



You're Not In New Jersey Anymore

By **Jenny Price** | March 13, 2012

I've been back home for 3 weeks now—since I drove out of L.A. at the end of August for an east-coast teaching gig—and I have to say, it's good to be back.

OK, I admit I miss a few things about my life on that other coast—my nephews, for example, and watching my car not move in the driveway. Also, the weather. As in, there's weather. I'm one of the few Angelenos who *prefers* weather, and while almost all my friends expressed real worries about how I'd survive the winter, I found a strategy—wearing warm clothes—that worked really quite well.

Here are a few great things, though, that L.A. has and that little village in New Jersey does not—and that I've had the chance to enjoy in these first few weeks back:

** [The L.A. RIVER](#) — Yoga Park, Marsh Park with all its stormwater-catching capabilities, Taylor Yard (aka Rio de Los Angeles State Park), and the gorgeous 37-acre Dominguez Gap Wetland, which, like the River, is a gigantic secret in plain sight.

Also the concrete confluence with the mighty Arroyo Seco, the 6th St. bridge underpass where all the crime shows dump the bodies, and the high concrete walls just below Del Amo Blvd. in Long Beach—all sites on L.A.'s biggest mistake, and all spots that are equal parts monstrosity and magic.

** [A ROCK, rolling by night](#) on a 260-foot-long truck, towards an art museum, at 5 mph (max) on the streets of SoCal—

—a region so defined by mobility and speed and the latest gadget, and by the production and transportation of the world's industrial goods, that the sight of A ROCK, A REALLY BIG ROCK, moving almost as fast as a pedestrian can go, for no real commercial or practical reason, makes so many people smile and feel joy and stop living life as usual that people take vacation days to pay homage to it, and street parties erupt spontaneously with thousands of people, as the refrains of "we will, we will rock you" rock the route.

(Sorry, [Christopher Knight](#), but this is *not* mostly about "money" and "masculinity.")

** **Awards-shows SWAG LOUNGES** — oops, I mean the Academy Awards gifting suite—with the standard orange wristbands for the Talent and blue for the media (aka the Talented) so that the vendors know who not to give that much free stuff to.

My haul this time nevertheless included age-corrective bamboo firming liquid, a key-lime vanilla age-defying masque, ultra-age-defying day cream w/crystal drops, Nu Youth serum, "age reverse safely" night recovery cream, and a firm-skin age-defying pill with a multi-phase release system in a vegan-friendly capsule.

I plan to put all of it together into a blender, purée it, drink it, and wake up as a 7-year-old. Then I'll want to eat my entire jar of Nordic Naturals ("essentials for an extraordinary life") strawberry Omega-3 gummy worms.

I loved the the eraserboard, at the Nordic Naturals booth, where, in response to the question, "What's essential to you?" people had written "family," "love," "happiness," and "my Mom and education"—though not, surprisingly, "a special device with a patented ingredient that slows down the aging process when you run it all over a special gel that you rub up and down your whole body."

Or "tweezers that are handcrafted in Italy and have a patented enamel finish, and which remove the smallest hair and come with a warranty." Or "the first and only coconut-based vodka." Or...well, actually, that nice little Blinks necklace that converts into reading glasses did make me awfully happy.

**** TACOS!! Good ones!!** - which is just about all I ate for the first three days.

I've hit my great Venice truck Isla Bonita, Venice's better-than-westside Benny's Tacos, La Taquiza near USC (mulitas!), Señor Fish, Taqueria El Sol in Boyle Heights, and El Taco Loco #2 in north Long Beach, which vies with Isla Bonita for most deeply missed chicharrones tacos.

Add in the best-in-show just-plain-chicharrones and the pandebonos at Café Colombia in Burbank, the white-bean mochi at Fugetsu-Do in Little Tokyo, the coconut glaze and coconut strudel at Porto's Bakery in Glendale, and the soft yeasty milk pudding and one of everything else at 85C in Irvine, and...

...then add all that to the glorious concrete River, THE ROCK that travels by night at 5mph (max), the dubious free stuff for rich people as well as a few of the Talented who really need to think about the ethics of taking free stuff while they're cramming it all into bags on the roof of a Beverly Hills Hotel...

...and throw in my friends, my cousins who are my personal rock here, and my fabulous L.A. River, [L.A. Urban Rangers](#), and [Antioch](#) colleagues, and...

Welcome home.