

# The Great Tide Pool

## TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

### POOL PARTY

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A few years ago, when I was searching for a title for my collection of stories about Pacific Grove, I settled on what, in hindsight, seems like an obvious choice: The Great Tide Pool. I explained that PG is a tide pool of its own – dense with history but alive in the moment, a great sum of its disparate parts, a little world encompassing just a few square miles yet teeming with wonders.

But of course, Pacific Grove is teeming with tide pools, as well. From Asilomar Beach to Point Pinos near the lighthouse, you'll find a treasure trove of opportunities along the rocky shore. So let's take a closer look at the wonders of nature's miniature aquariums.

The most remarkable thing about a tide pool is this: For the creatures within, it is a story of resilience. Adaptation. Survival. At high tide, the marine life must survive rolling waves, some of them crashing into this microcosmic world. Limpets utilize a strong foot to hold on tight. Sea stars use hundreds of suction-cup tube feet to stick to rocks, while acorn barnacles anchor themselves with an extra-strength glue. At low tide, when the ocean water retreats and the plants and animals must withstand hours in shallow pools or even exposed to air, they employ ingenious ways to keep from drying out. Sea slugs hide under seaweed or moist rocks. Turban snails draw into their shells and close up shop. Mussels also close up tight to retain water. Green anemone, which attach to a spot early in life and rarely move, fold in their tentacles and cover themselves with tiny shells.

Meanwhile, the miniature residents of a tide pool live in a state of eat or be eaten. To avoid the latter, they hide or camouflage or armor themselves. Sea urchins are covered in sharp, protective spines. Shore crabs scamper under rocks. Decorator crabs attach tiny animals to their backs, rendering themselves nearly unseen. A tiny fish called a sculpin changes color to match its surroundings. To catch food, the abalone uses a muscular foot to clamp down on drifting seaweed. Aggregating anemones use their



tentacles to sting and paralyze potential prey. Gooseneck barnacles use feathery legs to sweep the water and snare plankton. And bat stars? They liquify their food through digestive juices. Yup. Gross. But way cool. So marvel at the majesty of a tide pool, but if you go searching for tide pools in Pacific Grove, here are some general tips:

\*Check the tides: Tide pools are best explored at low tide. Check local tide tables that show the times and tidal heights throughout the day. Check the season, too. Early summer mornings often have some of the year's lowest tides, as do late fall and winter afternoons.

\*Be safe: Wear sturdy shoes or even waterproof rubber boots. And stay vigilant. Don't turn your back on the ocean. Waves are gloriously unpredictable.

\*Look, but generally don't touch: There is much more life in a tide pool than you think, so leave everything where you found it, whether it's a starfish attached to a rock, a crab hiding in a shell or even a splotch on a rock. Step lightly. Try to walk on sand if possible. Something as simple as turning over or treading on a rock can wreak havoc in this delicate environment.

And, of course, pay attention. Be patient. Look closely. You'll find that this tiny ecosystem is, in fact, a universe of its own that can amaze and inspire.