

Alcatraz, “The Rock”

A few weeks ago, while in San Francisco, my wife Bonnie and I took the opportunity of visiting an island in the middle of San Francisco Bay called Alcatraz. Alcatraz is nicknamed “The Rock” because the island, about a mile off of the shoreline, is a remote, rather barren combination of old buildings, pathways, rocks, plants, and birds. Much of the island is surrounded by steep cliffs dropping down into the icy waters below. The swift current in the bay heads out to the Pacific Ocean, going directly beneath the Golden Gate Bridge.

Alcatraz was such a formidable place that escape attempts became legendary. Over the years, 36 prisoners attempted to escape. Of these, 23 were caught, 6 were shot and killed while trying to escape, and 2 drowned. Five are still unaccounted for but presumed drowned.

Interestingly, some children equate school with “prison”—a place with rules and expectations that stifle their freedom to be and to do whatever they want whenever they want.

Alcatraz is definitely such a place. Known at one time as America’s premier maximum-security prison, Alcatraz was where America housed its most notorious prisoners from the mid 1930s to the early 1960s. Among these infamous prisoners were Al Capone, George “Machine Gun” Kelly, and Robert Stroud, also known as the “Birdman of Alcatraz.”

The rules for prisoners at Alcatraz included:

- Privileges: “You are entitled to food, clothing, shelter and medical attention. Anything else that you get is a privilege.”
- Good Conduct: “Good conduct means conducting yourself in a quiet and orderly manner and keeping your cell neat, clean and free from contraband. It means obeying the rules of the institution and displaying a co-operative attitude.”
- Recreation: “You will work eight hours a day, five days a week, with Saturdays, Sundays, and Holidays devoted to recreation. Movies are shown twice each month.”
- Work: “You are required to work at whatever you are told to do.” (Alcatrazhistory.com)

Bonnie and I have raised four children to adulthood, and we can definitely relate to the importance of rules and clear expectations. I have come to the

conclusion that one of the more challenging areas our children have faced in Christian schools and colleges is materialism. As a general rule, we have never had too little, but our children perhaps have had too much. I believe that many of the children we serve have a spiritual disease called *affluenza*. The main symptom of this disease is apathy, and the primary antidote is service.

For most parents, the dream of their children keeping a neat and tidy bedroom is a fairy tale! However, parents and educators alike would agree that good conduct and order are essential both at home and at school.

Our children live in an age in which many are “over recreated.” In other words, our families are so busy doing lessons, traveling to sports events, and participating in other “essential” activities to give our children every possible advantage in life, that our overactivity—instead of creating greater advantage—may in fact be pulling at the very fabric of our families. We are told that to win state championships, for example, our children need to practice all summer and forgo family vacations and holidays. Maybe it is not such a bad idea to reserve recreation for weekends and to limit movies and the Internet to two times per month!

It has been said that school is the work of children. Again, not such a bad expectation—that children and students be required to do whatever they are told to do.

Now, I admit that I have stretched a point here and there, and I admit that these things are easier said than done—but perhaps, as parents, we can learn a few lessons from the place called Alcatraz.

Reference

Alcatrazhistory.com. 2002–2005. Rules & Regulations. Carmel, CA: Ocean View Publishing. <http://www.alcatrazhistory.com/regpage1.htm>.



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