

You can call me *Mister*, stranger!

When I was 19 years old, one of my favorite junior college teachers, a woman for whom I had vast respect, would respond to a comment or question with "That's very interesting, Mr. Azevedo." It was always "Mr. Azevedo." Never Paul. Even hard-bitten, profane, sergeants in the army showed enough respect to address me as "Corporal Azevedo." I realized how far downhill we've come in the years since, when I got a phone call from some valley girl selling double pane windows. I'd never met her. I don't even know what state she called from. The conversation started "May I speak to Paul Ahz-uh-Vah? (long pause), Paul Azz-vee-dee-oh?" I make it a policy never to pronounce it for them, never to fill the pause with sound. That only encourages them. Next, she addressed me as "Paul."

That's my name, and you, who read this column, are welcome to address me as such. After all, we know each other. You've seen my face above these words. I may know you personally. At a minimum, you read this newspaper. We know each other, at least a tiny bit. But that valley girl? She couldn't find Pacifica on the map if she had to. She probably thinks this city is somewhere between Monterey and San Diego.

The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



I suppose I should be grateful she's human. There's a monstrous machine, which can dial my number, introduce itself, and ask me questions. I wish I had a machine that would answer it back. Leave me out of the loop. And don't tie up my phone line. I have better uses for it.

I like the phone. It allows me to talk to my mother and my remaining brother, even if I don't see them as often as I'd like to. It allowed me to talk to my daughter when she was in Germany as if she was in the next room.

When my grandmother arrived in San Francisco at the age of 19, she knew she'd never hear the voices of her parents or her family in the Azores again, and she never did, during the remaining 73 years of her life. The phone can be a great blessing.

These days telemarketers have done major damage to the social contract by which I keep my name and address in the phone book for the benefit of my

friends and business associates. Hardly a day goes by I don't get a call from someone whose crews are "in the neighborhood," so they'd like to give me a "free" estimate on siding, or roofing, or windows, or something. They called me! Therefore I have no compunction about asking all sorts of questions designed to throw them off their pace. If they ask questions designed to elicit repeated Yes answers, I say "No." I ask them their surnames, and attempt to address them as Miss Jones, or Mr. Smith, whatever it is. This hurts their feelings so much they often hang up on me. I never hang up on them. It's too much fun when an over-friendly gentleman calling from a boiler room not far north of Tijuana has to admit he just started on the job last week and doesn't know anything about the product he's trying to peddle.

Perhaps telemarketers ought to be taxed so much per call, doubled for all calls during dinner.