

EARTHQUAKES Quake research close to home

Lit professor donates yard to research

By ERIN BLAIR
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SANTA CRUZ — Not everyone has an earthquake epicenter in his backyard, but Richard Terdiman, professor of literature at UC-Santa Cruz does.

He's got the testing instruments in his carport to prove it.

Terdiman lives up in the hills on Branciforte Drive, about eight miles from the supposed focus of last Tuesday morning's earthquakes. He's been a California resident for the past 20 years and has felt the earth move before, but he described this series of tremors as the strongest he's ever felt.

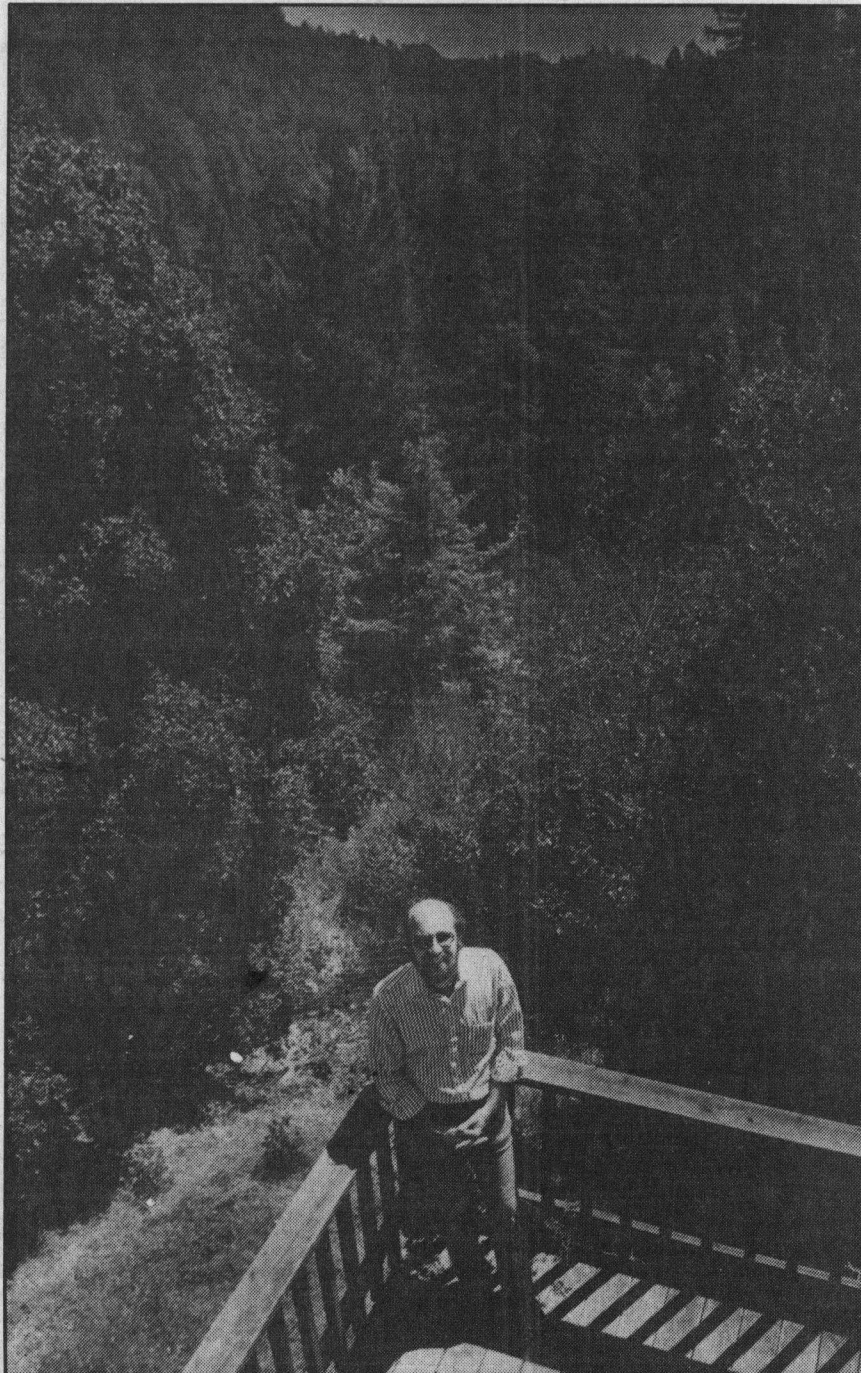
The day after the quakes, he went over to his friend Karen McNally's lab at UCSC to see what she had to say about them. Terdiman knows the seismologist from campus meetings. They both serve on the planning and budget committee.

At the Richter Lab, McNally and her colleagues were looking for sites for their instruments. They suspected that the magnitude 5.2 quake that awoke the Santa Cruz Mountains might be a foreshock for "the big one." With sensitive experimental devices they could record movement near the epicenter during the crucial five-day period when there was the highest risk of another earthquake. But where to put them?

Terdiman eagerly volunteered his carport, which turned out to be perfect.

"The land was stable, there was power for the equipment, it's not too close to the road, and there was someone to check on the recorders," Terdiman said.

Terdiman takes his recorder-checking responsibilities seriously. He said the machines have red bulbs that flash



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Terdiman lives close to epicenter, so his house became a research site.

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when they measure a shock. So far there's been no flash.

"Nothing's actually appeared, but I go out faithfully every few hours to check it," said Terdiman.

"Being an academic, I was glad I was able to convert it into something academic, to be involved in the research," said the professor of 19th century European culture and cultural theory.

Babysitting the instruments even has its moments of fun. "Journalists came by the house and friends say we were on CNN," Terdiman reported.

The science of earthquakes fascinates Terdiman more than it scares him. "I didn't have an exaggerated emotional reaction to it," he said. He believes it helps to be informed.

"Karen knows that lives and injuries can be saved if people know what to do and aren't just fatalistic. That water and food make a difference. She believes in public education," said Terdiman.

On Friday, the researchers took one of the two instruments from the Branciforte property and moved it to a site on Bear Creek Road closer to the epicenter. They also adjusted the sensitivity threshold of the instruments to pick up minor tremors.

Although he was nearer to the quakes than many were and heard his books fall off their shelves, Terdiman hasn't considered moving from the house he's rented for the past year.

"I don't think I'd feel any better being 12 miles rather than eight miles away," he said.