

Quake poems

CHANCE

the city
has no
electricity

"what
a nightmare!"
I say

"a chance
to count
stars"

you say
pointing to
the sky

SANTA CRUZ

she wakes up
shivering in
the middle
of night

still feeling
the missing limbs
of her amputated
downtown

COOPER HOUSE

(Santa Cruz landmark
wrecked Oct. 26)

like my
grandmother
she was stern
she was proud
she stood in the way

like my grandmother
she was taken away:
she'll come back in my sleep



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

UCSC poet Francisco Alarcon, right, and Chris Funkhouser, who has We Press, encourage earthquake survivors to write their thoughts.

EARTHQUAKE '89 — Santa Cruz City.

Thoughts from aching souls

By TRACIE WHITE
Sentinel staff writer

FRANCISCO Alarcon and his friends stayed up all night talking at his house near Beach Flats following the Oct. 17 earthquake.

The small group made a circle and listened to news broadcasts on the radio. They clutched each other when the aftershocks hit. "It felt like we were going back in time," said Alarcon, who teaches Spanish and literature at UC Santa Cruz. "Back to a time when you didn't need electricity to live. For me that night was very magical."

In an attempt to capture the feelings and emotions experienced during and after the earthquake, Alarcon and Chris Funkhouser, owner of We Press, have

published a small book entitled "Quake Poems." Proceeds from the \$2 booklet will be donated for earthquake relief.

Writers may not be engineers or doctors, but they can be part of the healing process after a major disaster, said Alarcon, who wrote the poems over a two-day period shortly after the earthquake.

"We thought maybe this would be healing," said Alarcon. "I believe there's a lot of sorrow that's being repressed. People's souls are aching."

Born in Los Angeles and raised in Mexico, Alarcon describes himself as a Chicano. Spanish is his first language, and many of his poems are written in both Spanish and English. He moved to the Bay Area in the 1970s to attend Stanford University as a graduate student. Since then, he has worked on a number of

literary magazines. Funkhouser publishes a monthly national poetry magazine called "We."

"Fifty years from now we'll all be talking about Oct. 17, 1989," said Alarcon. "It's important to record that before the routine takes over."

Alarcon dedicates one of the poems in the booklet to the friends who stayed with him the night of the quake. He talks about how "each aftershock brought us closer and closer."

He remembers the day after the quake, going to the store, forming lines, worrying about water and electricity. "It was shocking," said Alarcon. "It's an experience we should not forget."

Amid the earthquake's rubble, a strong bond formed between neighbors and friends who turned to each other in time of stress, Alarcon said. "I think it

shook a lot of people's consciousness. Strangers became familiar. Everyone had the same experience. That to me is very humanizing."

Alarcon and Funkhouser are considering publishing an anthology of poetry written by local people about the earthquake. There should be something more than just newspapers recording the event, Alarcon said.

"What about feelings? What was in people's minds when the whole county didn't have electricity? That was a very powerful experience."

"Maybe that's what the poets can do."

"Quake Poems" can be purchased by sending \$2.50, which includes postage, to We Press, P.O. Box 1503, Santa Cruz, 95061.