

1 BEHOLD VANISHING POMPEII

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3 To the editor, Boston Globe

4 Amazing! The Museum of Science does the impossible: The Pompeii exhibit shows a major
5 catastrophe, including bodies of people and animals at the moment of death. A dramatic
6 three-minute movie pictures the rain of volcanic ash followed by the all-engulfing pyroclastic
7 flow --- *all in a form suitable for children of every age.*

8 Instruction to an adult: Make an online appointment for timed entry. Enter the exhibit. Turn left.
9 Walk swiftly past everything to the back of the exhibit. Enter the room with the sign "Body
10 Casts". This is NOT a display of medical devices from Massachusetts General Hospital!

11 View plaster casts of people and animals at their moment of death --- not behind glass. Never
12 again will you see so many in one place, not even in Pompeii itself.

13 What sensitive adult can view these humans without sobbing? Yet a child treats each form as
14 an interesting white plaster statue and asks simple questions of his mother or grandfather.

15 A modern pet owner is devastated: The rain of ash --- cool enough to survive with some
16 gasping --- falls on the dog left chained by his fleeing owner. As ash accumulates to a meter
17 deep, the dog digs his way upward to survive. Then his chain tightens. The ash continues to
18 fall. Result: the dog's final twisted form.

19 Most casts are of dying men and women, alone, in groups, and --- my God! --- a couple who
20 reaches out to one another.

21 Children and adults watch a three-minute movie that spans the catastrophe, from first tremor
22 to final black wave of pyroclastic flow. No human or animal appears on screen, just distant
23 volcano Vesuvius and foreground Pompeii buildings that shudder, burn, collapse, and are
24 engulfed. The adult who pays close attention hears a bark or two and a distant human cry.

25 AFTER THE MOVIE: Lurk around the exhibit. Hear questions from the endless flow of
26 children. (Behold the goal of all these efforts!) Listen to a parent who watches her child's face
27 as she explains each form. She uses the powerful Motivation of Catastrophe to teach her
28 child about life.

29 The Meaning of Life? To see, to witness in awe, to begin to understand, to digest, to move on.

30 Hurry! A Day in Pompeii closes on February 12. You have 10, 9, 8, 7, 6 . . . days left!

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