Earthquake, January 17, 1994
Santa Monica, California

I: Lewis

It was chilly that Sunday night when we came home to our apartment, the air a bit acid, a combination of pollution and low fog. I remarked on it, and remember the slightly orange light of street lamps in damp air.

A few small quakes in past weeks had prompted us to think of safe spots; in the bedroom we'd chosen the doorway of the walk-in closet, a little room with a lot of cross-framing. When the whole building, and everything in it, suddenly began to whip back and forth, we leapt from bed and huddled on the floor by the closet door. For half a minute, with a deafening roar, everything moved in violent waves, then slowed to an occasional spasm, like a dying animal. It happened so quickly and so captured all my senses that I was never really afraid. I was simply <u>in</u> it until it slowed and stopped. My one physical feeling afterwards was the desire to take a shit.

The electricity was gone, with its background noise and light, but the car alarms on the street were dutifully calling their owners. 4:31 a.m. Peering from the closet door, the first thing I saw was the night sky through the bedroom's French windows, which was strange: that window is normally covered with a large blind (it had fallen, its hardware ripped from the wall). We got up and dressed, putting on layers of clothes for the chilly night. We wanted to get out of the building in case of aftershocks or gas fires.

But I haven't really described that half-minute. I've since listened to others describe it. "A very big shaking and rattling," one says. "As if someone took the house and shook it," says another. A man in the newspaper said he thought the sun had exploded, a modern fantasy (no "judgment day," only the scientific "sun explosion").

The thing had tremendous authority. Something was <u>coming through</u>. The building whipped about and heaved up and down. (In

a friend's apartment, it threw the lid from the tank behind the toilet, then threw the water out.) It was sudden; I was simply awake and in it when before I was asleep and not in it. I didn't really think about its size and duration; it was as if they had been expressed immediately. It was like being rolled in gritty ocean waves, a dark green torrent boxing the ears. It put one in mind of an animal, a snake that thrashed and shook, all rock, gravel, silt and cement. But what animal could toss the city around like that from beneath the earth? Later I kept thinking of the Norse poets trying to describe the end of their world--"gapes the grisly earth-girdling Serpent," "the Midgard Serpent writhing in giant fury."

And there was the noise, a rumble that is the sound of all things near and far falling and breaking, the noise of the building lashing about, the noise of plaster sheering from the bricks, and the radiators coming loose from the walls, locked doors wrenching open, mortar snapping and being ground to dust between cracking bricks, and the crockery, glass, books, flower pots, lamps and desks being thrown around the room, chunks of the ceiling falling. And that is just the treble clef, below which there must have been the sound of the earth itself, the lowest of low frequency waves coming through the ring of mountains and the ancient river-bed alluvial flat lands of Santa Monica, a miles-long wave propagated in stone and silt, a tone heard in the skeleton more than the ear.

And later I thought of such a sudden violence as a rupture in temporal scale, an avalanche of geological time breaking into the protective membrane of human rhythms, the millennium it should take to raise the Santa Susana Mountains fourteen inches suddenly compressed into a few human heartbeats like a bullet shot into muscle, as if your senses were suddenly irradiated by the aeons laying down their beds of fossil and then were just as suddenly returned to the old temporal flow, the dissipating chill of a particular night on earth, the breathing of another animal huddled against you, your back pressed into the green plastic laundry basket in a closet.

So we got dressed. We had done a tiny bit of earthquake preparation (bottled water in the cupboard, canned food) but we had no flashlight, and so lit kitchen matches to find our way about. Everything in the apartment, loose or fixed, seemed to have moved. The bookcase in the living room had toppled, and a large vase on top of it had shattered. In the kitchen another large vase from a top shelf had broken on the tiles. A desk fell over, the computer on the floor, a half-dozen keys knocked from its keyboard (now on the floor like a wino with bad teeth). Three of the fake corbels pretending to hold the fake beams in the living room had fallen.

We gathered a suitcase full of stuff; we went to the bathroom. (Later with friends on the street we chatted about who'd done what before fleeing. "I pissed, but I can't remember where," said one.) Our cat had disappeared. The apartment has no safety lighting, and the fire doors had all swung closed, so the halls were dark, silent, and smelling of plaster dust. Lighting matches we made our way to the street where people milled about, some in pajamas and bathrobes, a few barefoot. A radio finally told us that it was a 6.6 quake. I felt distinctly disappointed; I was sure it was a 7.

