

## THE ANATOMY OF CONSCIOUS CHANGE

By Kaye Coleman

*“Peacemaking does not mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring the injustice...the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight but the careful and arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is the evolution of love to set both the oppressor and the oppressed free.”* - Shane Claiborne, Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals

Creating any sort of change requires action. *Conscious* change, however, creates deep and lasting transformation through awareness, understanding, and resolved action. I came to know the anatomy of conscious change quite intimately while leading the Feast of Lanterns Board of Directors through a historic change to the Feast’s narrative over these past few years. This process included some deep diving into local history and ultimately led to my own awakening. Each of us is capable of making a real difference in healing our world and our communities. As a daughter of Pacific Grove, I offer my story as an example, as an invitation to begin looking at, questioning, and consciously changing those things that we find in our world that do not align with our values.

Growing up in Pacific Grove, I remember marching as a monarch butterfly in the Butterfly Parade of 1982. My family became an active part of the Feast of Lanterns in 1985 when my older sister, Joni Coleman Birch, first served as Princess Emerald. I was in 4th grade at Robert H. Down Elementary School by the time my older sister served as Queen Topaz. I was honored to be her crown bearer and can still remember walking down the great stone staircase for the first time in the pageant, *knowing* that one day I would be Queen Topaz. My parents, Virginia and Gordon Coleman, both served on the Board of Directors from 1985 to 2011. Throughout the years, I have been honored to serve as Princess Jade, Princess Emerald, and then Queen Topaz 1993. We learned quite a bit about local history while serving with notable local community members like Elmarie Dyke’s granddaughter, Joanie Hyler, and great-granddaughter, Trisha Muench Randall. The Royal Court followed traditions, wearing hair up in costume and always modeling proper etiquette. The experience of being on the Feast of Lanterns Royal Court was life-changing.

The event has been in existence since 1905 and has seen many incarnations. The original Feast of Lanterns was the Closing Ceremonies for the Pacific Grove Chautauqua Summer Retreat. There was a lantern parade, community concert, and fireworks over the Bay. Reverend Ng Poon Chew gave a talk at our 1905 Chautauqua speaking out against the Chinese Exclusion Act. Our Chautauqua also had a strong focus on natural history and played an important role in establishing the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History. That first Feast brought the town together in celebration of education, the environment, and diversity.

The Feast of Lanterns was even associated with beauty pageants for a time. In 1958 Elmarie Hurlbert Hyler Dyke revived the Feast of Lanterns and created the Royal

Court we see today. In 1962 Pamela Gamble was selected as Queen Topaz (Miss Pacific Grove), won Miss California, and competed in the Miss America contest. The *Legend of the Blue Willow* was acted out as the play for the Feast of Lanterns and continued to be the main event for 61 years. After Elmarie passed in 1981, the community decided in 1982 to establish the Feast of Lanterns Board of Directors and began offering scholarships to the young ladies who served on the Royal Court. Members of the Court were now selected through an interview process. The modern-day Feast hosts a week of large events, and the Royal Court makes over 50 appearances and reigns from March to December of each year. Members of the Court volunteer over 300 hours of service to their community. As you can see, the Feast is an event that is ever-changing and evolving.

It is a truly wonderful thing to have a longstanding community tradition that celebrates local history while grounding our youth in tenets of leadership and public service. Those selected to serve on the Royal Court exemplify well-roundedness in academics, art, sports, community service, and public speaking. The Royal Court teaches confidence and grace and ingrains in the members of the Court what a gift it is to be of service to others. This lesson was incredibly powerful for me to learn as a young woman growing into adulthood. I learned that *I* was valuable because I had substance. I made lifelong friendships with the young women with whom I served, and the entire experience prepared me for greater success in my professional life. I was proud to be an ambassador of history for Pacific Grove and felt that all the service work the Royal Court did was so meaningful. Even as a teenager, however, I remember feeling somewhat confused about why we acted out the *Legend of the Blue Willow* during the event to celebrate our town's history.

Years later, one of my most eye-opening and exciting roles as part of the Feast of Lanterns came with my election to the Board of Directors in 2012. The time had come to bring more organization, clarity, and sophistication to the organization. Throughout my time as Treasurer, Vice President, and President, I strove to communicate more clearly all of the amazing aspects of the Feast of Lanterns. It is, after all, an incredible event and more people should know about it. I began to work on projects for the Feast and immersed myself in studying local history with the help of a variety of professional historians and locals.

