

## A Portrait of Pacifica's "Reactor" ~ Tribune columnist Paul Azevedo

*"Oh! I didn't realize your father was so important!" Paul Azevedo's mother commented to her grandchildren at a banquet celebrating her son's 25th anniversary at the Pacifica Tribune. Paul's daughter Rena Azevedo Kiehn said that while an impressive list of Pacifica/Bay Area and California notables had cheered her dad's contributions to Pacifica through proclamations, resolutions, affirmations and in-person speeches – it was only when she met attendee Al Teglia and learned that this four-time mayor of Daly City, and fan of her son's, was a former president of the Italian-Catholic Federation that she was wowed!"*



Written by Jean Bartlett, September, 2020  
(A Pacifica Historical Society Project)

### AZEVEDO, PAUL ANTHONY(1931-2004)

"Paul Azevedo was the conscience of Pacifica for many years, writing a regular column for decades in the *Pacifica Tribune* called the 'Reactor,'" wrote Chris Hunter – Chief of Staff to San Mateo County Supervisor Don Horsley and former Editor and Publisher of the *Pacifica Tribune* – in his book "Legendary Locals of Pacifica, California." (Legendary Locals is an imprint of Arcadia Publishing). "... It seemed as though there was no topic in Pacifica that would not appear in the 'Reactor.'"

Paul began working full-time for Bill Drake's *Pacifica Tribune* in 1966. (Bill was the *Tribune's* Editor and Publisher from 1959 to 1989) What were Paul's specific jobs for the *Tribune* over the many years he worked?

"I can take a crack at naming them," Paul's son Mike Azevedo said. "First he sold advertising and then he became the Advertising Manager. He was Production Manager for a time – dummied the paper to fit everything in every week. Then he became the Circulation Manager. This meant he was in charge of the van, working with the carriers, making sure all routes were covered – which is why we were always delivering papers at o'dark thirty – and working with the staff who did all the paper distribution." (Paul's wife Lydia and their four children would all be involved in helping out at the *Tribune*.)

"His roles changed because back then, the newspaper was like a family farm," Rena explained. "The cows gotta get milked! The paper had to get out! You did what it took to make the place run."

"Dad was never a reporter," Mike added, "but he certainly reported and held many bylines. He was a photographer as well. As for columnist, that came about because he was so damned opinionated that he kept sending letters to the editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Bill Drake finally told him if he insisted on giving a paper content, it really should be his paper. Dad was never paid for it, but his column was well-read and well-known which was payment of its own. He continued as a columnist long after he retired."

Paul's daughter Joane Azevedo-Luesse further explained that magic moment when her already-a-Tribune-employee father became a *Tribune* columnist.

"Bill Drake was on vacation and opened up the *San Francisco Chronicle* to find Dad's letter to the editor," Joane said. "He was amused that he couldn't free himself from Dad's opinions even while on vacation hundreds of miles away. He figured if Dad was going to create content, he would rather it inspired sales of the *Tribune* than the *Chronicle*. That was when he offered him the column."

Paul's first "Reactor" column ran March 19, 1975. The last column he wrote was published on April 28, 2004. Joane estimates her dad wrote somewhere between 1,400 and 1,500 columns.

\* \* \*



Paul Anthony Azevedo was born in Santa Rosa, CA, on March 20, 1931 to Anthony and Jennie (Moratto) Azevedo. (*From Alpine Valley, CA, Jennie was the daughter of Isidore and Adelaide Moratto. Her father's family came from the Tavernette area of Cumiana, in Piedmont, northern Italy.*) At that time, the Azevedo family was living on a ranch on Todd Road in Santa Rosa. Paul, the eldest of Anthony and Jennie's three sons, would be their only son to be born in a hospital. His brothers Ray and Dan were born at home.

"My dad's dad established his own state of the art dairy at the age of 19," Joane noted. "My grandfather had been raised working at his father's dairy, which wasn't too far down the road. I believe my great grandfather came from a long line of Azorean dairymen on his father's home island of São Jorge." (Part of the autonomous region of Portugal, São Jorge is an island in the central group of the Azores archipelago.)

"It's a point of pride to be born with 'the hands of a Portuguese milker' in our family," Joane went on to explain, "huge, chubby palms with thick, almost rectangular fingers shaped a little like

candy bars! My grandfather milked the cows, did all the usual ranch work, and made deliveries all over the county. There were a lot of stories. Two people at a new account were speaking quite disrespectfully about my grandfather to each other in Portuguese. My grandfather was fluent, but made no mention of that until he left, parting with, 'Adeus!'"

"There was also the time one of the clients insisted my grandfather give them a refund for a cheese wheel which they failed to sell – and it had molded," Joane continued with a laugh. "He refunded their money, took the wheel back and sold it to the next client for triple the price as 'specially aged cheese.'"

The Depression eventually hit Paul's family hard. When Paul was 4, his father lost what Paul called, "The Todd Ranch." Paul always had memories of it. He remembered being under "strict orders to never go near the attic door. Bees had taken it over!"

"The price of milk bottomed out two weeks after they lost the ranch," Joane said. "My dad always said, with a warm giggle, 'If only he had been able to hang on for two more weeks...I'd be rich!' After that, life was an adventure. They lived in the Central Valley, Seaside – near Monterey, all over Sonoma County and maybe even Nevada. They lived in Half Moon Bay for two days, long enough for Dad to start school and his teacher to tell him that her maiden name was Azevedo. The job didn't work out and they moved on. They lived in rustic situations much of the time, like cabins. I got the impression my Dad loved one particular place. He called it 'Pop Deacon's Cabins' and told many stories about that time. Like being able to hear the entirety of the 'Lone Ranger' (broadcast) by walking past each cabin. They all had it on their radio, and as one grew quieter as you walked away, the next cabin's radio became louder. My dad was always proud of having lived in just about every town in California in which Jack London had lived."

Paul's mom, however, was running out of steam on all these moves. She used to tell her family, "Three moves is as good as a fire. The first move takes two big trucks. The second, one truck. The third, and every move after, a little trailer hitched to the car."

"They were very close," Joane said, "and had many extended family as well. That's likely what kept them going through a hard, unstable time. It was constantly 'all hands on deck.'"

Joane noted that her grandmother's work ethic was epic. "As long as she didn't have to deal with the public, she would do anything, and she was good at it. She fed all the workers when they had the ranch, she picked prunes and she candled eggs."

