

#LAXray in August, #LAXmas in December

IT'S WHERE I'M FROM

from 2012. The year in pictures, Cathy Marshall

When people ask where I'm from, I still say I'm from LA.

It's mostly true. I grew up in a fictional part of LA, south of LAX, not far from Gordita Beach.

We'll say that I'm from the South Bay. That's close enough.

There's no Gelson's, Grauman's, Grove, or Acres of Books where I'm from. The Jews of the South Bay don't go to Cantors; they stay in Torrance and eat Mee Krob and Szechwan Chicken, perhaps with chopsticks, or perhaps with a fork. The restaurants don't deliver.

"Torrance," I say.

"It rains in Torrance."

I'm the only one who laughs.





But I'm not from Torrance.

It's hard for me to admit that I'm actually from Rancho Palos Verdes. In my defense, RPV used to be unincorporated. So technically speaking, you could say "I'm from LA County. On the same side of the city as Compton."

You wouldn't be lying. Not really.

From our address you could tell that we lived almost 300 blocks from downtown LA. As if anyone kept count once they'd crossed 244th Street.

The first time I go to a Mediterranean resort, without even thinking I say, "It looks just like Palos Verdes."

Like Palos Verdes, but without the nearby gauntlet of defense contractors. It was the Cold War that made RPV possible.

In the 1990s, there was a persistent rumor that Bruce Springsteen bought one of the houses adjacent to Lunada Bay, right off one of those surfing beaches reputed to be locals-only.

It was a thrilling rumor. Wilt Chamberlain might've lived in Palos Verdes too, but that story was upstaged after he started his own rumor that he'd slept with thousands of girls.

I thought, "How could Wilt possibly keep track? Does he keep a list? Does he count ladies instead of sheep when he can't drift off to sleep?"

The rumors about Bruce Springsteen evaporated by the end of the 20th century, but you can look up that shit about Wilt Chamberlain in Wikipedia. 20,000 girls! He lived here.





-PARK GROUNDS OPEN:
During Daylight Hours Only

R.P.V. Ordinance No.12.16.03
Emergency Phone
911

I WANT YOU
TO PICK IT UP
RANCHO PALOS VERDES,
MUNICIPAL CODE SEC.
6.12.160

August. December. There should be a difference, but in December, as in August, there's still a riot of bougainvillea creeping up the side of a house.

A sprawling Moreton Bay fig tree is just covered with red oblate fruit. Nobody ever picks fruit—the loquats, the tangerines, the grapefruits, the plums—from trees in suburban yards.

“They’re not poisonous, are they?” I say as I scrutinize a Moreton Bay fig.

“You’re not supposed to eat them. I read that they taste insipid,” my brother says.

“They look ripe.” Indeed there’s a tiny bit of give when the red fruit is squeezed.

“I don’t think you should eat that, Cath,” my brother says.

We’ve had the same conversation a dozen times. It’s theoretical. But one day, in a fit of empiricism, I’ll eat a Moreton Bay fig and find out.

The peacocks are not a new thing. There've been peacocks in Palos Verdes since I was a kid. We'd go down to Peacock Flats and look for feathers.

Now the peacocks stroll the streets and cul de sacs. They don't fly, just hop and scatter. From lawn to fence to roof and back to lawn again.

They're noisy. People shoot at them.

I thought I'd seen quite a few in August, but by December, they had disappeared. Do they hibernate? Do they migrate? Or do they go inside and watch the Rose Parade on TV? It'd be conspicuous if they chartered a bus and drove the 40 miles out to the parade route on Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena.

Maybe they're in Las Vegas, playing video poker instead. I've heard they're bad losers.





Lichens grow on the north side of an abandoned Vanagon. The microbus is returning to the earth. Slowly.

I check for it every time I go back to where I'm from; it'd been there for years.

But by December, the Vanagon was gone. Did someone sell it on craigslist? Did it compost?

Even here in the desert by the ocean, the earth reclaims man's work eventually.

Donald Trump, who owns a tract of land on the coast not far from here, had better watch out for his toupee.

In Palos Verdes there are lots of new mailboxes. Big fortified mailboxes. Mailboxes that look like gentlemen's clubs for dwarves.

They are substantial, these mailboxes. Brick and mortar affairs. Stucco and metal. Lath and plaster. With shutters and locks.

Some are whimsical. Some are sad. Some evoke the halcyon days of the Cold War at its peak.

If I still had a security clearance, I could live in one of them.





What about this mailbox?

What are these two boys doing? Is one mounting the other? It's a puzzling scene. The top boy is staring off into the far distance, as if he isn't quite aware of what he is doing.

It's my favorite mailbox. I always stop to look at it.

"So, what're you guys doing?" I ask.

The mailbox tells me, "it's none of your beeswax."

The streets are silent on a warm December night. One household has set up a crèche with a handsome Jesus being admired on a green, green lawn. It's well-lit, staged, and peopled by a large cast, some of whom I do not recognize. They must be extras.



Ornaments and lights twinkle; inflatable Grinches and sleighs sway in the breeze. Palm trees are lit from stem to stern.



When I was a kid, no-one would've dared to create such elaborate tableaus within such easy reach.



Now no children play outside. An entire generation has grown up believing that the quiet streets are a hotbed of kidnappers, pederasts, and molesters.



This December I came to a slow realization that the rumors—cruising white panel vans, NAMBLA members, missing kids on milk cartons—were started by the Xmas Decorating Cartel.



I moved away from LA regularly, but then I'd come back and visit in December. The 405 would even be flowing.

Christmas in LA is so seductive.

I moved back to Pasadena four times, each in February after a December visit.

Eventually I left LA behind. But it's like every abusive partner. I can't help but defend it. Somebody accuses it of being a haven for artificial tans, white teeth, fake boobs, and general shallowness.

"It's not that bad," I invariably say. "In fact, it's better than here."