

Residents remember 1989 quake

Earthquake - 10 years later

Disaster defined lives of those who lived through terror in SC Mountains

By Kara Guzman

kguzman@santacruzsentinel.com
[@karambutan](#) on Twitter

LOS GATOS » The first thing Marva Bauer remembers is the sound of her house's foundation tearing apart.

"You're just listening to your life crash to the floor and I was terrified," said Bauer, 57. "And my husband was, you know, yelling,

'It's the big one!' The BRRRR. The pounding. It was horrific."

At 5:04 p.m. Oct. 17, 1989, Bauer was at her Highway 17 home with her husband Philip, about to watch the World Series game, when the Loma Prieta earthquake hit. She was 6 miles from the epicenter, standing in the door frame in her living room and was knocked to her knees, bruising her forehead

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LOMA PRIETA REMEMBRANCE

What: Commemoration of the 1989 earthquake's impact on the Santa Cruz Mountains

When: 4:30-6 p.m. Friday

Where: Loma Prieta Elementary north campus gazebo, 23800 Summit Road, Los Gatos

Details: Call 408-353-1106

10.15.14
Scotts Valley residents recall the shaking, followed by eerie silence

By Calvin Men

calvinmen@santacruzsentinel.com
[@calvinmenatwork](#) on Twitter

SCOTTS VALLEY » In the minutes following the 6.9 magnitude Loma Prieta earthquake, Bill Smith said he remembers an eerie silence in Scotts Valley.

Smith, the watch commander for the city's police department at the time, hopped into his pa-

trol car to survey the damage and came to Civic Center and Scotts Valley drives.

"There were cars that were stopped," said Smith, 62. "People were just stopped in the road and there was no traffic movement and everybody just stopped. It was one of those things where it was really weird because there was no sound."

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and hip.

During what she called the longest 15 seconds of her life, Bauer crawled to her husband in the bathroom. In what felt like slow motion, she saw the toilet fly off the floor and swirl about, later realizing the toilet wasn't moving — it was the house. The nearly 1 acre parcel where the house stood heaved 18 inches up and 5 feet north, she said.

"Closet doors were falling, cracking, bending, falling out of the railings. And there was a sound — almost like the sound of the train on the tracks — the pounding, pounding, pounding, it was just this constant pounding. There were trees hitting the house, you know, branches coming down, the widowmakers," Bauer said. "The sound of a constant crashing, stuff breaking, all of our things."

The couple managed to evacuate to Monterey, to check on Philip's mother. When they returned four days later, Marva Bauer said she remembers the smell of rotten food, from the refrigerator that fell, breaking not only the oven but its door, spilling its contents on the floor. The couple shoveled the debris, along with the remnants of nearly every piece of glassware they owned, into a wheelbarrow, she said.

The house still stood, but the garage was decimated, costing the couple nearly \$70,000 to repair, despite earthquake insurance, draining their savings, Bauer said. Deciding to cut their losses, the couple moved to Richmond, Virginia in 1991.

Staying on the mountain, amidst the disaster, was too difficult, Bauer said.

"We stopped collecting things, and just started living simply with what we needed," she said. "Because in 15 seconds we had nothing."

More than 75 homes in the rural Summit area were destroyed, roughly a third of the community, according to Sentinel reports.

For Los Gatos resident Michele Witten, who lived near the Summit on Terrace Grove Road, what she remembers is the aftermath.

