

The Canterbury earthquakes: Stories from Cashmere Primary School



**The Canterbury earthquakes:
Stories from Cashmere Primary School**

Compiled by Carol Mutch and Libby Gawith

Supported by Peter O'Connor & Sarah Yates

**with
Cashmere School children, staff and families**

Dedication

This collection of earthquake stories is dedicated to Lisa Willems whose untimely death touched all the members of the Cashmere School community. That she is mentioned by so many of the participants in this project is a tribute to her memory.

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Preface

The Canterbury earthquakes

On September 4, 2010, Cantabrians in Christchurch city, Waimakariri and Selwyn districts were woken at 4.35 am by a large earthquake, measuring 7.1 on the Richter scale. Centred near the town of Darfield, the earthquake damaged roads, railway lines, sewer and water pipes, chimneys, buildings and homes. Residents were introduced to liquefaction, which oozed up from the ground and spread across the landscape, especially where the ground was sandy, the soil was loosely compacted or it was near current or old waterways. Some suburbs were also subject to widespread flooding. Despite the size of the earthquake and the widespread damage, no-one lost their lives.

On February 22, 2011, at 12.51 pm, a major aftershock, measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale, centred much closer to the city shook an already fragile city. It was lunchtime on a working day. Younger children were at school or early childhood centres. Many secondary schools were closed for a teacher stop work meeting. In the city, people were going about their business. An upthrust of twice the force of gravity appeared to throw the buildings up in the air and back down again. 185 people were to lose their lives, most in two buildings – the Canterbury Television (CTV) and Pyne Gould Corporation (PGC) buildings. More damage to homes, workplaces, roads and infrastructure. More liquefaction; more distress and dislocation.

Canterbury residents were to experience over 12,000 aftershocks – many over 5 on the Richter scale and, in 2011, two more over 6 on June 13 and December 23. From the destruction and on-going uncertainty emerged stories of trauma and courage, determination and humour. The stories from Cashmere Primary School's community exemplify the range of experiences and emotions. They provide a snapshot of the trauma, trials and frustrations – a mother who never came home; a father whose firm worked in the PGC building; a teacher who lived in the eastern suburbs; and a family coping with the loss and rebuilding of their home. At the same time, they tell of the humanity and generosity of those who looked out for others; of a principal who had to manage a situation she could never have imagined; of teachers who kept a brave face despite their own situations; of parents doing the best for their children.

The strength of this set of stories is not just in the detailed recollections of adults but also in listening to the voices of children. Children from across the school shared their memories, their anxieties and their hopes for the future. They told stories with thoughtfulness and candour. Some stories were sad; some stories were funny. They had vivid recall of exactly where they were and what they were doing at the times of the largest earthquakes. They showed courage and resilience in their willingness to tell their stories despite the emotion that sometimes bubbled up from inside them. They had a positive outlook on the future. It is hoped that the stories shared here will provide an insight into their experiences and how it has shaped our children now and as our future citizens and leaders.

Canterbury schools tell their earthquake stories

The research project

Carol Mutch, a Christchurch resident but, post-earthquake, working in the School of Critical Studies in Education at the University of Auckland, applied for a grant from UNESCO to undertake a project in which Canterbury schools could tell their earthquake stories. The aim was for school communities to record their stories for themselves, their city and the nation.

Primary schools representing a cross section of the different schools in Canterbury, agreed to take part in this research project. Cashmere Primary School wanted their school stories to be collected through interviews and written up in a commemorative book. Not only would it record their stories, but it would also be available for future students and staff to read and appreciate what it was like for the school during and after the earthquakes.

Video interviews with staff and students were carried out by Carol Mutch and Peter O'Connor on Tuesday November 12, 2012. Audio-recorded interviews were carried out by Carol Mutch and Libby Gawith on Wednesday November 13, 2012. All participants were voluntary. Children were interviewed in small groups, often from the same class or the same family. The principals and teachers were interviewed separately. Family members chose to be interviewed together or as individuals.

The interviews were transcribed by Libby Gawith and edited into the stories that follow. The illustrations are from a mural completed by Cashmere School children after the earthquakes. The photographs were all taken by Carol Mutch. An edited DVD of children's interviews accompanies the book.



Children at Cashmere Primary School

Tim and Elizabeth Cross

Tim and Elizabeth's stories

Tim and Elizabeth are brother and sister. They talked about their experiences together. Tim and Elizabeth told us about their family. They have a mother called Vicki, a father called Mel and a cat called Fluffy, who is not a very nice cat as it's a bit scratchy. They live at the bottom of Hackthorne Rd, Cashmere, near Princess Margaret Hospital. Tim was 11 years of age at the time of the interview and Elizabeth was 9.

September 04, 2010

Tim slept through the September earthquake. Elizabeth was already awake. She had never experienced an earthquake before, so she actually had no idea what it was. The room just started shaking and she called out to Tim but he was asleep. He didn't answer her, so she thought he might have died; and then it stopped. Tim woke up. Her mother and father had woken up by that time, and they came to find them. Elizabeth tried to turn her light on, but of course the power was out. When daytime came, Elizabeth said they walked into their living room and all the books had fallen off the shelves. Later they found that their cat had run away and he didn't come back for quite a long time.

Tim thought it was pretty scary because he couldn't see anything, since it was dark outside. As they live close to Princess Margaret Hospital, they had a bit of light as the generators were on, but they had to wait until the daytime to see what had really happened. According to Tim, the September earthquake was *'almost like a warm-up'*. It is as if it happened to get everyone used to the feeling of earthquakes and aftershocks. When the February one came, they all realised how big and serious earthquakes really were. Tim says that when the February quake happened it *'went up a notch'*.

February 22, 2011

Tim and Elizabeth were at school on February 22. Tim was in Room 11, in his old class. Elizabeth was in Room 8 and they had just got their lunchboxes out of their bags. She had just opened her lunchbox when the shaking started. Tim's class evacuated to the field, and there they could see all this dust coming up from the city. It was quite surreal just how much dust there was. Elizabeth remembers that *'everyone was screaming every time an aftershock hit'*.

After the big quake, their mother walked up to school to collect them and was trying to stay calm when she arrived at the school, but it wasn't that easy. They went to The Cup, a café down the road, and the café staff were really kind. The café was actually closed but they gave them some food and some free muffins and that was really nice of them. Tim and Elizabeth walked home with their mother, but she didn't turn the car radio on because she was scared the garage was going to fall down. When they got home, tons of stuff had fallen down, things were smashed and Elizabeth said it smelt really bad.

In Christchurch, it took ages to get home because of the state of the roads. Their father was at work in Rangiora, so he had to come across town. It took him ages, at least 2 or 3 hours, to get home. That night they went to their grandparents' house in Amberley. They stayed the night because their mother didn't want to have a night full of aftershocks. They remember having baked beans for dinner. Overall, Tim said it was '*kind of surreal*' and Elizabeth said it was '*just shocking*'. Tim also said everyone came together; neighbours helped neighbours. Tim was nervous but not as nervous as he was after the June earthquake, when the building near his father's work came down. Elizabeth says she was also worried about the building beside their Dad's work in June. From a distance it looked like their Dad's work was on fire.

After the quakes

Tim felt there were not many aftershocks in Amberley in North Canterbury, where they went to stay. There were a few but not really as many as there were in Christchurch. They came back to Christchurch each day but they slept in Amberley for about three or four nights. It was their mother's birthday on the 27th February. They were going to buy her presents the day after the quakes. It was a bit disappointing that they couldn't but she did get some chocolate, so everything was fine.

Back at their house they had to take the chimney down because it goes right up between both of their rooms. They had to sleep upstairs together because both of their rooms had bricks in them that needed to be taken down. The bedrooms still have no doors to this day, because they can't fit them back. The house has moved so they don't fit. They've also got a concrete area that holds up the house and there's a big gap so the light actually comes through it. But as Tim said, '*it's just about what's happening in Christchurch; people just have to wait.*' They felt it wasn't really very urgent compared to some people's places.