"Candling" an egg allows a farmer to look at the inner contents of an egg, using a light or candle, to see whether the egg is fertile or not. By looking at the shape, color and opaqueness of the egg contents it can be determined whether there is a chick inside or not. This is done periodically to make sure the eggs are not what's called "quitters" – meaning they've stopped growing.

As to picking prunes, Paul used to say that, "For every box I filled, Mom filled five or more."

"My grandmother also canned sardines at the cannery which is now the Monterey Bay Aquarium," Joane said with admiration. "She did whatever needed to be done."

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, December 7, 1941, Congress required all able-bodied men between the ages of 18 to 64 to register with their local draft board, though in practice, only men 18 to 45 were drafted. Paul's father was drafted.

"He didn't get any farther than basic training before his allergies kicked in," Joane noted. "He was given allergy medication to which he was violently allergic and it put him in the hospital. The Army had one option for allergy medication and if you couldn't take that one, they wouldn't do something logical like find one you could take. They gave my grandfather a discharge and that was that."

Joane guessed her dad was 14 or close to it when his family moved to Oak Street in Santa Rosa and put down roots.



Clockwise from top left: Anthony "Tony" Azevedo, and his sons Paul and Dan. Circa 1945.

"It was during the Second World War and there were more jobs," Joane said, "and my grandmother was sick and tired of moving around for jobs and demanded they settle down."

In one of Paul's "Reactor" columns, this one dated February 23, 2000, he recalled his life in the 1940s, particularly at his grandfather's ranch in Santa Rosa.

"During family get-togethers, my dad and uncles would gather in front of the bunkhouse and shout at each other," Paul wrote. "They weren't angry, you understand. They were just re-living their boyhood. As a kid, if my dad wanted to say something to my Uncle Manuel or Uncle Johnny down at the barn, naturally the two kids would shout. The ranch was at the east end of the lane. One phone line served all the ranchers on that long road. There were no secrets, but they were all friends, always ready to help each other out. The phone was an antique even in 1945, an old wooden device that wouldn't have been unfamiliar to old Alex Bell himself."

"The ranch produced wine grapes and apples," Paul went on to write. "Cattle foraged in the hills behind the ranch house. My grandmother's garden was lush. My favorite tree was a huge old fig. It produced two crops a year and I loved to be there when one or the other crop was ripe."

Paul attended and graduated from Santa Rosa High School, but as he would tell his children, he worked long before he entered his high school years.

"My first job was carrying a bucket of milk from the barn to the house without spilling it when I was 4," he'd recall. "That's a very challenging job for a 4 year old."

In one of his column's, Paul discussed his earliest jobs.

"I picked prunes at 12," he wrote. "I hated it then and would have no reason to change my mind today. My knees are still sore. The summer I was 13, I spent six hours a day helping deliver glass bottles of milk to the porches of Santa Rosa. When I was 14, I became a *Press Democrat* carrier, delivering 214 papers, six days a week from the back of my bike. After a few months my route was cut back, but I was hired to return each morning to take any down route in my district. Soon I knew every house in the south part of the Santa Rosa of 1946. After my carrier days, I delivered for a small drug store, then set pins in a new bowling alley. I spent four hours a day during four years of high school and junior college doing a variety of jobs at the *Press Democrat*. I went from job to job each day, 'flying' the press, inserting newspapers, managing ten-year-old street salesmen, running the PBX phone system an hour a day, and any other assigned task." (An old newspaper term, "flying the press" means literally catching stacks of papers as they flew off the press.)



**Tony and Jennie Azevedo's three boys, left to right, in 1949: Paul, Ray and Dan.**

On June 27, 1950, President Harry S. Truman ordered U.S. air and naval forces to South Korea to aid the democratic nation in repulsing an invasion by communist North Korea. In junior college, Paul enlisted in the U.S. Army. He thought enlistment would offer an advantage over being drafted.

"They rejected him at the physical because he had bad eyes and flat feet," Joane said. "A year or so later, he again enlisted in the Army. This time he was accepted. He asked why was he accepted now when he had been previously rejected for bad eyes and flat feet and they said, referring to the first physical, 'Oh, you must have had a bad day.'"

Paul did his training at Fort Devens in Massachusetts, which was home to: two signal battalions, two regimental combat teams, the United States Army Security Agency Training Center and School, a number of smaller units and the First Army Chemical Defense School. Paul then headed to Herzo Base in Herzogenaurach, Germany, near Nuremberg. Herzo Base was a former German Luftwaffe base converted to a U.S. Army Base following the Second World War. In 1948, it became a major listening post of Soviet "chatter." The United States foreign policy following WWII was centered on the containment of communism both on its own shores and abroad. In 1950, the Korean Peninsula was divided between a Soviet-backed government in the north and an American-backed government in the south. On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea and the Korean War began (June 25, 1950 – July 27, 1953).

Paul worked at breaking Russian code at Herzo Base in 1952/1953. Much to his children's dismay, he never gave them details of his work. He wouldn't even admit that he had worked as a code breaker. "I can't tell you!" he would laugh. But his kids had it from a 100-percent reliable source, their mom, that he actually had done that.



Paul serving in the U.S. Army, 1952, Germany.

"I believe Dad really was sworn to secrecy," Mike said, "though he could have given us the basics of his time during the Korean War. But I believe he was proud to be able to say, 'I can't tell you!'"

Paul did tell his children that he was able to take a break from his classified work to visit relatives from his mom's side of the family in northern Italy. When he left the service in 1953, he did so as a corporal.

In a February 21, 1996 "Reactor" tribute column to his brother Dan, who died from an aneurysm at the age of 64, Paul talked a bit about the three Azevedo brothers' respective time in the military.

"Ray and I both enlisted," Paul noted. "We were regular Army, but neither of us were soldiers in the spit and polish sense. I once scored bullseyes at the rifle range, only to realize I had been firing on the wrong targets. I went into the Signal Corps. The world was a safer place after basic training because I no longer dealt with weapons.

