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God's Country

By Monique Rider

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In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, beauty can escape us. It is only by living in the moment that we can experience our wondrous environment. Sometimes traveling to a new and exciting place helps us to take notice of our surroundings.

Christmas Away From Home

My husband and oldest daughter, Angie, were my traveling companions as we left Grand Rapids, Michigan on the morning of December 24. It was the beginning of the first snow storm of the year. At 7 a.m. we had about 3 inches of snow and more was on its way. I kept thinking Oh, please just let us get out of Michigan! If we can just get off the ground in Michigan, we'll probably escape the storm and get safely to our destination – Las Vegas. Sure enough, the flight was on time and we arrived in Las Vegas by 11 a.m. We had a great lunch (in 60 degree weather) and did some sightseeing.

It felt fun and exciting to be spending Christmas away from home for the first time. The travel plans were well organized - by me, of course! We planned to drive to drive to Koosharem, Utah on Christmas day to pick up our youngest daughter, Vanessa, from school. It was a five-hour drive from Las Vegas but we planned to spend three days with her at a hotel not far from her school. We would then return her to school, drive back to Las Vegas, spend two days there, and fly home to Michigan.

Knowing we would be driving most of Christmas day, we went to Christmas Eve Mass in Las Vegas. That was a new and interesting experience – the church was very modern in design (a bit unusual for a Catholic church) but beautiful, bright, and colorful. There was a male soloist who had a wonderful voice – we could have listened to him all evening! He really helped create the tone of the whole mass. I can still hear his deep voice singing praise to the Lord.

The Drive Through Nevada And Utah

We went to bed early that night because we had to get up at 5 a.m. on Christmas day. The drive through Nevada and into Utah went fine – no snow or ice! The Nevada mountains looked like large

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haystacks from a distance. There was a lot of barren highway but the mountains lined the sky like a painted picture. As the sun rose on Christmas day it was a beautiful sight to behold! The three of us were in awe as a small shimmer of sunlight popped up over a mountain peak. It then rose higher until it shown brightly over the highest peak.

In Utah the temperature was in the single digits. It didn't matter, the scenery was beautiful – our God is a wonderful artist. Entering Utah we were greeted by huge rock formations. Several times while driving we spotted bald eagles perched atop the jagged rocks, surveying their territory. We drove through mountains that looked like rainbows - stripped colors of pink, gray, and orange rock.

We reached Vanessa's location by noon, picked her up, and then drove a half hour to Richfield, Utah. We spent three days there in a cozy hotel. Not much to do so we.....shopped! That was fun. For

three days we shopped, went to movies, ate out, and relaxed. It was good to see Vanessa again.

A Test Of Fitness In The Nevada Mountains

The next leg of the trip began after returning Vanessa to school. We drove back to Las Vegas and, again, the weather was in the 60's. Our evenings were spent on the Strip but we decided to spend a full day hiking and rock climbing in the Valley of Fire state park. The park was located about 45 minutes from Las Vegas.

This was so beautiful I think of it almost daily. I now understand why that area of the United States is called "God's Country". We admired the huge caverns and layered rock formations; boulders with colors of pink, gray, blue, and yellow. It looked like one big rainbow that stretched toward the horizon. We went off the beaten path of the trails, made our way straight down the mountain, and spent almost five hours rock climbing and crawling within the caverns. Up and over boulders we went, squeezing between the narrow passes in the rock. The boulders and jagged rocks went on for miles - and so did we!

It was so amazing! We took video, pictures, and tried to store whatever we could in our memories. We had our gear on our backs so that our hands were free for climbing. Our supplies included water, food bars, jackets, cameras, and maps. (Well, the maps were no good because we were off the trail!). We hiked, climbed, and crawled for hours – over huge boulders, slippery, loose rocks, and through colorful layered crevasses. It seemed that the more we climbed, the closer we could get to the horizon – so we kept going. Using stones we chalked arrows on the rocks, so that we could find our way back up the mountain. The stones were loose so we had to be extremely sure footed. Also, there was no one else around for miles - so getting injured was not an option.

I had never seen such beauty - nature in its rarest, most rugged form. I was enjoying every bit of the adventure. It began to get late so we decided to turn around and make our way back up the mountain to the main trail. We followed the chalked arrows but climbing back up was tough duty. The three of us felt victorious as we emerged over the top of the mountain. We were happily exhausted once we got back to our car – and only a little sore the next day!

A New Awareness

The flight back to Michigan was uneventful and we arrived to face 3 feet of snow. However, we had a new appreciation of its beauty. Actually, there was a deeper awareness of everything. What a euphoric feeling - to be able to slow down, look around, and soak in the splendor of the environment! For me, this adventure validated that nature puts me in touch with myself and with my surroundings. That's a feeling I intend to cherish forever.

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Monique Rider is a Life Coach and Personal Trainer. She owns Trinity Coaching Services, a company that offers fitness training and personal growth services to clients worldwide. To learn more about Monique please visit her website: <http://home.talkcity.com/workoutpl/trinitycoachingservices/> or email

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Trust Is ...

By Joyce C. Lock

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Honoring God as the only One with all answers for our circumstances.

Seeking God for those answers.

Waiting for God's answer.

Listening for God's answer.

Receiving what God has revealed as all we yet need to know.

Walking in that faith.

Believing God will continue to give instruction, as needed.

Letting God do the rest.

Respecting the character of God knowing, when He gives a promise, He has to be faithful because God cannot lie.

Accountability in not calling God a liar.

Remembering what God has done for us already.

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Accepting that God has proved Himself trustworthy to trust again.

Realizing we can even ask God for help with our unbelief.

Acknowledging that God is not a respecter of persons, that however He loved the people of old, He actually wants to love us, too.

Recognizing whenever something touches our heart, that is God; as that is where He dwells.

Discovering that God will always do the most loving thing possible.

Putting the weight of the world back on God's shoulders, where it belongs.

Running to Daddy's arms; knowing He will catch us every time.

Faith to stand against all evil; as per God's individual instruction.

Living above fear.

Seeing God as infallible and undefeatable.

Freedom to be the person God created us to be.

Rejoicing in that God is not finished with us, yet!

The more we come to know and experience God, the greater our trust ~ because He is always faithful. Doubt diminishes and our faith increases ... 'til we finally learn that there is no one we can trust more than Him, not even ourselves.

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They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion,
which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.

As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,
so the Lord is round about his people
from henceforth even for ever.

Psalm 125:1-2

Joyce C. Lock is a published author, poet, and columnist. In addition, she founded and maintains the e-mail ministries "Heavenly Inspirations" <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HeavenlyInspirations/> and

"Share a Smile" <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/smilesharing/>. Joyce's writings encourage us in our relationship with God and each other.



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