School opened quite a lot later. As Tim said, '*it took them quite a wee while to check everything.*' It was a relief to see all their friends again. Sadly, the mother of a girl in his class had died. That news made Tim happy to have his own mother, but it was really sad. Elizabeth thought it was lucky that their mum was working at home on the day of the earthquake because she worked in a 12-storey building that later had to be pulled down.

When they came back to school they went out for a lot more games than they usually did. They also did lots of earthquake practices. Tim said they wrote a little bit about the earthquakes but they didn't really like to talk about it that much. In Elizabeth's class they talked about it quite a lot for the first week but after that not much.

Tim and Elizabeth's reflections

Sometimes they go for a drive around the centre of the city and Elizabeth '*can't even remember what was there*'. It's easy to get lost. When he is older, Tim thinks he will tell his own children that lots of the buildings have gone and that he could point out what used to be the cathedral, but by then it will be a plaza or shopping centre or something like that.

Tim said it was a good learning experience but that just caring for others and helping them is the most important. One of the caring things that Tim did was not mentioning the earthquakes too much, because not many people liked talking about it. It was just part of their daily lives. They would get an earthquake aftershock and they just got used to it.

Tim felt that they've got to take into account that people had lost lives and houses and his own family was pretty well off in that sense. Tim had come to realize that *'stuff didn't really matter. It was just kind of getting along and helping other people.'* Elizabeth explained, *'You can always get new stuff but you can't buy someone's life back.'*



Children at Cashmere Primary School

Lucy Watt, Saffron Elliott, Amelia Kirkness and Charlotte Hall

Lucy's story

September 4, 2010

When the September earthquake happened, Lucy's Dad had gone out to cricket and she had fallen asleep in her Mum and Dad's room. Daniel, her brother had gone back to his bed so she just thought, 'Ummmm, is Daniel getting up or is he rattling round? She didn't know if it was a quake until they went under the doorways. Their neighbour, Colin, came round all the houses to see if everyone was okay.

February 22, 2011

Lucy was 7 years old at the time of the earthquake. She was all ready with her jelly and just about to take a spoonful when the earthquake struck. She stayed on the mat and did 'turtle safe' but then the teacher told them to get under a desk. When she was under the desk and looking out, she could see all of Christchurch moving, as in Room 2 it is possible to see through the big sliding door. A few minutes after the earthquake, a teacher told them to go down to the big field. When the teacher said to get out, they didn't wait for everyone to get in line, they just went out. They went onto the field and she moaned about her jelly for weeks. Her brother was eating a bun and he dropped it. Then he put his lunchbox in his desk. Much later the caretaker emptied out all the lunchboxes and emptied out his lunchbox. He'd only had a banana that day. After the earthquake, when they were all on the field, Lucy kept worrying about her mum and dad. Later she found out that one of her neighbours had died.

Going home

During the earthquake they had builders on site and one of them was up on the scaffolding and he dropped his drill and quickly climbed down. He could see everything in the house moving and he just held on so he wouldn't fall off. They weren't allowed inside the house unless they wanted to go to the toilet as everything was all over the floor. All the things in the kitchen had fallen down. Lucy's family stayed in the tent that night. Her mum made a video of all the mess in the house. Then Lucy, her Mum and Daniel went up to Kaikoura and then up to Auckland, where she went to school for two days. She didn't want to miss school but her brother spent the whole time off.

Because they had builders on site, they fixed all their things up. After the earthquakes, Lucy got a bunk bed but she always slept on her bottom bunk so it would protect her in case something fell.

Lucy's reflections

Overall, Lucy thinks she is lucky, as they have got a better house than she used to have. She has got a bigger bedroom and a playroom. It is good for her parents as well as Lucy because she doesn't mess up the whole lounge.

Every so often the city would get 3s (on the Richter scale) but Christchurch is so used to earthquakes that they don't really feel them anymore. When they get 3s, they go, *'that's only a 3'* but in other cities when they get 3s, they go *'Ahhhh!'*

The neighbours who lost their mum, have now got a nanny because their dad works. Lucy is still helping the kids in this family, as Olivia in Year 6, comes down and plays with her.

Saffron's story

February 22, 2011

Saffron was 7 years old at the time of the February earthquake. She was eating a banana at the time of the shake. While she was walking over to the teacher, the earthquake struck and then she went under the desk. She remembers the rumbling; the earthquake was rumbling and everything was moving and making a big sound. She was really scared. Saffron had no idea that the earthquake was going to happen. She was so surprised and all her friends were really frightened because they never knew it was going to happen again after September either.

When Saffron got home, her Mum said it was too dangerous to go inside and then later she took her inside. Her Mum has a collection of precious elephants and they had smashed and it was sad as they are a treasured collection. Saffron said it was fun coming back to school because then she could see all her friends again. In 2012 it doesn't feel that scary for Saffron because everyone is used to quakes and aftershocks.



Amelia's story

September 4, 2010

Amelia was wearing her purple nightie on the night of the September earthquake. As soon as the power was put back on after the quake, she called everyone on the class list to make sure they were okay.

February 22, 2011

Amelia was seven years old at the time of the February earthquake. She was sitting at her desk, reading a book while sipping chocolate milk. She usually reads books while she is eating lunch, because she likes reading. She just grabbed the book and took it under the table with her. Amelia remembers everything shaking. Her lunchbox ended up smelling like month-old chocolate milk for the rest of the year, because of the spilt milk. Amelia remembers thinking about how gross the chocolate milk on her face felt. The browsing books were all spread out on the floor and she almost slipped on one of them. Amelia's chair fell on her head at one point. She didn't fall over because she can't even fall any more from the jiggling. The jiggling is what happens after an earthquake when her legs always feel like jelly. They feel all shaky and she can't stand up straight. She will always remember the quake and that day when she smells chocolate scented stickers or chocolate milk.

Mrs Lewis, the teacher at the time, wasn't that scared. She just kept pretty calm as she was sitting at her desk doing something on her laptop. The teachers put out tarpaulins on the field once they got down there so the children didn't have to sit on the muddy grass. At the time of the quake, Amelia was thinking about her Mum and Dad because she was wondering what they were doing at the time. She was also wondering if all the bottles and stuff in the kitchen had fallen down.

At home everything fell down. Her snowflake ball fell but she has still got her favourite purple nightie because she kept it on her chest of drawers. After the earthquake, the kitchen looked like it was *"the victim of a multi-coloured oil spill"* because all the bottles and stuff had all fallen out and broken.

After the earthquake

Amelia has a lot of after school activities and, at that time in late 2011, she was doing a dance class on Thursdays. They were having earthquake drills at the dance class. There was a gigantic heater hanging from the ceiling and the dance teacher told them what to do if one of them started to fall. One day at dance class, the teacher told them to go out the emergency exit. It was in the corner behind the curtain. Another day they were told to do the turtle. They actually did even though it was only a 2 on the Richter scale!

Charlotte's story

February 22, 2011

Charlotte is the daughter of Kerry Hall, Assistant Principal, whose story appears later in this book. She was almost 6 years old at the time of the earthquake. She was eating her sandwich and she didn't know what was going to happen. When it happened, she was the first or second person to get under the desk. The minute she got under the table, she brought her sandwich with her in her mouth. Her friend was drawing so she brought her drawing with her but she got annoyed because she was on the carpet and she put a hole in her drawing. During the earthquake Charlotte was holding onto the legs of the table so it didn't move. It was really strange going under the desk. When the first shake happened Charlotte was really scared. She was thinking about her brother and sister at the ABC in Beckenham and it gave her a big fright. It was not the first time at Beckenham ABC for her baby sister, Abbey, but she didn't know what earthquakes were all about.

Miss Knight, her teacher, was eating an egg, doing her paperwork and then she ran to the door as fast as she could and she almost tripped over a chair. In the classrooms, things were smashing onto the floor and there were lots of things that happened, especially with lots of videos smashing.

Her Dad came and picked her up and she went home. On the day, the power went off and they couldn't get inside the house because they had forgotten where they had put the keys. It was really hard but Charlotte's dad managed. He has a business called 'U need a plumber' and he used some of his tools through the keyhole and then they got inside. They were under the table with the radio on and they didn't get to do anything. Dad got a blanket for them.

