

THE DAY THE EARTH SHOOK

Earthquake Ten yrs later

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Ten Years After:

Looking back at a defining moment in time

by Kim Monari Jeannette

OCT. 17, 1989, AT 5:04 P.M., there was a low, rumbling sound. Some have called it rolling thunder. And just as thunder accompanies lightning, the rolling thunder accompanied an earthquake that tore through the landscape like lightning slices through the sky.

The 7.1 Loma Prieta earthquake lasted only 15 seconds. Those who lost loved ones, homes or businesses would feel the effects of it for years. The quake shook foundations, the local economy and any sense of serenity and security.

Most people who were in the Bay Area at the time of the earthquake

remember where they were and what they were doing. Just as an earlier generation remembers those vivid details the day President John F. Kennedy was killed, it is one of those freeze-framed moments burned into the memory.

A voice for the county

At KSCO radio (then simulcasting KLRS FM 99.1 with AM 1080), the *Seeing Beyond* program was about to start. Host Bonnie Pieper had tried for months to secure New Age musician Steve Halpern for the interview program. Halpern, a former Santa Cruz resident, had moved to the Bay Area, and his interview had been rescheduled several times. At 5:04 p.m., announcer Eddie Hudson was reading



CHIP SCHEUER

the weather in the adjoining studio and turned to see a 16-inch clock fly off the wall. An avalanche of taped radio commercials tumbled down

from their shelves in the production studio across the hall. Heavy metal drawers containing large, old electronic transcription albums swung open. Outside, satellite dishes swayed from side to side like posies in a strong wind. There was that low, rolling sound, but the station was strangely, although briefly, silent.

The jolt shook the transmitter door open. It was a safety feature that disrupted power. Within five minutes, Bill Brooks, the station's chief engineer, had the station back on the air. The 10,000-watt station now assumed its role as the designated Emergency Broadcast System station for the area. The first of thousands of telephone calls began pouring into the station. They ranged from inquiries from foreign radio networks ("Had the Golden Gate Bridge slid into the ocean?") to questions

about runaway pets. Large companies like Lipton and Seagate called in with information for their employees. So did UCSC, Cabrillo College and the school districts. The resulting widespread power outages made for a huge captive audience. As thousands of frightened people listened in the dark to portable or car radios, the station churned out vital emergency information: What to do about gas shut-off? How safe was the water? When would the landslides be cleared and Highway 17 opened? Where were the Red Cross shelters located?

Damage reports came in along with the stories of people going house to house to check on their neighbors. As evening fell, a county-wide barbecue was on, with people sharing what they had, cooking on outdoor grills.

Announcer Don Husing was due in at the station at 8 p.m.

"I was sleeping in a chair at home. All my cassettes came off the wall. I figured that it was just another small earthquake," he says. He learned it wasn't from a Bay Area radio report that said hundreds had

Top right: Santa Cruz firefighter Dan Gigliotti's exhaustion mirrors that of many emergency workers following the Loma Prieta earthquake. This Myrtle Street home behind him burst into flames after a gasline ruptured.



WALLY PARHAM

Right: This gutted lot at the corner of Lincoln and Pacific was Ford's Department Store at the time of the quake, and is now University Town Center.

been killed. The error would be repeated the next day in a headline in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Husing says he knew it would be telephone pandemonium. Hudson, John Muth, Husing and other staff members (myself included) were working 12- and 14-hour shifts at the station. TV reporters from KMST 46 recounted what they'd seen. Few people had television reception. People called in with offers of generators to loan, homemade food came from one of the convents, and a masseuse gave back rubs to those on the air. Language students from the Monterey Institute for International Studies came and translated a number of the messages into Spanish. The on-air studio was filled with growing mounds of items that had been announced and those still to be announced. It seemed ironic that KSCO owner J.J. Jeffries had recorded some earthquake preparedness tips just weeks before.

Unplanned in planning

Joe Hall remembers being one of the few Santa Cruz city employees left in city offices. He had been working the counter in the Planning Office. Most of the employees in the complex had gone home to watch the Bay Bridge World Series between the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland A's. Hall had ordered a pizza and was just about to head home and watch the game.

When the temblor hit, Hall says a few employees dove under desks.

"Looking out the window I could see the Holy Cross steeple was crooked, but I didn't think it could be too bad," he says.

