

# EARTHQUAKE EXPRESS

326 H STREET P.O. BOX 1644

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA THURSDAY APRIL 2, 1964.

In order to inform all friends and relatives of conditions in Anchorage, with the Camp Fire Girls and with me I am writing this newsletter to you all. It is the quickest way to let you all know that I am fine, Shamrock is fine and my house is undamaged. I'll try to add a personal note on the end of this general information so this won't seem too impersonal. I know you will all understand.

It has been frustrating for us up here not to be able to get word out to you as it must have been for you trying to get thru to us. To communicate now send air mail letters - they get here almost as usual. I have heard that people can phone in from outside but we still can't get long distance calls thru. Communications has been one of the major problems in this disaster. Anchorage even in normal times has the world's worst phone service. You can imagine what it was like with most of that disabled and overworked. Another problem in locating people was that many people are listed only by a box number where they receive their mail. Their street address is different and often the streets have no street signs and more often no street numbers. Hundreds of families including myself don't even have a phone. Those that do sometimes have as many as 10 parties on their line. Put this all together and you have one big problem in trying to locate and check on people. I was helping at the Red Cross for a few days when I couldn't get into my office and they had received close to 80,000 telegrams inquiring about friends and relatives. In an hour and a half of phoning on Tuesday I located 7. To say we were overwhelmed was an understatement! There were also an equal number of people trying to get messages sent out. By now I think most people have been able to contact the ones they needed to and casualty lists have been assembled with relatives notified. The worst most surely is over!

Going back to Friday afternoon I thought you might like to hear what things were like that fateful day. I'll tell you what happened to me. I was in my office finishing up a few odd jobs before I went to Good Friday services at my church down the street. The windows started rattling and I thought to myself - oh, another one of those tremors. This is not uncommon in Anchorage. As I turned to go to the office across the hall (we are on the 2nd floor) I felt an enormous jolt which threw me against the door jam; then the whole building was rolling and pitching with a rapid undulating motion that made it impossible to stand. I would have been thrown to the floor several times had I not been able to brace myself in the door jam. It took all my strength to hold myself there. I kept thinking it's got to stop - but the shaking and rolling didn't subside. It continued for at least two to two and a half minutes. Long enough for me to realize what was happening and to ponder the fact that I was on the second floor of one of the oldest frame buildings in town and I was sure the whole thing would crumble under the strain. I hollared to the secretary across the hall, "D-d-do you t-t-hink w-w-we should make a r-r-run for it?" My throat was all dry and I knew my respiration had trippled normal. She fell to the floor and held onto the corner of the desk; no answer came. She looked terribly pale and her eyes were like saucers. The fire extinguisher crashed to the floor at my feet as there was a slight lull in the havoc. I called to her to follow me as I attempted to slither down the hall toward the stairs. "Look out for that sky light!" a man in a doorway yelled. I managed to duck into another doorjam as the second wave of convulsions started. Several people in the hall held on for dear life for the next few minutes till all the tremors subsided. "Man, I didn't think this old place would take suce a beating" one of the men said as we were all making a quick exit. I was sure every step I took I'd plunge thru a loosened board. We all ran into the street to see what was happening. My car was rolling back and forth at the curb. I noticed I had a parking ticket and muttered, "damn meter maids!". As I looked up 4th Avenue I could see all the windows of the Northern Commercial Co. broken, it seemed to me then that we had suffered quite a serious quake, but I was sure it was just in the down town area. Charmie Burke came running out of the beauty parlor calling to me. Her hair was up in curlers and still wet. After a few minutes conference we decided to get the heck home. I went back to the office with some reluctance but I had run out without my coat or purse. Surveying the shambles of the office - everything was scrambled knee deep on the floor - beads, mints, papers - we didn't pause to check too much because we were anxious to get out of the downtown area and see how Charm's roommate Linda was at the L Street apts. (they are 14 stories high) The building didn't look too bad from a distance but as we got closer we could see huge cracks in the walls and many broken windows. A girl we met said she had been gaught in the bath tub on the 11th floor but had managed to grab some clothes and get out. I noticed she had bedroom slippers on as she tramped over a snow bank. Another girl we saw had run out in her bare feet. There was even someone caught at the 10th floor in the elevator - she said she knew she was done for but somehow the door opened and she got out. After