A man went by on a bicycle saying "better get out of here, there's a smell of gas." A half-mile away a gas explosion had taken the back wall off an apartment building shortly after the quake, but on our block I smelled no gas, just the sour air I'd smelled the night before. Later another man walked down the sidewalk saying gloomily that he could smell gas. The doom sayers had been briefly released from their dank apartments.

We went for a walk. In front of each apartment building, the clustered inhabitants. A rabbit cage on the sidewalk, rabbit inside. A portable black & white TV sat on the sidewalk saying "there's been an earthquake." We came up California to Fourth St. In the 5:00 am darkness we could see the top floor of a five-story brick building, the Charmont, in ruins: whole walls had fallen away, the sidewalk was strewn with rubble. It was so dark that it

took a minute to see what had happened, but slowly you realized you were seeing the night sky through what used to be the top floor. It was uncanny, like seeing a face missing a nose or a cheek. (No one was hurt; we came upon some people later, much stunned, who wanted us to know it was a rent-controlled building; one older tenant, a woman with a few belonging in a plastic bag, was wandering around a nearby parking lot, trying to remember where she'd parked her car.)

In the early light the office building that houses the Getty Center--12 stories, black glass and white cement--looked wholly intact; no broken windows, the emergency lighting on. We came down Fourth St. to Wilshire Blvd. and turned the corner. The plate glass windows of every storefront on Wilshire between Fourth and Third were broken, the sidewalk a wilderness of broken glass. The owner of Mike Caruso's Gentlemen's Apparel paced in his doorway talking into a cellular telephone (ordering plywood?).

We came back up Third Street and discovered a payphone. It had a dial tone and so, lighting kitchen matches to see the key pad, we phoned our relatives, most of whom heard the news first from us. As I was calling someone jiggled the phone booth and I leapt back. (This jumpiness lasted a week; a spouse rolling over in bed was always good for a quick panic.)

We walked to the palisades overlooking the Pacific. A young woman on the street corner wanted help with jumper cables; she had left her headlights on for two hours and now couldn't start her car. I had no desire to help her. I noticed this with detached interest: my helping persona had apparently fled. I thought the woman was an idiot; I thought she should learn how a car works if she wanted to own one--and walked on. At the palisades I remember a tall street lamp with its glass globe cocked at a forty-five degree angle. The lights were on below us, on Pacific Coast Highway and on the Santa Monica pier.

We went back to the Getty office building around 9:00 am, hoping to get into our offices (I think we imagined them to be a safe spot; I vaguely saw myself crawling under my desk and going

to sleep). But now the skin of the building was strangely discolored on the higher floors; it seemed to be leaking. A security man let us in a side entrance and we climbed the service stairs (intact, though every sheetrock seam had been revealed, plaster dust everywhere). The Getty occupies the fourth through the tenth floors of this building; we went to the security desk on four and asked what needed to be done.

They needed help with a flood. A dropped ceiling on the ninth floor, shifting back and forth, had sheered a dozen heads from the sprinkler system. Now the ninth floor was two-inches deep in water, the eighth was one inch deep, and it was raining on seven. Later we learned that the few guards in the building at 4:30 am had gone up floor-by-floor looking for damage. When they found water on seven they stopped to cover the photograph collection with plastic sheeting (I have since seen, hidden behind books on the shelves, the rolls of sheeting they keep on hand "for emergencies"). They say it is lucky the guards didn't go higher, as they would have been overwhelmed.

We went to the eighth floor and started moving water. The strategy was to pour it down one of the two inner stair wells. We had brooms and buckets and mops and waste baskets and one useless shop vac. There was sufficient water that one could pretty much bail with a waste basket until it was full, carry it to the stair well, yell a warning, and dump. We did this for maybe two hours. I remember pausing once in a sunny conference room; on the wall there was a large, delicate Susan Rothenberg drawing of a horse, undamaged and looking more than ever like a cave painting; below in the bright city of Santa Monica smoke rose from two burning apartment buildings; the distant mountains looked wonderful with their garland of blue-brown smog.

