



Breaking the Rock: The Great Escape from Alcatraz

By Jolene Babyak

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Taut, suspenseful account of June 1962 Alcatraz "escape of the century" when three men disappeared.

Showing security lapses, staff morale, modernizations, building deteriorations and risky behavior which led to the closing of the Rock.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

At 15, Jolene Babyak (Eyewitness on Alcatraz) was living on Alcatraz with her warden father when four prisoners famously attempted escape in 1962, digging through walls and disappearing forever on a homemade raft all except Allen West, who was caught, and to whom Babyak attributes the initial plan. In *Breaking the Rock: The Great Escape from Alcatraz*, Babyak recounts factors that made the attempt possible including crumbling facilities (due in part to salt-water toilets, whose leaking pipes eroded the concrete walls), new four-man dining tables (providing the escapees with privacy), a closed-down armed-guard tower and endless, painstaking planning by the prisoners. Numerous interviews with inmates and guards who knew the escapees, extensive investigation and Babyak's personal interest in and access to the events distinguish this account. Ninety-six b&w photos.

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From Library Journal

Once the most infamous prison in the world, Alcatraz today is a tourist attraction across the bay from San Francisco. On a 22-acre battleship-shaped sandstone rock, Alcatraz defied escape attempts. Yet in 1962, there was a successful escape by three men. Babyak (*The Ten Greatest Escapes*) was a child at the time, living on the Rock with her father, acting warden Arthur Dollison. Combining her firsthand knowledge with newly released Alcatraz documents, she recapitulates the events surrounding the escape and speculates about what happened to the men, who were never heard from again. The mastermind, she thinks, was Allen West, a wily, longtime con who got Frank Morris and John and Clarence Anglin to join him. West's plans were brilliant in detail, including building a raft and leaving lifelike heads on the men's cots. Ironically, the plans were helped by Dollison's relaxing of some of the more stringent security rules and by errors made by the Alcatraz staff. In suspenseful detail, Babyak describes the course of events leading up to the fateful telephone call received by her father on the morning of June 12. West chickened out at the last minute, leaving him to say to everyone who would listen that he had "broken the Rock." Did the other three make it to safety? Babyak suspects that they did not. Yet what exactly happened remains a mystery that prison buffs can ponder. This is essential for all crime collections and, considering its lively cover, should do well in public libraries. Frances Sandiford, Green Haven Correctional Facility Lib., Stormville, NY
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About the Author

Jolene Babyak has become one of the most knowledgeable authorities on The Rock, having interviewed and viewed the files of more than 175 people associated with Alcatraz. She also lived there briefly twice as a child, during when her father worked there for nine years, and one year as associate warden.

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