The process of learning more of the Feast's extensive history deepened my appreciation for the event. I would often stop people in the street and ask if they knew what the Feast of Lanterns celebrated. "What is the Feast of Lanterns?" I would say, wanting to see what different folks knew about the event and its purpose. What came to my attention from these conversations was the significant impact the Royal Court makes on the community and how much people of all ages look forward to their reign each year.

As I continued attending more events and speaking to the press about our organization and event, however, I discovered that the Feast was deeply misunderstood not only by visitors, but even by many locals. These conversations made clear that there was a disconnect between what the event is and how it is perceived. Everyone loves the

fireworks at Lovers Point, but most folks know little to nothing about the history of the *Legend of the Blue Willow* or the events of the Feast of Lanterns. Then I began hearing growing concern and feedback from community members that described the event as, in their words, offensive. Little did I know that when I began to search for solutions to clear up what I believed was a misconception, my search would lead me to begin personally and professionally addressing issues like cultural appropriation and inclusivity.

In 2016, I met Gerry Low-Sabado, a descendent of Quock Mui, who was the first Chinese American woman born on the Monterey Peninsula. Quock Mui spoke five languages and was instrumental to trade in the area. She was a powerful woman in our local history. Gerry is also a descendent of Tuck Lee, who was the last Chinese American to leave the Point Alones Fishing Village after the tragic fire. Gerry and I were nervous to meet initially but found that we shared a lot of common ground. I did my very best to listen and understand her concerns as a Chinese American and how an event like the Feast of Lanterns affected her. I wanted to understand what was at the heart of the criticisms of the Feast, to build a bridge and heal the disconnect. Gerry and I began a friendship, along with a series of conversations that would ultimately change the Feast of Lanterns. I read Kera Abraham Panni's articles in the Monterey County Weekly from 2008 and 2009 in which the Feast of Lanterns is deemed to be cultural appropriation. I was doing my best to dig deep to understand this complex issue. I was unsure what to do at first except to do my research and listen deeply in hard conversations.

As a traditionalist and someone who had grown up with the Feast, it was very hard for me to understand how the event could be hurtful to some members of the community. Over the course of four years, I came to see that changing the Feast of Lanterns and updating its narrative for the community was long overdue, that listening to the voices of our community's Chinese descendants and recognizing their concerns was a great opportunity to heal our beloved community. I had to face the facts that lay before me and begin to reconcile my white privilege and how it blinded me from seeing that the event could be interpreted by others in the community in a hurtful way. Facing and working to unravel injustice will be a lifelong endeavor. Each of us has opportunities every day to stand up for each other, to make our world better one act at a time, to be present with the reality of what is, and has long been, happening in our world.

Changes to the Feast of Lanterns are just one example of changes underway in the City of Pacific Grove. In general, there is a movement to celebrate diversity, create accessibility, and expand inclusivity in our community, from the building of low-income housing to the hosting of events that are inclusive to all.

## WHY CREATE CONSCIOUS CHANGE?

"Should American culture adapt to the immigrant or foreign cultures or should immigrant cultures adapt to American culture?" Gary Baley posed this question in a series of articles he wrote for the Cedar Street Times in 2019 covering the change in the Feast of Lanterns pageant. This question illustrates the need for change. The answer is that American culture *is* immigrant culture.

We must heal and release the mindset of “us versus them.” We are all immigrants or descendants of immigrants with the exception of the indigenous people who lived here first. This outdated idea is tearing our country and world apart. We need to find a way to come together. We are strong because of our diversity. Involving the community of Pacific Grove allows us to make this change together. We can find common ground and make our hometown tradition even better.

## IS THERE CULTURAL APPROPRIATION IN THE FEAST OF LANTERNS?

Cultural appropriation, also referred to as cultural misappropriation, is the adoption of elements of an outside, often minority, culture, including knowledge, practices, and symbols, without understanding or respecting the original culture and context by members of the dominant culture. For example, during Halloween, some people buy, wear, and sell Halloween costumes based on cultural or racial stereotypes. Costumes that depict cultural stereotypes like "Indian Warrior" are sometimes worn by people who do not belong to the cultural group being stereotyped.

Aspects of the current Feast of Lanterns celebrated in Pacific Grove have left many individuals sensitive to cultural appropriation. These aspects include the use of traditional Chinese clothing as costumes and particular words in the script that debase a Chinese character during the play. At one point during the performance, the father says to his daughter's lover, "Pig, son of swine. I'll cut you up and feed you to the crows." The father, a Mandarin, is also booed by the crowd as he chases the escaping lovers.

