the east, several in Pacifica to the west. The prisoners chose to avoid the homes they saw in San Bruno. Instead they hiked over the hills.

They came down from Sweeney Ridge into Vallemar, hid under a home, then broke in. By pure chance they had selected the home of a retired sea captain in his nineties. Christian Pedersen.

What a man he was! Adventure ... accomplishment ... rescuer of arctic explorer Roald Amundsen ... whaler ... fur trader. He had lived a rugged heroic life. In his old age he and his wife of 48 years retired to their snug harbor in

Vallemar surrounded by memories of the northern seas.

One of the escapees called himself, ironically, Ramon Salcido, among a collection of aliases. Salcido and his partner broke into the Pedersen's home, killed the good captain, and terrorized his aged wife. In 1969 Salcido was called a major failure of the judicial system. Ironically by 1977 he was walking the streets of San Francisco once again, quite legally. He proceeded once again to demonstrate the failure of the system by killing officer Douglas Gibbs, eight years after he had killed Captain Pedersen.

I and many others were unhappy to learn he was loose once again. As I commented at the time, no one in the criminal justice system thought it was our business. They did not bother to tell us. When you want to build an eight foot fence or add a room close to the property line, you must go before the planning commission. The neighbors must be notified. A public notice is published in the *Tribune*. The city sends out postcards to all residents within a certain perimeter of the property. We are told where to go and when to be there if we wish to object or to comment. A public hearing is held.

No one in 1977 told us that Captain Pedersen's killer might be turned loose so soon. Every man convicted of a serious crime deserves consideration, but so does the interest of the public which wishes to be protected and avenged. We need the equivalent of an environmental impact report from the parole board or the prison system. An ad, or at least a news release, should detail a criminal's

background. Newspapers in the area where the crimes were committed should be notified. The notice should describe his crimes and notify the people involved that he is being considered for parole. If such an ad had been published in the *Tribune* in 1977, I and others might have protested, the parole board might have reconsidered, and police officer Douglas Gibbs might have enjoyed many more years of his life. The system still operates in silence. Criminals still leave prison unnoticed. You would think, by now, that we would know better.



The Pacifica Tribune is published every Wednesday in Pacifica, Calif. Our phone number is 359-6666.

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10-3-90