

# The Great Tide Pool

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



## THE BALLOON PLATOON

This year, when the 65th Annual Good Old Days street festival plays out in Pacific Grove on May 4th and 5th, folks will enjoy the beer and wine gardens, 40-plus bands on five stages, dozens of arts & crafts and food vendors, carnival rides, a quilt show, a petting zoo, a firefighter challenge...

But I've always had a favorite part of the festivities - the PG Rotary Parade that kicks it off. Because I've always had a favorite part of the parade - the Balloon Platoon. If you're a Pagrovia who has witnessed your share of Good Old Days parades, you just cracked a smile.

How to describe them? Well, they run a tight ship - and by that I mean they squeeze into innertubes around their bellies and dress as sailors (their white uniforms are made from queen-sized sheets). And instead of swords or rifles over their shoulders, they carry... mops. Actually, the captain of their ship (they call him the "commodore") doesn't carry a mop. No, he's much more important than that. He wields a toilet plunger. They might have called themselves the Platoon of People Who Don't Take Themselves Too Seriously.

For some reason, for years I thought this group of ragtag, round-bellied, marvelous mop-toters was local. But the Balloon Platoon is actually based out of Pleasanton. This squad of shapely sailors has strutted their stuff in parades throughout California - from Patterson to Piedmont, from Santa Clara and San Francisco to the San Diego Holiday Bowl Parade. But they've also appeared at the Indy 500, the National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade in Washington D.C., the Seattle Seafair Parade, Philadelphia's 4th of July, even London's Christmas Parade and Singapore's New Year Parade. In 2003, they performed alongside the Sun City Dancing Grandmothers during halftime of the Fiesta Bowl... and received a standing ovation.



And they've been doing it for a LONG time - in fact, exactly 50 years. The first Balloon Platoon appearance was at Pleasanton's Good Times KNBR Parade in 1974. It's been so long that membership has become generational - there have been father-son platooners... and I've seen photos of pint-sized (child) platooners no bigger than their mops.



Following each parade, the members of the Balloon Platoon spend almost as much time posing for pictures as they did performing. But I've had the pleasure over the years of seeing them before each parade because they always gear up in front of my house on Spruce Avenue. And then I get to watch them practice their maneuvers on their way to the parade route on Pine Avenue, perfecting each maneuver according to the commodore's call:

"Pirouette!"

"Carousel!"

"Shake and bake!"

"Right shoulder mop, ho!"

But I noticed something last year. In the past, at least a dozen Balloon Platooners participated in the Good Old Days Parade. Last year, there were only seven. It may have been simply a matter of personnel scheduling, but the numbers have dwindled. So I say: See them while you can. Get yourself to Good Old Days in PG, park yourself along Pine Avenue, and watch a bit of wandering whimsy.

*The Great  
Tidepool*