People out on the street were panicking. Hall didn't want his 8- and 10-year-old children to see the panic.

"I picked up my children from the child care trailer at Holy Cross School. I thought the safest place for them was in the car in the middle of the parking lot at work."

He says his wife was commuting over Highway 17 and he had a feeling she would be safe. A rain of bricks had showered down on the Pacific Garden Mall. The beloved Cooper House, Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Company, the Hihn Building, (*GOOD TIMES*' office site at the time), Ford's Department Store and others had not survived the temblor. Hall's professional work with buildings was mixed with the emotion of seeing dazed people wandering around the littered streets.

"It was the first time I'd seen people walking around in circles," Hall says.

But for all those who seemed stunned, there were so many others who pitched in to help. They dug in the rubble to extricate injured Edith Dominguez from Ford's Department Store and tried to douse the flames that consumed a Myrtle Street home when a gas line ruptured. They lined



GREG PIO

The sky's the limit at Santa Cruz Travel, which still stands at the same location today.

up at the Red Cross asking to do whatever was needed.

Hall's assignment was to set up an evacuation center at the Civic Auditorium. He ran back every 15 minutes to check on his children. People flooded into the center almost immediately. Many were seniors from the St. George Hotel and El Palomar Inn and Casa del Rey retirement residence at the Boardwalk. Many needed their medication. City Councilman Don Lane came to help. After getting his children settled in with a friend, Hall continued his work at the Civic. He would be there until 3 a.m.

Hall believes there were miracles in the quake. The first was the baseball game. So many people were watching it on television that there were fewer people in the downtown area than there might have been. The second was the incredible amount of help that came from all over the country. Nearly 60 building inspectors came to examine thousands of structures. There were Red Cross volunteers, utility workers, and emergency crews. The private sector responded generously. A beer company bottled water in beer cans. Large warehouses in Watsonville were soon filled with donations of food, clothing and diapers.

Along with the miracles were the ironies. On top of Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt's desk, Hall found a letter to State Sen. Henry Mello about the vetoed bill SB 1088. It would have

provided state funds for seismic retrofitting. The unsent letter was dated Oct. 16.

A tale of two cities

Wormhoudt and Watsonville Mayor Betty Murphy had their hands full. They shared the pain of heading a city with hundreds of homeless residents and a destroyed city center. Both cities lost about 30 buildings on Pacific Avenue in Santa Cruz and on Main Street in Watsonville. Both had landmark churches (Holy Cross and St. Patrick's) that suffered heavy damage and had lost steeples.

Outside of the mall area, 37 buildings were destroyed in Santa Cruz. That included the Casa del Rey retirement residence at the Boardwalk that was home to 150 people. Capitola and Scotts Valley lost about seven buildings between them. In unincorporated parts of the county, more than 350 structures were damaged beyond repair.

From barns to multi-million-dollar mountain homes, Loma Prieta's wrath was indiscriminate. Outside of Watsonville's city center, more than 175 structures were destroyed. Many of them were homes belonging to the people who could least afford to lose them, like farm or frozen-food workers. Those who had gone through the Mexican quake of '85 shied away from indoor shelters, preferring to set

up "tent cities" at Ramsay and Callahan parks.

A saddened President Bush toured the damaged mall with Wormhoudt and Gov. George Deukmejian. Second lady Marilyn Quayle and Cesar Chavez saw the destruction in Watsonville. Evangelist Billy Graham handed out sandwiches at the Salvation Army. Another Graham, rock promoter Bill Graham, came into Watsonville with the Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger on a school bus to give the city \$500,000 for earthquake relief.

Eventually, the long lines for federal-assistance sign-ups dwindled. Red Cross shelters closed. Trailers from FEMA were rolled into Watsonville for replacement housing. Pavilions were constructed in Santa Cruz. The rockslides on Highway 17 were shored up and commuters were escorted around them by the CHP. Life seemed to be getting back to normal.

But "getting back" would be a long process.

