

The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

SAMPLING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

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Last December, in one edition of the Monterey Herald there appeared two articles about the holiday season. One was a look back at Pacific Grove's "Singing Christmas Tree" of a couple generations ago, featuring local residents standing on platforms, winding their way up a 65-foot-tall tree, and belting out carols. The other story touted a new book titled *The Coastal Christmas Caper* in which author Ellis Erikson's protagonist Nora Whitman (editor of the fictional *Lovers Point Chronicle* and amateur sleuth) embarks on "a cozy holiday mystery packed with twists, turns, and enough Christmas magic to keep readers turning the pages."

The juxtaposition – an old, half-forgotten tradition and a new book – reminded me of how different aspects of the holidays appeal to different people. The month or so between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day is largely person-specific, preference-based, particular to each Pagrovian.

For some, it's about the pageantry – the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade (my dad's favorite), the Rose Bowl Parade (my dad's favorite if Michigan is playing), and (more locally) PG's annual Holiday Parade of Lights, a procession of light-adorned floats, bands and dance troupes that celebrates local pride during the holidays. For others, it's about wonder and whimsy – the house on Dennett Street that synchs Christmas songs and light shows, or the myriad homes in the Candy Cane Lane neighborhood festooned in everything from St. Nick to the Simpsons. Or, for those who prefer more traditional holiday decoration, there's a walking tour – Holiday at the Inns – when PG's historic inns heap tradition upon tradition.

Of course, for some holiday celebrants, it's all about the tree. Some facts: Nearly 350 million real Christmas trees are grown on nearly 15,000 tree farms in the U.S. (about two-thirds of them in Oregon), employing more than 100,000 people, both in full or part-time capacities. Some more facts: There are some 4,000 tree recycling programs in the U.S., and it takes as much as a decade of braving the elements for a tree to mature to be harvested for the holidays. So the next time you marvel at a living room Christmas tree, consider that it's as much about effort and endurance as it is about electric lights.



One PG Christmas tree celebration that has endured is the annual tree lighting at Jewell Park that combines sparkling decorations, singing, and a visit from Santa. One PG Yuletide icon that hasn't survived: that old Singing Tree. There are plenty of Pagrovians who have been around long enough to remember it, however, which points to another holiday staple - memories. Maybe it's the ornaments that have been passed down through the generations or the ancestral Hanukkah menorah or the roast recipe that now resides on a fading, dog-eared index card. Speaking of recipes, PG restaurants have been known to host their own culinary holidays - whether it's Chocolate Chestnut Truffle Cake at Wild Fish or gingerbread cookies at Happy Girl Kitchen.



My childhood memories of the holiday season tend to revolve around classic TV - Frosty the Snowman, Bob Cratchit, Whoville, the Island of Misfit Toys. Or maybe you prefer the more modern classics - from Love, Actually to Elf. Or the not-so-classic but ubiquitous Hallmark holiday romances.

But for me, nothing compares to a 1946 black-and-white masterpiece that never grows old: It's a Wonderful Life is both epic and intimate, heartwarming and (yes) life affirming. It's important to recognize during each holiday season that not everyone has family nearby and, frankly, not everyone can describe the season as the most wonderful time of the year. So the holidays also mean giving, both emotionally and financially, to those who need it most. As angel Clarence Odbody informs George Bailey in one of the most satisfying moments ever on film, "No man is a failure who has friends."



So Merry Christmas, Bedford Falls! Now what cozy little town does that place remind me of?