



SANTA CRUZ  
Historic Perspective

## Memories of quake still vivid



Many older houses in Watsonville were wrenched off their foundations by the force of the quake.



ROSS ERIC GIBSON COLLECTION

The World Savings Building was destroyed by the Oct. 17, 1989 earthquake, while leveled much of downtown Santa Cruz.

# Santa Cruz residents recall fateful moment

BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON  
Special to The Mercury News

Five days after the 1989 earthquake, I started the Santa Cruz Quakestory Survey. It collected personal quake narratives as part of a living history project and was published on the first anniversary of the Oct. 17 earthquake.

Several schools contributed to the survey as a class project, and stories are still being accepted. Here are some excerpts from our eyewitness history:

### Beautiful stroll interrupted

It was a beautiful, warm day on Pacific Avenue, where butterflies danced over

sweet-smelling beds of jasmine blossoms. I was downtown preparing for the 20th anniversary of the Pacific Garden Mall, which took me from store to store, talking to friends and merchants along the way. I returned home on West Cliff Drive shortly before the quake struck at 5:04 p.m. When it was over, I ran outside only to discover joggers on the bike path and cars going by as if nothing had happened.

### Those in ocean unaware

David Brazel had been scuba diving off Natural Bridges and saw little landslides off the cliffs, but had no idea a quake had occurred. Surfers told me they didn't real-

ize anything had happened until a cloud of black smoke rose from the downtown.

### Smoke break at 5:04 p.m.

The smoke was from fires on Myrtle Street mixed with dust from collapsing unreinforced brick buildings downtown. Chris Smith worked in the Antiques Collective in the St. George Hotel, and had just stepped out the Front Street door for a smoke.

Suddenly, "... there was an incredible BOOM! ... and everything started shaking. ... watching shock waves rippling

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ROSS ERIC GIBSON COLLECTION

One sidewall completely fell away on the building housing Plaza Books in downtown Santa Cruz.

# 1989 quake memories still vivid 5 years later

## ■ HISTORY

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through the pavement like a lake. then the tree beside me started shaking violently . . . but as I ran (across the street), the rippling asphalt knocked me . . . to my knees (so I) grabbed a parking meter . . . to ride it out.

" . . . I saw at least 10 windows explode out, throwing glass on the sidewalks. Seams were opening up in the brick walls, and my truck was bouncing around like a pogo stick."

After the quake, Smith went back in to survey the damage when a fireman came through and said not to smoke because gas mains had burst. Smith gave up smoking after that.



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*Historic Perspective*

### Center divider crumbled

New Music Works director Philip Collins was driving over Highway 17 to give a program in San Jose. "Suddenly, I began to lose control of the car . . . like I had flat tires . . . The trees started whipping around violently, and . . . the road in front of me suddenly pushed up, like Godzilla was going to come out of the Earth. I pulled over hard to the side of the road, (then) watched the road split down the

middle, and the center divider crumble like goat cheese. Little landslides were also occurring up and down the highway."

### Bridge collapses

Dana Gibson was leaving Watsonville and thought she had four flat tires. She pulled over and 12 yards in front of her the Struve Slough bridge collapsed. "But to turn around, motorists had to drive through the thick foliage in the center divider. Devastation in downtown Watsonville closed (Main) street and traffic was routed through the neighborhoods. Here it seemed there was a fire on nearly every block, and every other house was at least a foot off its foundation."

### 'This is not a test'

At Possibilities Unlimited on Water Street in Santa Cruz Jenny Lou Robinson was helping save antiques between numerous aftershocks before heading home. "I got in the car, and for the first time I heard on the radio . . . 'This is *not* a test. This is an earthquake emergency broadcast.' . . . Mom said: 'Be careful, the road might not be there up ahead.' But I said: 'If the car in front of me disappears, I'll slow down!'"

County roads became obstacle courses of nonworking street lights, pits and torn-up pavement, fallen bridges, landslides, and detours around downed power lines.

### Tsunami evacuation

Junior high school student John Reding camped with his family on a bluff above Capitola. "The night was long, as the hun-

dreds of aftershocks occurred. As we fell asleep, we heard the . . . loudspeakers right below us evacuating Capitola Village in fear of a tsunami."

### Confused shopping trip

The next day, Gayle Guerrero waited for three hours at Zanatto's market in a long line stretching to the river, "because they were only letting a few people in at a time with flashlights. . . . And everybody was telling their emotional (earthquake stories, which was) just what I needed after a sleepless, fretful night!"

When they finally let her in, she was so "spaced out" she pushed her cart around aimlessly, trying to make out what the silhouettes were on the shelves, and grabbing things in the dark. "When I got to the checkout, . . . I had to laugh at the items I'd chosen. There were malt balls, cheese puffs, marshmallows and wine. No batteries, not even water. The only practical item was a can of tuna fish. So these were the emergency provisions I'd waited three hours to buy. They didn't even go together."

### Words from the Bible

The Sunday after the quake, Janice Germond Anderson felt chills as the congregation read in unison the 46th Psalm: "God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not be afraid, even if the earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths; even if the seas roar and rage, and the hills are shaken by the violence."