On the eighth floor it seemed as if all file drawers had rolled open and then all filing cabinets had fallen over, some of them face down in the flood. Art books, files, papers, invoices, family photographs, plants..., lay in the water, but it was impossible to know where to begin so mostly we moved water. We went up to the ninth floor once, which seemed worse, I think

because more of its ceiling had fallen. We went to the fifth floor library where open books lay knee-deep between the shelves, like truckloads of split firewood.

No one seemed to be in charge. A man in a hard hat was pointed out to me as the leader but when I toured the ninth floor with him and tried to get him to decide where to put us to work he looked around perplexed, said it was hard to know what to do, and walked away. The people who actually run the Getty were all dealing with their own damaged homes, of course, and I heard occasional complaints that the emergency phone list didn't seem to be bearing the fruit it was designed to bear. Nonetheless, when you think that the telephones in fact worked, that Santa Monica's electricity returned within hours, and that the quake hit while everyone was in bed, you realize we were spared whole other orders of chaos.

After a few hours we left to find something to eat. I had had a headache all morning, the backs of my legs ached, and my hair itched with plaster dust.

We went back to our apartment. The electricity had returned, but not the gas. There were large cracks in the outer walls. The cat showed up, having apparently hidden somewhere in the apartment. I heated soup in the microwave oven and made coffee in the electric coffee pot; Patsy ate some cereal. We began to clean house, picking up the glass in the kitchen and living room, mopping the floors to get the glass splinters up. We put the desk back together. The air was filled with masonry dust--brick dust, plaster dust, cement dust, pulverized grout and pulverized mortar. Every surface was gritty, and the hairs in my nose were gritty. I swept and washed the dining room table, then we took each book and dusted it, stacking our library on the table. I swept the crumbled plaster into piles on the wall-to-wall carpet while Patsy sat at the table doing the crossword puzzle from the Sunday New York Times.

It had become clear to me soon after the earthquake that ahead of us lay long days of boredom spiked with random anxiety

attacks. A friend had once suggested we might enjoy a trip to an old resort hotel near San Diego ("La Valencia" in La Jolla), so while we were still at the Getty I had called and made a reservation. (When I first dialed the phone a cheery recording said: "Due to the (pause) mudslides in your area we are unable to complete your call....") After cleaning up we tried to decide if we should leave. Patsy curled up under a blanket on the bed and I slouched in a chair. We were weary, dirty and disoriented, and it was hard to get a clear picture of what was happening in the city at large. On the one hand, having cleaned up, I felt maybe the worst was over. We are part of a group here; it made sense to stick with the others. The "authorities" were telling people not to go anywhere; we weren't sure the roads would be open. On the other hand, it did not look like much would happen soon; because there was no gas there was no hot water; we weren't sure how we'd feed ourselves, where we'd sleep, or even <u>if</u> we'd sleep, considering the aftershocks.

So we packed suitcases, loaded the car, and drove south--sticking to city streets for about ten miles, then getting on the freeway. In fact we had no trouble leaving town; the damage lessened quickly as we went south, the roads were open, and we were in La Jolla before dark. It was a little eerie to be in a place where life moved along as usual--the beautiful sea coast, the fancy shops with their January sales, the sushi bars, a piano player in the hotel lounge--and we felt a kind of survivor guilt, knowing that if we hadn't been so tired and confused we would at least have tried to bring some of our friends with us.

In the hotel I took a shower and washed my hair twice. Then I washed the masonry dust from my hair brush. I got out our portable computer, a PowerBook, and cleaned the dust from its case, only to find it had been smashed by one of those falling corbels. The screen had a spider-web crack and the faint rainbow colors of an oil-slick. (Repair bill, two weeks later, $920.) There were pieces of red brick in the carrying case.

We watched some TV, but had to turn it off; the newscasters hover over the most traumatic sights, and I found myself choking

up every time someone on the tube started to weep. We went to sleep around 9:30, or tried to, that is: Patsy fell asleep and woke with a start after a few minutes, then began weeping hysterically. When I thought back to the moment of the earthquake I found it recreated itself in great detail in my body, a strong somatic memory, complete with an adrenaline rush. (This faded after two or three days, which oddly disappointed me--now this turns into a verbal memory, I thought.) When we finally got to sleep we must have slept ten hours.

