

# Beach Boys

by Jon Robertson  
(Copyright © 2021)

For seventeen years I lived in Virginia Beach, just a five minute bike ride from the boardwalk. I rode my bike among the seabirds, the air, and the sun and waves several times a week for years, and didn't even mind the tourists, unlike most locals. I secretly enjoyed their good times and the laughs they saved up all year. I rode my bike at ten o'clock in the morning for a break from work and again in the early evening when the boardwalk came alive with music. During the season, different bands played up and down the strip every night. Dance bands, jazz and reggae groups, duos, soloists, and Top 40 played from Fifth all the way up to 39th Street. With the waves washing in behind me, I'd listen as long as I wanted without having to pay a cover or buy a drink.

The dangers riding your bike at the oceanfront are many. People, especially babies, dart out into the bike path without thinking. Also, the college and high school kids party nonstop and like to show off. As I passed the age of fifty, I realized that I couldn't pedal fast enough to get out of harm's way when they started throwing stuff off their balconies or blinding you with laser pointers to impress their girlfriends. It was the same type of stupid crap I did when I was their age, so, naturally, I was concerned about it. With my reaction time and eyesight going to the dogs, I decided to stop riding after dark. I used to love those bike rides, so I continued riding during the daylight hours—that is, until I injured my knee. It happened at the end of August 2005—the night I decided to break my rule.

It all started when my neighbor, Grant Beck, cranked up his stereo too loud. Being writers, such distractions made my wife and I run chattering like irate squirrels from window to window. So as *California Girls* thumped in the air, I swaggered outside to make the world a better place. Luckily,

Grant was getting something out of his pick-up truck, so I shoved my hands into my pockets and gave him a shout from the curb.

“Yo, Grant. You think you could turn that stereo down? It—upsets the wife.”

He laughed a little. Looked at me all mystified and said, “It’s the Beach Boys.”

“Yeah, I know,” I smiled politely. “I just wondered if you could you turn it down a little.”

“Not really,” he stiffened. “It’s *the Beach Boys*.”

“Yeah. I hear ya. ‘...wish they all could be California—’” I sang, approximating a subtle dance move to show him that I really did understand that part. “Okay,” I grinned, holding my fingers together and squinting through the space. “But just a *little* too loud. Okay?”

“No, man. Over *there*,” he shrugged irritably. “They’re playing—on the beach. *At 5th Street*.”

“Are you crazy?” Then I remembered seeing the notice in the paper and realized that it really was the Beach Boys, and the sound was merely echoing off the side of his house. “Oh. Right.”

Even though it was past dark, I wanted to get closer. To hear better. To try to catch a glimpse of them. I rolled out my beach cruiser—a standard-issue, fenderless and gearless bicycle—to see what I could see. The beach was jammed—sidewalks, streets, restaurants, and boardwalk. The city had everything roped off, but I knew short cuts: secret passages between the hotels. I put my plan into operation.

In Virginia Beach, there are a lot of cops. Police officers patrol the oceanfront on foot, horseback, bicycles, ATVs, jet skis, helicopters, cars, motorcycles, and boats. The city has to keep control or the gangs would take it over like ants on a jelly sandwich. They had ordinances against blasting your car radio, yelling, and cruising Atlantic Avenue. There was also a no-cursing ordinance. They posted signs on every block reading, “No @\$%#&.” No kidding.

I would have hated it as a kid, but in my advanced years I knew it was necessary. Rules kept the Oceanfront suitable for families, which was the resort's bread and butter. They protected the boardwalk, too, reserving it for pedestrians and skaters only, providing a separate path for bikes that ran parallel about eight feet away. The police will remind you if they catch you riding on the boardwalk, at least during high season. In the winter you pretty much have free reign. "The beach is ours again," the locals say after Labor Day.

So there I was, trying to navigate the guy wires, blockades, and fences they'd put up against hundreds of people like me trying to poach some *Little Deuce Coupe* without having to pay for it. This wasn't difficult. The closer I got, the better they sounded. Between the temporary canvas walls, I glimpsed Mike Love and Brian Wilson and started riding back and forth so as to appear carefree and casual.

I was slowly pedaling along the bike path, in full compliance with the law, when I noticed three kids around ten years old up on the forbidden boardwalk cranking their twenty-inchers toward me as fast as they could. One of the kids let out this Geronimo yell, and before I knew it, launched himself off the boardwalk and down the little bank one inch in front of me, intentionally cutting me off. This caused me all in one motion to tip sideways and crash to the ground with my knee tangled painfully in the bike frame. I heard myself yell, loudly, and in slow motion, during an abrupt pause in the music, "*Come back here, you sniveling little bastard!*"

The boy—a tattooed, shaved headed, pierced fourth-grader—grinned and executed the next step in his plan. He found the nearest police officer, faking tears, whimpering that some "mean old drunk said curse words at me"! I think the little prick even had scars on his face.