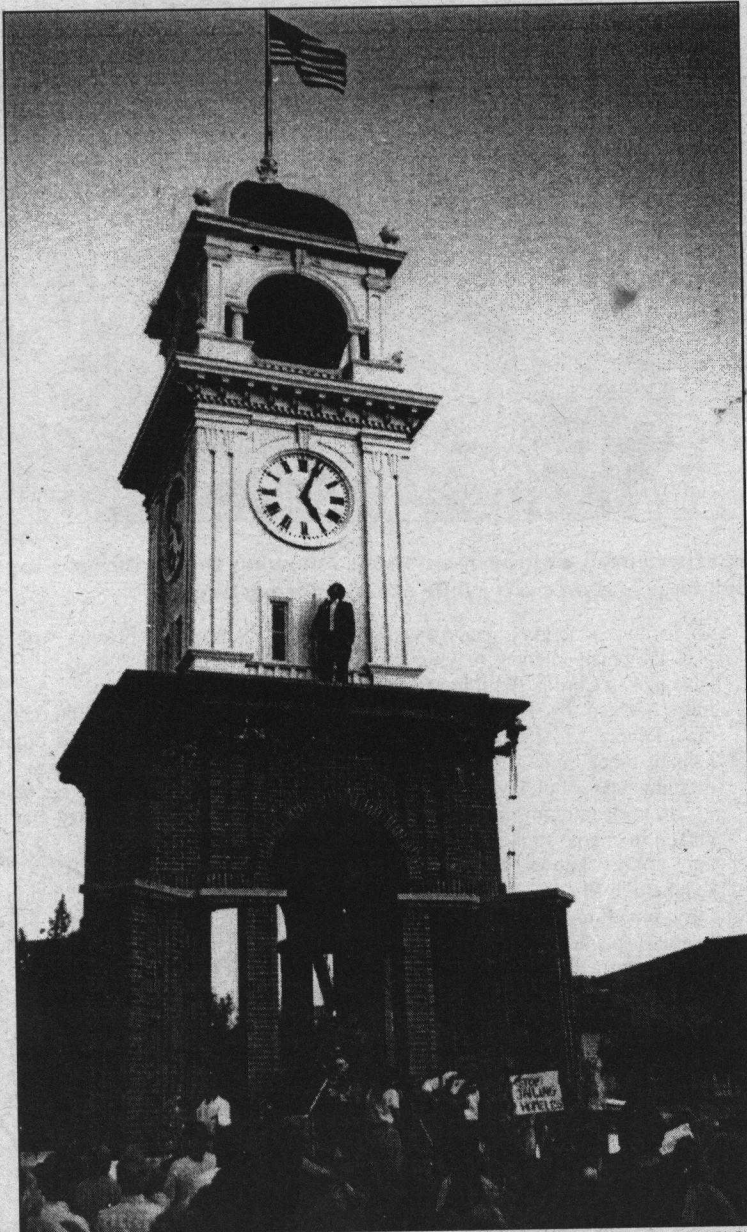
In Memoriam

Seven Santa Cruz County residents died in the quake. Six of the deaths occurred in the county.

Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Company employees Robin Ortiz and Shawn McCormick lost their lives when a brick wall of the building (then near World Savings) collapsed. Shopper Kay Trieman died when Ford's Department Store's roof partially collapsed.

The Bake Rite Bakery on Main Street in Watsonville crumbled in on Elida Ledesma Ortega, who died shielding her grandson from the falling bricks. Horses that had broken free from their corral hit Dale Benedetto's truck on a darkened Highway 1, killing him. Gary P. West was in Bonny Doon near the water when a section of cliff collapsed beneath him. Boulder Creek resident John Anderson died when a San Francisco office building collapsed.

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GREG PIO

Assemblyman Sam Farr restarted the town clock before a crowd at 5:04 p.m. Nov. 18, 1989, announcing that downtown Santa Cruz was back in business.

Readers Recall the '89 Quake

Work was over. I just commuted over the hill to Ferrari Florist downtown to exchange my plastic pumpkin with movement-sensory L.E.D. eyes. As I stood in front of the counter waiting for the clerk to get off the phone, the store started shaking. Behind me stood a young woman with her newborn baby and a frightened look on her face. The shelves started emptying themselves across the room. The clerk disappeared. I wanted to hide, but where do you hide in a glass shop? I threw my arms over them to protect us from flying glass. Slivers of glass struck my bare legs. I looked up to see if we were in danger when I saw a tall wooden shelf starting to fall on us. With my left arm out, I said (to the shelf), "No, you don't," as I held it back. I kept wondering, how much longer? Then the shaking stopped. Someone yelled from the back door, "Everybody out." Grabbing the lady's hand, we jumped over the glass and shelves toward the rear door. As I exited, I told someone, "I left my pumpkin in there and I'll be back for it."