I got up early and sneaked out to read the paper and drink coffee at the local Starbucks. Reading about the quake in the New York Times, I too began to weep. A few days later I became intensely irritable, and remained so for several days. Everything made me angry, a slow door on an elevator, a waiter who didn't come right away, a loved-one fumbling with a key. When a stoplight changed to green and the man behind me honked I had a strong desire to bash his brains out.

We stayed in La Jolla two nights, then drove back to Santa Monica. The City had by then sealed our apartment. Engineers were going building by building through the city putting up green, yellow, and red tags. The yellow cardboard on our door read "LIMITED ENTRY" and "Entry for emergency purposes only."

We were living on the third floor of a 1928 apartment building, the Embassy. When we moved in last September I had seen an old sign on the main entry: "This is an unreinforced masonry building. Unreinforced masonry buildings may be unsafe in the event of a major earthquake." That's the sign on the left; on the right a slightly newer one reads: "This URM building has been Upgraded & Strengthened to conform to State & City minimum Earthquake Safety Standards." It was the capital letters in the second sign had put me at ease.

I now know that the outer walls of the Embassy are three courses of brick. There is apparently no additional wood framing, except to frame doors and windows. The brick walls, that is, carry the weight of the floors and the roof. The second sign

refers to the fact that three years ago the building was retrofitted to help it survive an earthquake. In an old masonry building they fear most that a quake will send the walls out far enough that the floors or roof will fall (this is what happened to the fifth floor of the Charmont two blocks away, though its roof never fully fell). When they retrofit, they bolt the floors and roof to the walls with steel plates and angle iron. In our building after the quake several third-story walls had serious cracks (ones that go all the way through the wall), but no wall had moved out. The cracks are worrisome nonetheless; in the event of a good aftershock there are three or four places where a wall might fall (two of them in our apartment). The engineers didn't think the roof would go, I gather, as they allowed the rest of the building to be occupied. But perhaps the rest of the building is just back to "may be unsafe in the event" and "minimum Earthquake Safety Standards." (In fact, the City sealed the entire building during the first weekend because they wanted the owners to produce a letter declaring it "safe"; many post-earthquake decisions were being guided by fear of lawyers.)

In Santa Monica, 140 buildings are now unsafe to occupy; 3,400 apartment units were seriously damaged. We are about 12 miles from the epicenter, but the town seems to have been more damaged than others at an equal distance because of the age of local buildings combined with the soft alluvium soil that the city is built on.

Our hassles arising from the loss of our apartment were minimal as we are lucky enough to be here as guests of the Getty Center. The Getty leases, long term, a number of local apartments to house visiting scholars. While all the details got sorted out they put us, and a half-dozen of our colleagues, in a local hotel for a week (the bill was $1,500 in our case). Then they moved us into a modern apartment across the street from the old one. Modern apartments here are wood-frame and have <u>lots</u> of plywood in the walls, which stiffens them; the one we are in has almost no wall cracks, and those it does have mostly reveal where the

builder tried to finish around a window without cutting a new piece of plaster board. The new apartment gets a lot of light, and has an extra bedroom. It shakes in the aftershocks, but we don't get out of bed unless there's something over 5.0.

Two weeks after the quake we had dinner with a couple--Janet Sternburg, a writer and film consultant, and Steven Lavine, the president of the California Institute of the Arts. Cal Arts is a private college in Valencia, set up about 20 years ago mostly with Disney money. It has 1,000 students. They teach art, dance, film, video, music, and theater in one large building, "all the arts under one roof."

The earthquake almost destroyed this college. Lavine estimates they suffered between $10 and $30 million in damage (their entire endowment is about $25 million). In the large building, two huge heating and cooling units shifted back and forth, destroying most of the duct work. A formerly containable asbestos problem has turned into an uncontained asbestos emergency. One dormitory is uninhabitable; others had no hot water for a week. The semester had just started; students were still allowed to withdraw with full funds, and many were. There was a gas leak on a service road that they decided to live with rather than lose all power and all student. Classes are currently being taught in a warehouse leased from Lockheed, a synagogue, a travel agency, and so on.

