



20 YEARS AFTER LOMA PRIETA

PREPARING FOR THE BIG ONE

WHEN THE UNDERGROUND TSUNAMI of soil and bedrock came boiling up the San Andreas Fault on the evening of Oct. 17, 1989, it exploded like a bomb in Los Gatos — the first small town in the path of the heaving seismic wave. The Loma Prieta earthquake brought down the brick facades of buildings along Los Gatos' Main Street, including the historic opera house.

And it was just getting started.

As the quake rippled outward from its core, it left a trail of destruction from Santa Cruz to San Francisco.

In the lifetime of most Californians, this would be the Big One, the unforgettable quake against which all others were measured. And yet, at 6.9 on the moment magnitude scale, Loma Prieta was not a particularly ferocious tremor — worldwide, there have been 12 earthquakes as large or larger this year.

It was awful enough. Loma Prieta left 63 dead, most of them buried in the rubble of the Cypress Structure collapse about 50 miles north in Oakland. Thousands more were injured and the quake caused \$7 billion worth of damage throughout the Bay Area.

But its 15-second duration was a mere hiccup in temblor terms: It was the Itty Bitty Big One. As recently as 2006, a quake in Sumatra shook for 10 minutes, and the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906 kept that city and its inhabitants writhing for nearly a minute.

"The longest minute of your life," says Jim Yoke, emergency services coordinator for the Santa Clara County Fire Department.

ARE WE READY FOR IT?

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