

**"Live, from North Hollywood, California..."\*\*\*\***

Hit squarely in the noggin with the idea a vacation home was not uncalled for, I made flight plans. Oh, certainly work was pleasant enough. I wasn't altogether disenchanted with it. I wasn't tired of toiling or dulled by drudgery, just a bit less chipper when faced with corporate paper pushing. Then one Sunday afternoon when peddling my bike up Ventura Boulevard, finding it difficult to ignore exhaust despite the sunshine, I realized I hadn't been home for a year. I slowed to catch my reflection in the window of "Holiday Hairpieces for Men and Women."

Home was always Cannon Beach. Anyplace one masters puberty is inevitably viewed as 'home' with a grotesque fondness. This cheerless thought in mind, I contemplated the girl in the window. Infamous in my youth for too much make-up and decidedly inappropriate toggery, I was gleeful to see I had only outgrown the lavender eye shadow. I fancied physically (some might add 'intellectually') I was just the same -- just the same.

In recent years my visits home have grown fewer and far-far-farther between. Perhaps because since leaving for University -- and upon graduation, just leaving -- I often imagined locals had catalogued my pubescent errors for public record. I clearly recall my humiliation at "townies" commenting on the phases that thrust me into womanhood.

One August dusk (I was eleven or so), the scabby kneed Spruce Street gang I was running with held a ferocious game of Kick-the-Can. A tiresome curler-headed neighbor came out to request we not play in her yard.

"I'm sick of cleaning up after that St. Bernard of yours..."

I acquiesced, but informed her it was a tad difficult to keep track of our dog's visits to inviting lawns.

Deaf to this logic, she said, "You know Annie, you shouldn't be playing with these boys anyhow! You're getting your strawberries now!"

I first merely raised an eyebrow at the absurdity. Then, with the boys' laughter ringing in my ears and a furtive glance at my chest, the connotation of her words sunk in. Face flaming, I responded definitively, "I am NOT."

"Yes, you are." She was one of those people glad to give unwelcome news. "Yes, you are. . . You know, your sisters never rough-housed when they were becoming young ladies."

Unable to quell the need for retribution, from that night forward I always gave dear Precious (the afore mentioned St. Bernard) extra attention after she had actively admired that fine woman's rose bushes. (Her roses weren't the worse for wear in the end; she should have thanked me for it.)

At seventeen, wearing some tawdry thing or another (that was my scarf phase), I was waiting tables at the Brass Lantern when: WHAABAM! A member of the C.B. Bachelor Fraternity (nope, not you Peter) looked me up and down. He shook his head, advised me not to "grow up too fast," and then turned away (after requesting more pita and a lemon wedge for his hummous). Speechless, I filled with a fury that festered, fermented, and (just yesterday) finally expired. I was always getting indignant over such chidings as these. And no matter the passage of time, holidays spent in Cannon I often entertained feelings of being rather thirteen-ish.

Miscellaneous Local: "Well, if it isn't little Annie Osborne."

Me: "Yep."

Miscellaneous Local: "Why, you look so grown up!"

Feeling quite brainy and a little peckish, I retort with the ever witty: "I reckon so."

Miscellaneous Local: "Well, well."

Me: "Well, bye."

Subsequently, I pilgrimaged sparingly to the motherland while hankering for adulthood.

When I left it was my conviction that city life meant freedom from this meddlesome gossip. I'm miffed to admit it took some time to recognize that grievous hearsay was not endemic to small town inhabitants, but to bipeds everywhere. The city simply provided a larger landscape. There is no place better to learn this disagreeable truth than Los Angeles. (Of course, gossips in Hollywood are paid loads of dough to be "curious.")

The advantage of mega-metropolises like London or L.A. is that they are remarkably easier to hide in. What's that? You question my inclination to do so -- to disappear into a mass of humanity? Allow me to inquire: Have any of you locals ever driven to Seaside for Snapple and Snackwells to avoid running into friends and/or loved ones at Osburn's? Have you sipped an Amber Ale discreetly in some shady pub, attempting to shirk Bill's regulars? Perhaps you have made the drive to Portland, bent on becoming smitten with someone you weren't related to?

Though I may sound as if I'm touting the social freedoms of the city; tut tut, allow me to make myself clear. Those of you heading toward the big town and a "what ho" with someone you haven't shagged ten years past, fine and dandy, do as you will. Sleep outside the family. Just save the flaking, the brawling, the scheming, the wearing of fetching lampshades for home. Knowing folks in Cannon Beach remember your past degradations is realistic; believing folks care is narcissistic. Hometown locals may tease one to no end, but forgive one (eventually they have to). City folk put you on "Hard Copy" and hound you until you pray for the end (not that I would know).

In a few short days I will hop on a plane, and over 7-UP and honeyed peanuts imagine that this time, this trip, I return a woman. (Strike up Oprah's theme please.) A deep sigh, and a cough as a bus glides by, and I'm off and riding again. . . . . Which would be a tidy end to this essay if I had not inadvertently been blocking the door to the hairpiece establishment throughout my coastal musings. When peddling away, I looked back in horror to find six or seven wiry-capped consumers shaking their fists after me. I crossed the street, cut between two cars whose drivers were jawing on cellualars, and narrowly escaped being hit by a turquoise Cadillac convertible. Another glance behind confirmed I'd lost the baldies and was safe again amidst the traffic. I decided then I was really looking forward to those pre-packaged nuts; I have had my fill of crackers and cheese as of late.

\*\*\*\*If you think the title is pretentious, you've never been to North Hollywood.

This essay brought to you by: Little Annie Osborne.

Post Script:

I don't remember it being this cold. I used to go prancing about in cut-offs mid-winter, and I can't ascertain if my current reaction to this frigid breeze is from getting older or from California sissifying me. I'd forgotten the sensation of slipping into jeans so cold they feel damp. I keep fidgeting with my thigh-highs, trying, in a lady-like fashion, to inch them further up my legs.

Chill dilemma aside, it has been splendid to tool around in my dad's Buick wagon, checking out new developments and visiting old friends. And I've kept the eyeballs peeled for tidbits and details that characterize Cannon Beach to carry in my heart when I'm away from her again. Back in North Hollywood and lounging at the apartment pool, I'm sure to recall memories of men with big beards and facial hair (in L.A., males proudly display prevalent jawlines) who drive extended-cab trucks, all sorely lacking vanity plates. Reaching for bottled water (I will need to cool off), I will think of my mom wearing eighteen layers and drinking H2O straight from the tap. A quick dip in the pool, and I'm sure to remember these days of wading in waters that dear Great Grandma Braillier waded through when herding the cows back to the Tolovana homestead. But I've lapsed into the hokesy-folksy. It must be this fresh air.



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**CORVALLIS:** The Environmental Center, OSU

**SALEM:** Heliotrope

**ASTORIA:** KMUN, Columbian Café, The Community Store & Café Uniontown

**SEASIDE:** Buck's Books & Universal Video

**PORTLAND:** The Goose Hollow Inn, Powell's Books (Two Locations), Music Millennium (Two Locations), The Laurelhurst, Key Largo, East Ave Tavern, and many many more.....

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