searching the parking lot we finally located Linda looking quite ashen. Her voice trembled as she described watching the walls crack open in their fourth floor apartment. She was carrying all the essentials her ski boots and a bag of hair curlers. We all decided we'd get what we could and head for my house where we thought it was safe. I wasn't so sure it was a good idea to go in the building again as we groped our way up the black stairwell. Somehow we managed to get to their apartment and quickly gathered armloads of clothes and blankets and made our way out. I was relieved to get into the open again as I had smelled gas inside. I drove ahead and the girls followed. There was an enormous traffic jam going up L Street - I saw later everything had slowed down to get across a huge three foot upheaval across Romig Hill. Remarkably, KFQD was on the air when I tried my car radio. They were telling everyone to go home, take care of their families, stay there and put supplies into the car in case another shock wave came. They felt a car was safer than a building to be in. It was then that I learned that the Turnagain area had been hard hit. All the windows in Caribou's store were broken I noted as I passed Northern Lights shopping center. I began to worry as I drove on what I'd find at home. I live only 1 1/2 miles from Turnagain. Everyone seemed to be headed for their homes in a stunned silent fashion. Occasionally you could hear a siren wail.

I found one very nervous dog and a completely upsidown house. Everything was turned over or upset - but strangely - only two hanging lights broken. Of course every object on every shelf in every building in town was dumped on the floor we found out later. Stores as well as householders had a gigantic job to do in cleaning up. Must admit, tho, my place didn't look too neat before the quake!

A quick check revealed all the neighbors were well. After clearing a path thru the house we all went over to the Mansons and had a bowl of hot moose soup which Jo had heated on a Coleman stove. Listening to the radio, a portable one, was the best way of getting news. Over and over they announced that people should go home and stay there. We surely didn't want to do anything else!

The extent of damage was slowly revealed as more reports dribbled in from all over town. The entire city had no water, electricity, gas, heat or phones. Civil Defence and city officials were frantically trying to set up emergency facilities. Both Ft. Richardson and Elmendorf Air Force Base had rushed to aid the situation with mobile power units etc. Fortunately all the main power and gas lines had been disconnected at the time of the quake which prevented many fires. Emergency shelters were set up at schools, Salvation Army, American Legion and the Red Cross had their disaster headquarters at the YMCA.

We listened to the radio till 1:00 a.m. as we huddled in blankets in the dark. Time and again they broadcast messages from separated family members. "Will you... contact Civil Defence headquarters... Does anyone have any information about... Several people made personal messages at the radio mobile units as they searched for loved ones. We were all grief stricken as we listened to Dick Fischer, Charm's employer, and his wife plead for news of their two boys and their baby's sitter. His house had been swept out to the inlet in the worst of the Turnagain bluff slide. It wasn't till noon the next day they found the children at the baby sitters home. They had not been able to reach any one. He finally went to bed, but slept only fitfully till 6:00 a.m. There had been intermittent tremors all night which kept waking us. We would sit up in bed and wait to see if they were bad enough to move to the car. None were. There was constant rumor of another quake coming. The subsequent tidal wave did almost as much damage to coastal towns as the quake did to Anchorage. Valdez, Cordova, Kodiak, Seward - were all badly damaged by the wave. It had subsided somewhat by the time it reached Anchorage. Seward was just getting ready to celebrate being chosen an All America City on the basis of their courage in building up the economy of the town in the face of serious setbacks. And now, they had the worst setback of all to overcome. Kodiak had to be evacuated as did Valdez and Whittier.

In the morning we planned to hike out to see if we could get a message thru. The first reports that had gone out were of "hundreds dead in a leveled Anchorage" and we knew families and friends must be frantic. There was no contact with the outside except some ham radios and military aircraft.

I hiked over to Turnagain and got in before they posted military guards. I found most of our Camp Fire friends well. The Albers had managed with all the family and grandchildren on the living room floor. We all felt lucky to be in one piece. The little three year old had been very upset all night and even then kept telling me "a terrible thing happened to their house - all the dishes broke" Many little children had had terrifying experiences.