These elements of the Feast of Lanterns, interpreted by some as cultural appropriation, date back to 1958 when the annual event was revived. The creators of these introduced elements, specifically Queen Topaz and her Royal Court and the Feast of Lanterns play, did not purposely introduce them with malicious or disdainful intent. In fact, the theme of the revived event was advertised as "An All-Day Family Community Folk Festival Heralding Friendship Between Peoples" that invited participants to wear a foreign costume representing a nation of their choice.

Within several years, the few participants who wore foreign costumes representing other nations waned and the festival theme of "Friendship Between Peoples" disappeared. The festival continued to emphasize elements from Chinese culture.

## THE FEAST OF LANTERNS EVOLVES INTO CULTURAL APPRECIATION AND INCLUSIVITY

*"Be the change you wish to see in the world."*

- Gandhi

I worked with the community and led the Board of Directors to create an awakened change. In 2018, Diana Li attended a Feast of Lanterns board meeting and she presented her experience of attending the pageant as a Chinese American woman. The board voted

at that meeting to begin working on changing the pageant with the intention to unveil a new story in 2020. At the 2019 pageant, I formally addressed the public and announced that the Board of Directors was seeking to consciously change the story. That fall we hosted an open forum to discuss creating change and invited local writers to submit their story ideas. Gerry Low- Sabado and I spoke at the forum together. A Change Committee was formed with members of the Board of Directors and longtime volunteers for the Feast of Lanterns. Laura Edeen's storyline was selected by the committee and she worked with us to create a new legend for Pacific Grove. I also attended a training on restorative justice to develop my understanding on how to further facilitate conscious change. All of these steps were challenging and wonderful at the same time. I uphold the following principles of restorative justice to support the intention to make the Feast of Lanterns an event inclusive of all cultures that celebrates our local history in an authentic way:

#### Principles of Restorative Justice

- Inclusivity
- Imaginative
- Beloved Community
- Interdependent
- In Relationship
- Co-Creative
- Patient
- Survivor Centered
- Humanizing
- Rooted in Courage, Love, and Healing
- Reciprocal Power

1. LOCAL CULTURAL HISTORY – The Feast of Lanterns will continue to deepen the Royal Court's role in teaching local history by having members of the Royal Court present on specific cultural groups and their history in Pacific Grove. These presentations will impart knowledge of the Indigenous Nations (Rumsien, Esselen, Ohlone Costanoans, etc.), the Chinese Fishing Village, and other cultural groups, along with the history of the founding of Pacific Grove by the Methodists, the history of the Chautauqua Assembly, and the history of the Feast of Lanterns and its revival in 1958 by Elmarie Dyke.

The Royal Court and members of the Board of Directors have attended the Walk of Remembrance since 2016 to learn about the contributions and experiences of the Chinese Americans who lived in various fishing villages on the Monterey Peninsula and at Point Alones in Pacific Grove. We attend the event as regular students and citizens. We will continue to educate the Royal Court by having the Court attend other events related to local history, specifically to learn about the different peoples who have lived here in Pacific Grove.

2. AUTHENTIC CULTURAL PERFORMANCES – At the Feast week events, there will be opportunities for the public to explore cultural sharing, learn ethnic dancing, and view performances from local cultural groups. We will feature authentic cultural performances

at Opening Ceremonies, at the Feast of Dancing, and on Feast Day. This exposure will allow our community to learn about the diversity of our peninsula and foster cultural appreciation. On Feast Day we will feature a cultural fair of 15 distinct groups with space to provide cultural sharing of their choosing. There will be cultural performances on the pier. The cultural fair will offer an opportunity to learn various forms of dance offered on the grass near the cultural fair. Our vendors will showcase foods from around the world providing another opportunity for learning and fun. Reflecting and returning to the history of the Feast of Lanterns, everyone will be encouraged to attend the events in costumes that represent their family's culture and heritage.

3. UPDATING THE FEAST OF LANTERNS LEGEND – The previous mythological story of the Feast of Lanterns was modeled after the *Legend of the Blue Willow*. It was acted out at Lovers Point Pier from 1958-2019. Elmarie selected the story as the main event for the Feast of Lanterns with the intention of bringing the community together in celebration of love. This legend was a fictional story set in China which resulted in the Royal Court performing in costumes that were based on Chinese folklore and blended with European folklore. The *Legend of the Blue Willow* is cultural appropriation due to its origin. It was a marketing story written by a British man to sell his dinnerware. It is not an authentic Chinese legend and does not acknowledge or support the local contributions of the Chinese Americans who actually lived in the Point Alones fishing village before Pacific Grove was founded. The Pacific Grove Feast of Lanterns, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) organization whose purpose is to further and enhance the culture, history, and heritage of the City of Pacific Grove through civic and cultural activities, including the annual Feast of Lanterns Festival, and to provide scholarships for the continued education of the Royal Court through an annual scholarship fund.