After the earthquakes

The day after the earthquake, school was closed and Charlotte's family went down to Ashburton. Charlotte went with her sister, Abbey, her brother and her Mum. Then they went to Dunedin and they had to sleep there. They left two children there and they came back to school. Charlotte had to do this reading test and she did well. She had a special tea and it felt like she was little again just with Mum and Dad.

Charlotte is excited as she is going to get a new bunk bed. She is also excited as now, at Christmas 2012, she can invite her Nan and Granddad from Dunedin to come over to her new house as there is more room. At her old house they had to sleep in the spare room, because her Granddad snores really badly and it echoed around the whole house.

Children at Cashmere primary school

Toby Elliott, Fergus Laing, Jake Corlett, Caleb Thompson-Marr

Toby's story

September 4, 2010

For the earthquake in the middle of the night, Toby would have been about four years of age. He had put all of his fluffy toys on the top of the shelf above the head of his bed. When the earthquake struck, the fluffy toys all fell on him and he was pleased that they were only fluffy toys.

February 22, 2011

Toby would have been five years of age at the time of the February 22nd earthquake and newly started at the school. He remembers immediately after the earthquake that he was in a private group with his friends, when the school children were all clustered on the field, waiting for their parents to come and collect them. They were just in a little ball on the edge of the field and they weren't screaming, they were just saying to themselves 'Sweet', and trying to be really brave.

When he went back to his house after the earthquake, his room was fine because his grandfather, Pop, had built it very well. But when he went to his sister Saffron's room, the really tall and big wardrobe had fallen over, all over the floor.

Toby's reflections

Toby is pretty proud of himself because he wasn't a scaredy cat when he came back to school. He didn't go through worrying that he couldn't go to school. On the first day when he came back, he was deep breathing and trying to relax, to make sure he was okay. He thought only one thing had changed and it was not about cracks but about liquefaction. When he saw the sandpit again for the first time after the quake, he said '*that's not a sandpit anymore, it's a liquefaction pit*'.

As a 5-6 year old going through all the thousands of aftershocks in Christchurch, Toby learnt to manage some of his fears. In the night of September 4, 2010, when everything was shaking and everything moved, some things moved into places that made really scary shadows, Toby became really scared of the dark. But he overcame his fears by learning how to '*grab*' them and control them.

Thoughts on the future

Toby thinks he knows everything that's been lost. There were lots of things lost like sports places in the middle of the city. He really misses things like going to plays at the Court Theatre. Christchurch needs a giant swimming pool and a nice big sports stadium. Toby wants to save up for a swimming pool because currently all that is available near this school is a swimming pool and a tent at Pioneer Stadium in Lyttelton Street.

Fergus's story

September 4, 2010 and February 22, 2011

Fergus slept through the September one in the middle of the night. He would have been 8 years old at the time of the February earthquake. He said the earthquake at 12:51 pm on February 22nd was just like *'watching the city go up in dust.'* He could hardly even see the city because there was so much dust. He was about to have lunch when it happened. On the field immediately afterwards, he said that everyone was screaming. *'There were shrieks and cries. People were running down the hill, trying to get their kids from school'*. It was all a little scary for him.

He remembers going home to his room and finding that the shelf just in front of his door, which had books from when he was a baby, had fallen down. The cupboard doors were wide open and had smashed onto the floor and he couldn't get into his room for ages.

That night his family put up a tent on their front lawn but his Dad kept on going inside so he could get lots of food out. They made a portable stove and cooked some sausages on it. His Dad actually slept indoors that night. The rest of the family, except Meg and his Dad, all stayed on the lawn in a tent. His sister's friend was there and their next door neighbours, too. They have quite a big lawn so there were lots of people. Later on they went to Castle Hill, where their holiday home is, until school started.

Fergus thought it was a bit different when he first came back to school. He thought some of the people were a bit *'scatty'*. However, there weren't many changes to the buildings because they're all pretty strong and stood up well. He thought the teachers were a bit anxious.

Fergus's reflection

Fergus says he is just carrying on and putting everything behind him. Christchurch is now all prepared and ready for anything like earthquakes and natural disasters. All the houses are nice and strong now. He thinks they could make the town square where the food trucks used to come, like the pancake trucks, except maybe bigger and with more things to do for children.

Jake's story

February 22, 2011

Jake was 10 years old at the time of the earthquake. He thought some of the teachers were a bit shaky, because in the classroom lots of people screamed and the teachers had to take care of them. He remembers most how he felt when the earthquake happened. It was a scary time for him. His older brother and a few of his friends kindly came over to him and picked him up and gave him piggy back rides and ran him around the field because he was sad and scared.

At first they stayed outside at their next-door neighbour's house. He played there with a good school friend. Jake remembers when they got their house, his Dad went first. When they went in, everything was on the floor. They have lots of plates and things and they were all on the floor. It smelt pretty bad because of all the stuff that had spilt.

His little sister's wardrobe had a massive hole in it because it had chairs in front of it. When it fell down and a chair went straight through it. His wardrobe fell down on top of his stuff. His cats were pretty scared and one of them stayed under his Mum and Dad's bed for a week and didn't come out for food or anything.

When he came back to school there was only one crack in the ground out of the whole school, so nothing had really happened to it. Jake thinks it was quite hard for the teachers as there was lots of pressure on them to keep all the children safe. Teachers had to just '*keep calm and carry on*'.

Jake's reflection

For Christchurch in the future, '*they could have a sky tower that is really stable, like a big tall one and maybe have some writing on it with something about what Christchurch has been through or something on it...in big bright lights*'.

Jake is very proud of the bravery that he showed when the earthquakes happened. After it happened he was calmer, especially over the next couple of weeks, he got really calm. However, a few weeks after the earthquake, Jake got scared of the wind because it sounded like an earthquake.

"Initially," he said, *"there was fear in the family. Life was all so normal before the earthquake and then everyone in Christchurch had so much fear, of earthquakes and how many lives they took."*

Jake thinks a good motto would be for the kids in Cashmere School would be: *"The bravest kids in town."*

Caleb's story

September 4, 2010

Caleb was 6 years old at the time of the earthquake. He couldn't remember the time of the first earthquake but he does remember that it was in the middle of the night. He was actually sleeping and his Dad tried to wake him up, but then his Dad fell over on top of him and he woke up.

The future

Caleb has seen a lot of the images of the rebuild of Christchurch. His Dad showed him where the cardboard cathedral would be going and has explained some of the new plans for Christchurch.

Children at Cashmere Primary School

Toby McAleer-Harding, Charlie and Henry Cadillac

Toby's story

February 22, 2011

Toby would have been 11 years of age when the earthquake struck. It totally took him by surprise. He said when they were on the field after the quake, there were heaps of people crying and shrieking and some were really freaked out; scared because they couldn't find their mothers or hadn't heard from them. He had to wait at the school for four hours for his parents to collect him, as they were both stuck in traffic the whole time. His mother worked over by the airport. One of his friend's mums texted his Mum and Dad to see where they were, so he had some idea they were safe. While he was waiting at the school, there were some kind parents who came and waited with them. Toby remembers the free ice creams coming to school. He remembers all the different flavours, especially the Jelly Tips and Magnums, as they were all really expensive ones. Strangely enough, both his parents arrived at the school within 2 minutes of each other. Toby was pleased to see them. One of the Mums from their school died in the earthquake, so that day those children were picked up by their Dad.

When Toby got home, everything was on the ground. There was glass on the floor and a window broken. They cleaned that up in about an hour. They had water but the power didn't come on until the next day. The next day they went to Hanmer Springs. Later they went to Napier for 3 weeks to stay with family. Toby went to school there and they were really nice to him. When they got back to Christchurch, there were cards in their letterbox from the school in Napier. Toby kept three of them.