By the evening of this dinner our lives were more or less back in order. We were back at work at the Getty; we had settled into the new apartment. I had been trying to stop talking about the quake. But here we were back in it. Poor Steven seemed to be in shock. It was hard to know what to say to him. Toward the end of the meal he said "I now realize that 'all the arts under one roof' may also means 'all your eggs in one basket.'" Sternburg said she had put a muffin in the microwave, set the timer for 44 seconds, the actual length of the quake, and waited, thinking how short is the time that can change lives so fully and so inexorably.

II: Patsy

It's been two weeks since the earthquake. The morning it happened it seemed as if it changed life forever--that I'd never feel safe again. And yet, here we are. Terror, like pain, fades, becomes a story--even the body lets go. The sway in the blood doesn't happen so much, adrenalin stops jumping when the table wobbles.

I was actually awake when it happened, lying in the dark, idle thoughts dribbling through my head. Everything began to shake, the blinds, the floor, the bed. Lew jerked up and instantly we were out of bed and in the closet. There had been a strong jolt the previous Sunday afternoon, and then an aftershock that night when we went to bed, so this was oddly familiar and we had already decided what we would do. What was not familiar was how afraid I was. We huddled on the floor, arms around each other, while everything rumbled and shook. I didn't even think it was that big an earthquake or that we might die. I just felt Fear. I could tell Lew didn't, or maybe I was feeling it for both of us. It seemed to go on for a long time. "You're shaking like a leaf," he said as the thing went into what turned out to be its final rumbles, which was comforting--maybe something ordinary was happening if the ordinary metaphor adequately described it.

Those in charge of timing these things later reported that it was 44 seconds. Remembering our leap into the closet, the helpless waiting, the absolute takeover of forces well beyond ourselves (power greater than ourselves?), remembering us crouched there--as I lay down in bed that Monday night, I suddenly couldn't stop crying. I kept feeling it was happening again, my body holding the memory of how afraid I'd been. I finally got to sleep by concentrating on my breathing, saying to myself, "I'm here, and I'm breathing"--zen ordinariness at last making perfect sense. Just here, just breathing. That, of course, was the point. It just happened, the terribly feared thing, the worst thing that could happen if we went to California. The number came up January

17, 1994, and here we were. But then it was over. The room stopped shaking and we came out of the closet.

Part of what was so scary was that at one point the lights went out--street lights, night light--clearly the systems were down; the planet had taken over. So we came out of the closet, feeling our way in a dark world, stumbling over unfamiliar stuff on the floor. The blind over the French window was slumped enormously against the chair; the mirror hanging at a 45 degree angle, the dresser drawers open, one of them with my new chenille sweater, still unworn. I had no idea what to do next, but Lew was quite sure the thing to do was get dressed. I couldn't think why, but I did see that shoes would be a good idea and so mechanically put on all the things I'd taken off a few hours earlier until I got down to my feet, and then started feeling around in the dark for my glasses. We had no flashlight, but an expedition to the kitchen yielded matches. Lighting them was a great relief. Dark and blindness was where we lived now, so the light of a match seemed a miracle. For one thing, it revealed my glasses in the drawer of the nighttable, stuck open and wet from spilled water.

In the living room the bookcase was fallen over, a vase smashed, stuff everywhere. In the kitchen the desk was all over the floor, and my Macintosh and printer; the microwave was half off the top of the fridge. We packed some bottled water, some cans of tuna, and a coffee cake I'd bought that day. I'd been greedily anticipating it when we went to bed; now I wasn't even sure if we should bring it along. It, or anything. Now that we were so clearly in the midst of chaos, it did seem as if we should get out. I couldn't find Bitburg anywhere and vaguely imagined she'd gone out the window and down the fire escape.

Out in the hall it was totally dark. The fire doors had closed, making the building feel abandoned and isolated. We made our way down the stairs lighting matches and then feeling for the handles on the firedoors until we got to the lobby and the front door. On the sidewalk was our little group, everyone dazed and amazed, but already reporting 6.5--the real thing. Six and a half. The next hours, till dawn, were strange and aimless. We stood

around, bonding with each other's predawn faces. It seemed wrong to leave the group but it kept drifting into little pieces, with sudden bursts as someone would try to take charge and count noses. "Where's Pierre?" No Pierre? Someone went back in to get Pierre. What about Mrs. Haskell? She's about 80, and the building's manager. Shortly thereafter she was herded out in a terrycloth bathrobe and bare feet; she had no idea where the gas shut-off was.