After being fortified with some fireplace hot coffee, Sally and I went to see how some of the other folks has fared.

What a sight to view from the bluff!!! It truly looked like huge waves had swept 100 houses out to Cook Inlet. It was deceiving because your eye half expected to see rolling waves of water because of the odd angles of roof tops, pieces of lumber, cars, and walls and furniture carried out of their natural setting. One at first thought of a flood- but then realized that all these houses and parts of houses were held in gigantic mounds of earth. There was a sheer dropoff of 30 to 75 feet along a stretch of 2 miles. For those who know the area; Marston Dr., McCollie, Sonstrom, Bluff, the end of Clay Products and Chiligan were the hardest hit. We walked along, amazed at the terrible force of this quake and what it had done to all these beautiful homes in less than 5 minutes. Many houses had crumpled under the pressure and others had given way when the earth beneath them started sliding. Camp Fire friends who lost their homes were Jean Woodland., Marion Ruda, Alice Peck- Alice and her youngest girl who is a Blue Bird were in the house when a 15 foot wide crevasse opened up in the street in front of them and went right thru the house. The house was split in two as if by a giant ax- half in it's normal place and half in a hole 15 feet lower. There were tales of the mother and two children who rode their house a quarter of a mile out to the inlet with the motion of the quake and were rescued by helicopter. Many were stranded and so recovered. The rescue teams were able to search many inaccessible areas with the copters, Mrs. Lowell Thomas, Jr. and her children ran for their lives from their home and up the road- none too soon- for as they they looked back the house and all the street behind them dropped off and were swept away. Dr. Perry Mead suffered a tragedy in his family. Two of the seven known deaths in Anchorage were his children. All five children were fleeing from the house. Pam, who is a Camp Fire Girl in 5th grade saved her brother and sister but the oldest and youngest boy who were just behind them were swallowed in a crevasse that simply opened and then closed over them. Some of the houses that were not swept away are condemned and uninhabitable because foundations are slowly giving way. It is feared that as the spring breakup comes that even more damage will be apparent. Georgia Goudie's basement is slowly caving in, the Ganapoles get nearer the bluff every day as pieces of the cliff drop off. Some houses that appear to be all right now may not be as time goes on. This is also true of the downtown area.

It is indeed tragic to hear of all the terror and deaths that were a result of the earthquake. One should not however lose sight of the fact that while we mourn the loss of these fellow Alaskans everyone up here is amazed and grateful that the toll of deaths and injuries was remarkably light- considering the amount of property damage suffered. In Anchorage there are seven known dead a few unaccounted for and not more than fifty injured, Valdez had about 30 deaths out of 1200 people, Seward about 3 or 4 out of 3000, about 10 in Whittier out of 30 inhabitants. Homer, Palmer, Juneau, Fairbanks had light damage and no deaths. Kodiak had several deaths and was badly damaged.

In Anchorage one must also remember that the major damage was in the downtown and Turnagain areas only with some scattered major damage along L, M, N, and 3rd Street. 8th Avenue had 1½ blocks demolished and sunken in a hole 20 feet deep. This area is about 3 blocks from the Camp Fire office. The skyline will be radically different when demolition crews finish their work. For those who know Anchorage these buildings are down or will have to be torn down, L Street apartments, Knik Arms (maybe), Sherilyn Arms, Hill Building (this is deceiving because not a crack or broken window can be seen on the outside but the whole center of this 10 story building has caved in), Cordova Building (Bureau of Land Management here) 4 Seasons apartments - collapsed already, McKinley Building, J.C. Fenney's- the front fell off during the quake, Hillside apartments, Denali Theatre - already down, 5th Avenue Chrysler and the new Alaska Sales and Service - already down, Government Hill School, N.C., several new office buildings have fallen down too. West High will need major repairs and until they are done all high school students will double shift at East. Major buildings that are standing and suffered little or no damage are, Anchorage Times, Court House, Post Office, 4th Avenue Theatre, Anchorage News, all the banks, Providence and Presbyterian Hospitals, Alaska Native Service Hospital and City Hall and Police Station.