"Dan was drafted and he was never stationed outside California, but he was the one who drove the tanks at Camp Irwin and loved it. Then he was assigned to the Presidio Honor Guard Drill

Team. The group spent its time marching in parades, winning national awards, polishing chrome helmets and boots until they were mirrors and cutting the backs out of starched shirts to make the sharpest soldiers you ever saw. Dan fired volleys at funerals, had his picture taken with movie stars like Audie Murphy and Leigh Snowden, and appeared at the openings of movies. While Ray spent his leave time in Japan and I managed short trips to Munich, Rome, Venice, Paris, Berne and Turin, he grabbed a bus at the Golden Gate Bridge and was home in Santa Rosa in an hour, hanging out with his high school buddies."

"After the Army, Dad was unsure of what he should do," Joane said. "So he took a career test and it said he was strong in English and other subjects. This implied success in advertising or writing. He chose advertising because he thought, 'That's where the money is.' Later on he would say that it was his column, therefore writing, which truly gave his life satisfaction, happiness and reward."

Paul headed off to San Jose State College, now San Jose State University, where he not only achieved his degree in advertising, but he met the "girl of his dreams." Her name was Lydia Dunham. The year was 1957. A native San Franciscan, Lydia was then working as a teacher at Peter Lassen Junior High School in Sacramento, CA. The first president of the Newman Alumni Club in Sacramento, she was attending an area meeting in San Jose comprised of SJSU students, of which Paul was one. (Students attending secular universities/colleges can experience the Catholic faith through the on-campus Newman clubs. The clubs are open to all walks of faith and provide a spiritual and social venue.) About a year and a half older than Paul, Lydia found the boy from Santa Rosa interesting enough that she agreed he could try to teach her to play pool – though she long admitted that she never did learn to play.

What was it about Lydia that Paul fell for?

"Dad loved puns," Joane said, "and legend has it that she spellbound him when she said, 'You know the difference between a crow and a raven is a matter of a pinion.' I also remember one time we were helping her with her résumé for a job. I was reading a list aloud which she had written in longhand, and he was typing it up. I made a comment expressing surprise at the great length of her list of accomplishments. He gave me a look of admonishment and said, 'Your mother is an extremely talented woman.' She baffled him often but he had mad respect for her."

Then there was the fact that she could hold her own with Paul and any of the men in his family when a debate was "on." (Paul was famously known in Pacifica as a whip-smart challenger/debater.)

"There is no doubt that Dad grew up in a family that liked to debate," Mike laughed. "And it was a family of diverse opinions. Every political extreme was represented."

In his tribute article to his brother Dan, Paul shared a sample of his family's differing opinions, along with their inclusive, unbreakable bond.

"I'm a strong advocate of gun control," Paul wrote. "Dan was a proud member of the National Rifle Association. That wasn't the only thing we argued about. When Ray and Dan and I got together, there were always arguments, but never cross words...Dan was my brother and I loved him."

"When my mom met Dad's family she was an outlier because the women would be in the kitchen and the men in the living room," Joane said. "Mom would always join the men in order to talk politics with them. I think that both perplexed and wowed my dad. The men in his family, including his large extended family, had always made it fun for him to have a 'good' argument or debate. Dad enjoyed recounting facts."

"If there is one thing my dad loved, it was explaining," Mike said. "And for someone who likes this, a debate is a great thing because it means a chance to explain. Dad never gave short answers to a question that let him explain."

All four of Paul and Lydia's children said their dad absolutely encouraged that kind of thinking in his kids.

"I once read that Stephen J. Gould (a science historian and highly-acclaimed popular science writer that was a favorite author of Paul's) acknowledged that while the changeover of the millennium was technically 2000 to 2001, it was so much more fun to see four numbers change than just one," Joane said. "When my dad inevitably informed me of the 'real' changeover, I invoked Stephen J. Gould's comment in return and received a look of astonished pride. He loved it when we showed sharpness and impressive vocabularies – and quoting his favorite authors didn't hurt either!"

"He showed a clear sense of pride when his kids developed expertise in their fields," Mike said. "We all headed in our own directions and Dad recognized that."

But what was it about their dad that made their mom fall for him?

Well, along with liking the fact that Paul was an aspiring writer, thankfully Paul's affinity for having an opinion was equal to her own.

"They both loved knowledge," Joane said, "and being involved in the world."

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**A Portrait of Pacifica's "Reactor" ~ Tribune columnist Paul Azevedo (page 8)**

On New Year's Eve, 1959, Paul proposed spontaneously and Lydia said, "Yes!" Lydia was still teaching in Sacramento and Paul was living in Walnut Creek. He had a job selling advertising for a local newspaper. In the spring of 1960, Paul's brother Ray, attending college nearby, stayed with Paul. Paul wrote about his family, as he so often did, in one of his columns.

"In the spring of 1960, Ray was an impecunious college student between school terms," Paul penned. "It was too early to head for his summer job as the breakfast chef at the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite, and he badly needed to stretch his funds. I was working for an East Bay weekly newspaper, engaged to be married, but still living in my bachelor apartment in Walnut Creek as the tenant of Mr. and Mrs. Levi Parker Million. The two were elderly, retired chicken ranchers and a couple of the nicest people I've ever known. Florence was the first white child born in Cripple Creek, Colorado, in the early days of that famous mining settlement."

"Ray suggested I allow him to crash for a couple of months, with menagerie," Paul went on to write. "He'd replace my bachelor amateur cooking 'skills' with his professional services while he was there. It was a win-win situation for me and he charmed the Millions – so Sam the Mynah bird, the snapping turtle, and the rest of the pet parade, were welcomed to my euphemistically entitled, 'garden apartment' for a few spring months."

On December 26, 1960, Paul and Lydia married at St. Timothy's Catholic Church in San Mateo, CA. They made their first home in Walnut Creek.



Paul and Lydia (Dunham) Azevedo, December 26, 1960, St. Timothy's Catholic Church, San Mateo, CA.

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**A Portrait of Pacifica's "Reactor" ~ Tribune columnist Paul Azevedo (page 9)**

Before the couple had been in Walnut Creek for a year, the owner of the newspaper Paul worked for decided to clean house and fired everyone, including his own son. The couple moved to San Francisco – a little apartment on the corner of Frederick and Ashbury that leaked when it rained. Paul got a job selling advertising with the *Daily Pacific Builder*. The *Daily Pacific Builder* "has reported on and published construction reports, legal advertising and request for bid notices covering the Northern California and Northern Nevada regions" for over 125 years. Paul spent a lot of time traveling by airplane to sell ads all over California.

