

Weekly Specials

MAYA BECK

Come shop at Boney's! We offer a variety of healthy, organic, and natural foods as well as fresh seafood and frozen items at affordable prices. We have more than five varieties of that mystifying peanut butter with oil on top. We also stock the bulk raw honey your dad loves so much in exactly the quantities he wants. We have a dozen barrels of bulk rice and legumes that you shouldn't stick your curious little hands in and those tall canisters of dried things whose levers you shouldn't pull. Over in our refrigerator, we carry healthy green trays of wheatgrass for your mother to juice by hand with her silver manual juicer—and yes, we sell those too! We also have those short, double-basket shopping carts you will forever find cute, although you'll no longer get to ride in them once your brother is born.

Boney's, your first brush with organics!

[Correction: Following a 1996 family rift, Boney's is now Henry's Fresh Market.]

Come to Vien Dong Market! We're right by the library, fifteen minutes from home, on your way home. We have foods you cannot understand, little child, but your wide eyes that can read no script will not see their names as foreign. The seafood here seems more alive: fragrant bodies, lobsters fighting in their tanks with rubber-banded claws. You always want the Koala's March family pack, an eight-inch hexagonal prism filled with silver packages filled with cookies. It's on sale this week. Go ahead! Your father almost always buys you Botan Rice Candy, pink with delicate rice paper wrapping that melts on the tongue. Each cartooned box holds a sticker or kiddy tattoo you can trade with your brothers. We always have instant Korean ginseng tea, one hundred tea bags in one box. The package is gold with red details, like a valuable present to bring your mother. Bring it home with your books. It weighs far less.

We have no slogan. We aren't a chain. Come to Vien Dong Market!
[Update: As of 2008, the Vien Dong Market you know has closed.]

Food 4 Less has everyday low prices! We've just opened a new location down the hill from you. We are a no-frills supermarket stocking a wide selection of bulk duros, tamarindo, and more and more and more. You bag your own groceries here! We know it's novel, but please stop playing with the conveyor belt, okay? Thank you. We've got a sale on jalapeños, a sale on tomatoes, a sale on cilantro, a sale on onions, and you've got a brand-new Quick Chopper. Whirl them all together and discover the joy of homemade salsa fresca. Our produce sales are so reliable that your brothers can dash in without supervision while you wait in the car with your dad. The car doesn't start if you turn off the engine, so they must be quick! Maybe circle the parking lot. Stare out the window, up at the stars. Try to find your house on the hill.

Food 4 Less! It's fine; everyone here is as poor as you are.

Vons is value! We gave you your franchise job the year before you started college, pushing carts while softly crying for fear of being trapped in retail. We sit in a sunseting mall, our health grade a rare warning B, but before that, we sat in the Campus Plaza, and you, in the back seat of a station wagon, watched

the neon sign of a majorette with a feathered headdress whose baton twirls via the magic of light. She seems to herald something more exciting than groceries. You want to follow her lead to another land. Before that, we sat near the stadium, and you, in the back seat of a station wagon, watched the beautiful bodies in motion through the glass of an LA Fitness. They cycle and jog in very little clothing, and you think that they look how Californians, how Americans, should. When we work together, you will develop a taste for six-packs of gourmet soda in glass bottles, fueled by a fear of alcohol. The strawberry shortcake bar you bought in singles to reward yourself after shifts on your first job becomes a sale on six-packs—and they no longer seem a treat. After you depart for college, our B-grade location will shutter, crystallizing the sense of trappedness in a hollow building in a dead pastel mall, in a city you leave behind.

Vons offers ingredients for life: Stay loyal.

Ralphs offers great food and really low prices! We are based in Compton and were founded in Los Angeles, so you'll miss us when you miss California. Your favorite store is our downtown location, a full block on Market Street with brown brick, black pergolas, and gold lettering. We have the first underground parking lot you can recall, a manmade cave you are delighted to enter, every time. The minerals in our milk still rest in your bones. We have a sale on everything that formed your palate: Hebrew National hot dogs (one for each member of your family); all the sweet, bright cereals you desire; great bins of the black plums you didn't realize were seasonal because it is always, always sunny around us.

Come back home, to Ralphs.

