The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA
by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

EVERYONE LOVES A PARADE

One of my favorite observations about life comes from an opera singer named Robert Breault, who said, "Opportunity is a parade. Even as one chance passes, the next is a fife and drum echoing in the distance." That well describes the wonder of Pacific Grove's Holiday Parade of Lights – a public procession of possibilities and joyful anticipation of what comes next. Then again, I'm also partial to a description by one of my favorite comedians, Demetri Martin: "Parades are man's attempt to make traffic exciting." I suppose it all depends on your attitude.

During the Parade of Lights, held every year one week after Thanksgiving, the communal attitude is palpable. As the light-adorned floats and bands and dance troupes pass by, the faces of scores of Pagrovians light up, too. It is all about a celebration of the holidays and local pride.

This year's parade, scheduled for December 5, promises to be as overflowing with spirit as ever. If it's anything like last year's, it will be a mix of camaraderie and quirkiness and spirit and silliness.

Last year, for the first time, a panel of three judges were asked to choose which participants should receive a handful of awards. I was asked to be one of them, even if I'm occasionally more Simon Cowell than Santa Claus. So three of us – Stephanie Loftus (owner of The Quill), Erik Uppman (Cannery Row's VP of marketing) and me (just some guy who writes good) sat on a stage and watched as the parade floated by.

It was a small town celebrating it's small-town-ness. So there went the mayor, the city council, the police and fire departments, the Rotary Club, the Chamber of Commerce. And here came the kids and adolescents who make PG so vibrant – Cub Scout Packs 125 and 126, PG High School's Dance Team and Breaker Band, even the Breaker Bots Club piloting a remote-controlled entry.

Representatives from local businesses and organizations marched by, each with their own quirky way of presenting themselves, including Lighthouse Cinema, Rock Star Dance Studio, Hare Construction, Kombi Tours, Millette Construction, Sotheby's International Realty, Sharp Corners Cards & Collectibles, and M8 Wellness. As they waved to their friends and neighbors, it was as if each was saying, "Thanks for your support, PG, now and in the future."

Of course, no town is complete without its local angels—volunteers, non-profits, and organizations that headline Santa's Nice List. So the townsfolk cheered for Al & Friends Sunday Breakfast for the Hungry and the Gateway Center and Art Abilities, a non-profit that empowers intellectually disadvantaged people through creative expression. And there was a regional flair, too - an appreciation of our neighbors, not just within the town, but beyond it - Spreckels Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Seaside Cheer Team, the Monterey High Dance Team and Cheer Squad.

There was a remarkable diversity in the pageantry, including the vehicles (a series of antique cars, a gaggle of motorcycles and BMX bikes, a few decked-out vans, a trolley) and the themes. In fact, our Judge's Award (best overall themed entry) went to Adventures by the Sea, which featured many of these modes of transport. But there were themes aplenty. The folks at Monterey Bay Charter School call themselves the Gnomes, so a Gnome Wonderland float passed by. Olsen & Olsen Insurance went with a Hawaiian Christmas motif. The DiFranco Dance Project offered a sort of snowy samba.

In the end, the judging was probably the least important aspect of the spectacle, but we did our jobs. The Elfin Magic Award (best entry featuring children) went to the Ohana Center for Behavioral Health. The Holiday Spirit Award went to the PG Middle School Cross-Country Team. The animal-related Rudolph Award was a no-brainer—Tiny Paws Pug Rescue and its parade of pugs. And the Fruitcake Award (most humorous entry)... well, that was easy, too. You can't help but giggle when a flatbed rolls by adorned with toilets decorated to look like reindeer. Thank you, George Wilson's Plumbing.

There is always one constant to the Holiday Parade of Lights. It ends with Santa waving to the gathered Pagrovians, this time aboard a motorcycle. But he needn't have brought any presents because the gift was obvious all evening—a community celebrating communally.