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Miller Futero

Miller Futero was a guard for Alcatraz Prison, also known as the “Rock”. He lived there from 1945 to 1956. These are some of his words about Alcatraz Island.

By Carmela Gulisano

In the middle of San Francisco Bay lies a small jewel of an island. Many people assume that Alcatraz Island only has a prison on it, but it also has a community. During the the time when Miller was there he noticed three main parts of the island. Those parts are the prisoners’ lives in prison, the family life of island residents, and how the community and prisoners connect.

One area that Miller thought was important was the prisoners. From 1934 to 1963 the prisoners had to follow a strict set of rules, and the hardest of those rules was that they couldn’t talk to each other. The guards enforced this rule so prisoners couldn't plot escapes or rebellions with other prisoners. However, as with every rule, people can find a way around it, and that is what the prisoners did. They would empty out all the water in their toilets and talk through the pipes. Futero said, “The prisoners thought that we didn’t know about it, but really we just thought it was amusing because eventually someone would need to



go to the bathroom and the conversation would be over!” Although, if prisoners got caught doing things that were against the rules, serious consequences followed. For example, as punishment the prisoners would have to drag canon balls around the courtyard and if they were caught stealing some prisoners were branded with the letter “T” for theft. Also, prisoners would get sent to D-block, which was where all the worst behaved prisoners went. The guards had a tough front but they also cared about the prisoners. That is why along with rules the prisoners also got some rewards. In the prison, if prisoners found rodents they would make them into their pets. They would hide them under the dining table and feed them some of their food. This gave the prisoners a companion through the hard years in prison.

Another area Miller had mentioned was the family life of the guard families living on Alcatraz. Growing up on an island had its perks and downfalls. One exciting thing was that, the kids got to take a boat to and from San Francisco each day for school. Miller proclaimed, “My kids loved going to school because of the boat ride.” When the children got off the dock for school, reporters would ask them tons of questions about the prison. The children were not supposed to answer any questions that had to do with the prison. If they did answer or give any information they would get into a lot of trouble by their parents. We asked

Futero if any child was punished for releasing information and he said that most of the children didn't release any information because they were too scared of their parents. The kids and the families loved the isolation that the island gave. The kids on the island lived one quarter of a mile away from the prison house, and the families weren't worried about their safety. They knew that any violent people on the island were in the prison and that made them feel safe.

The last part that Futero shared was how the prisoners and families connected to each other. Children on the island loved to interact with the prisoners and found their lives to be intriguing. Every so often on the island there was a movie and talent show in the basement of the prison. Guard families and non-violent criminals would go and enjoy the night of fun. In the prison the non-violent convicts got to do service that had to do with the families. These services consisted of the prisoners going outside of the prison and doing things like cleaning the guards' houses and/or babysitting the young children. Miller said, "The kids loved having there own prisoner to play with and would always look forward to the days where they got baby sat." For the families garbage was a cause of concern. The families had to be careful not to throw away items that may be weapons or tools, such as cans or razors. The prisoners collected the garbage, so there couldn't be any harmful items in there. There was a special part of the island where the families would put harmful items, and they got handled by non-prisoners.

I really appreciate Miller Futero for letting me interview him and telling me all of these amazing stories and facts.