Pavilions

***(See Vons, but in the rich part of town, with better sushi and more international food)**

We at Fred Meyer is mighty fine! Pioneers of one-stop shopping, we were one of the first to sell lollipops and fingernail clippers under one roof. As if you

were a lost trailblazer, welcome! Our blackberries, unfortunately, do not taste like the fresh ones on bushes you find outdoors. We will trade cans of pineapple and apple juice for your little government tickets. How much cheese, how much milk, how much bread, how much tuna? Just crouch to the floor and look for the bottom-shelf sign that says WIC. Once or twice, your older brother will buy prune juice or tomato juice, first from curiosity and then as a joke. None of the fancy stuff, though. (Your fourth and final little sibling prefers breast milk. We don't sell that.) We do sell foldable shopping carts, for your mother to cart up and down hills, on and off buses. Sometimes you take the handle and push or drag for her, as a young and strong young thing. We don't sell anything to salve the shame you feel toward your mother. But she will find you a small daily planner, half corkboard and half whiteboard, free with coupon, and it's the thought that counts. We sell the two-liters you refused to consider when packing to run away, a map of Washington in your hands but no hatchet to be found in the house. We sell hatchets, but will not give one to an angry black teen. We sell packs of cardboard boxes your father will bring home for you to pack up your lives and go.

Fred Meyer: We sell that, too!

Albertsons

***(Remember the first time you spotted us? When you thought our blue a rival to the red of the markets you remember? We are one now; see Vons.)**

Stater Bros.: It's our meat that made us famous! The first thing you see of us will be our deli hats and your strongest memory is of disgust toward our meats. Why? We were founded in Yucaipa and are headquartered in San Bernardino, so you will wonder why we have never met before and grow suspicious. You refuse to accept us, but where else can you go? Silly girl with your head full of seafoam dreams, you are surrounded by mountains, trapped in a sandbox. You and your siblings are young and hungry, but you must all cook now. Someone must. In our first meeting, you brought coffee that, fed to your feverish skinny

body sharing a hotel bed, brought you to fainting. You will think of me when you think of the ambulance. You will think of the hair store next to me in Desperate Hot Springs, the loiterers who smell of alcohol. We have specials on existential dread, Jell-O, Kool-Aid, Sunny Delight, and other products that target your race. We also sell cans of tuna for the cat you have adopted, a pregnant orphan teenager that you shelter. She pees outside. She will be taken away.

Stater Bros.: The low-priced leader in your hometown! (Liquor stores never have sales.)

SuperTarget: Expect more, pay less! Expect hypermarket more. We live near college and fuel your bachelorette life. Behold! A sale on frozen single-serving meals to stash in your side of a shared freezer; the boxes of fruit snacks and applesauce you buy because fresh fruits go bad too quick for your liking; the two-dollar mixed-fruit juice that sates the cravings you fear are low blood sugar; the bottled vanilla and mocha Frappuccinos that power your late-night writing binges until your growing abdominal pains are recognized as caffeine intolerance; the five-dollar frozen pizzas you break in half to eat over two meals; the back-to-school lamp you christen Scotty; the furniture that is yours and chosen by you and yours only for the first time ever. We are your cave of wonders. We learn adulthood together: you belatedly training your body to use the tampons (buy one, get one free) in the shared bathroom of your three-person girls' dorm. Sometimes our store layout is so much the same from city to city that you will feel as if you've entered a space beyond time, Sealed Reality where you are actually one city over from your parents, actually on the other coast, actually in the heartland, and actually in your hometown, all at the same time.

SuperTarget! We house *and* feed you.

Safeway

***(See Vons, but farther from home. No, further still, where Dreyer's becomes Edy's and Best Foods becomes Hellmann's, and Famous Amos appears on top shelves to charm your parents. Where are you going?)**

Trader Joe's, your friendly neighborhood international grocer! We stock myriad vegetarian meals as well as ground beef you can't eat without another family member to handle the raw flesh and transform it into a meal. We also stock gyoza that you'll want more than your budget can allow and one-pound chocolate bars that your dad buys your mom, who somehow manages to tuck into her now frail body. Did you know that we have the same birthplace? You cannot remember the name of that first store, with the wheatgrass. Henry, like your father? No, that couldn't have been the name. But now that you are older, you're free to buy gallons of carrot juice and drink until you are dyed your favorite color with carotene. You are free. One day, you'll no longer be able to find the candies you wanted to try, the ones your father never bought. The space of what's missing on our shelves is like a scar—we will fill it with a new concoction to heal it up, kiss it better. There is no sale, but change remains the only constant. We know you get down sometimes, but we won't let you grow bored eating. We will grow you fat with experience, and pleasure. Have another plate of bird's nest, dear, have another glass of wassail. We promise you have never tasted anything like this before.

Trader Joe's: Great quality at great prices. That's what we call value!

