

Two Abandoned “A-List” Private School Tours (re-post)

Description



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When we were looking at kindergarten for my daughter, I think we toured about 10 schools.

There were two school tours that I’ll mention in this post because (1) they are extremely coveted schools with big reputations (and, we found, egos to match) and (2) my husband and I abandoned both tours mid-stream in order to maintain our sanity.

School #1

The first school is a near-impossible-to-get-into K-12 school, not exactly close to our house. With traffic, it’s about an hour drive. Our tour was scheduled for 8:30 a.m. I scheduled my nanny to come at 6 a.m. to make sure we could leave the house on time.

On the way to the tour, my husband and I had an argument. Traffic was horrible, there was road construction and a detour. My husband had already decided this wasn’t going to be a drive we could do. I wanted to continue on to the school and complete the tour. We were totally stressed and snapping at each other. He was driving, tailgating the car ahead. He knows this makes me carsick.

We arrived at the school and were greeted by the admissions director, an ice queen. She had us and the other group of parents stand outside the admissions office while she told us about the school. It went on for an eternity. The ice queen droned on. Bored out of my mind, my eyes wandered. Parents were dropping off their kids for school. A very showy drop-off scene. We waited for a few late arrivals than preceded to start the tour. The actress Maria Bello, wearing Hudson Jeans, was on the tour, along with her ex-husband. My husband was on the verge of being an “ex” as well, as he made small talk with Ms. Bello, striving to find some commonality in their Philadelphia roots. When he made reference to her cheerleader scene in “A History of Violence,” I ushered him away for a sharp elbowed reminder of why we were there.

The building of this school is quite nice. It’s big and relatively new. The walls are adorned with the art of famous LA artists. Although this art was probably donated, the artists on display sell their work for hundreds of thousands of dollars per painting.

We went into the kindergarten classroom, where they were doing show and tell. Show and tell? In my mind, that's an old-fashioned, dated waste of time. This was a hip, modern school. The teacher had a kid up at the front of the class with his item to show. It was some sort of small animal, as I remember. Another little girl was sobbing hysterically, since school had just started a few weeks earlier. It was hard to focus with her crying and they finally had her leave the room with a teacher. Not impressive. It definitely didn't live up to the hype.

Then, it was time to go to the math class. The teachers talked about the math program, which seemed fine, if not a bit fuzzy. They also seemed quite proud of the fact that a girl in the class had broken her arm on a recent overnight field trip. I'd pay more than \$20,000 to have my kid break an arm on a field trip?

This school is big on community service and really touted its various programs to help the community. Parents on the tour seemed very impressed by this. To me the programs seemed outdated and stale. There's a lot more innovative stuff happening in LA schools, but it wasn't there. The programs appeared to be at least a decade old. Parents were complimenting the admissions director at every opportunity. I was sure Maria Bello liked the school the most of everyone. She kept oohing and nodding with approval at everything.

To me, the school seemed chilly, it lacked warmth. Perfect buildings, gorgeous artwork, no energy, way too quiet for a lower school.

After the community service portion of the tour, my husband and I gave each other "the look" which means "let's go". The tour wasn't finished, but we knew this wasn't the school for us. We left. In some ways, it feels good to cross a school off your list. On the other hand, that leaves one less option.

School #2

Plastic surgery. Designer logos. Super-high heels. Haughty attitudes. The Real Housewives of New York? Nope. A private elementary school tour in Los Angeles.

The second tour we abandoned is yet another super-difficult school to get into. I was curious to see this school since it is one of the most sought after private elementary schools in LA. This is partly because of the celebrities who have kids at the school and partly because of the parents at the school, many of whose heads are swelled to the point of bursting with self-importance. Of all the schools, this school suffers (or benefits) from the most rumors about how many kids will be accepted, how many siblings, etc. Parents can spend hours talking about whether this school will admit one or two new kids in a given admissions cycle. We toured it at the suggestion of our preschool director.

We arrived and were told we'd be on a tour with two other families. There were lots of other tours taking place at the same time. This school has a low-key exterior and location that belies its interior pretentiousness.

The mom who was our tour guide was very unfriendly, had a plastic surgeon husband (who had clearly worked on her face, and my husband speculated a little too loudly, her rejuvenation) and knew very little about what was actually happening in the classrooms. She was jittery and unfocused. I wanted to switch tour guides. Her focus was to look around to see who else was on the other tours. Head to toe in

designer clothes, she had zero interest in my family. None. She never made eye contact. Nor did she have any interest in our companion family on the tour. They were not wealthy enough, it was obvious, even though the husband mentioned he was a lawyer.

After the tour, the head of school welcomed parents in the auditorium. This head of school is very impressive. Or so the head of school told everyone in the ten minutes that were allocated to us. However, we knew that wouldn't be enough to make this school work for us. My husband and I saw a door marked "Emergency Exit". Too bad, or we could have made our escape. Again, we gave each other "the look". We made a quick exit out the front and were gone.

I write about these two abandoned tours to say that even if everyone else likes a school, you may not. It's better to bow out early than waste everyone's time. I couldn't get excited about either school. Parents all around me were practically hyper-ventilating they wanted a spot at both these schools so badly. These two schools were all theirs.

Our preschool director tried to get us to re-think this school. Tour it again. We have friends there and they love it. It simply wasn't right for our family.

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