

Mountain Climbing



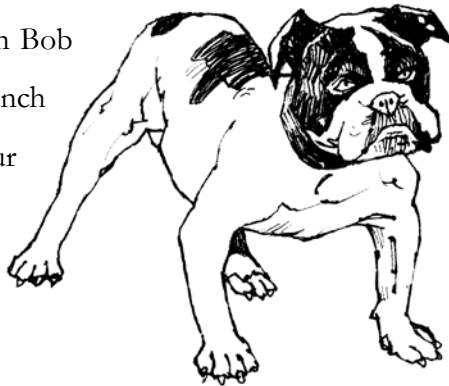
My husband, Bob, and I lived on a ranch in the Arizona desert. The name of the ranch was Rancho Vistoso. That means ranch with a view or a lookout.

Just across the road from the ranch were the stately but craggy Santa Catalina Mountains. In the winter months they were sometimes covered with snow, but during the summer they were ideal for hiking. Every

night just after the sun went down the mountains took on a rosy glow. Then they didn't seem to have peaks and ravines at all. Instead they looked like they were made out of cardboard. That's how they got the nickname *Cardboard Mountains*.

The foothills leading up to the mountains were filled with wonderful and exciting things. At least to hikers like Bob and me. For instance, there were the crumbling remains of adobe (mud) walls where a Spanish mission had once stood. There were abandoned houses that still had things in them like brass beds, old sewing machines and gas refrigerators. Once we discovered an ancient windmill whose rusted vanes were struggling to turn in the hot desert wind. A trickle of red water dripped into a huge rusted tank below.

One day when Bob was free from ranch work, we took our bulldog and some food and set out to go mountain climbing. Like



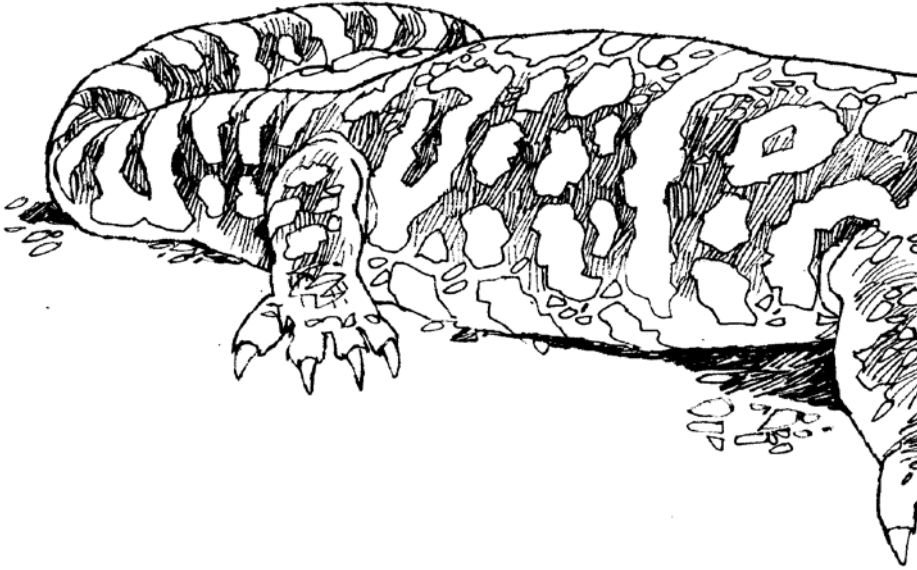
gigantic, rugged friends, the pinnacles of rock beckoned to us. However, to reach the mountains we first had to walk through a forest of Cholla (pronounced *choy-ab*) cactus. These cacti could be deadly. Their thorns could go right through your boots and into your feet if you even brushed against one. They grew with round joints that could be different lengths. Many joints fell to the ground, so a person took great care in not stepping on them.

We made it through the Cholla forest with only one mishap. That was when my foot touched a fallen joint and the thorns embedded themselves in my foot. It was very painful and I couldn't take a single step until Bob pulled out his pliers and removed it.

The way grew steep and rocky. I was in the lead with Bob and our dog behind me. Feeling perfectly safe now that we were away from the cactus, I wasn't paying much attention to where I was going.

Suddenly Bob yelled, "Betty, look out!"

He was too late. I heard a loud *biss* beneath my foot and turned to see that I had come within a half inch of a deadly Gila monster! Its thick, forked tongue was flicking in and out. Its beady eyes never left my face.



“Bob,” I whispered, “it’s beautiful!”

“It’s also deadly. Back away from it slowly.”

I learned later that there are only two venomous lizards in the world. One is the beaded lizard and the other is the Gila (pronounce *bee-lah*) monster. Orange and black, the Gila monster is beautiful and its skin looks beaded. A Gila monster grows nine to fourteen inches long. In the winter they hibernate. In the spring and summer months they search for bird or turtle eggs. They also feed off small animals, like baby rabbits. Their tongue is forked like a serpent’s, but thick. When they



bite they hold on and chew, trying to get as much poison into their victim as possible.

Needless to say, I backed away from the lizard slowly. It had been a very close call and I'm sure that only the Lord protected me from being bitten.

We continued our climb, leaving the foothills behind and starting up the steep, rugged mountains. In places we had to pull our dog up by his collar. Then, at last, we reached a meadow lush with green grass and lofty pine trees. A cool mountain breeze was blowing. Bob made a small fire so we could cook hotdogs and make some

instant coffee and we laid back
against the grass to rest.



It was like entering a different world from the cruel hot desert with its many dangers.

I think about the traps and dangers Satan places before us. He will do anything to tempt us to lie, take something that doesn't belong to us or do other sinful things. That's why it's important to keep our eyes upon Jesus, just like Bob and I kept our eyes upon the heights of the mountains.

Maybe you remember Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. He got out of the boat to walk on the water to go to

Jesus. But he began to look at the storm instead of looking at Jesus and he began to sink. Jesus, in his faithfulness, reached out to Peter and saved him.

And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom.

II Timothy 4:18.