Eventually Lew and I went for a walk around the block, where we encountered the rubble-strewn sidewalk, the empty space where the top floor wall had been on that so pretty building at Fourth and California. Someone on the other side of the street yelled, "Get away from the building!" and I leapt into the street heart in mouth. It seemed perfectly likely that the whole thing might fall to the ground right in front of us. We walked past the Getty building which was wonderfully untouched-looking and even had some lights on. A guard seemed to be walking aimlessly across the lobby. On Wilshire the sidewalk was covered in smashed plate glass. The menswear store, the wig store, the bakery, the recycled designer clothing, the drugstore--a burglar alarm wailing pointlessly--and on the corner of Third, Lenscrafters with the breeze blowing through all its fancy optical machinery. "Oh dear," I said. "I was going to get new glasses this week."

In the newspaper machine that day's NY Times was already there. Headlines about the middle east, though--nothing about us. I suddenly realized it was normal morning on the east coast and those who loved us were listening to the news. Then we were passing a pay phone, and there was a dial tone and I had my AT&T card in my wallet, just like in the ads. So we stood on the dark street and talked to our relatives. At the other booth was a Russian couple trying to call somebody. But it wouldn't take their quarter and they couldn't speak to the operator. I tried to help them for a while, but in fact there was no operator, just a recording saying there was a lot of demand for lines right now. You never know when the opportunity to use spoken Russian will come up, so don't get caught like I did without even one word.

In the early daylight, we took a second walk around the block, this time with our Getty colleagues the Fanes and their friend Luigi who is head of the Italian department at UCLA. Luigi began clowning around about the menswear now open to the street and finally was unable to resist offering us a wooden duck from the display window. Until that morning, this was a store that had a little sign in the window saying the display was for the benefit of those who appreciate fine clothing. The owner of the store, clearly a man guarding as well as appreciating his merchandise, silently, possibly uncertainly, watched the cheerful, oblivious Italian professor fooling with his duck. On the next corner was a man lying on the sidewalk with a coat over his head. As we approached, a cop car pulled up and two young cops got out. The guy on the street started up in fear and one cop said, "Did you sleep through that, man?"

All over the street people were gathered in front of their buildings; also gathered were cars, double parked with people camped around them. A lot of folks here move instinctively to their cars in a disaster. And as it began to get light, Lew got our car out of the garage and parked it next to a surely meaningless red line on the curb. We got some pillows and stuff out of the apartment, which felt very creepy to be in, and not knowing what to do and becoming cranky, we drove around the block to the Getty. I had some vague idea that we'd move into our offices, that the place was an unharmed island, the diamond as big as the Ritz, and we'd go there. This time the guy in the lobby was wearing a hard hat and eager to impress upon me that this was a major, major disaster. His idea was that sure we could come in, and start volunteering. "Go to the fourth floor and ask what you can do to help," he said seriously. I was still imagining setting up house in my office, but we followed him up a flight of back stairs--the non-corporate bones of the building--to the eighth floor.

It seemed something aquatic had gone wrong. Several floors were awash. One stairwell was pouring water; at the top of

another a disorderly phalanx of security guards were using brooms and squeegees to shove water out of offices. We began to help. I was incredibly tired, but it was better than wandering the streets. This was work that had to be done and almost mechanically we did it. It seemed sort of like the labors of Psyche--an unimaginable amount of water spread out in every direction, behind file cabinets and under drafting tables, floating paper cups and soaking into spilled books as if they were sponges. People kept arriving with inadequate equipment: elaborate orange extension cords hooked up to shop vacs clogged with some other day's mess. Somebody arrived with a case of Evian water. A security guard came up to me and rather emotionally thanked me for helping. "No problem," I remember saying casually, swigging from my Evian. You got a problem? Call Insomnia Woman.

