

The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

MARCH OF TIME

October 1, 2025



In 1939, the year of Pacific Grove's 50th anniversary as an incorporated city, a PG resident named Reginald Foster mused about a way to celebrate it. His idea: a festival celebrating the arrival of the monarch butterflies – as seen through the eyes of the Costanoan tribe that had first settled on the Monterey Peninsula. Several skits were staged at the local baseball park, and it was by all accounts a success. It was repeated the following year, before taking six years off as a result of World War II. In 1947, Foster revived the autumn event – the Butterfly Pageant and Parade. Sixty actors, young and old, took part in the pageant, along with 48 dancers, 23 singers, and eight narrators. It was a big deal, this welcoming of the butterflies. And it has been ever since.

In recent years, with the pageant long gone, the Butterfly Days celebration has included a Butterfly Bazaar food-and-frolicking celebration behind Robert Down Elementary School, a silent auction of locally-crafted birdhouses and quilts, a croquet tournament at Caledonia Park (inspired by John Steinbeck's description in *Sweet Thursday*), a historic walking tour, a lecture event at Chautauqua Hall (last year it was "Monterey Peninsula: Hollywood's Playground"), and a Sunset Celebration (sips and snacks and soft music) at Point Pinos Lighthouse.

But the Butterfly Parade is the main event in Butterfly Town, USA.

Every year, on the first Saturday of October the entire community gathers to watch the parade, a celebration of its children, in which each class from the city's elementary schools is dressed in its own historical or ecological costume. The kindergartners march through town adorned in brightly-painted orange-and-black wings, as if just escaping their cocoons, the smiles on their faces as wide as their wingspans. All of which makes it more profound that in PG a 1938 city ordinance mandated a \$500 fine for harming a monarch butterfly.



In fact, those butterflies provide a sort of allegory for the real meaning of the experience. The monarchs arrive each October from as far north as Alaska and take up a five-month residence in the pine and eucalyptus groves – “one of those happy accidents of nature that gladden the heart,” Steinbeck wrote in *Sweet Thursday*. The temptation is to compare the orange-and-black-winged beauties with the tourists who come and go – many of them, in fact, enjoying the soundless splendor of the Monarch Grove Sanctuary. But really the butterflies tell a tale of generations and return. These Monarchs are the offspring of last year’s crew, having never visited the Peninsula before, yet somehow knowing exactly where to point themselves.



And there you have the allegory. The parade is more than a march through town; it’s a march through time. Former teacher Jennifer Ross, who received KSBW’s Crystal Apple Award in 2018, taught the littlest learners in the district for nearly four decades. Each October, she strolls along Pine Avenue with the local pre-schoolers, and many of these little ones are the children of her former pre-school kids.

This is perhaps the essence of Pacific Grove – a constant parade of new faces, to be sure, but also a generational constant. So the parade is the monarch migration with a human face: generations revered as cornerstones of a community. Young ones knowing which way to go. A happy non-accident that gladdens the heart.

