

My so-called suburban life



We are back home after a week at my parents house. The drive from Nevada down Highway 395 took us through some places that...let's just say, I was glad when I saw we were approaching Orange County.

It's a little disturbing to me that I have become some comfy and accustom to OC, driving as fast as I can in my Escalade through towns with one gas station and an auto graveyard, not wanting to have to stop. And if we are finally forced to stop, I lay out the law to everyone, "Don't touch anything!" before releasing the autolocks.

After pleas from the kids to eat at one of the zillion McDonald's we had passed, we pulled into the Golden Arches in Bishop. I squeezed into a spot next to a thrashed white car with one window smashed out and a sheet duct taped in its place. Two women stood outside the car—not moving an smidgen to accommodate us—both were smoking and when we opened our doors, I could hear crying from behind the sheet. As they smoked the younger one complained to her shoeless friend, "She thinks she's a princess already." Motioning to the window she took a big puff and said, "...up all hours wanting something."

At that, she reached her pudgy hand through the window and pulled out a little baby (little, like six months tops) by her one arm and brought the infant to her chest with her other hand, lit cigarette now dangling right under the baby's left ear.

Emily, my daughter, stood speechless. She hates cigarettes and gets all Cindy Brady when she sees anyone smoking. "Mom," she started, tapping me on the arm, standing right in front of the trio, staring, "She's smoking while she's holding..." I quickly nudged her along toward doors of the restaurant. "But mom..." she kept on, now pointing to them and looking back and forth to me then them.

When we got inside we ordered our usual fare and the women were now in the play area, with what we guessed were their other kids. All dirty and shirtless. All ignoring the barked orders of their moms. The baby still cried as she laid across her mom's big, round ketchup-streaked belly.

Emily glared at them for a while, but eventually got down to the business of asking everyone for their pickles and negotiating when she could open her toy. As I sat there, finishing off my Purelling blitz, I realized that living in Orange County my kids are pretty sheltered from that sort of scene.

I guess I've become insulated, too. Larry laughs at me when I wince at the dirty bathrooms, gum stained sidewalks, and overflowing trash cans of some towns and cities. We have a joke that when we see discarded fast food bags or beer cans in our town's streets we gasp and say in mocked horror, "Someone call the police! There's garbage on the streets of Irvine!"

When did I become this person? I lived in San Francisco for 10 years. I hichhiked through Europe by myself. I listen to The Clash for heaven's sake! What has happened to me? Where's my heart? Does suburban life softly lull even the most ardent urban adventurer and once compassionate youth into a snob, slowly and deceptively until we wake up and find we can't tolerate life unless it's polished and Febrezed? Or is it just part of getting older? Or being a mom? What?

No matter what the cause, I felt like a good dose of something subversive and charitable, but had too much laundry to do and far too much on Facebook to catch up with and then I had to run to Trader Joe's because I HAD to have their Edamame Hummus, which was delicious and I wanted to go in the jacuzzi before the kids went to bed, so I forgot all about my dilemma.

Until now. Is it so bad that I like my suburban life? When did this happen to me?

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Maybe to counter-balance this feeling, I've started a group on Flickr called "Things That are Unintentionally Creepy."
Things like clowns or dental equipment from the 1800's,

puppets...that kind of thing. Please join and add any photos of things that made shudder. I know I have a hair-trigger creep button, but I surely can't be the only one.