Coming back to school

When Toby came back to school, he talked about the earthquakes with his friends, which he thought was a good thing to do. They also played games. They had to write two pages about the earthquake. The Year 5s wrote only one page but the year 6s wrote two pages. Toby was shaking writing his story because that is how he felt writing about it and also because the earthquakes are shaky. He was really sad because his Grandma, who lives down the bottom of the hill, had her wall fall down. They were still practising the 'turtle' at school for most of 2011. If they were in the Epicenter, which is really stable, they still covered their heads, just in case.

Toby's reflections

When the city is having big earthquakes, it is obvious because the ground shakes a great deal. When Toby hears a rumble, he knows it's a big earthquake, especially as everything moves. One day a big truck went past their house, in late 2012, to fix the house across the road, and his mother said, '*Get down, it's an earthquake*'; but it wasn't and everyone laughed.

Toby is proud that he went through and survived the earthquake. He thinks it depends where someone was at the time of the quake, whether or not it will be hard for them. Toby thinks it is good to have survived an earthquake.

Charlie's story

February 22, 2011

Charlie would have been 6 years of age when the earthquake struck. When it happened, he didn't really know and was surprised by the whole thing. The surprising thing was the earth shook sideways. The thing Charlie will remember most about February 22nd was eating the free ice creams from The Cup café across the road.

In the earthquake, their house lost power and water so they went to their cousins and stayed there for a couple of days. In the earthquake, they got a huge crack in their driveway, that is sort of fixed now. His Dad's office got destroyed in the earthquake. He's now got a new building. His Dad showed the family round the new office a few days ago, and it's quite cool.

Returning to school

On the first day back at school, the kids in his class shared their earthquake stories for news. It was a long news session that first morning back. Charlie remembers writing about his experiences of the earthquakes. He remembers that it felt like it was a fun thing to do. He could remember the earthquake quite clearly. It was so easy to write about and he's a good writer.

Charlie's reflections

There have been '*millions of quakes*' since September 4, 2010. He has a really funny story about one time he burped so loud that, it made a shake and he thought it was like an earthquake.

Charlie says that a big earthquake is longer and scarier. They are scary because they last for ages and they are really big. They are also quite loud. The little ones don't bother him. It depends where people are when the earthquake strikes, whether or not it will be difficult for them. If you are in the countryside it won't be so hard.

The sad news, according to Charlie, is that there are some really good buildings that have fallen down in the earthquake. He also says that there are still lots of ruins in the city.

Henry's story

September 4, 2010

In the September earthquake, Henry remembers a little den of cushions that he was sleeping in.

February 22, 2011

In February, he would have been 10 years of age when the earthquake struck. He was about to take a bite out of his sandwich. Later that day Henry had to wait with his mother, who is a teacher at the

school, until everyone had gone. She was in charge of the children in her class and she was looking after students who needed help; kids who were crying or surprised by the quake or whose parents took a long time to get to the school. Henry's Dad was in his building in the city and it collapsed. He managed to get out but he also saw the steeple fall down off the Cathedral.

The power and water was off when they got home. There was lots of glass in their kitchen and damage in their house. They had to stay a couple of nights at their cousin's place in Amberley. The power came on 3-4 days later and the water came on two weeks later. Some people came to Christchurch from another city with their fresh water. Henry's family took water bottles and filled them up.

Henry's reflections

Henry thinks that big earthquakes can be scary because of the atmosphere and it is really 'LOUD'. Sometimes the books and the chairs are moving. He also says that some of those little earthquakes are really fun to survive; a bit like riding in a waterslide.

He is pleased now that in Christchurch everything is getting fixed up. The city has got rid of the old buildings that cost too much to demolish.

Henry is part of the buddy mentoring programme where he goes down to the little kids' classes and helps them with their work. After the earthquakes, the younger kids had to draw what they wanted to have when the city is rebuilt. One of the kids said that the city needed a new swimming pool.

Henry is proud that he survived the earthquake. He thinks that when he is older, he will probably know a lot more about earthquakes. He will always remember that he did the 'Drop, Cover, Hold'.



Children at Cashmere primary school Abbey West, Erica Laing and Daniel Watt

Abby's story

September 4, 2010

Abby was 10 years old for the first major Canterbury earthquake. She found it quite scary.

February 22, 2011

Abby remembers that the February earthquake was really, really noisy. It felt as though someone had picked up the building and was shaking it. It was really loud and she could hear people yelling. She also remembers that, as soon as the earthquake stopped, her teacher screamed and ran into the wall. She was trying to find the door but she hit the wall instead.

The Owners of The Cup café gave Abby free ice creams. Abby and her family were leaving school to get a ride home to Westmorland. They were walking down the hill with her mum's friends. The staff asked them if they wanted the ice creams for the school because their freezer and power had gone off. So they gave Abby and family the four bags of free ice creams and they took them back to the school. They went pretty fast!

Abby's dad's building fell down in the earthquake. It was the PGC building. He worked for Perpetual Trust and they lost lots of people. He was in the desk that was squashed the most. Luckily he was in Auckland that day. Abby was pleased that her dad wasn't at work that day. Her Mum helped out with their neighbours, because half of their house fell down the hill. Their cousins and aunt and uncle from Te Anau came up and got them. They went to school down there for a few weeks.

Coming back to school

It felt a bit different when they came back to school because she was still scared if there was going to be another shake and what would happen. After a while it all went back to normal.

Miss Smith, her teacher, made up a cellphone box a few days after they came back to school. They put their cellphones in the box, so that if there was a really big aftershock, they were able to contact their parents, especially because lots of them have really young brothers and sisters.

June 13, 2011

Abby says it was frightening but they were all kind of expecting something, so it wasn't the worst. After the February quake, the school organised to have a box full of beanies and safety blankets in the shed. Abby says that all felt a bit safer having the earthquake box in the shed under the school, in case of emergency.

Abby's reflections

Abby says they now have all their neighbour's cellphone numbers. When there are major aftershocks, they all meet at the end of their driveway as they are all quite close, to check if everyone is safe.

Abby says Christchurch does not need any buildings over two storeys, because if it fell down that would be really scary.

Erica's story

February 22, 2011

Erica was 11 years old at the time of the of February 22nd earthquake. Her abiding memory would be seeing the city from the top of the Cashmere hills. They couldn't really see much, as it was just a big cloud of dust -- the biggest cloud of dust all over the city. Erica was watching the city during and after the quake. She was trying not to think about what had happened there and she was hoping people could get out okay. She wasn't really thinking about the people dying.

Just before the earthquake they were having Year 7 girls' lunch. That day they had made cookies with icing on them. So they all ran down to the field, with the chips, biscuits and other things in their hands and were busy giving them to everyone.

Erica also remembers lots of cellphones. People calling friends and family. If some kids didn't have cell phones, people were calling other parents to try to find out how their kids were. Parents were also asking if some parents had seen other parents. It was all pretty frantic.

Erica's family spent the night of February 22nd on their front lawn. The day after the earthquake, her Mum went into the double brick house next door where all the walls had fallen out. She went in with Jason and tried to get as much stuff out as they could get. Then they packed it all into boxes and went through it with them. That was quite nice thing to do. Erica's family have a house up at Castle Hill and they went up there for two weeks while they were waiting for school to re-open to try and get away from it all.

Coming back to school

When they first came back, people started remembering what they had done that day. There was lots of talking about it for the first month or two, and then some people who hadn't been seen in a while or since the earthquake, would start sharing their stories. The teachers kept all the routines going and they tried to make it normal. They put it back to normal quite quickly.

Erica's teacher, Mrs Calder, explained what they were to do if there was another earthquake. Her message was: *'Don't worry about what other people do, just do what you feel is right for you.'* She explained that some people might be hiding under their desk and some might be sitting on their chairs and riding the wave and some would be under the doors. She was realistic about the different reactions and behaviours of everyone in the room.

June 13, 2011

They were told to be prepared for lots of aftershocks. However, it was a big wake up call when they had another 6.3 on June 13 – just when they thought there were only going to be small aftershocks. It was good at school as everyone knew what to do and they weren't freaking out as much. Everyone went straight to the field. They didn't have to worry about getting the stragglers. At school that day, they were all in the 'Epicenter' together, so that was quite helpful. After the June aftershock, Erica's family went to Cashmere High school and helped dig out the liquefaction because there was quite a bit of that on the field.