When one section of the floor was down to the soggy carpet, we took a break and got someone to let us on to the sixth floor, where our offices are. It wasn't wet, but every box of photographs on the floor-to-ceiling stacks that are the main feature of our little area was toppled down. It was impossible to go between shelves, and even more than the water it spoke of the size of the event. Every box, every book in the library, every computer monitor...everything thrown. In some offices ceiling tiles were down. I made a phone call, during which there was an aftershock and I found myself calling elsewhere from under a desk.

I had thought we would just go back and mop till we dropped, but it turned out we were going back to our apartment. It was a slightly chilly, bright day by that time. On the sidewalk we found our neighbor Ramon, and together we stared up at the cracks in our building. A man and a boy stopped to stare with us and to utter amazed little cries about the demise of the church a few blocks away: the steeple tower down, the school--the boy's own school!--missing a wall. I was suddenly hungry and found our sack of food in the garden where we'd left it and began stuffing pieces of the coffee cake into my mouth. It was a relief to be there in the chilly air, but there was a blankness to the day. Life was at a halt, there was nothing but the moment, the clean light, hunger,

and the sweet taste of the pastry. Ramon, who had so coolly advised me the week before that all you had to do was know where you'd go and have some bottled water on hand, wasn't hungry, didn't want to reenter the building, and only wanted to walk off his disorientation. Working at the Getty had brought us to some senses--to some sense of life resuming, of work to be done. But the moment was a little empty. What was, for instance, our relationship to other people? Changed? the same?

Back in our apartment I looked at the living room wall and knew we couldn't live there anymore. The phone was working, so we called some more people. The power was on, so we made soup in the microwave. Bitburg reappeared, so we hugged her. We picked up glass, stacked books on the table, swept brick and plaster dust off things. Something was dripping in the bathroom. We made the bed and began piling things on it that we might take with us if we went somewhere. I thought sitting quietly and doing a crossword puzzle might be relaxing. The cat purred. Lew worked his way into the bathroom, where he neatly piled broken tile and cleaned the tub and the floor. I lay down on the bed, thinking a nap would stop the rubbery feeling. The bed was not sleepable. We decided to go to La Jolla.

La Jolla seemed quite notable for its stability. Our hotel room was large and undamaged, the hot water worked, the staff hustled around looking for a vacuum cleaner to help Lew hose off the PowerBook. The one drawback, as it turned out, was a large TV that featured on every channel news of the earthquake. Scared, homeless people, predictions of aftershocks, unreassuring seismologists, avid reporters. Dan Rather, in field gear, was boldly challenging a structural engineer, a fellow who'd seen a few years and who finally said, "Look around at how much <u>didn't</u> fall down." Still, the sense of having narrowly escaped apocalypse increased and culminated in my sense that the earthquake was pursuing us as I tried to drop off to sleep.

In the morning, though, the room was flooded with light, the Cove blue in the sun, tea and oranges and the last of the coffee

cake--we still had our little bag of provisions with us (including tuna and can opener), traveling like like Third Worlders with provisions against disaster. In the afternoon we walked the cliff path around the Cove, once again just tourists on the beautiful earth. I thought of the coast walk we did in Padstow, Cornwall, last summer, at the end of a day that had included a quarrel in a tea shop and a torrentially rained out expedition. That was like this: beauty and calm after a shaking of the foundations. Only this had a wonderful reality/unreality to it. Nice soap in the bathroom and wreckage on the TV.

We managed to get in touch with several people at the Getty, and learned a bit about our group future (a hotel on the beach in Santa Monica, as it turned out). Our group had been so afflicted with random wandering Monday morning it was hard to know where our community was. In the early hours, when we were helping shovel water at the Getty, it was clear we were doing the right thing, and yet it seemed so extreme. Our apartment was a shambles; the streets were full of glass; there was no telling if life would go on as before, and yet here we were heroically pitching in. Though it was calming and good to have an occupation, it didn't feel normal. It made more sense when we set the microwave straight and were eating soup in our battered apartment. Of course, the next day the apartment had a yellow tag on the door and we never slept there again. Our return from La Jolla was followed by a week overlooking the heated pool and jacuzzi at Loew's Hotel, then new digs in another building. At night, while I may dream of earthquakes, when the aftershocks come I am reluctant even to get out of bed.

February 3, 1994
Santa Monica, California