My truck was around the corner from Woolworth's. I tried to run around the block, but the buildings were still falling. The phones were out, but I tried to call home, anyway. So I ran through the arcade at El Palomar to Pacific Avenue. The mall was destroyed. Little ballerinas (from The Studio) were on the street crying. I leaned into Robert's and yelled, "Anybody in there? Any-one need help?" No answer. I saw a car crushed by a tree. Someone yelled, "We need volunteers to help get the people out of the Palomar Inn." People were screaming and climbing out of the fire escapes. "Oh my God. Where is my family?" I remembered. I found my

new truck covered with glass that I had to pick off carefully to clear out a path.

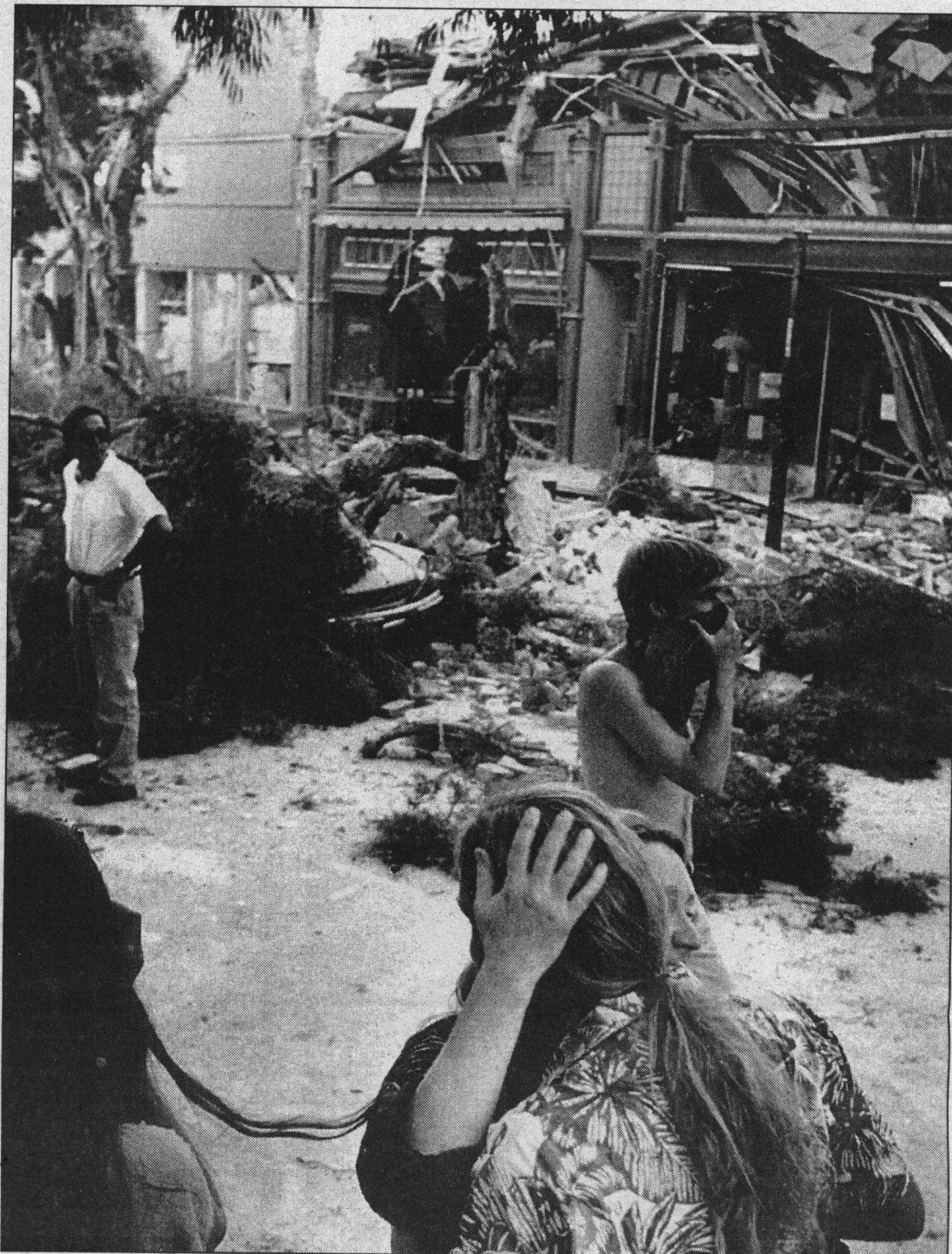
In front of the old Gandy Dancers, a car in front of me veered to the left, so I went to the right. Then she changed her mind and ended up side-swiping me. After an exchange of heavy words and license numbers, we drove away.

