

Some miraculously escaped death as the terror struck

By Pamela Kramer
Mercury News Staff Writer

Ryan Moore was taking a nap in his family's Santa Cruz Mountains home when the first shock of Tuesday's earthquake jolted him awake. Before he could react, the house lurched away from its cliff-side perch and plunged more than 100 feet.

"I just closed my eyes and stayed in my bed with my sheets around me," said Moore, 20. "I knew what was going on."

It was 5:04 p.m., and the Bay Area was shaking.

"I heard the house break, and just a big, big break, just the whole house crumbling apart. And I felt the fall, just a free fall, with everything just coming down on top of me."

In seconds, Moore was at the bottom of the hill. The roof had slid over his head and lay just five feet beyond. The house around him was kindling. His father was frantically calling his name from the driveway above, where he and his wife had barely escaped. They had fallen on the driveway from the shaking and turned to see the house — with their son in it — pitch over the edge.

Moore, covered with flecks of plasterboard, extricated himself from the rubble and climbed to join his parents. He suffered only scratches and bruises.

Those who lived through it never will forget the half-minute of terror that interrupted a sunny afternoon to kill, by some estimates, as many as 275. The randomness of survival and death as people went about the normal business of their lives may be hardest to understand.

Eva Liu, 24, returned to her apartment at Bay and Fillmore streets in San Francisco to find that her building had collapsed.

Ordinarily, Liu said, she would have been at home at the time of the earthquake. The housekeeper at San Francisco's new Marriott Hotel said she had stopped for a drink after work.

"That saved my life," she said. "That half-hour saved my life. . . I don't know how to express my feelings."

All over the region, people struggled to avoid the sudden death they feared the earthquake would bring — sometimes only to be played with maliciously by the quake.

At Monta Vista High School in Cupertino, the girls' junior varsity volleyball team stampeded en masse from the gym, screaming.

"The ground was moving so violently on the football field that I had thoughts of it opening up and swallowing the whole team," said the high school's football coach, Buck Shore.

And at Cupertino High School, water polo players had trouble getting out of the pool because of the waves.

"The kids were being smashed up against the sides of the pool and even washed up onto the deck," said football coach Norm Eliason, who could see the pool from the football field.

In Santa Cruz, 26-year-old Robert B. Allen had just walked into his two-story Victorian apartment building.

"I bolted back out the door. As soon as I hit the pavement, the balcony fell down."

Outside, Allen danced madly as

live power lines snaked in the street. "I was just jumping around in circles, waiting for one of the lines to hit."

Suzan Parks, 24, had left her job in Santa Cruz early to get to her mountain home in time to watch the start of Game 3 of the World Series. She ended up dodging boulders on Highway 17 as a cliff gave way.

Mercury News Wire Services contributed to this report.



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