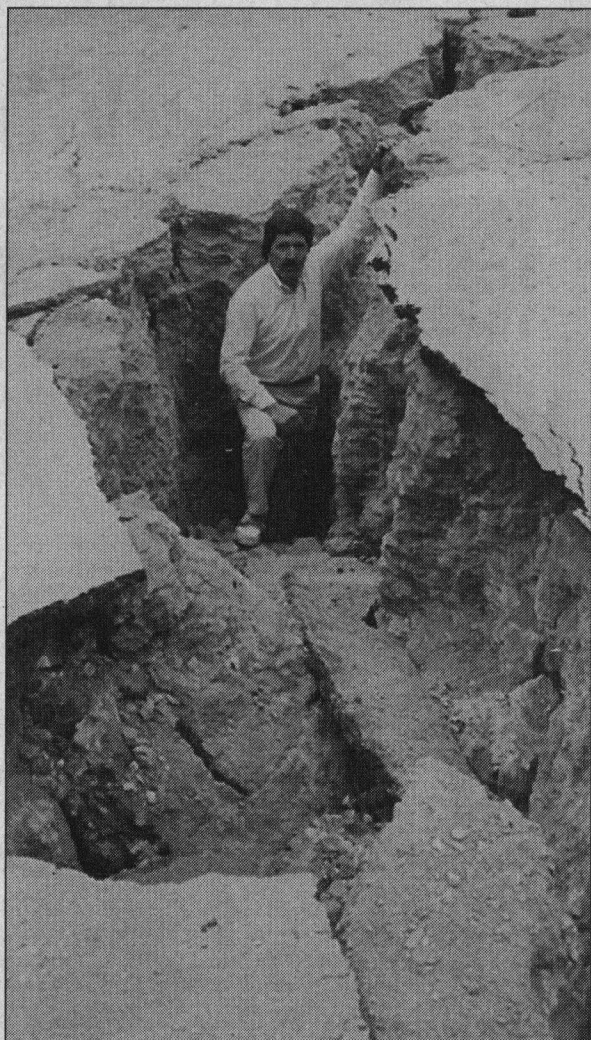
The neighborhood was not only without power, but also water, since pipes to the small private systems had burst. The three main roads leaving the area were blocked due to slides, she said, and the community had no outside help until the next day, when news sources announced that the epicenter was in the Santa Cruz Mountains, not Gilroy, contrary to initial reports.

"Then it was like the entire world turned to us," Witten said. "We had National Geographic taking pictures of us, we had Red Cross and all these supplies coming in."

Tents were pitched at Loma Prieta Elementary and the Loma Prieta Community Center, for the newly homeless.

"You realize very quickly how precious life is when you go up to the community center and you see all your friends, everybody you know, and the looks on their faces," Witten said. "Walking from one camp to another and hearing of people whose houses collapsed completely or their house burned down."

Witten said her house was damaged, but not de-



CLYDE POWELL — CONTRIBUTED

KGO-TV reporter Tony Russomanno stands in a fissure on Summit Road, a few miles from the epicenter, the day after the 1989 earthquake.

stroyed, and families like hers had survivor's guilt, creating a divide in the community between those who still had homes and those who didn't.

"I actually felt guilty," she said. "I think everybody up here who didn't have severe damage felt guilty because you were looking around and your neighbors had lost everything."

Shortly before the quake, Witten had picked up her

baby son Alex from her neighbor's house, who was baby-sitting but had to leave early. Witten returned later that night to check on her neighbor, finding the house in ruins, like a pile of Tinker Toys, she said.

"I stood there holding Alex and I just started crying hysterically," Witten said. "That's when I broke down. I just started crying and realized, 'Oh my god, my son almost died.'"

Effects

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In Santa Cruz County, the temblor devastated the downtown Santa Cruz area, causing buildings to collapse, crushing cars with debris and creating fires by bursting gas lines. Despite the damage, there were only a few telltale signs of the damage, Smith said.

"I remember looking in one direction and it looked like smoke was rising from one side and looking in the other direction and it looked like smoke," he said, adding that it felt like sensory overload and he wasn't sure where to go first.

In the days that followed, Smith and other officers organized into split shifts: 12 officers on shift, 12 off shift. By a stroke of luck, then Scotts Valley Chief of Police Steve Walpole had created an earthquake preparedness guide for residents leading up to the natural disaster and handed them out 10 days before the quake.

"Everyone told me I was a



DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL FILE

Bill Brooks' heroics saved a life in this Scotts Valley home.

jinx," Walpole said, who still lives in the county, with a chuckle. "(The earthquake) wouldn't have happened if I hadn't made the manual."

Walpole said 12 Scotts Valley homes were destroyed after the quake and there were 400 other homes in the city with some damage.

City Councilwoman Donna Lind said she re-

members the devastation to the homes, including her own hillside house. Her living room was damaged and Lind said she thought her home would be designated as uninhabitable but it ultimately wasn't condemned.

Despite the damage, Lind, a police officer at the time, ensured her neighbors

were safe and even gathered them in her home to calm them down.

"We were on a deck on a hillside," she said, laughing at the scenario that could have turned tragic. "Not where people should want to be, but I think they all wanted to be where I was and you could look over the town from my deck."