

Only on the Left Coast:

I was going to write something snotty about life here in la la land but it would be redundant. You know what I mean. There is so much that goes on here that could happen nowhere else that the sarcastic edge is hardly necessary. The left coast is defined by strange and wonderful occurrences. A walk down the street on any given day is likely to reveal itself, given an open mind, as a trip through a place that was floated away from the rest of the continent a long, long time ago.

Palm trees in February. The jonquils just bloomed. I have my pants rolled up to my knees. I am 58 years old, well educated, much too concerned about what other people might think of my behavior but, here I am, walking down the street with my pants rolled up. Because it feels good.

One of the first and truest left coast lessons is that it's really fun to do something just because it feels good. If it's February and the sun is out and the temperature is around seventy, you start getting that light headed attitude that the rest of the world defines as spacey. It's not spacey here. It's how you behave because you live in a place that is so much easier on your body than the place that you came from.

Minnesotans came from Scandinavia and Germany and settled in a place that was as cold and as tough as the places that they came from. And, by and large, they act like it. Californians came from everywhere, including Scandinavia and Germany, and settled in a place that seemed very much like heaven. And so they behave accordingly. They live in a state of constant bemusement, senses bombarded, formerly frozen brains stimulated beyond reasonable limits. The normal rules simply do not apply. It would be unreasonable to expect that they would.

I was walking down the street today (before my pants got rolled up) as two bicycle riding police officers pulled up on the sidewalk. They were dressed neck to toe in smart black fatigues. They packed large German sidearms. They sported robins'-egg blue crash helmets. They were in better shape than I have ever thought of being. As they dismounted in the middle of the sidewalk a citizen cyclist came racing straight for them.

He managed to skid to a halt just as his front tire kissed the jack boot of the larger of the two officers. The civilian was a tad put out that his way was being obstructed by immovable objects and expressed himself, as Californians do. "Dude, what's up? That was close."

The police were not amused. As one reached for his summons book the other administered the tongue lashing. "You're not supposed to be riding on the sidewalk. It's dangerous to be riding on the sidewalk. The sidewalk is for walkers (he nodded in my direction). You could hurt someone." I guess it never occurred to the officer that he too was on the sidewalk, with his bicycle. The lovely irony of three bikes meeting on this single square of pavement exactly in my path on this day during our brief stay in California was not lost on me. Here, I thought, is exactly what I have been trying to explain. Things happen here that don't happen elsewhere. How could they?

We'll be leaving here shortly. We are headed back to our own beautiful part of the world in a couple of days. I knew from the start that I would have a hard time saying goodbye to my daughter and granddaughter. We've had five weeks of my best girls every day, all day. Finer time cannot be spent, I think, than in the company of smart, funny, beautiful women. I am flattered beyond propriety that they seem to enjoy my company as well.

What surprises me is that I will also miss the California manner of being. What I used to casually dismiss as air-headed has revealed itself as entirely appropriate and fitting behavior. Sure, you wouldn't want to try this sort of stuff back where we live. It wouldn't fly. It works here and nowhere else. Only on the left coast.