Erica's reflection

When they rebuild the city, Erica thinks that there needs to be a lot more things for kids to do in the city, other than shopping. The centre of the city, before the earthquake, was a place that kids didn't really go unless they were going to the aquarium.

Erica thinks that the earthquakes have made everyone a lot closer to their friends and their neighbours. Everyone tries to get to know people more, so that is nice. In their neighbourhood, if there is a big earthquake, then everyone goes out and checks on everyone else in the street.

Daniel's story

February 22, 2011

Daniel was 10 years old at the time of the earthquake. He was at his desk when the earthquake happened. He just went under the desk. Then he went down to the field and '*that was that*'. Daniel didn't really care about the earthquake and he didn't really mind it. In fact, earthquakes didn't really bother him at all. However, he does remember hitting his head on the desk. All the desks were moving so much he hit his head on a moving desk. When they were on the school field, they could see the whole city and the dust from the buildings collapsing.

Going home

Daniel wasn't allowed to go in the house until his Dad had gone in and checked it. They were doing renovations at that time, but all of that was okay. However, the other part of the house wasn't as it had cracks all through it. They were building two new kids' bedrooms but they were still in their old bedrooms and they were all damaged.

Coming back to school

When they came back to school, they wrote a story about the earthquake, especially about what they did afterwards. Daniel thinks it was okay to talk about the earthquakes in school. The first week there weren't as many kids as some were still away and some were just coming back.

June 13, 2011

The June earthquake wasn't such a surprise for Daniel. He thinks they were all prepared for another quake. They had an earthquake in September, 2010 and then 6 months later there was the February quake, so they were expecting that there was going to be another one. Daniel says that it felt safer coming back to school after this earthquake because they had put the earthquake box together for all the kids in the school. The box had all their beanies and survival blankets and other stuff. It was in the shed down under the school and there's lots of two litre water bottles and two portaloos.

Christchurch rebuild

Daniel's Dad is designing for Athfield Architects so he has been talking with him a lot about the future buildings in Christchurch. Daniel also hears things on the news. He knows, for example, that instead of having QEII Sports Stadium way out where it was, they are going to have a big sports complex in the centre of the city. However, the people near the old QEII stadium are getting annoyed because they wanted the big stadium back out there but they are only just going to get a little one, like Pioneer Sports Stadium. He thinks it's good that the big sports stadium is going to be in the centre of the city as it will be more accessible for everybody.

Daniel's reflections

Daniel has learned to get to the safest spot as fast as possible. It is not always possible to know the best place to be, as it's hard to know if the building is safe or is going to come down. Daniel is unfazed by the earthquakes. The thing he did notice that has changed, was that the Dads now all check the other houses and on each other in the street.



Principal at Cashmere Primary School

Jacqui Duncan

Jacqui's story

February 22, 2011

Jacqui considers that February 22, 2011 was a significant event in her professional life. As it was her lunch break, she was in the café across the road when the earthquake struck. It was a very frightening and difficult time. The whole of Cashmere hill moved with an almighty thud. She realised very quickly that she had the ultimate responsibility of care for staff and children at the school.

In an instant, she was at the bottom field of the school before the children started arriving. Many children were hysterical and in tears and the teachers arriving were white-faced and nervous. She put on her principal's smile and the first message to everyone assembled was, *'It's okay, we're safe and Cashmere Primary is safe.'* The whole ground was moving with severe aftershocks and there was a great rumbling noise from the ground. She had to think at the time about whether where they all stood was safe or not.

The senior staff *'all clicked into automatic gear.'* The teachers were with the children and the support staff turned up with the class lists. The lists were really important as the parents started to pick up their children and everyone needed to be accounted for. Admin staff were meeting parents at the gate and giving them the message to tell their children that it was okay. The community by and large got that *'keep calm'* message.

The children were thinking of their parents, and staff were thinking of their loved ones. Jacqui was looking out over the city, and saw the dust rising. It was surreal.

Parents arrived very quickly and were standing on the outside of the school circle. Jacqui realised then that she had an audience and that she had to look like she was in control and her response needed to be calm and instant. She had great support from the parents and teachers. There were no leadership difficulties.

All the time, Jacqui was getting texts from her daughter, a nurse, who was trapped in the hospital. Her grandson was trapped at school and her school teacher husband couldn't leave his school either. She couldn't think of her family at the time and just had to assume they would be okay.

During the day they had to look after and provide pastoral care for staff who were hearing stories of houses being flooded, *'munted'* and broken. By 5pm that day all the children were collected. The last four children arranged to go home with family friends. One parent was never going to return that day. At 5:30pm Jacqui left and locked up the school. It took 2-3 hours to get back to her home and grandchild. Her house was a mess. Cleaning up a house without water is hard. She realized now they had their own family issues to deal with.

The following days

By February 23, they knew that one of the mothers at the school would never come home. Jacqui texted the husband the next day, and he replied that, *'she still hasn't come home.'*

On day 3 after the earthquake, Jacqui focused on making sure they could re-open the school. As Jacqui worked tirelessly to get everything ready, her family just had to come second.

Civil Defence was saying that no one could enter the building or site. The Ministry of Education was busy relaying the list of things needed to re-open. She had a dilemma. If she couldn't get into the school, then they couldn't get it ready. Jacqui wanted to start pulling the school back together as soon as possible. So the caretaker and Jacqui bought hard hats, wore sensible shoes and organised electricians, plumbers and builders to re-open the school.

After seven days, Civil Defence withdrew and the Ministry of Education said they could open again, once sewerage and water were operable. It was only at this stage that some other principals started to get tradespeople in.

There was a sense of urgency about getting normality back for the children. Parents felt they needed to protect their children and get them out of the city. Some school families went to the United States, Australia, Auckland, Wellington and to their holiday homes. Families were leaving the area and they had one third of their children enrolled in other schools around the South Island and throughout the country.

Jacqui realised that they needed to create a sense of life here in Cashmere for their school families to return to. A big part of her job was to make sure their community could see that their school was still there and was safe. Jacqui says: *'Before the school re-opened, we put daily news on their website so our community always knew what was happening. It was very reassuring for families who knew, blow by blow, the stages of readiness of the school. The message we were sending out was that the school was open and ready, as soon as the sewerage and water goes on.'*

They were also communicating with staff in a variety of ways, through emails and texts and the team leaders were communicating via their communication trees.

All this time, Jacqui was communicating sensitively with the father who had lost his wife in the earthquake and checking things out with his neighbour. They had the funeral before school re-opened. It was incredibly sad for the whole school community.

In that week, the recently resigned School Office Manager had also died. They had two funerals in one week. There were lots of emotions. Self-control was needed to get through such a difficult week.

There was a Staff Only Day before school resumed. In the morning, everyone **the** chance to tell their story and support each other. In the afternoon they talked about how they would support the upset and stressed children and parents. On reflection, this was quite a good process as they spent the whole week strategically thinking ahead and talked about the threats and issues for the school.

Jacqui was working on high adrenalin levels and waking up early, as well as having a 1-3 hour drive to school, each way, each day. School initially started later than usual, for staff who were commuting great distances, in heavy traffic, on terrible roads.

The school held a parents' fish and chip evening several weeks after the funeral. Jacqui explains: *'We wanted to reinforce the message that we are a warm and caring community, and that we are all in a*

safe place and normality is back. The father who had lost his wife was there but was nicely protected by his friends. From the experience of losing a school parent, the school developed a real sense of community and doing things together, especially as the school parents were taking meals to the family who had lost their mother for six months after the earthquake.