Utilities are slowly being turned on thru the city. We had lights by Saturday night and water Sunday night. In the interim we were strategically located right next to a private woods which took care of the sanitary facilities. Others not so fortunate lived in more densely populated neighborhoods. One did have to observe some caution in the knee deep snow however! The only real discomfort has been our lack of gas which prevented us from getting heat and cooking- except in an electric fry pan. We subsisted on sandwiches for 4 to 5 days as we helped at the Red Cross headquarters. At night we just pile under 6 wool blankets and are comfortable till we have to get up and see our breath in the air. It has been between 10 and 30 degrees all this week which is not too bad. Most people are glad it didn't happen a month ago when it was 20 to 30 below zero. Whatever situation folks find themselves in here they can find some encouragement in the fact that they are luckier than some of their fellow citizens. The worst off are happy just to be alive.

Some commentators have expected vast numbers of Alaskans to flee the ruins and move from the state. We hate to disappoint them but I only know of a few families who were going to move and then only temporarily. Most every one I know is staying put and getting ready to dig in for the big cleanup job.

One advantage for us up here is that we can get a better perspective of the state of things in Anchorage and other cities too. The news media have naturally focused on all the destruction and deaths. We up here know that only two areas of town- important ones we grant but still only two- are severely damaged. The rest of the city is relatively unharmed. Live goes on, business as usual. Only a few street are now blocked off; stores are open; there are plenty of supplies and transportation and communications are pretty well restored to normal. The highway to Seattle is open (Anik River bridge is damaged but passable), the ferries are unharmed, and Gov. Egan is negotiating for federal aid to repair some of the public utilities. Talk has it that there will be plenty of work this year- you can understand why. Housing may be in short supply but Alaskans are used to coping with the weather, small space, and inconveniences. I hope this doesn't sound like we are glossing over problems and oversimplifying them. There will be lots of hardship and hard work endured before things are right again. What I'm trying to point out is that it seems people here are not overwhelmed or defeated by this blow. They are standing ready to start fresh and hope to rebuild what was lost- and make it better if possible.

The Camp Fire program has suffered its second setback of the year as many of you know. On New Years Day the building that housed our office burned to the ground. we lost everything, but did have fire insurance to replace office machinery and supplies. We just got relocated February 10 and had dug in to replace records and files and furniture when .... The surplus furniture we were to get got fouled up in paperwork or red tape and because we weren't able to get it before March 28 the emergency absorbed all available surplus furniture and supplies we were to have. At the moment we have the essentials- typewriter, adding machine, and mimeograph so we can keep going. The furniture is something else--- I don't know what it is doing for our public image but it does not exceed two folding chairs(one bent) and a rickety table. The quake did not do too much damage to the contents of our office (what was there to hurt) Total loss: 4 squashed boxes of mints- and we ate them. The building has been temporarily approved for occupancy. So we will be able to stay here I hope- we will be hard pressed to find new quarters with all the loss of other office space. If the 3rd Avenue bluff starts to give way we'll take to a tent in my driveway, and borrow some wig-wag flags from the Boy Scouts.(No phones in my neighborhood). The present location does feel a bit more wobbly now but this may just be my conditioned reflexes. Our Camp Fire Board will meet to make some plans about our next moves. We want to find some appropriate project for the organization to undertake in the restoration of our city. The Chugach Council faces some difficulties, most of them have \$\$ on them. Last years Chest Campaign was not an overpowering success(we got about 50% of what was approved) and next fall we think the community may be more aware of the worth of the Chest agencies but many will be unable to give due to their financial setbacks. But somehow we all feel we can solve these problems. Do not feel sorry for us- the program is growing and is taking hold in the community. Earthquakes and fires and being poor don't matter too the children who are getting a good experience in a group. All this, you see, gives me and all our fine board and leaders reason enough to keep plugging!

Do send letters and news to the above box number. Be assured that things are getting back to normal. There would be some who doubt me -but Alaska is really a fine place to live! Come see for yourself.

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Just a note to let you know we are all ok - only a few frayed nerves and a bad cold to show for it. C.F.C. are operating - on the customary shoestring - but still operating. Hope all you folks and your family are ok. Was Al down here during the quake? I thought I heard his name on the radio. Write soon - Joan