

Guest Blogger Jenny: Do “Ordinary People” Send Their Kids to L.A. Private Schools?

Description



Would She Need A Designer Handbag To Tour Private Schools?

Recently, we saw a comment on *Urban Baby* from a concerned mom, preparing to tour schools. She wanted to know if she should purchase an expensive designer handbag, so she’d fit in.

While some might dismiss this query, I think the subtext of this handbag question is totally relevant. Obviously, she isn’t a moneyed mom, but she was worried that all the other families were loaded. She worried that she was too “ordinary” on her own, to fit into the private school social structure.

I think at every L.A. private school, there are going to be some extreme standouts. Years and years ago, my sister attended Westlake School, when it was just for girls. One of her classmates was Tori Spelling, and she was invited to her birthday party one year. Yes, she was invited to that insanely huge place up in Holmby Hills, the one that I believe boasted a bowling alley and a gift wrapping room. Mostly, what she remembers about that party is that there were ashtrays in every room, as Mrs. Spelling smoked (it was this, not the bowling alley, that was shocking to my sister). If my parents had been trying to keep up with private school families like the Spellings, it would have taken more than a Gucci bag to do it.

At Mirman, the school my daughter attends, there seems to be no outward signs of wealth. Sure, eventually you might have a playdate and show up at a mansion somewhere, but it’s always kind of a surprise. The parents all seem modest and unpretentious; I recently attended a parent potluck dinner at which no one really discussed their work (and you know, in that crowd, there must be some very impressive professionals). Mostly, we just talked about our kids. The handbags were deposited at the front door and not seen again.

When I decided to look for more than anecdotal evidence, it got rougher. Income levels are not something private schools are required to share; most simply state that they admit kids from “diverse” income levels, whatever that means. There don’t seem to be any hard and fast figures on the money.

I do know (going back to the unscientific, but infinitely more entertaining land of the anecdotal) that I did wear a gorgeous scarf to my John Thomas Dye prospective parents night. I do not normally accessorize with ease, but figured a little embellishment wouldn’t hurt. Sure enough, the AD complimented me on my scarf. I considered handing it to her. But did it help? No way.

The other thing to keep in mind? Appearances, particularly in L.A., are deceiving. That fancy car could be a lease on its last legs, the fancy house underwater, the fancy bag secondhand. And keep in mind that everyone is capable of embellishment. At that potluck dinner, a group of us discovered that all our children had been lobbying for cell phones, saying that “everyone else has one.” Well, it turned out NONE of them had one; I think there might be a single kid in the class in possession of such a thing (and the parents weren’t at the potluck to even confirm this). Yes, our children were lying to attain greater status, much as an adult is when they purchase an expensive handbag, to appear to be someone they’re not.

Jenny Heitz has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. Her daughter started 4th grade at Mirman School this year. She previously attended 3rd St. Elementary School. Jenny has been published recently in the Daily News and on Mamapedia, The Well Mom, Sane Moms, Hybrid Mom, The Culture Mom and A Child Grows In Brooklyn. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).

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admin