

My earthquake experience

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **82 (2016)**

Heft [6]

PDF erstellt am: **13.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-944320>

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My earthquake experience

I was drifting away to sleep on Sunday night when I felt the tremor... There was no doubt as to what it was. I rushed to my kids' bedrooms to wake them up and instruct them to "do the turtle". Both kids greeted me with a "grmph" and went straight back to sleep. The dog seemed to not care. The quake finally stopped. A drawer had rolled open, but that was the only visible indication of the quake. I discovered the next morning that a block of concrete had moved in the garden. We live on solid ground in the hills above Wellington so the shaking is relatively limited here.

After the quake I went back to sleep amidst frequent aftershocks, unaware that sirens were soon wailing in Petone and that many of my friends needed to evacuate to the hills because of the tsunami risk. Given the force of the shake I knew that I would not go to work in CBD the next day and that my children's school would be closed. Petone is a suburb in Lower Hutt, near Wellington, and is close to the sea and therefore at high risk of tsunamis.

On Monday, Wellington CBD was strangely eerie. Some buildings showed obvious damage: fallen tiles or broken windows. The traffic has been bad since Tuesday, with more streets closing as more buildings are deemed unsafe. It is only going to get worse, once everybody is back at work.

The emergency services kept telling us on Monday: "stop thinking about the quake, now get ready for the storm!" And they were right. That storm was the worst I had experienced since in Wellington. Streets often get flooded here, but on Tuesday the northbound lane of the SH1 linking Wellington to the Hutt Valley had transformed into a river.

Note to self: next time you feel a strong earthquake, do not go back to bed, go to FaceBook or other social media to inform your friends down the valley that you have a room for them should they need it.

Odile Stotzer

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