Jacqui says: *'Recovery is all about the community. Principals and schools can lose their community quite quickly – the community has to have confidence that the school is working properly.'*

June 13, 2011 & December 23, 2011

In some ways the June 13 aftershocks were much harder. The school dithered about closing or staying open. *'The day after the June aftershock, we debriefed with staff about whether we needed to send children home or stay at school. Overall, it was messier decision making because there were lots more variables to consider.'*

On the December 23rd aftershock, Jacqui checked the school and put a message on the school website very quickly. It was all quite demanding. Most people don't know how much principals do behind the scenes, and there is always so much to check and prepare after a big aftershock. This one was right before Christmas and at the end of a very big year.

Leadership in times of crisis

On reflection, Jacqui said, *'Principals don't think about themselves. They don't tell people what they've done. They just need to know that they are doing the right thing. If a principal says something like, "The school is safe", then he or she is believed immediately and that is very powerful.'*

Jacqui is a major supporter of distributive leadership. It worked well for Cashmere primary school immediately after the February earthquake. The earthquake showed Jacqui the power of *'real leadership.'* It put all the theory on distributive leadership into practice, especially around relational trust. On the day, the leadership team kicked in and they were making sure the right thing happened. The training and up-skilling really worked for the school. They worked calmly and there was no personal heroism. The deputy principal, the assistant principals and team leaders went and did what was needed at the time. The administrative leader, who is also part of the leadership group knew to go to the gate and meet parents and tell them to stay calm, to not bring their tears to the school but to cheer the children up.

Overall, the senior leadership team put out positive messages and saw positive messages coming back from the parent community.

Thoughts about the future

Overall Jacqui thinks all the schools in Christchurch did really well getting through the earthquakes, repairing their schools and supporting their school communities. Jacqui was disappointed by the Ministry of Education's timing of the reconfigurations of schools in Canterbury as really it was still a time to celebrate what everyone had done to keep the Canterbury schools running, such as principals, caretakers and teachers. The education sector worked really well throughout this difficult time.

Teachers at Cashmere Primary School

Meg Cadillac

Meg's story

February 22, 2011

On February 22nd Meg was a new teacher at Cashmere Primary School, after having been a reliever in the school over previous years. She was three weeks into her new school year, teaching in the classroom during the 6.3 earthquake. The earthquake struck and she and the children immediately went outside, onto the fields below the classroom, where it was really calm.

Meg had two of her children with her at the school (Henry and Charlie) and a 12 year old son, who had just started at the local high school. Her 12 year old had a half day off school because of the PPTA secondary school teachers' stop-work meeting at the Town Hall. He was going in to his Dad's offices in the city for the afternoon. He was on a bus, just near the underpass on Moorhouse Ave, near the central city, when the earthquake struck. Fortunately, the bus was okay and he got off and decided to walk to his Dad's offices.

In the meantime, Meg's husband had gone out of his building into Cathedral Square and had seen the cathedral come down. He knew that his 12 year old son was on his way so he went looking for their son. He saw a bus on Colombo St, which had many dead people on board. As he was walking past this bus, he suddenly saw his son appear from behind it. Meg's husband was overwhelmed with relief and gave his son a big hug. The teenage boy reacted with, *'What are you doing? You don't need to hug me.'* He was completely *'teenagery'* about his Dad's show of emotion. Meg's husband doesn't get emotional, but he was quite emotional that day, finding his son alive, walking towards him.

Meg felt that her husband and son were fine. She was concerned, but up at Cashmere School, on the hill, away from the city centre, she didn't really understand the impact of the whole thing, until parents started arriving and telling their horror stories.

As teachers on that day, they put on that teacher smile, took a deep breath and carried on. As a parent, she was quite lucky because two of her children were there at school with her. It would have been different if her children were at schools on the other side of the city. Having them nearby helped her with her anxieties. Her husband was on the other side of the city but he was a grown up so could look after himself. He was less of a concern for her. It wasn't until afterwards that she thought about what could have potentially happened to her son and husband.

After the quake, ice creams arrived from The Cup café across the road, as their freezers had lost power. They were Magnums and other expensive ice creams, which Meg's kids were not usually allowed. It was a real treat as everyone who was still at school at the time got one.

Family stories

Meg's teenage son didn't really talk about the day of the earthquake and what he saw, but he did say 18 months after the event, *'I was unlucky going on that bus.'* She said to him, *'No you were lucky. You missed the wrong bus. You got on the right bus'*.

Meg has this image of her son walking round in a daze after the quake. They tried to talk to him about it initially and he said it was fine and brushed it away. Meg still imagines him walking around and all the buildings falling around him. He saw people trapped in that bus as he walked past. Only one person on his bus asked him if he was all right after the quake. Meg hoped that someone would have looked after him, but he did meet up with his Dad, so it was all fine in the end. Over a long period of time he told them the things he saw on that day, but only bit by bit.

The most vivid picture that she will always have is of her husband walking towards their son immediately after seeing the destroyed bus. Once he had found his son, he said, *'Let's go see how the rest of the family are.'* They got very dirty walking through all the rubble on the road. Meg remembers them arriving at school sweating as they had virtually run from the city centre to the top of the Cashmere hills to school to be with the rest of the family.

Meg's husband's work building collapsed in the city, which impacted on them, because his workplace had three moves. In late 2012, the workplace returned to the IT Hub in Manchester St. Meg says, as a family, they came out pretty well. Meg feels they have been relatively unaffected because their house was still standing and was okay. They live on the hill just around the corner from the school and they have had only decorative stuff fixed after being damaged.

They were relieved that they hadn't lost anybody close to them although Meg did know Lisa, who passed away during the earthquake. Meg went to her funeral and realised how hard that was for their school parent community.

Returning to school

On February 22nd, Meg had a lot of upset children, but after spending time with their families after the quake, they came back calm and ready for normality. As a school they wanted things to get back to normal. The teachers tried to create a place that was as normal as possible. The school was pretty undamaged, so that helped. When the children returned to school (about 4 weeks later), the teachers reinforced the key message that the earthquake was a natural thing and it just happened.

Meg said, *'The children were just so resilient and just wanted to get back to normal'*. Meg didn't have any hysterical or tearful children in her class. Some children with homes badly damaged were in a normal kind of environment at school, so they tried even harder to make the classrooms look nice and like *'business as usual'*. Meg had children from her class who left the city. One girl went overseas, came back and couldn't cope, so moved again. Kids in her class lost their houses. Meg felt very fortunate and that kept her going as a teacher. Her family was fine, all well and not seriously hurt.

If someone in the class wanted to talk about the quakes or aftershocks, they'd talk and listen. The children did art work and they wanted to write about the quakes – mostly the 'exciting' things. Many kids saw the time off afterwards as a big holiday, and that positive attitude was reflected in their parents' approach to the disaster as well.

Meg's reflection

Meg says that people had lived through something huge and it was important that they came together as a community to get through it. People really did look out for each other. A good example was the farmers who came in to town to give water to people who needed it and this meant so much. It gave their family something to do. Some farmers came and sat all day and talked with locals. One day the farmers brought in onions and just gave them away. Meg also remembers the kindness as they got to know their neighbours a lot more.

Meg's own children were calm and dealt with the quakes very well. Meg thinks that the kids in the school in the future will be really resilient and will be able to deal with a lot of stressful situations, especially as the school and the children all dealt with the earthquake really well together. They were all outside on the field and virtually all the adults were calm. Lots of the kids were just busy playing soccer, waiting for their parents, after the earthquake. Some parents were arriving upset and subtly the teachers were trying to shield the children from it.

All in all, Meg has quite a positive spin on her earthquake experiences because they were very lucky. Meg says Jacqui and Cathy were both very calm on the day. This meant that the teachers went into calm mode and they all got the message that they had to look after the children and keep them calm.

One story – the ice cream story will remain with her. Meg feels that telling her earthquake story makes her feel like her Gran in the UK, talking about the war. Meg does feel that this generation, in this city at this time, has a story that they have lived through. It was huge and something that most people don't go through in their lifetimes.



Teachers at Cashmere primary school

Sharlene Kyte

Sharlene's story

September 4, 2010

In the September earthquake, Sharlene was at home asleep and it took her a while to register what was happening. She jumped up and yelled '*Earthquake!*' but by that time, her partner was already up and he said, '*You're a bit slow off the mark.*' She really didn't have a sense of anything; it was like she was in a deep sleep and then she was shaken awake.