As I pulled up into my driveway, I met Stew, who had gotten Nicole from a Mission Hill basketball game. We were afraid to go upstairs. Nicole wouldn't. Everything was on the floor. Three beams were split in the ceiling. The driveway was cracked from the back fence to the street.

I didn't go to work for the rest of the week and spent the next month working from home at night. My days were spent helping to relocate Pacific Garden Imports and St. George residents. We all went into Watsonville and helped distribute food and clothes to those families who had no transportation into town. Nicole and I watched tearfully as they tore down the Cooper House. We saw them bring out the bodies from the Coffee Roasting Company. I was drawn to the fence in front of Ferrari's with tears in my eyes for days. I was so lucky. I helped. It still brings tears to my eyes. In fact, just writing it down finally made me cry.

**Christine Maddox
Santa Cruz, CA**

When the quake struck, I was watering my garden at the Community Garden on Trescony Street. The loud rumbling roar, the screams of frightened people, the crash of brick chimneys were all around me; the



CHIP SCHEUER

Those on the Pacific Garden Mall experienced a range of emotions following the earthquake as some surveyed the damage to buildings and property while others expressed relief.

very ground seemed to roll. It felt like the hand of the Supreme Being slapping me and telling me "NO!" even though I didn't then and still don't accept the notion of a supreme being.

The next morning, my now-former wife heard over the radio to report to the Red Cross Center on Soquel Avenue next to the freeway.

The scene there was one of organized chaos with people coming and going. Volunteers were being turned away at the door, there were so many. Slipping in, we offered our services, she helping to organize a

sandwich production line and I taking over the small kitchen, making soup and chicken Cordon Bleu, food thankfully donated by Hobbee's Restaurant. People had been up all night helping others and were hungry; the morning passed quickly.

After cleaning up from lunch, the person in charge spoke to us all, asking, "Who knows how to cook spaghetti?" My ex, ever so thoughtfully, piped up, "My husband makes a great spaghetti!" The woman in charge turned to me and said, "Great! We need 500 dinners by 5 o'clock and you're in charge."

Setting up in the well-equipped kitchen at Messiah Lutheran Church on High Street, we went to work.

There were about a dozen or so of us chopping and slicing through the mounds of donated food. Most of the noodles and tomato sauce were destined for the Civic Center, the rest scattered around town to the various shelters.

Swede, the retired pastor of the church, helped boost our morale by

telling jokes and repeating with his deep resonant voice, "Courage! Have courage!" The afternoon flew by. Power was restored to the church around 3 p.m., we had our dinners packed and on the way by 5 p.m.

