

The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

FROM ELSEWHERE

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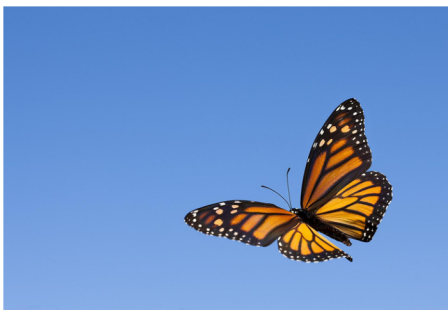


There is a summer camp in northern Wisconsin – Camp Nebagamon, a magical place of refuge for three generations of my family – that features a profound symbol at its entrance. It is a sign consisting of many panels, each representing a native language spoken by a camper or staff member beneath the pine trees of the Northwoods. They are all translations of the same phrase: “THIS SHALL BE A PLACE OF WELCOME FOR ALL.”

What began as three panels (French, Spanish, Danish) has evolved into nearly three-dozen so far. Vietnamese and Portuguese and Chinese. Hebrew and Swahili and Maori. Arabic and Gaelic and Ojibwa. Every added panel enhances the power of the message. It was conceived as a means of conveying how the camp had become a place of global scope, but time has come to redefine the sign as a general expression of inclusiveness. So “welcome for all” is a statement of diversity and acceptance.

I like to think that Pacific Grove offers a West Coast version of this inspiring notion. There are families that have walked the grounds at the tip of the Monterey Peninsula for generations, and they constitute a foundational element of the little city by the sea. But this is also a paradise that draws people of all types from all over the nation and the globe.

In the earliest days of Pacific Grove, before the turn of the 20th century, when the little sanctuary by the sea was just getting its sea legs, everyone came from somewhere else. By definition, when you’re starting a community, you haven’t grown up there. So the folks who turned a piney grove into a bona fide city were pioneers in most every way. They didn’t just come from Gilroy and Salinas and San Francisco. They came from far and wide.



Consider: Early hardware store owner F.H. Ray arrived from Nantucket, Massachusetts, by way of Chile and Sydney and the Azores on a whaling ship. Butcher Cypress Johnson, from Indiana, conducted an ox team across America to arrive in the West. Henry Kent, one of the city's first councilmen, came from Illinois. Real estate agent T.W. Cook was originally from Ohio. Grocer James Moore came from Tennessee. Harness maker Gilbert Hamilton was a Pennsylvanian. City marshal Edwin Rich was a Bostonian. J.F. Gosbey (of the Gosby House - new spelling) was born in Nova Scotia. And the mellifluously named Prosper Fish was a New Yorker who worked on a Mississippi River steamer before getting gold fever and heading for California.

PG's modern-day population largely consists of residents who can't conceive of a better place to live - both lifelong Pagrovians and non-natives who chose to settle along Monterey Bay. I have formed friendships with people not only from New Hampshire and Oklahoma and Arkansas, but also from Germany and Switzerland and Armenia. Tourists, too, traverse the globe and find their way to the tip of the Monterey Peninsula. PG's Chamber of Commerce and Tourist Information Center have welcomed a worldwide collection of travelers, visiting from... well, just about everywhere. And of course, this small town also offers a large array of exotic culinary options - tandoori paneer at Taste of India, panang tilapia at Pacific Thai Cuisine, ravioli di spinaci at Mezzaluna Pasteria, Israeli fried falafel nuggets at International Cuisine, a lamb shish kabob at Petra.

So maybe there should be a sign at the entrance to Pacific Grove, something along the lines of "THIS SHALL BE A PLACE OF WELCOME FOR ALL," something that conveys open arms to those who arrive here from great distances.

Actually, there is: "WELCOME TO PACIFIC GROVE, BUTTERFLY TOWN, USA."