They went up the hallway to the doorframe of the lounge and her partner was holding onto their tropical fish tank. They were waiting for the aftershocks to stop, but when the adrenalin kicked in they went out and checked on the dog and other things.

Their neighbours were up, checking on other neighbours. They were all okay. Sharlene and her partner couldn't decide what to do next. Sharlene immediately started thinking of things like water supplies because they didn't have water stored or any other emergency items. Obviously, there were things to be cleaned up even though they didn't lose a lot. They just had the odd dish that was broken. Her partner flies radio-controlled aircrafts and the planes had all jumped and bounced and tried to fly on their own in the spare room, so that was the most expensive part of their damage. They live at Templeton and their house was fine.

February 22, 2011

In the February earthquake, Sharlene was at school. It was only a couple of weeks into the school term and they had just had reading. The kids were at various stages of packing up. Some had been doing a newspaper search so they were folding up and putting them away. Sharlene had just wandered back to her desk to get something. Some had their lunchboxes out and then there was '*the shake*'.

Initially, Sharlene just paused, wondering, '*Is this getting bigger? Is it big enough to tell them to drop?*' By the time she went '*Drop!*' they had all dived under their desks and she did too. Because her room is on the bottom level of the two-storey, she remembers it being really, really loud. She was yelling because under her desk, she couldn't see anything or anyone. She kept shouting, '*Stay under your desks*' as loud as she could.

When the bell rang, Sharlene told the kids to line up outside. When they got out, everyone else was streaming to the field. She was just trying to think rationally, whether to line up or not, that kind of thing. She had a new girl who had only just moved to Christchurch, and who was very upset on one hand and someone else crying on the other hand, but they all got down to the field.

There were lots of aftershocks, when they were on the field, pretty much immediately. They were loud and thunderous. The ground feels quite different when people are on grass than when they're in a building. The children had a lot of different reactions. The kids were obviously upset. There were also people who were responsible for getting things out and getting the microphone and calming everyone down. Lots of parents, who lived nearby, turned up and then the stories started coming. Sharlene remembers teachers being really strong and brave. She did see a couple of teachers trying to hold it together. She was just worried about the kids, and thinking, *'They're my first priority right now.'* She just tried to not let it get to her, but obviously it did.

Sharlene tried to block out the idea of what could be happening to her family and partner. He's a mechanic and she was thinking *'Is he under a car? What's going on? What's happening with Mum and Dad? They live over in the eastern suburbs.'* Eventually, she got her cell phone but the reception kept dropping in and out. Sometimes all the messages would come through at once, but the moment she tried to respond, the reception was gone. That was a huge frustration for her. Everyone wanted to know that she was okay and she had no way of telling them. In the end, she didn't really want to look at her cell phone because she couldn't respond.

One of her most vivid memories was when they had to wait around until all their parents had picked up the children. She had one girl in her class whose Mum didn't come for a very long time. As time went on, she got a little bit more worried, but she kept assuring the kids that the parents were on their way. She told them that there would be road blockages. When the mother arrived, she was in a real state because the car had decided not to go. She was quite late when she arrived, in tears and red-faced and she was saying, *'The Cathedral's gone, there are people dead in the streets, there's sewerage all up Barrington St.'* That was like the moment of reality. Sharlene said to the mother *'Shhhh, there are kids around.'* Then suddenly it started filtering into her head that this event was huge.

Going home

Once all her class had gone, she was a bit apprehensive about driving home. She got into her car remembered that, in September, Halswell was really badly hit by liquefaction, so she was expecting the worst. She passed a house about two thirds of the way down Hackthorne Rd. It's still sitting there exactly as it was on the day. All the tiles on the roof had caved in and nothing has happened to the house since that day. It's like it is preserved in time. Every time Sharlene drives past and sees the roof caved in, it reminds her of the day.

On that day, she had a really clear run home. There was no liquefaction and the roads were fine. She got home expecting a mess, walked in and nothing had moved. At her place in Templeton, Sharlene still had power; she still had water and the dog was fine. So they were in a really fortunate position.

Once she got home, she turned the television on and that's when the images started coming in and she just sat there transfixed for a few hours. She got hold of her Mum and Dad and she made them come and stay with her for a couple of nights, just for her own peace of mind. They were all being *'Oh no, we're okay'* but they didn't have power or water. She had to have the awkward conversations about toileting and what to do, with her parents. She hadn't lived with her parents for

quite a while, so it was kind of strange. After a couple of days her parents heard they had their power back on and they wanted to go home.

Helping out

Sharlene really wanted to help in some way so she did some baking and thought, *“Right, I’m going to take my baking to the people. I’m going to do something. I can’t just sit around on my hands.”* She drove over to the east of Christchurch, to Burwood way. They had a centre set up there and she arrived and they had everything sorted. Things were being catered and they didn’t need anything from the public. So she felt a little bit pushed away and that her little act of kindness was rejected and insignificant. They told her about a centre in New Brighton so she traversed the roads, which was difficult. The couple of days after the earthquake were crazy. There were roads that were closed all over the place but she managed to get to South New Brighton and found this little drop-in centre with a kitchenette and people dropping in and having a coffee and a chat. So she gave them her baking.

This little church group at the centre was all set up. They had jobs and people ringing in saying they needed water and other things. They gave Sharlene a job and supplies and said, *‘Here’s the address, you’ve got a car, off you go’*. So she loaded up with all the plastic bottles filled with boiled water, headed over to this person’s house thinking, *‘Right, my first good deed.’* There was no one home, so she left it all there, and went back where they were giving out more jobs. There was a real sense of urgency even though a lot of the products that people were donating, was stuff that people would have for a while, like toothpaste and toiletries. Sharlene thought, *‘That’s probably not what they need straight away, but I guess they’ll need it in the future.’* She ended up getting buddied up with other people. They had to take supplies of stuff to Parklands and drop it off for a lady who was going to distribute it to the neighborhood. She traversed some horrible streets, trying to figure out how to get there. The street was full of liquefaction and water everywhere and she couldn’t work out how to get to the house. She asked people on the street and they said, *‘You can drive through the park’*, so she was four-wheel driving trying to get round to this person’s house. She unloaded all the stuff and again no-one was there. She waited a while but this wasn’t really what she imagined about volunteering and helping, so she decided to go back home.

After she got back to the safe side of town, it was a really different feeling and a real feeling of relief to be out of that environment. Even though she’d only been over there for half a day, she wondered about the people who lived in that daily. She really felt for people out in the east of Christchurch.

Communication

For the next few weeks, she kept checking the website for latest updates. She was constantly on the Civil Defence, the Ministry of Education and the school websites. A lot of her time was spent checking websites; that’s what she’d do because she wanted to know the latest information. She got texts from management and she was just waiting to see what was going to happen next.

Texts and contacts with staff and families were set up after the September quakes to get out bulk messages to the community in an event like an earthquake. They were getting texts to check the

website or that the engineers were going to be assessing. They weren't really long texts, they were just sent to everybody.

They also got plenty of texts from Jacqui. Jacqui and the board felt a need to keep them as informed and up to date as possible, unfortunately, the story kept changing. One minute they should be able to open by Friday, and then they were not allowed to open. Obviously, they were told they weren't allowed to come into school on their own until the engineers had been through and given it the ok.

Coming back to school

While the children were off, she phoned the families because she wanted to know how the kids were, to get a gauge of how they and their families were coping. The staff came back before the children. While nothing had moved in her classroom, Sharlene really didn't want to come back to school. She was very worried about how the kids were going to be and how the community was going to be.

The staff had a big debrief in the staff room. They had a chance to connect with the other staff to find out about all their different situations as some of the staff had lost homes and really suffered. The session was not just about commiserating, they were also celebrating that they were all still here. They talked about their responses and what they were going to do on that first day. They discussed the messages they were going to give and the types of things to be doing with the children.

The message from the school was, *'Let's not rush back in, but let's start introducing some familiar routines'*. This was what the kids wanted and needed. They cancelled all staff meetings that were not needed, so teachers weren't feeling rushed or stressed.