In January of 1963, the couple's first child, Mike, was born. Not too many months down the road, Lydia and Paul were reevaluating the "hazards" of their apartment. Not only was it damp and tiny, but there was a three-foot drop off the back porch. Lydia decided it was time to buy a house. Paul wasn't so sure. He wanted to wait until prices came down. It took some effort, but Lydia convinced him prices weren't coming down.

Finding nothing "livable" in their price range in San Francisco, the couple took the advice of their real estate man. "Buy in Pacifica."

"They used Mom's retirement savings from her time teaching and Dad's GI Bill, and got a mortgage for \$16,000 for the house they bought," Rena said. "Dad was always very happy that Mom twisted his arm on the decision to buy when they did."

In September of 1963, the family set down roots on Hermosa Avenue and stayed, and by 1969, the family would include three more children: Rena, Martin and Joane.



Lydia, Paul and baby Mike, 1963.

The couple fell in love with Pacifica and both became well-known, thoroughly involved citizens.

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Early on, Lydia was a member of and/or working volunteer with the La Leche League, the Pacifica Democrats Club, AAUW (American Association of University Women), the Pacifica Co-operative Nursery School and Pacifica's Alternative Class – which later became the Alternative School and is now Ocean Shore School. She would become the Community Club Leader in charge of the Pacifica 4H Club and serve in the League of Women Voters. She would also have memberships in the Pacifica Historical Society, the Sierra Club, Friends of the Library, and she was a San Pedro Valley Park volunteer. She additionally worked as a substitute teacher once her children were old enough to do so.

Paul joined the Pacifica Democrats Club when the family moved. Over the years his memberships additionally included: the Rotary Club of Pacifica, Linda Mar Neighborhood Organization, the Pacifica Historical Society, the Open Space Committee and Friends of the Library. Through the latter, he became very involved in the "Jail Outreach," acquiring and providing reading materials for inmates and also teaching literacy. He was also very active with the Friends of the Library in establishing Pacifica's Sanchez Library which opened in 1981. But it was his involvement with the Democrats Club that brought him to the attention of *Pacifica Tribune* Publisher and Editor Bill Drake.

"Paul had started the Democrats Club in Walnut Creek," Lydia Azevedo said in a 2007 interview with the Pacifica Historical Society. "So when we moved to Pacifica, Paul went to a Democratic convention and he hitched a ride with Joe Fulford, who was some kind of an officer. Back in Pacifica, Paul gets a call from publisher Bill Drake. Bill said, 'I'd like to come by and talk to you about that convention. I apologize for calling after 9 o'clock at night but I've been selling advertising all this time.' And Paul said, 'Oh, I know what you mean. I am an advertising salesman.' And that's how Paul began working for the *Pacifica Tribune*. This would be in the summer or fall of 1966."



1967, Paul with Rena and Mike in Pacifica's Linda Mar Shopping Center.

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Lydia also noted during that 2007 interview, that once Paul began working at the *Pacifica Tribune*, the *Tribune* became a family affair.

"All four kids helped Mom with downed paper routes from the time I was a toddler," Joane said. "Mom did that, as well as 'complaints' – delivering papers when they did not show up to individual houses – until I was an adult. All four kids worked as inserters at some point. I did administrative and janitorial work there, too."

In addition, Joane had a paid foray into professional proofreading before she turned 10.

"Dad hired me to assist him with proofreading when I was 6," Joane said with a chuckle. "I was officially paid, by check, by the *Pacifica Tribune*, for the hours I worked reading Public Notices out loud while Dad compared the texts. Public Notices must be very precise and I had to distinctly state every mark of punctuation and every word without missing anything."

Rena recalled her childhood days working at the *Tribune*.

"At 10, I was delivering newspapers with my older brother in various parts of town," Rena said. "The two of us would deliver downed routes while my mom would be rolling papers and keeping track of our whereabouts. At 12, I went to Dad's office weekly after school. My main job was to find all the half-filled coffee mugs that were scattered throughout the garage he worked in. Since the building was half a block from the ocean, it got quite cold – I realized the coffee was not just to supply caffeine but also to warm his hands day in and out! I also proofread as needed. From age 13 to 16, I was inserting newspapers – ads together and back sections into front sections. Ultimately, adults replaced children delivering newspapers and machines replaced people serving as inserters."

But it wasn't all work in the Azevedo family. There was lots of time devoted to reading, debating and museum visiting, particularly San Francisco's Academy of Sciences. Nonfiction narratives about science really pulled their dad in. Following his reading of Willy Ley's "Dragons in Amber," which Joane noted was about the rediscovery of the Dawn Redwood – a tree species thought to be extinct – her father "grew a Dawn Redwood, a ginkgo tree and a fig tree in our backyard. He loved the idea of living fossils. He also had a rock garden with succulents. Geology was another one of his big interests."

Then there was camping.

"Dad enjoyed camping and we all hiked many a trail at Big Basin Redwoods State Park," Rena shared of their relatively local adventures, "Memorial Park, Butano State Park, Yosemite National Park, and Silver Lake which our parents discovered through the Newman Club. Camping was an inexpensive way for us all to be together. Hotels and amusement parks were out of our price range but a few notable exceptions included: a 1971 cross-country trip to Colorado to visit an aunt, family 'press passes' to the opening of Marriott's Great America in 1976, and annual trips with other newspaper carriers to Candlestick Park to see the San Francisco Giants play." (Built for the Giants, Candlestick opened in 1961.)

"Dad loved Yosemite and we visited often during our childhood," Mike added. "He rarely, if ever, had reservations so he'd pack up the car and we'd be carried out at 2 a.m. for the overnight trip to wait for a campsite to open up at one of the few first-come-first-serve campgrounds at the park. Every visit created its own set of stories."

"We had a big family and small cars," Mike continued. "Those long trips to Yosemite, or even Colorado via Arizona, meant taking out the back seat and replacing it with sleeping bags and a rope to hold us all down. My mom was a master of fitting everything into the car."

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**Paul, camping with the family, 1960s.**

Paul actually had quite a long list of things to do that he thoroughly enjoyed. He loved the ocean and studied the tide tables for fun. He enjoyed fishing, though his son Mike noted his dad wasn't particularly successful at catching fish.

