

# The Reactor

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## No batteries: Grandpa whittled a calculator

Some people are complaining about the stagnant productivity of the American people, in the face of more and more tools that theoretically should increase that productivity. But if Americans had deliberately set out to waste energy and lower productivity, they couldn't have done better.

Look at the joggers in the park. Grimly determined, they move along at a brisk pace, going nowhere. Most joggers are alone, or going too fast even to have a discussion with a friend or spouse. Every day opportunities are lost to learn and to bond.

In an ideal situation to discuss philosophy or quantum mechanics or rock music, they do none of the above.

As far as I know no one has even bothered to invent a foot-powered generator that could tie the reward of TV to the work of making electricity.

Pacificans, among others, pay good money for someone to haul away

leaves, branches, and other garden refuse, then go to the garden shop and buy sacks of soil conditioner intended to replace the good garden compost they threw away at great expense. Even the scavengers, who make money on this arrangement, are trying to persuade us to compost garden and kitchen scraps.

We endanger ourselves and our families with organophosphate insecticides, when we could accomplish almost as much making our own home-made insecticides from home grown garlic and soap.

Some people commute from the San Joaquin Valley to San Francisco, wasting the most precious hours of their lives, and the best miles of their cars as well. Meanwhile there are lots in Pacifica which could be filled in with affordable housing, except that neighbors fight every effort to build in this area close to big city. Every ridge-

line must be clear, every vista pristine, even places like Mori Point, which hasn't been pristine in a hundred years.

My Portuguese grandmother lived to be 92. Until her age caught up with her, in her late 80s, she recycled, composted, gardened, grew her own vegetables, used even the fish head for soup. Her grandchildren have forgotten the lessons she taught us, and are now having to learn the hard way what we could have learned by close observation. She, who could barely read and only learned from her children's homework, instead developed and used a fantastic memory.

My grandfather, who did not have the benefit of schooling, could not read or write, but he taught himself how to record numbers with a pocketknife and a whittling stick. At cattle auctions, his seemingly casual whittling was actually a record of cattle numbers and estimated weights. He didn't know much about Aristotle or the Civil War, but in a fiercely competitive business he knew how to buy cattle and make money at it. He respected the value of arithmetic far more than those of us to whom it is presented on a silver platter.

Not everything that came from the old country is worth preserving, but in our rush to calculators, computers and electronics, we may be losing knowledge of inestimable worth, should we open our eyes.