The Board of Directors asked the community to help to write a new myth that is set in Pacific Grove and explores themes that are relevant to this area. The story is set in Pacific Grove and revolves around a family of monarchs who live in the Point Pinos Lighthouse. Any role in the play is open to be played by anyone who wishes to step into that role. For example, the monarch can be played as a single person or a couple in any combination. The new legend is a modern fairytale that addresses themes relevant to the origins of the Feast and our current world.

At the opening of the new pageant, the children of the world light the way for the Royal Procession down the great stone staircase. Each child carries a lighted lantern and a flag to symbolize his or her heritage. The new story is a celebration of the “monarchs” who live in the lighthouse and their children are beloved by the town because they are the Royal Court. These children are celebrated for their intelligence, connection to community, and service. Each Princess (or Prince) is celebrated for her or his unique talents and gifts, and each plays a larger role in the new legend than in the previous play. Queen Topaz (or King) falls in love with a scholar named Avery who is lecturing about the wonders of nature here on the coast at our 1905 Pacific Grove Chautauqua. The two exchange notes in a magical spiral seashell, and the Lady of the Bay (our Saint of the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary) assists the lovers in ultimately finding each other.

The parents of Topaz want her to marry a wealthy partner and select Lord Berwick. This Lord is no man of integrity and he has stolen a magic pearl from Asilomara, the magical sea dragon. He is only interested in money and power gained by exploiting the environment. In contrast to Lord Berwick, the scholar Avery is deeply in love with nature and science. It is clear that Topaz wants to spend her life with Avery, not the self-interested Lord Berwick.

The new story holds elements of the past, such as the Royal Court with Topaz choosing her love instead of obeying her parents' wishes and their pick for her life partner. The Lady of the Bay is the supernatural being who assists the lovers in escaping and transforming into monarch butterflies.

4. INCLUSIVITY ON THE ROYAL COURT – The Royal Court has been opened to all young people instead of only being open to young ladies. Anyone can try out for any role in the play. This opportunity is open to young people who identify as female, male, or non-binary who may wish to play either princess, prince, queen, or king. All are welcome!

5. ACCESSIBILITY OF THE EVENTS – The Feast of Lanterns Opening Ceremonies and Pageant have been livestreamed on Facebook since 2017 to make some of the large events accessible to all. These videos are also on the website and Instagram to provide as many outlets as possible for the public to access this content. Most of the public events for the Feast of Lanterns are free, family-friendly, and open to the public. The pageant has a sign language interpreter, and we provide priority parking and space to those with physical disabilities.

*“The only constant is life is change.”*

- Heraclitus

It is clear from looking at the history of Feast of Lanterns that it has always been evolving. Change is a real part of life and we all experience it on a daily basis. Since it is a fundamental truth, I see every reason to embrace change by opening my mind and heart to new perspectives. Creating conscious change is holding the intention that we can grow to make our world better, to think globally and act locally, to see that we are stronger for our diversity! We can heal what is out of balance and be better for doing so. Finally, we owe it to the next generations and to our elders to make our world healthy and whole.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who has taken the time to read this article and who is willing to embrace change in the best possible way. I love our community and all the amazing people who come together to celebrate Pacific Grove with the Feast of Lanterns.

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Chautauqua: The Nature Study Movement in Pacific Grove, California (2015) by Donald Kohrs

Chinese Gold: The Chinese in the Monterey Bay Region (2008) by Sandy Lydon

Feast of Lanterns Official Programs (Magazines 2016 – 2019)

Life in Pacific Grove California (2017) Edited by Patricia Hamilton

Life in Pacific Grove California – Book 2 (2018) Edited by Patricia Hamilton

Images of America: Pacific Grove (2005) by Kent Seavey and the Heritage Society of Pacific Grove

### Community Resources:

Healing and Reconciliation Institute - <https://www.healingreconciliationinstitute.org>

Monterey Bay Chinese Association – <https://montereychineseassociation.org>

National Coalition Building Institute – <http://ncbimonterey.org>

Pacific Grove Heritage Society - <https://www.pacificgroveheritage.org>

Pacific Grove Public Library – <https://www.pacificgrovelibrary.org>

Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History - <https://www.pgmuseum.org>

Whites for Racial Equality Monterey County – [whitesforracialequality@gmail.com](mailto:whitesforracialequality@gmail.com)