"While fishing with his outdoorsman brother Dan, we were told that Dan caught both his share and my dad's share," Mike laughed. "Dad somehow didn't catch a thing while fishing from the same boat!"

Paul also liked flying kites, throwing a Frisbee, studying geodesic domes, growing "baseball bat-sized zucchinis," playing checkers and listening to classical music – particularly Beethoven.

"He would work or read the paper in the dining room in the front of the house at five on Sunday mornings," Joane said, "blasting Beethoven's 9th or 5th symphonies. It didn't matter that he woke us up. He just loved to be 'enveloped' by it!"

Meanwhile, in his "Reactor" column, Paul found not only a forum to voice his opinions and memories, but a record to preserve his love of history and all the details built by individual stories – and he loved learning and writing about Pacifica's history.

"He saw history in general as a treasure chest of riches," Joane said, "the value of which needed to be researched to be understood. I think he loved Pacifica history not only because he loved the town itself, and therefore saw it as an appropriate project, but also because the history was subtle, yet often momentous. The Sanchez Adobe was not just a historic building; it was the oldest building in San Mateo County (open to the public). Sweeney Ridge was not just another campsite for Portolá. It was the place where the big European discovery of San Francisco Bay happened. The quarry wasn't just an old quarry. It's been in operation since the days of the missions." (As early as 1776, the quarry's limestone was used in mission buildings and the building of the San Francisco Presidio.)

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**A Portrait of Pacifica's "Reactor" ~ Tribune columnist Paul Azevedo (page 13)**

"The herculean effort of the Ocean Shore Railroad to exist, the astounding generosity of Honora Sharp's will, the vision of Andy Oddstad," Joane continued, "I think my dad appreciated how understated all of it was. Pacifica was both magnificent and unassuming."

Paul also looked to Pacifica's San Pedro Valley as the location of the Bay Area's first planting of that edible thistle, the artichoke – given its mix of ocean fog, rich soil and mild winters. He wrote about the artichoke in 1982.

"In one of the little valleys poking its way back into the coastal hills," Paul noted, "it may have been Guiseppe Silicani who experimented with a cutting of a plant brought from Italy. The gray-green Carciofo thrived in the rich San Pedro Valley and the plant (in English translation) would give its name to the whole region of 'Artichoke Gulch.'" (The Pacifica Historical Society website notes that Giuseppe brought the artichoke from his native Tuscany and cultivated it in Pacifica. It should also be noted, that while the majority of Paul's historical words on the "Pacifica" artichoke are true, "Artichoke Gulch" is pure fiction, used to promote Pacifica's once-annual rodeo, "Frontier Days," in the *Tribune's* "special" edition titled *The Artichoke Gulch Gazette*.)

In many ways, Paul was a collector.

"He collected quarters of every state during the period when every state had its own design on the back of the coins," Mike said.

"When he was in Germany, he collected Depression money, including bills which were printed on one side with a 1920's value of a million marks," Joane added. "He had a geode collection, and shell fossil collections to go with the Dawn Redwood and gingko in the yard."

"When the *Tribune* storage was being cleared out of old *Tribunes* going all the way back to the founding of the paper," Mike went on to say, "Dad rescued the whole collection on behalf of the Pacifica Historical Society, keeping it from the dumpster."



**Paul at the *Pacifica Tribune* in the 1980s.**

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A Portrait of Pacifica's "Reactor" ~ Tribune columnist Paul Azevedo (page 14)

"He loved Sherlock Holmes and in a lot of ways he was a history detective," Joane said. "He was thrilled when his friend Grace McCarthy (another legendary Pacifican) showed him an old telephone book from 1955. He explored it like an old abandoned castle."

"In addition to his own writings," Paul's son Martin Azevedo noted, "Dad kept clippings of stories that interested him on Pacifica history, and on social and political issues – smoking, gun control, etc. His cousin Michael J. Moratto was and is a famous anthropologist who studied California archeology, including the Native American tribes who lived along the San Mateo Coast. Dad referenced Michael's writings multiple times, and Michael wrote at least one article on local history published in the *Tribune*, which I presume my dad helped to arrange."

Through his column, along with trips to City Council meetings, Paul also kept things vocal regarding the problem, 600-foot stretch of road along Highway 1 called Devil's Slide. Devil's Slide travels beneath an unstable, rock-sliding, sheer slope of a mountain – a mountain that rises 900 feet above the Pacific Ocean.

In 1935, drivers heading south along the coast from San Pedro Valley (now part of today's Pacifica) to the first village south of Devil's Slide, Montara, took the narrow, winding and steep Pedro Mountain Road. When the construction on the Devil's Slide portion of State Route Highway 1 began that same year, drivers breathed a sigh of relief. Travel time would be cut in half and be less dangerous. In 1940, a landslide wreaked havoc on the Devil's Slide stretch and throughout the years, until 2012, when two 4,200-foot tunnels mined through the solid rock of Montara Mountain opened and replaced that stretch – landslides and erosion would quite literally stop traffic. Road stoppages included five weeks in 1980 and six months in 1995.

Paul had followed the problem since his earliest days in Pacifica. He was not for a tunnel solution. He'd read about a plan adopted by San Mateo County in 1958, to build a freeway to bypass Devil's Slide. That original plan was for a six-lane freeway, running seven miles over Montara Mountain, from Pacifica's Linda Mar neighborhood to the Half Moon Bay Airport, with interchanges leading from San Francisco to San Luis Obispo.

Then in 1976, the California voter-approved California Coastal Act "established the California Coastal Commission to review and approve building plans, including highway construction, along the coast." The act mandated that rural Highway 1 stretches along the coast were limited to two lanes. Caltrans told the public they could make that freeway bypass, two lanes – though at a width which would have made it the widest two-lane road in the country.

From the beginning, environmental grassroots organizations fought an extraordinary battle against the bypass – in court and eventually by vote. In November of 1996, the dedicated work of Save Our Coast and Citizens' Alliance for the Tunnel Solution placed Measure T – the Devil's Slide Tunnel Initiative – on the San Mateo County ballot and it won with a 74 percent voter approval.

In Paul's immediate circle, there was someone with a completely opposing view from his. His wife Lydia wanted the tunnel solution and became very involved in fighting for it.