In a moment, the cop slid to a stop beside me on his ten-speed, his tiny little red and blue lights flickering. He was decked out in his dark blue uniform, gun belt, radio, and safety helmet—little more than a callow lad himself—and he asked routinely, “Are you all right, sir?”

“My knee hurts.” I winced and stood up carefully. “Other than that, I guess I’m okay. I saw you talking to those little creeps. Did you see what they did to me—?”

“Do you have any ID sir?” he asked, cutting me off. He dismounted, the leather elements of his uniform squeaking.

I told him no, I didn’t have ID, because I only lived a few blocks over, near the marina, as though that would count for something. Half a block up the boardwalk, I could see the boys laughing like crazy. I was tongue tied because of the no-cursing rule.

“Officer—you know he cut me off *on purpose*. That little—those little bas—those little sons of bi—”

“Sir, are you new here? Don’t you know we have an ordinance against cursing in Virginia Beach?” Then he got sarcastic with me. “It may be permissible where you come from, but in our community, you can’t call children filthy names. I’m going to have to write you a citation.”

“*Oh, come on!*” I shouted, hot with rage. I tried to explain through clenched teeth. “Look, that—fatherless little squirt cut me off on purpose. Look at him up there. Laughing. And you’re giving *me* a ticket?”

“Yes, sir. It’s the law.” He leaned close. “Smells like you’ve been drinking.”

“No, no, no!” I smacked myself in the forehead. “I mean yes—wine with dinner like every night.” I struggled to avoid expletives. “That—diminutive—and unclean little—*pizzle* must pull this—*caca*—all the time. He could hurt someone like he just hurt me. And where’s his father? I bet that—STD-infected swyver of goats doesn’t even know he has a kid. And what about that canine

female of a mother, letting him out this late at night on his own? That's child neglect, any way you slice it, officer. And here—and I feel sorry for you—but, you fell right into his trap.”

“Name and address?”

“Are you really writing me up!” With my knee throbbing, I was this side of reenacting Mt. Vesuvius. “That's *great*, and the real criminal is a half a block away—*riding on the boardwalk*, I'll have you know. All I called him was—an innocuous *noun* meaning an offspring of inferior or questionable progeny—a word that is perfectly acceptable in public. I had hoped that by calling him this name I'd inspire him to look into his genealogy—to trace his roots and find some dignity in his pathetic life, so he doesn't perpetuate the mistakes of his crack-head parents. Sometime back around 1997 they were probably blacked out in the rear of a station wagon exchanging a toxic mix of chlamydia and Mountain Dew. And that pathetic pint-sized demon was the result.”

“That's Robertson—with an R?”

“You can't be *serious*? Look—aw, he's gone now. You let that pud-yanking condom-escapee get away. If I could just sit that stink pile down for one minute, I'd explain why his little game is so dangerous. Explain how easily his *arms* and *legs* could be torn from their sockets, for example, and used to beat him unconscious. Officer, if that failed abortion ever grows up, you'll regret this day. That untutored bleeding sphincter will turn to crime because he wasn't disciplined as a child. He's already a—feculence-gulping *buggerer* of mothers. You'll be seeing him again before he's eighteen—you mark my words. He'll be a drain on the system. A clog in the courts.”

Without expression the officer efficiently zipped off the ticket and handed it to me.

“The fine is twenty-five dollars, Mr. Robertson,” he said. “You can use this handy envelope to mail it in or fight it in court on the date listed there.”

“That’s just, great,” I fumed, slapping my thigh with the ticket. “I’ll just stand in line behind the woman who wore a that illegal thong and the dweeb from Little Rock who didn’t know he couldn’t finish his beer on the boardwalk.”

“Up to *you*, sir,” he sneered. “Have a nice *evening*, sir.”

He lowered his angry cop face to my angry local face, but something happened. Sweet harmonies now seeped through the canvas barricades.

*“I’m pickin’ up good vibrations...”*

And the officer and I froze in time. Our heads bobbed in unison side to side, grins spread on our faces, and the fury evaporated.

Mounting his bike once again, the officer waxed pedagogical. “A ticket for the concert would only have cost you ten bucks, sir.”

I nodded.

My knee would never be the same, and my bike-riding days were over. Yeah, and I could have listened for free off the side of Grant Beck’s duplex. But one sawed-off little andouille smoker got away scot free. He never showed his face again at the South end of the beach. I know because I looked for the little fucker every day, for two years.