

The Great Tidepool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA
by local award-winning author, [Brad Herzog](#)

A VIEW TO REMEMBER



It rests in the shade of a cypress tree with a sublime view of the rocky outcropping that so defines Lovers Point. To the assorted seagulls and sightseers, it may be only a bench—in the way that something is only a snowflake or only a butterfly. On the very first day that my wife and I moved into our current house in Pacific Grove, a neighbor whom we had never met welcomed us with a homemade coffee cake. It was only later that we marveled at how Norma Keleher could be so giving when so much had been taken away. Only a couple of years earlier, on September 11th, 2001, she lost her only daughter Suzanne.

Six days shy of her 44th birthday, Suzanne Calley was returning from a business trip to Boston, hoping to make it home just in time for her 20th wedding anniversary. She called her husband. He told her he loved her. And she boarded the plane. It was American Airlines Flight 77, the one that was hijacked and flown into the Pentagon.

For a couple of years, Norma kept a candle burning above her fireplace, next to a photo of Suzanne. But it was something more permanent, more public, that most helped her in her grieving. Her daughter, an enthusiastic scuba diving instructor, grew up in Pacific Grove. So the PTA of the Monte Vista School provided the funds for a memorial bench located just beyond the waves and dedicated to Suzanne and “to the victims and those touched by the events of 9/11/01.”

Thanks to Pacific Grove’s Bench Naming Rights program, scores of similar memorials can be found along the coastline—and at Caledonia Park and Jewell Park, the golf course and Grove Market, Lighthouse Avenue and the library. There are nearly 170 benches in PG—and another 100 on a maxed-out waitlist. It is an understandably popular tribute, offering both comfort and remembrance.

Memories lives on with the names: Lester and Rosalie Jacobsen. Bud and Betty Nightengale. Trinidad and Cecilia Chavez. Bert and Sue Winter. Cosmo Taormina. Sally Wardle. Charlotte Hubbard. Loved ones often inscribe phrases that resonate—words of gratitude (“You made our dream come true”) and platitude (“Even a bad



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day is a good day here”), never-forgotten advice (“Be the things you loved most about the ones now gone”) and personal maxims (“Do what you love to do”), memories (“We sing because we’re happy”) and promises (“Until we meet again my sweet angel”).



Every year on September 11th, Norma Keleher used to visit her daughter’s bench, and her friends would gather with her, drinking fine wine and reminiscing with smiles. Norma passed away three years ago, just a few years shy of her 100th birthday. Every time I see that northeast-facing bench at Lovers Point, I recall a line from a poem someone sent to her in the days following the tragedy: “Do not think of me as gone... I am with you still... in each new dawn...”



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