"My dad was, as dare I suggest all of us kids are, a reliable Democratic vote," Mike said in an earlier interview regarding his mom Lydia. "But when it came to Pacifica, my dad believed in stoking the fires of prosperity. He was conservative when it came to Pacifica. This was likely because he heard good arguments from everyone he talked to as to why the bypass was needed for the local economy, and he was in touch with every possible business owner in town. A good local economy meant lots of advertising."

Author: Jean Bartlett ([www.bartlettbiographies.com](http://www.bartlettbiographies.com))

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A Portrait of Pacifica's "Reactor" ~ Tribune columnist Paul Azevedo (page 15)

"My parents had a 'Bypass' sticker on the driver's side, and a 'Think Tunnel' sticker on the passenger side," Joane also said in that earlier interview. "But they respected each other enough to allow for such differences in opinion."

In a November 28, 2001, *Half Moon Bay Review* article, journalist Eric Rice reported on the history of the Devil's Slide Tunnel fight. (Important to note that at the date of this article, Caltrans had not begun any tunnel construction.) In his article, Eric sat down with Paul.

"For years Paul staunchly supported the bypass and questioned other proposals," Paul wrote. "But the passage of Measure T combined with the passage of time has blunted his criticism. He now believes a tunnel is inevitable, though he isn't convinced he'll live to see it."



Paul, seated next to Grace McCarthy, voices his opinion on a local issue at a Pacifica City Council meeting. Circa 1995.

"The thing about my dad was he worked hard to do what he believed was right with the information he had available to him," Joane said. "He would make jokes, saying things like, 'If you keep an open mind, people will throw their trash in it.' Nonetheless, he was open to learning many new things, whether about science or humanity. When he knew better, he tried to do better."

One of the things that Joane was shocked to learn about her dad when she was 15 years old was that he was a stutterer.

"I overheard my mom discussing to her delight that he was able to stand in front of a crowd and give a speech," Joane said. "I had no idea. After I learned about it, he told me how difficult it was to go door-to-door to collect fees for his paper route when he would stutter through the words, 'Press Democrat.'"

He was sent to a speech therapist in San Francisco when he was about 12. She taught him breathing exercises and other methods of relaxation.

"He said the classes themselves didn't really help him to progress," Joane went on to say, "but going to San Francisco each week by himself on the bus, at the age of 12, did help. And because of his lessons, he was exposed to the Main Branch of the San Francisco Library as he waited for his bus to return home. That was a profound experience in his life."

"He once asked the librarian how many books were in the library," Joane continued. "She told him 44,000. He was floored, and rather disappointed that he could never read all of them, because he calculated that it would take finishing a book a day for 120 years. What helped him the most to overcome his stutter was a course he took in college and a book by Wendell Johnson, 'Because I Stutter.' (Johnson was an American psychologist and a pioneer in the field of speech pathology.) The course in college taught him about the relation of the condition, to feeling control of situations. To demonstrate, they had him go into a camera shop, deliberately stutter, and ask for tomatoes to purchase. That was the real breakthrough for him."

Joane also stated that her dad grew up believing he was clumsy, "Because he couldn't catch a ball. They always seemed to fly at him out of nowhere. He always believed magazines were dishonest because their pictures made the world seem so crystal clear and colorful, which was not the reality he saw. I believe he was almost a teenager when his mother asked him, 'What time is it?' and he shrugged. She told him to look at the clock and he said, 'What clock?' When she figured out that to him the clock on the wall was just a blur, he had his first trip to the eye doctor. He often told this story."

"The doctor put glasses on me as I was facing a window," Paul's story began. "Across the street was a sign advertising the 'Golden Dollar Store.' It would forever remain to my eyes as the most beautiful sight I had ever seen."

"My dad moved around constantly throughout childhood, wore coke bottle glasses when he was finally able to see, and had a profound stutter," Joane said. "It was a rough beginning even though he was surrounded by good people."

Perhaps it was Paul's childhood vision and speech issues that particularly gave credence to this love he had for his grandfather's favorite motto: "If a thief knew the true value of manure, he wouldn't steal anything else!"

"Dad found that phrase both hilarious and profound," Joane chuckled.

Paul worked at the *Tribune* until the early 1990s, not long after Bill Drake sold the paper. Then Paul retired from the *Tribune* though he continued to write his column.

"He worked weekends at the Pacifica Chamber of Commerce," Joane noted, "a job he thoroughly enjoyed because he got to talk about Pacifica to people who had not yet heard his stories. He worked at the Elections Office on Tower Road (San Mateo) at some point after that, where he became a legend for noticing major typographical errors in election ballots in Chinese and Spanish – two languages he neither read nor spoke!"

"After finishing the proofs in English as he was expected to do, he looked at a ballot in Chinese," Mike said. (That's when his dad discovered "problems.") "For example, everywhere it stated 'Vote for One' on the English ballot, there should have been the same set of characters for each occurrence on the Chinese ballot. They were inconsistent which implied that some instructions were wrong. They were about to send out ballots allowing for the wrong number of votes per candidate group. This would have been a nightmare for those running the election. Luckily, Dad discovered the mistake before the incorrect ballots were put into use. They had to get them reprinted at an additional cost but oh, did they save face!"

In his retirement, Paul also loved it when he was brought into a classroom to make use of his great cornucopia of informative anecdotes. Mike offered an example.

"He was brought into school classrooms as an expert on Pacifica history and each student would tell him the street they lived on. He would then explain the history of the name of their street. He knew the reason for the name of every street in town!"

But Paul wasn't just there for other's people's kids, he was definitely there for his own, and he let them know they mattered.

"The Pacifica 4H Club was a big part of the lives of all the Azevedo children," Rena said. "I joined at the age of 9. Our father approved but was concerned about how much time it was taking from our lives over the years. Mom was busy with leading the community club, meetings and such. At times it was a point of contention. When I was 17, I was given the opportunity to co-lead the weeklong summer camp."

Rena said that finding enough male adult chaperones was just not happening. Her mom told her to ask her father.

"That seemed to be the furthest thing from reality!" Rena said. "My father felt a bit awkward around other people's children and was not great at making small talk with them. I wasn't sure he would enjoy himself. What I didn't know was my mom had already told him to take a week off of work. He needed to help me out! So, when I cautiously asked him, I was shocked when he said, 'Yes!'"

