

# Waiting for the earthquake in Los Angeles

*Living in LA means always being alert for the next earthquake and preparing to survive the aftermath.*

**David Willis, BBC, 5-1-10**

I am writing this waiting for the earth to move.

Any minute now, I fully expect the walls to buckle, the computer keyboard to bounce along the desk and the bookcase to sway like a pantomime drunk.

Then, just as my backside starts to vibrate, an anxious upward glance will be met by a cascade of books and family photographs.

My last memory of "the Big One" will be my Homer Simpson wall-clock, a fraction of a second before it bounces off the end of my nose.

It could happen, of course, at any time.

Los Angeles is surrounded by a patchwork quilt of faultlines, the most famous of which - the San Andreas - straddles the divide between desert and sea like a hump-backed beast.

Most of the time, the beast is docile but every so often it feels the need to let off steam.

The last time that happened, 72 people died and it cost \$20bn (£13bn) to clean up the mess.

Speculation about the next big one has been mounting ever since.

## **California roll**

Scientists say predicting earthquakes is impossible but then came word that they had, in fact, narrowed it down to a particular date - the day I, your humble servant, am writing these very words.

The story was a little convoluted. A woman who worked at the Los Angeles seismology department had been warned by one of her superiors to expect a major rumble the following day.

The woman told her husband, who told a friend and before long the bloggers and the texters and the tweeters were working themselves into a frenzy.

The news spread across Facebook and MySpace faster than a nasty rash. After 16 years of waiting, another big quake was finally on the way.

It seemed Mother Nature had been setting the stage for months. California roll used to be something you got at a sushi bar, now people were almost getting used to being rocked to sleep at night.

Since the start of this year, Los Angeles has experienced 70 small quakes. That is more than in the last two years combined.

Nothing to worry about, say the experts, but try telling that to people (like me!) who have started to find all the moving and shaking more than a little unnerving.

### **Survival kit**

Only a few weeks ago, I was in bed and the earth really did move for me.

Jolted into drowsy consciousness I lay there, blinking owlishly in the darkness, wondering what on earth to do.

The advice these days is "duck, cover and hold", which means dropping to the floor, crawling under a desk or table, and clinging on for dear life.

**“ I could not bring myself to tell Steve that, having woken up hungry the night before, I had eaten my earthquake kit ”**

But I knew that, in the time it took to fumble for my glasses, grope around for the light switch, and wedge my bulbous frame under the bed, the house would have been reduced to matchwood.

So I just sat there uselessly, watching the ceiling fan rock gently from side to side and the furniture pogo around the room and prayed to God it would all soon be over.

Which I realise, as coping strategies go, is not exactly ideal.

Preparation is key, as Steve the local odd-job man reminded me.

He had all the food and water he would need. The only thing missing from his earthquake kit was a gun - and he intended to buy one later that day.

Sensing my alarm, Steve explained that once food was in short supply it would not be long before the residents from less salubrious parts of town ended up on his doorstep and, after he had seen them off, their next stop would be mine.

Steve seemed so well organised I could not bring myself to tell him that, having woken up hungry the night before, I had eaten my earthquake kit.

All that remained was a battery-powered radio and a couple of cans of spaghetti.

### **False alarm**

Well, that's a relief! It seems after all that I may not need it now. At least not today.

**“ Living here may be hazardous but one thing it is not is dull ”**

Local TV is saying that those reports of a conversation between the woman and her boss were pure invention, the work of internet hoaxers bent on putting the wind up the already nervous residents of earthquake country.

Sad to say, it worked like a charm and word has it that those who once spun rumours about the death of certain celebrities are now carving a new niche for themselves, as purveyors of bogus information about the date of the next trembler.

But at least it is probably safe to go out shopping and there are three things on my list.

Power bars and bottled water I can find in the supermarket. The third item requires a licence and probably some target practice, too.

Without wishing to make light of what could be a terribly serious situation, it does conjure up a bizarre thought that, if I survive being buried in the rubble, you could find me picking off looters as they head up the drive.

Which only serves as a reminder that living here may be hazardous but one thing it is not is dull.