

Brian Payne*President, Central Indiana Community Foundation and The Indianapolis Foundation**A Long Steep Hill*

After a long day's work, I began the walk down the long steep hill to my car. At twenty-six years old and in my first career job, I was a man on the move and really wasn't prone to stop to smell flowers of any kind or to wallow in one of nature's poetry lessons. But I was halted by the prodigious beauty before me. The sky was so unusually clear as my eyes took in the open fields of what may be the most beautiful university campus in the country. They kept arching down, now onto the historic village of downtown Santa Cruz and out to the wide beach and rolling waves, and then across the sparkling Monterey Bay and onto the city of Monterey forty miles south.

I believe this was the first time that I became truly conscious of how inspiring a place can be. For the next eight years of working as Managing Director of Shakespeare Santa Cruz, I never failed to anticipate that view. I was often disappointed by the cloud cover or fog that so frequently owned the bay, but on that rare, clear, blue-skied day, I was in awe and consciously tried to mark the moment—forever.

Now so much of my life's work and passion is focused on how to create a great sense of place and how place can differentiate and inspire a neighborhood or a city. Place can inspire people to travel thousands of miles for the experience of just being there. And place is so powerful that it can ignite your senses, imagination, and creativity. A beautiful and unique place can change the values of people and communities. That's actually our goal with the Indianapolis Cultural Trail: A Legacy of Gene & Marilyn Glick. We expect that it will make the citizens of Indianapolis care more deeply about arts, culture, beauty, the environment, walking, bicycling, and other forms of recreation and transportation. We also expect that it will make them care less about their cars. People will come to Indianapolis from all over the world to experience our downtown, our cultural districts, our arts and entertainment venues, and our wonderful people through the unique framework of the Cultural Trail.

Indianapolis has an incredible number of inspiring places already, both natural and human-crafted. The new-old Central Library is my

favorite indoor space in the city. It is a masterful achievement. The grounds of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Eagle Creek Park, and the Monon Trail are other very special places that bring out the best in people. We have many other places that should and could be truly inspiring but don't live up to their potential. Monument Circle and Broad Ripple Park are at the top of that frustrating list. Monument Circle should be the best public gathering place in the country and challenge the most inspiring European parks and piazzas. Broad Ripple Park has a long list of terrific assets, but the value of the individual parts greatly exceeds the impact of the whole. It's ridiculous that the Park fronts the White River and yet the river is a missing element in the visitor's experience. It's also so close to Broad Ripple Village and the Monon Trail and yet is really disconnected from both. Fortunately, there is some early momentum to fix both the Park and the Circle.

Last year I took my wife, Gail, to see my home city of San Diego. We began with a three-day stay in a wonderful hotel on Pacific Beach and rode rental bikes into La Jolla Village, another of the world's inspiring places. "Why would you ever leave a place like this?" she challenged. I explained that Pacific Beach and La Jolla Village were not the places of my youth. That would be Chula Vista, twenty miles south and two million dollars inland. I explained that the beautiful Pacific Ocean was not really a part of my daily existence, other than the infrequent planned trips to the beach. I showed Gail my first home and my elementary school where Robert and Neil (my best friends to this day) and I played unsupervised sports for hours until dark in the summer and on weekends. Then a really strange thing happened. I noticed that a few steps up the long steep hill from my boyhood house there was a view of the beach. The playground at my elementary school sat near a cliff and had a spectacular ocean view. I was stunned and saddened. Why didn't I notice them all those years? How could I have missed them? I know, I was just a kid, but my experience could have been so much fuller had I looked, had I seen.

Lucky for me, you can learn to look, to see, to become inspired by the specialness of a place, no matter your age, no matter where you are.