At camp, Rena made sure she knew the teen in charge of the cabin her dad supervised. She didn't want to have any over-the-top pranks pulled on him. She worried about her dad's "boisterous" snoring, but even her dad got a kick out of his loud, recorded snores played over the camp speakers during the morning radio show, warning campers to be on the lookout for wild, noisy bears seen stalking about the campsite.



On the last night of camp, the adult chaperones participated in a skit at the evening campfire.

"It was a take-off on the 12 Days of Christmas," Rena said, "and I was shocked to see my father, the first one out, singing poorly while holding a tree branch – 'On the first day of camp, my mother gave to me, a raccoon on a redwood tree.'" Then the next person came out and sang their verse and my dad had to chime in with his – each time stretching out the words so as to make the torture last longer. Everyone was yelling and laughing and having a good time. I'll never forget it. My hero!"

Rena also shared the story of the time her dad got dressed up in the "Red Suit."

"I was in my mid-twenties," she recalled. "I was trying to impress my bosses and I was in need of a Santa for the Tiny Tot classes I supervised. I beat the bushes. No one was available. I thought, my father?"

Rena pleaded with her dad. After saying "no" a half dozen times, to Rena's surprise he finally said, "Yes!" He drove all the way from Pacifica to Sunnyvale, twice, where he was suited up for the part. "My hero!" Rena reiterated.

Mike also shared a story on his dad.

"I was looking for something in the garage and sitting on a shelf was a baby food jar," Mike recalled, "long since empty of its original contents. My dad often used these for storing nails and such. This small glass jar had rocks and screws and nuts and a small typed piece of paper. Curiosity got the best of me and I took out the paper and read it. Paraphrasing, it said, 'June 21, 1964, while working in the yard, my 18-month-old-son Mickey called me over saying, 'Dayee! Dayee!' I walked over to him and he held out his hand. What he was handing me was the contents of this jar. He is my first child and he couldn't have known that it was Father's Day. What a wonderful Father's Day present it was.'"

"He saved pebbles, nuts and bolts handed to him by an 18 month old for their sentimental value," Mike continued. "That's who he was. He did that with history too."

Paul's children have a long line of stories on their dad that still make them smile. Joane decided to take a stab at describing their dad for the person who never met him.

"His sense of humor was one of his great joys in life," Joane began, "particularly regarding terrible puns and quoting that obnoxious story which ends with, 'Patience, little donkey, patience.' He loved to laugh!

"He had a strong sense of righteousness and morality. He would joke, 'If you're gonna steal, steal big!' What he meant was to make it worth all the guilt and looking over your shoulder, the point, of course, being that it was not worth it. I was taught if you give the clerk a ten and she hands you change for a twenty, you give her back the extra money. When I walked the Golden Gate Bridge with him on the bridge's 50th anniversary, everyone was writing their names on the Botts' dots in the center of the road and then taking a picture of them. Dad would not allow me to do the same because that was 'vandalism.' This was typical of him. He was honest to a fault.

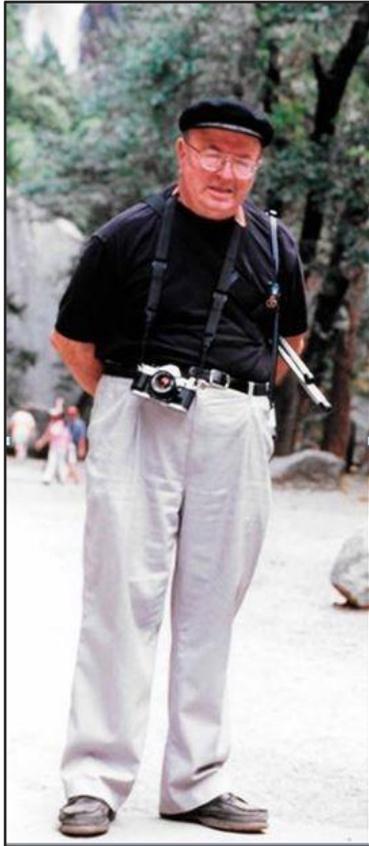
"He donated gallons of blood throughout his adult life. He volunteered constantly for causes he believed in. He loved to talk and impart information and facts. Many would say that his favorite phrase was, 'That reminds me,' which began a story he had heard or lived. He was an anti-smoking activist. Cigarettes devastated his father's health."

He wrote Joane letters when she went to work at Yosemite when she was 18. He told her that he had known lonely times in the Army. "He had a sincere desire to help," Joane said.

He also once figured out the extremely important, correct phone number a 90-year-old man needed. The man had dialed Joane's place of employment. He told her that he had fallen, broken his neck and that he was in the hospital. He was going to die soon and he wanted to donate his body to science. Joane could not convince the elderly gentleman that he had the wrong number. Joane was haunted by the call, phoned her dad and her dad figured out, via his quick-thinking research, that the gentlemen had transposed two of the digits. Paul gave his daughter the correct number for the Body Donation Hotline.

"I called the man back, gave him the number and he thanked me," Joane said. "I hung up and cried. This was thirty years ago, before the Internet was anything of which to speak. I cannot think of who else I might have called in such an event. My Dad was a dulcifying personified precursor of Google."

The lifelong Democrat, who would have been so proud and gratified that his friend Jackie Speier has served in Congress since 2008, was not afraid to say, in the same sentence, that he supported and admired Democratic Congressman Tom Lantos, Republican Congressman Pete McCloskey and Independent CA State Senator Quentin Kopp. If he felt someone was in the right, he said so. (According to Joane, Quentin Kopp and her dad, "Enjoyed the abuse of sesquipedalian vocabularies.")



Paul at Yosemite Falls. Circa 1995.

Paul died Sunday, May 9, 2004 in Chicago.

"He died on Mother's Day," Joane said. "My parents had visited their friends (former Pacifica Chamber of Commerce Executive Vice President) Loyle Mueller and his wife Mary in Iowa City. They were on their way to visit the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago."

Joane worked at United Airlines at the time and her parents received standby flight benefits. Knowing how her father felt about San Francisco's Academy of Sciences, she knew he would "go nuts over the Field Museum." But her folks never made it. Her father died the morning of the planned Museum visit. At the age of 73, Paul suffered a fatal heart attack.

At Monday's May 10th City Council Meeting in Pacifica, each of the five elected officials spoke "fondly of Paul" and adjourned the meeting in his honor. The same was done at the Daly City Council Meeting. Tributes to Paul flooded the *Pacifica Tribune*. On Wednesday, May 12, Correspondent William Love reported, some of which is included here.

