

THE GREAT TIDE POOL

by Award-Winning Local Author, Brad Herzog

In *Cannery Row*, arguably the most lyrical creation by America's finest writer, John Steinbeck reserves some of his most evocative prose for a description of the Great Tide Pool at Point Pinos in Pacific Grove: "It is a fabulous place: when the tide is in, a wave-churned basin, creamy with foam, whipped by the combers that roll in from the whistling buoy on the reef. But when the tide goes out the little water world becomes quiet and lovely." So when an iconic writer chose to marvel at a near-perfect example of the interconnectedness of a place and its inhabitants, he was describing Pacific Grove.

Over my nearly three decades as a Pagrovia, I've encountered many attempts to describe the place. People here still greet strangers with smiles, so one writer for *Via* magazine once referred to P.G. as the "Mayberry of the Monterey Peninsula." But that doesn't adequately take into account the spectrum of people and possibilities.

Years ago, a visiting friend of mine had a different take. As we strolled into town during the Magic Hour, a cinematographer's favorite time of day, the setting sun cast a warm glow on the century-old Victorians and the City Hall clock tower began a serenade amid the serenity. My friend said, "It's like you live in that town from *The Truman Show*." And then he added, in mock director's voice, "Cue the bells!"

Too good to be true. That's what he meant.

But the truth is, I still defer to the Peninsula's most eminent author, who wrote many of his masterpieces in his family's still-standing cottage on 11th Street. The town's rocky coastline is a tidepooler's dream, but in Steinbeck's observations we can find not only limpets and hermit crabs and waving algae, but also a universal metaphor. In *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, he marveled at how a "small and perfect pool" offers an understanding that "all things are one thing and that one thing is all things."

So there you have it: Pacific Grove is a Great Tide Pool – 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 while it is advisable to leave most tidepools undisturbed, this one is meant to be embraced.

So in this homage to my hometown, I'll be tidepooling twice a month, in the sense that I aim to explore and celebrate life in this coastal paradise. The events and opportunities. The traditions and hidden gems. The practical, the peculiar, and the profound. After all, I've always found Pacific Grove to be a place where you can ponder without the obstruction of background noise. It is like peering into a tide pool of the mind. As Steinbeck wrote, "It is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again."