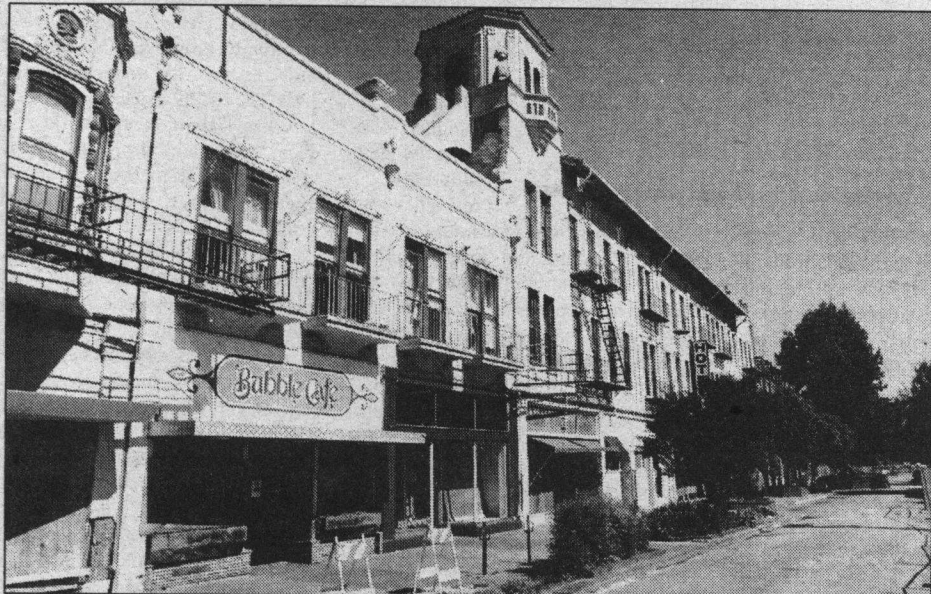
For years, I believed the quake did not affect me, other than making me jump every time a bus or truck went by, but that is not true. The quake was more than a diversion to my problems, it taught me a different appreciation of life and the short passages of life.

With the help of a good counselor, I learned to take control of my life and accept responsibility for my own happiness.

I am quite happily married now to a wonderful woman and I have a beautiful child, thanks in part to the earthquake of 1989.

**Arthur Wood
Santa Cruz**

*Readers Remember
Continued on page 17*



GREG PIO

Loma Prieta and a later fire almost destroyed Pacific Avenue's 96-year-old St. George Hotel. The reduplicated hotel now houses Body Options (where the Bubble Cafe was).

TEN YEARS AFTER

Readers Remember
From page 14

I had just returned from picking up Chinese food for dinner and had only started to set out plates and silverware at the kitchen bar when the shaking began. It's funny what goes through your mind at first. Initially, none of us were alarmed, we envisioned chuckling over what a strong jolt it was, eating our egg-foo-yung and fried rice. Then the shaking intensified and confusion set in. We looked at each other like, "What now?" Eventually, my husband and my son took control and herded us all under the counter where the egg rolls sat cooling just over our heads. Then there was only the sound, like a freight train bearing down on us, and we were directly in its path. Glass was breaking, crashing everywhere, the cabinet where I kept wine and brandy had opened and the bottles smashed close to us. It smelled like a tavern. It seemed to go on forever. And all I was grateful for was that we were all together, our entire family present and accounted for. I guess that indirectly, I have the Chinese food to thank for that — the meal we were all so fond of had gathered us together. Weeks afterward, I was afraid to let our kids go anywhere without us, afraid it might happen again.

Nada J. Misunas
Santa Cruz

On that October day in '89, I had just recently moved into my new mobile home in Fremont with

my daughter, then 12 years old, and my house rabbits, Cindi Lopear, Janis Loplin (both lops) and Bun-Jovi.

I was in the door frame (ironically) of my front door. And Janis was loose in the house. Just as I was stepping outside, the house began to shake and rumble.

Instinctively, I yelled to Janis, "What are you getting into?" But the shaking didn't stop. My neighbor saw me outside and yelled to me to get something. We were having an earthquake. After all is said and done, yes I was really shaken up. I later learned my parents had just crossed the Bay Bridge.

A couple of days later I went out to see my horse in Los Altos. I walked the humungous pasture looking for her. I approached her, as usual, from the left side. Slipping the halter over her head, I jumped on and rode in. But she had no enthusiasm in seeing me. With brush in hand, I began the ritual "bond-brushing." Again, starting on the left side. I rounded the backside and worked my way up the right side toward her head. When I reached my destination I gasped in horror.

The entire right side of her face looked like it had slid off (or at least over). Her ear hung to the side, her eye had no movement, her mouth hung open and her tongue hung out to the side.

In shock, I cried out for help. We immediately got the vet out and determinedly tried to figure out not only how, but what had happened to her. Clearly it had something to do with



CHRIS MADDOX

Myrtle Street suffered some of the greatest earthquake damage, to which this home can attest.

the earthquake scaring all the horses. Was she kicked? Did something fall on her or, at least, into her? What could cause all that damage without a trace of a mark? No cuts, no hair loss — nothing.