*"Paul seemed to know everything and everybody in Pacifica," said Bill Drake, former owner and publisher of the weekly Tribune, "contributing ideas to reporters for several generations."*

*Ernie Scott, speaking on behalf of the Pacifica Friends of the Library and the Pacifica Library staff, said Azevedo "is literally legendary at the Sanchez Library, which he almost single-handedly got built. He was bright, perceptive, witty, a great raconteur and a remarkable person."*

*"I always enjoyed reading Paul's articles or his Letters to the Editor, because he wasn't afraid to speak up," said San Mateo County Times columnist Carolyn Livengood, who had worked at the Pacifica Tribune from 1966 to 1968. "While I didn't always agree with him, I respected him for encouraging me to think about a subject. He paid attention to life around him and set an example for me to do the same."*

Paul was buried at Lone Tree Cemetery in Hayward, CA. The service was officiated by Paul's friend, Reverend Joseph Gross and was limited to close family, including the Lorvan and Szentkuti families of Pacifica. Several weeks later there was a community event in the lower level of Pacifica's Sharp Park Library. It was standing room only.

Representative Tom Lantos entered a tribute to Paul into the Congressional Record.

#### A TRIBUTE TO PAUL AZEVEDO

**HON. TOM LANTOS**  
OF CALIFORNIA  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
*Tuesday, June 8, 2004*

MR. LANTOS. "Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Paul Azevedo, a resident of Pacifica, California, located in my Congressional district, who passed away on May 9th. Mr. Azevedo was a popular columnist at the *Pacifica Tribune*, a local paper, a historian of his beloved town, and above all, a family man.

"Mr. Azevedo was born in Sonoma County, California on March 20, 1931. He served in the U.S. Army and earned a degree from San Jose State University. Mr. Azevedo moved with his wife Lydia to picturesque Pacifica 41 years ago where they raised four children, Mike, Rena, Martin and Joane, in this picturesque Peninsula town.

"Mr. Azevedo joined the *Pacifica Tribune* in 1966 as an ad salesman and proceeded to hold almost every imaginable job at the paper before eventually settling into his role as a columnist. Known as 'The Reactor,' Mr. Azevedo eloquently opined on all matters that affected the Peninsula. Sometimes he merely related historical anecdotes that he thought relevant to the present day. A bit of a maverick, he did not always write the conventional column, but inspired praise nonetheless for engaging his readers on a variety of diverse and interesting subjects.

"Mr. Speaker, no one knew more about Pacifica and no details escaped his steel trap of a mind. In the last 'Reactor' column, his family recalled all the places around town that he loved with no area left out.

"As one would expect of a vocal columnist, Mr. Azevedo had strong opinions about politics, however despite those opinions, his overriding desire was to ensure that his beloved democracy was upheld. That is why in addition to writing his column, he also worked in the local election's office, proofreading election material in English, Chinese and Spanish, and although not fluent in Chinese and Spanish, he spotted errors in the materials that fluent speakers overlooked by finding inconsistencies in the text. Mr. Azevedo also looked to preserve the natural beauty of Pacifica as a member of the Open Space Committee.

"Mr. Speaker, Mr. Azevedo was as much a part of Pacifica as the fog that rolls in off the ocean and the waves that crash on his beloved beaches. Both his personality and his column will be sorely missed. I invite my colleagues to join me in paying tribute to him, and all that he meant to family, friends and neighbors on the Peninsula."

\* \* \*

Paul's children wrote a final "Reactor" column on May 19, 2004 to celebrate their father and to thank Pacifica for all that it had given him. Portions of it are included here.

"Paul Azevedo loved to live in a little town where the altitude from the highest hill to the lowest point varied more than the entire state of Indiana. He loved the history of geological events that formed the Devil's Slide.

"He loved the Pier, the Grace McCarthy Vista Point, the sun in Linda Mar, the arboretum of Vallemar and the fog in Pacific Manor. He savored the view of Pedro Point and Linda Mar Beach driving down Highway 1. He loved the history of Pacifica and loved to be part of it.

"He loved working at the *Pacifica Tribune*. Bill Drake, the paper's publisher for many years, has always been a consummate gentleman and a great friend of our father's. We hold him in the highest regard.

"Our dad loved sharing his opinion. If everyone agreed on a subject, it seemed that Dad would take the opposite view just to be sure all sides were aired. None of us have ever directly voiced our own opinions in this column, so while we have a chance, let us just say that we didn't always agree with everything he said here.

Author: Jean Bartlett ([www.bartlettbiographies.com](http://www.bartlettbiographies.com))

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**A Portrait of Pacifica's "Reactor" ~ Tribune columnist Paul Azevedo (page 21)**

"He had lived all over Northern California, but nowhere for very long. After renting in San Francisco, our parents wanted to buy an affordable house. They moved into a Linda Mar rancher when our Dad was 32, set deep roots and have stayed 41 years.

"The people of Pacifica provided a place for him to live, work, socialize, debate and write. In Pacifica's valley of developed artichoke farmland, with its misty breezes and quirky politics, its weedy eucalyptus and active citizenry, our father was at home for good."

*Mike, Rena, Martin and Joane*

In continued celebration of his love of Pacifica, Paul himself is closing out his biography with excerpts from his June 23, 1999 "Reactor" column titled, "San Pedro Rock Standing Guard."

"San Pedro Rock, that ship's prow that juts into the storm tide at the southern end of Shelter Cove, thrills me every time I see it," Paul wrote, "and that has been thousands of times in the almost 36 years I've lived in Pacifica. Never have I looked at that proud sculpture without exulting just a bit. It's jagged, it's rugged, it's moody, it's arrogant – if you can say those things about something inanimate.

"But the rock does live. It responds to weather. It appears almost soft in a sunny haze. It's gray and somber in a wet, high fog. It shines proudly white in a bright sun. It changes every day and every hour. It guards our southern bastion, as Mussel Rock guards our northern gate. No city ever had two finer portals.

"From San Francisco south, San Pedro Rock is the westernmost part of North America. As the crow flies, the next landfall south is the Antarctic continent."



**Paul Anthony Azevedo, March 20, 1931 ~ May 9, 2004.**



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco. She is also a former Hallmark Card writer, a produced playwright and a published author.

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