

The Great Tide Pool

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

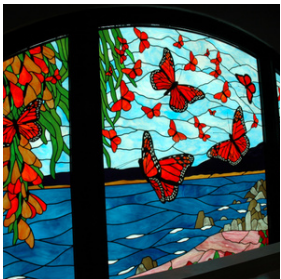


HISTORIC HEIGHTS

"Probably nothing in the way of promotion Holman's Department Store ever did attracted so much favorable comment as the engagement of the flagpole skater..."



So begins Chapter 19 of John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*. The story is based on a real event in Pacific Grove, when a performer known as The Mysterious Mr. X broke his own record by staying aloft 120 feet above the street for more than 50 hours. Steinbeck's chapter is a rather tangential diversion amid the narrative of Doc Ricketts and friends, but I prefer to think of it as several hundred words of whimsy with an acute observation at its core. The story of the flagpole skater is an examination of perspective.



"Everyone in town," writes Steinbeck, "was more or less affected by the skater." Henri the painter vowed to build himself a skating platform and try it at home. Old Doctor Merrivale started shooting at him with an air rifle. Mack and the boys reacted with a shrug and returned to the Palace Flophouse. And high-strung Richard Frost... well, he had a question that he couldn't quite get himself to ask.

The skater wowed the crowds atop a building that was described, at the time of its construction in 1924 (on the site of the former Pacific Grove Hotel), as "the largest store of its kind on the coast between San Francisco and Los Angeles." PG's tallest building (and covering a full block) turns 100 this year. It has been periodically reinvented—a department store, an antique emporium, now a condominium complex—but it still stands on Lighthouse Avenue as a lesson in point of view. Depending on one's outlook, it is either a valuable piece of property, a treasured repository of history, a massive work of art, a local landmark, or all of the above.



Like most anything, the point of view depends on one's perspective. And that describes one's point of view of Pacific Grove. For me, it was a carefully-considered destination—a choice made after examining criteria regarding what I wanted out of a place to live. For many—far more people than I realized when I first moved here—it is a lifelong home, a why-would-I-move-anywhere-else conclusion. For others, it is temporary good fortune. Maybe they're spending a couple of years at the Defense Language Institute, or they snagged a job in the hospitality industry. Pacific Grove can be retirement nirvana, a sort of senior sigh of relief. Or an experiment. Is small-town living for me? Is this the right location and climate and friendly vibe?



So yes, we can extrapolate from the Cannery Row characters. Some of us are Henri the painter, easily and often inspired. Some are surely like Mack and the boys, wondering what all the fuss is about. And some are like Richard Frost, unable to get beyond practical considerations. You see, thanks to some liquid courage, Frost finally got the nerve to pose the question that had been nagging him and more than a few other observers. "Hey!" he shouted up to the skater. "How - how do you - go to the toilet?"



Someone had to ask.

*The Great
Tidepool*