After careful evaluation of all her symptoms, or lack thereof, it was decided she may have had a stroke. I worked vigorously for months to try and bring her back to normal, but to no avail. She had lost her ability to blink her eye for moisture. The ear remained the same, her mouth moved, sort of. She would never be the same again. One day, the vet approached me and said maybe it would be better to put her down. For her. So we eventually did.

It broke my heart. I can't believe 10 years have gone by. I guess because I keep her picture and a poem in the car where I can see it every day.

But a catastrophe such as the quake, reminds me of how precious every day is. Whether it be people, animals or just life itself. Make the most you can of it.

Living and loving life —

Karen Fagundes
Felton

I was in downtown Santa Cruz. It was a very warm day with the temperature in the upper 80s, maybe even 90 if I remember correctly. There was a certain feeling in the air, a certain atmosphere that characterized that day — balmy, exotic, sensual.

I decided I wanted to watch the World Series. In the past, I had watched sporting events on the TV in the St. George Hotel's lobby, like the 1978 American League playoff between the Red Sox and the Yankees, for example, but this was 1989. I headed over to the Front Street Pub and I walked in the door about 5 p.m. only to find out the game didn't start until 5:30 p.m. So I figured I'd go over to the Pacific Garden Mall and return in 30 minutes.

I got out the door and a few yards down the street, and then it happened. It got very still and then I heard this strange sound, like a freight train rumbling along, and then I heard glass breaking and a woman screaming and I was thrown several yards forward. My first thought was that this was the end of the road and I was going to die, or that this could be the result of a bomb, a gigantic explosion — maybe World War III has started — until I finally realized that it was an earthquake.

I remember walking around Santa Cruz that evening, and it resembled a war zone! Lights were out, the smoke of fires burning could be seen in the air, the pavement of sidewalks and streets were cracked and split with huge holes here and there. There were a lot of downed buildings and houses and piles of rubble everywhere.

It was strange. It was kind of eerie in the darkness that enveloped the city, with the fires burning in the distance. At the same time, there was a touch of festivity or, perhaps more accurately, people pulling together and trying to help one another out in the face of a tragedy. I was living in Capitola at the time, and it took me a long time to get home, since the bridge was out.

This was a shocking experience, but since I suffered no physical injury or loss of property, its harm to me was minimal. The worst part for me was the aftershocks that followed and the wearing effects on the nerves they created, and thinking that maybe this could be the one that buckled the foundation of the house.

I was in love at the time, and my memories of the earthquake were clouded by this. Looking back on it, it was a peak experience not unlike a psychedelic trip: intense, deeply felt and awesome fear — something to keep you up all night.

Richard Snow
Santa Cruz

We had just added a new addition in the same year when the earthquake struck. The house, which was built on stilts of about 6 feet

above the ground, collapsed and fell all the way to the bottom. It also moved about 5 feet to the right. A giant oak tree in front of our house saved the structure from rolling down the very steep hill it's sitting on. We were able to save the newer addition by jacking it up, but had to tear down the rest of the house.

At 5 p.m. on Oct. 17, 1989, our neighbors were over showing off their newborn baby boy. The mom had just picked up the baby to feed him when all hell broke loose. Heavy appliances and the cast-iron woodstove went flying across the room like paper airplanes. My husband and the neighbor managed to crawl under the doorway to watch the whole house and the deck around it go for a ride. The mother held on tightly to the baby and wasn't hit by anything heavy. Miraculously, her little 2-year-old, Kyle, was found covered in soot, but unharmed in front of the woodstove, which could have killed him.

The house had separated in two; we lost our propane tank, water tank, the toilet, and all our dishes and glassware. It rained the following day, so lots of our belongings got ruined then. We had to move, but the house we moved into temporarily was red-tagged, so we had to move again. We moved a total of three times while rebuilding our house, and finally moved back in during summer 1990. It took another decade to complete everything, but we are grateful that everyone escaped physical harm, but not psychological damage. To this day, it is difficult for my husband Don and our neighbors, the McCarthys, to talk about the worst 10 minutes of their lives without getting choked up.

We live right on the San Andreas fault. We've always known it's a dangerous place to live, but we love the serenity and beauty of the canyon, looking down on Santa Cruz, hoping and praying that enough energy got released in 1989 so that we don't have to fear another "Big One."

Silvia Baker
Aptos



GREG PIO

Residents look on as the Cooper House is torn down.