

The Quake of '89

Charting the path of recovery

AFTER THE walls buckle, and the roofs cave in, and the objects that people collect to help mark the course of their lives disappear forever ... after all that, it becomes time to start again.

The victims of the earthquake were as random as the path of the havoc. Vic-

tims like the Clancys, whose home burned onto the nervous ground of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Or Carol Roos, who had to watch helplessly as a bulldozer tore apart her home in San Francisco's Marina District.

There were victims like Shari Lee and her roommates at the University of Cali-

fornia, Santa Cruz, who wonder if they'll be able to continue in school. And Dorothy Otto, injured but one of the lucky survivors in the collapse of the Cypress Street Viaduct in Oakland.

Beyond their differences, they hold much in common. They have lost things of profound importance, but they have

perhaps gained a new perspective on what defines value. They have sorrows to bury, but they also have spirits to nurture.

And they have their lives. Today, and over the next few months, as they go about rebuilding those lives, the Mercury News will follow their endeavors.

In the mountains: a couple's paradise lost to flames

Displaced gardeners plan to plant new life after tragedy

By Aleta Watson
Mercury News Staff Writer

The marigolds, statice and cosmos still bloom in Charley and Mary Clancy's front garden, but all that remains of their mountain home is a charred frame and piles of sodden rubble.

Less than an hour after the disastrous earthquake Oct. 17, the wood-shingled house burned to the foundation, leaving the Clancys with only the camping gear left in their pickup truck from a recent vacation.

Recently, the couple poked among the ashes one more time and talked of plans to rebuild on the sunny, level lot in the Santa Cruz Mountains, two miles north of Boulder Creek. Gardeners both for pay and pleasure, they looked a long time for the right piece of land before they bought their house on Meadow Drive five years ago, and they don't intend to leave it.

"We're hoping to get a trailer and stay right here on our property until our carpenter friend can build a new house for us," said Charley Clancy, 35.

"We've still got the gardens."

Even after the fire, the Clancys,

who both work as gardeners, remained close to their home, staying with neighbors and camping in their own driveway when the aftershocks made them too nervous to remain indoors.

"It feels good to stay in the neighborhood," said Mary Clancy, 32. "You feel like you're still home — on your own land at least."

She blinked back tears as she told of returning home Tuesday evening to find firefighters in the street and flames shooting from the house into the overhanging trees.

Her husband had just picked her up from her job when the quake hit. Neighbors noticed the fire about a half-hour later and said it seemed to have started near the propane-fed hot water heater.

The backyard herb garden was spared in part because neighbors tried to fight the fire from the rear with a bucket brigade, carrying water over a fence from a nearby swimming pool.

"It means a lot," Mary said, "to have people like that living around you."

But almost everything else that the Clancys treasured is gone.

All the antique furniture, family mementos, new appliances and power tools went up in the flames. Lost were the quilt made by Charley's Aunt Cora nearly 50 years ago, Mary's original Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls, a 150-year old dresser, and a china cabinet full of Fostoria crystal and antique plates. Collections of stamps, maps, beer cans, wine bottles, books and license plates also burned.

The saddest moment came when they found the body of their little gray Manx cat in the back bedroom, where it had apparently suffocated in the smoke. They buried it in the back garden.

"That's the hardest part," he said. "We were real close to our cat."

Mary Clancy agreed — but hopes the worst is over with.

In many ways, however, the fire may have been just the beginning of the Clancys' troubles.

They spent the first two days after the fire just trying to find their insurance agent. Their insurance papers were ashes and since the premiums were paid out of a bank impound account and they



José Luis Villegas — Mercury News

Mary and Charley Clancy, after a fire destroyed their home

had never made any claims, they couldn't recall the name of their agent.

Countless phone calls finally led them to the Farmers Insurance office in Santa Cruz. There they learned the name of their agent in San Jose, who was not expected to return to his office until next week.

They were discouraged when the agent's receptionist pointed out their policy did not include earthquake coverage, but heartened by advice from a lawyer that their fire insurance should cover the damage.

