

Seeing God On Vacation *Focus on the Family Magazine*

This summer, as we pack up the car and kids to head out on family vacation, let's remember that our role of teaching our children Biblical principles is a job that never takes a holiday. As a matter of fact, some of our best life lessons can be learned in the laboratory of life in new and fresh environments. Let me share one such invaluable teaching opportunity that presented itself in beautiful San Francisco. While vacationing on the West Coast, my heart's desire and prayer for each day was that we would see God's handiwork and be reminded of His greatness as we ventured out like three eager explorers to discover new aspects of His creation.

The last place I expected to see God answer my prayer was in an abandoned prison. Alcatraz wasn't my first choice in the tourist attractions, but living as a lone woman among men, I was quickly out voted. There in the middle of the San Francisco Bay, just a mile and a quarter from the sights and sounds of the beautiful city, sits a rock island, known by some as the "Devils Island of America" where the country's most corrupt, incorrigible criminals were housed from 1934-1963. Al Capone, and machine Gun Kelly were just two of the more colorful residents. As we ferried across the bay, we taxied up to "The Rock" and stared at the shell of concrete walls, barbed wire, and iron bars, an eerie feeling crept over my body. Each of us picked up headphones and a cassette recorder and toured the prison while listening to the taped voices of various prisoners recount their days behind bars. We walked in a cell called "the hole," closed our eyes and tried to imagine what it would be like in solitary confinement with no light, no sound, and no other voice but our own.

My heart was heavy as I thought about the souls that passed those halls, souls full of darkness, depression and despair. But as we rounded the final corner of the tour, we saw an amazing sight. There sat a white haired eighty year old grandfather, with crystal blue laughing eyes and a radiant smile that spread across his wrinkled face. A line formed as tourists stood waiting for him to sign his name and number on his autobiography, Alcatraz: From the Inside. This precious man before us was Jim Quillen, ex-prisoner #AZ586. He had spent ten years of his life, from 1942-1952, behind bars in this prison built to house the most dangerous criminals of his day. I looked in his eyes as we spoke. This was not the face of a dangerous man. What had happened to change his life? I didn't have to flip many pages in his book to find the answer. In it he wrote, "It was only through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and His intercession, that my life of hopeless incarceration was averted. His help and forgiveness permitted me to obtain freedom, family, and a useful and productive place in society." I went back over to Mr. Quillen and sat by his side for a minute or so. Then God spoke to my heart, "You prayed for ways to teach your family about My handiwork. This man is some of my best work." On our trip to San Francisco, I was able to remind Steven of God's unchanging strength in the majestic rock cliffs of the California shoreline and of His nurturing care as the Vine dresser in the hills of the wine country.

We saw a picture of God's protective canopy over His children in the towering Red Woods of the forests. But God's greatest lesson came when we looked into Jim Quillen's eyes and saw God's most incredible masterpiece - a changed life. This is a picture that Steven will have in his mind for years to come. This summer, join me in praying that God will open our eyes to new and fresh ways to pass on a godly heritage to our children and see His handiwork all around us.