



## Disaster

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*Cherie Langlois*

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Like many people around the world, my thoughts have been centered on the citizens of Haiti this past week: Mourning the staggering loss of life in a poorer-than-poor country whose people have so little, and have now lost their family and friends, too.

Hoping the survivors will get the food, water, and medical care they so desperately need.

Wishing I could do more to help, and feeling helpless because devastating earthquakes, like so many other natural disasters, are out of our control. They just happen, ready or not.

This morning, reading the latest news about this tragedy, I found myself flashing back to one of the largest earthquakes to occur here in Washington in recorded history: the 6.8 Nisqually Quake in February 2001.

Compared to Haiti's earthquake, ours was nothing—it caused surprisingly little structural damage to buildings and only one casualty. Still, it ranks as one of the most frightening incidents of my life, one that shook my natural disasters-happen-everywhere-but-here complacency.

The rumbling started as I prepared to walk out of my daughter's third-grade classroom at our old rural elementary school, where I volunteered. Her teacher and I exchanged looks, both of us thinking the same thing: that Fort Lewis (our local military base) must be bombing stuff again.

But instead of fading away, the rumbling grew louder. The room started to tremble, and the truth sank in a few heartbeats later. "Earthquake! Get under your desks!" we yelled in unison. Thanks to their earthquake drills, the kids promptly obeyed, and we dove under nearby tables ourselves.

The next 45 seconds stretched like taffy as the world shook and my table bounced so hard I had to grab a leg to keep it from jumping away. The teacher and I kept calling "It's OK! Stay put!" while my panicked gaze remained glued on my daughter, huddled under her desk across the room. Beyond Kelsey, the old cinderblock wall shuddered, but held it together.

When the earth quit heaving, we hugged and laughed with shaky relief, then filed out, crunching across broken glass to await the white-faced parents flocking to the school.

Kelsey and I hurried back to our farm to find our home and outbuildings still standing, the animals unharmed. The only evidence of the quake: a single photograph lying on its side. What would we have done, I wondered, if our home had collapsed?

A few months later, I put together our first disaster emergency kit. Controlling earthquakes was out, of course, but I could control whether our family and animals would have food, water, and other essentials during the aftermath. If you still need to make disaster preparations, check out this great article on Farm Disaster Plans by Carol Ekarius.

~ Cherie

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