But they have no idea what assistance they will receive from the

Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Still, they prefer to be optimistic.

"I'm trying to look on the positive side," Charley Clancy said. "I figure this is a new start for everything and this time I won't collect everything under the sun."



Quake disrupts students' lives

Classes take





Ron Burda — Mercury News

Dorothy Otto now worries about driving freeway

students' lives

Classes take 2nd place to housing needs

By Paul Rogers
Mercury News Staff Writer

Shari Lee and her roommates spent last weekend in the rain, lugging clothes from their wrecked Myrtle Street house and wondering what to do next.

Lee — along with two of the women with whom she shared the blue, one-story house — had just started fall classes at the University of California, Santa Cruz when the Oct. 17 earthquake ravaged the neighborhood and the Pacific Garden Mall, a half mile away.

"I'm not sure what I'm going to do now," the 24-year-old art history major said. "I have to find a place to live. I don't know if I'm even gonna be able to go back to school and that's the whole point of being here."

Finding a place to live always has been one of the most difficult tests for college students in Santa Cruz. A largely out-of-reach market, filled with pricey apartments and resort condominiums, mandates house sharing for many.

But now there are middle-class families packing Red Cross shelters and soup kitchens. Tents dot baseball fields. People are huddled under trees and sleeping in cars.

Classes have started again at UC-Santa Cruz. But Lee and her roommates still are worrying about where to stay, not about school.

One of the women, 21-year-old Russian literature major Michaela Lowthian, is sleeping in a friend's living room on nearby West Cliff Drive. "An extended slumber party," she calls it. The others have taken refuge in crowded studio apartments or with other friends.

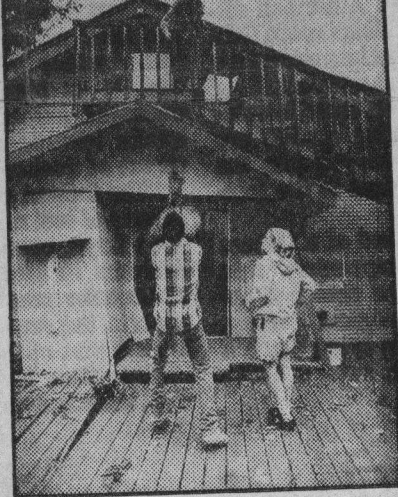
"School ceased to be important lately," Lowthian said. "We're just sort of wandering around in a daze."

As she spoke, roommate Rhonda Botello, 25, handed garbage bags full of books from her ransacked attic room to friends in back of the house.

"My big concern today is where am I going to take my things?" Botello said. "I was going to put them out in the yard, but now with the rain I don't have anywhere."

Someone suggests pooling their money and renting storage space. Another option discussed is just leaving everything in the cars indefinitely.

Botello, a Spanish literature major scheduled to graduate in De-



Karen T. Borchers — Mercury News

MOVING OUT — UC-Santa Cruz senior Rhonda Botello tosses clothing to friends helping her move from wrecked Myrtle Street house.

cember, said she still hopes to finish school on time.

"But it's hard to concentrate," she said. "I'm trying to get through 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,' but I keep reading the same paragraphs over and over again."

The stereo and television were wrecked and possessions were lost, but at least no one was hurt, everyone agreed. Botello, the only one home during the quake, raced down a flight of wooden stairs as they broke apart.

Just walking through the building now is an unnerving adventure.

“School ceased to be important lately. We’re just sort of wandering around in a daze.”

— Student
Michaela Lowthian

A gaping hole, four feet across, let rain into the living room where the chimney fell in. Stairwells are collapsed. Heating pipes protrude through wooden floors that no slope like the decks of a ship.

The three-bedroom house, a bargain at \$1,150 a month, would have to be razed, their landlord had said.

"I don't think any of us ate for two days afterward," said Kel Oblinger, 20, who also lived in the house. "Our nerves were shot."

Oblinger came to Santa Cruz from Los Angeles three years ago to attend Cabrillo College. Now she works at a computer disk company in Scotts Valley.