When the children came back, Sharlene got digital cameras and got them to video each other telling their stories. They also had a booklet to fill in with their point of view of the earthquake and what had happened at school. It wasn't long but it was a quiet activity. One of her students went up to Nelson and attended another school so she talked about that. Some of them had posted things on the school Ultranet so they could share with their parents at home. They were really good about it.

On the day the children came back, the staff got given a list of possible short term and long term symptoms or effects of trauma children can have after a natural disaster. When children were acting out, staff didn't automatically assume that they were being naughty. They could consider that the behavior could be a long term effect of the earthquake and what they'd lived through. Also when staff were having discussions with parents six months or so later about things that were happening, they could say that it could take this long for some reaction to the earthquakes to manifest.

All the children were given a copy of Gavin Bishop's 'Quaky cat.' Everyone got a copy and they could relate to the things in the book. There were also good curricular resources; books like, 'It is time to hope again' and other resources. There were books in the library, especially at the junior level. Sharlene thinks now and hopes that someone is creating those resources around hope specifically and not just about the earthquakes, but something with the children in Christchurch in mind.

Longer term effects

The school had quite a few practices and earthquake drills. Everyone reflected on how best to do things. If the kids still wanted to talk, there was some space in the curriculum to talk about the quakes and their reactions. After June or July 2011, when Christchurch had those couple of those close aftershocks together in the middle of the day, staff were reflecting on what they could have done differently to improve the system.

The school looked out for the staff. There were constant emails, and messages at morning teas and lunchtimes, that if staff were not coping, to let management know as there was support and funding for relief teachers. Also, if they needed time to go and sort things out with their house, then they were encouraged to go, as there were funds to cover those things.

In 2012, Sharlene had a student in her class whose mother had died in the 2011 earthquakes. This has been different for her especially around how they negotiate things like Mother's Day and making cards. She asked him whether he wanted to make a card and take it to her grave, but he said, '*No I'm going to make a card for Mothers Day*'. He made it for his Dad who has stepped in and become Mum as well. He seemed quite well adjusted about it all.



Teachers at Cashmere Primary School

Kerry Hall

Kerry's story

Kerry Hall is the Assistant Principal at Cashmere Primary School. She was living in Burwood in eastern Christchurch until her house was 'red-zoned' and now lives in Westmorland.

September 4, 2010

In the September earthquake, it was the noise that woke Kerry and her husband. He jumped on top of her and she said, "*Don't be ridiculous*", and he was saying, "*It's an earthquake.*" All she could think about was their baby who had been home from the neonatal unit in hospital for only a week. The night before the baby had been very colicky, so Kerry had put four phone books under her bassinet to prop it up, to settle her. As Kerry put her into the bassinet, she had thought that it wasn't very stable. She wanted to keep the five year old and the two year old out of the room so that bassinet didn't get knocked over. When Kerry felt the earthquake, all she could think of was the bassinet going over and the getting flung into the wall. She yelled at her husband to get the baby, and she ran and got the two year old. Her husband got carpet burns right down his legs, getting down the hall way to get to the baby, and then he got back to get the five year old. After that, everything was fine. Then the lights came back on and everything was sorted. They had power and they were texting others who didn't have power. Kerry remembers ringing her mother in Dunedin at 8 o'clock in the morning. She said to Kerry, "*Did you feel that Alpine fault at 4 this morning?*" Kerry said, "*Mum that was us, and it was in Christchurch.*"

The back yard had liquefaction everywhere but the house was fine. Digging out of the back yard so that the kids could play outside was tricky. The kids were fine and they thought it was great. Charlotte and Sam, the five and two year old, thought it was quite funny that the earth kept shaking. They called it the washing machine and said, "*Oh the washing machine's going*", and they stood there and '*wibbled*' with it. When they were told to get under something, it was hard to get them to do it.

Getting ready for 2011

At the beginning of 2011, the staff got together as a team and talked about what they knew about the kids from the previous year. Kerry had Year 4s and the teachers who had had them the previous year were able to pass on valuable information. They told her which kids she needed to be aware of and to look after whenever there was a shake. On the day of the February quake, therefore, she knew who she needed to be looking after.

Kerry's family face February 22 and beyond

In February 2011, their house broke in three places. They had water coming in with the rain, which was great with three young children. They had liquefaction up to knee depth right through the backyard again, but luckily not through the house, so Kerry thought they were lucky. All of their neighbours' houses broke in half and liquefaction came up through their houses and they had to keep living there. That was horrendous. Kerry had to take her three kids down to her mother's place

in Dunedin. The school came back in March, 2011 and Kerry had to leave Abbey (by then a six month old) and Sam (two and half year old) with her mother in Dunedin and bring Charlotte (her five year old) back with her to school.

Kerry and her family had no water for a month, no power for three weeks and no sewer from February to June 2011. That was the tricky thing. Kerry and her daughter, Charlotte, were having showers in the Epicentre building at school. Charlotte thought it was hilarious and she kept telling everyone that she was lucky to have her showers at school.

Meanwhile Kerry's husband who is a plumber did all sorts of things to create a big water tank so they and all the neighbours could get water. They had to time it to get water for washing dishes and having baths until the water came on, a full time months later. That was challenging.

School was great for Kerry as the school wasn't damaged. It was normal and there was water and power. Home wasn't a great place to be in 2011. Kerry was staying at school slightly later with Charlotte and having a later pick up for her two younger children from daycare. That was less time the kids were up at home and less time she was trying to keep them inside, away from the liquefaction and sewerage contaminated area.

In early June 2011, they were finally able to have Charlotte's 6th birthday as they said they could have the party when they could flush the toilet again. Her actual birthday was in March.

The Cashmere parents brought their kids over to Burwood/Parklands. Kerry was collecting their cell phone numbers and the parents said, '*Kerry does it really matter? Do you really need our numbers?*' Kerry replied, '*If there is a quake, you won't be able to get across the bridge, and you won't be able to get your kids.*' At that time, the parents said they would just go down to the Palms shopping mall and Kerry replied, '*No it is closed.*' Then they said, '*We suppose we could go to Eastgate shopping mall*' and Kerry replied, '*No, that is closed as well.*' So the parents decided to stay for coffee at the party.

At school after February

At school after February, the children at school played lots of games. It was all about them feeling safe, having fun and keeping them happy about being back in the school environment. It was also to remind them that school was a great place to be and not a scary place. Earthquakes happened at school, but it was okay. The teachers spent a lot of time letting the children talk and tell their stories. They were drawing, writing or recording with the computers, so that they had the chance to say what they needed to be saying. They were not just jumping straight back into maths and all the normal things. There was opportunity to record the stories, video the kids telling their stories, talking time, writing time, drawing time, so that the children had a chance to share in whatever way they wanted to and felt most comfortable. Many of the children wanted to talk about the cool trip they went on and the great stuff they had done while off school. A lot of people went to stay with family and they wanted to tell their stories, but most of those stories were not in Christchurch. They did lots of work with the children using the Lion Quest and their work on building a class. It's a resource kit that they have it right through the school. They did lots of that, focusing on looking after each other, caring for each other, listening to each other and developing lots of those skills.

As a staff, they did a lot of social staff get-togethers and all drank a lot of wine and relaxed over the wine and just talked.

Kerry is part of the senior management team. One initiative they did was to put survival packs together so they knew kids would be warm if they were outdoors for another earthquake or major aftershock. As a parent, it gave Kerry peace of mind that they packs were ready, and as a teacher she didn't have to worry whether she would have enough resources to keep the children warm.

The children at Cashmere Primary School did really well in 2011. The school was prepared to just have 2011 as a year without too much pressure, and as long as the children didn't fall backwards, then that was great. They made a decision that they just wanted the children to retain what they knew already, but they were not really pushing for them to make leaps and bounds. The children still did really well. Kerry says she was really focused on the children and making sure that school was fun. She wanted the children to feel safe and positive which meant that they were doing lots of work together. Kerry argues that explicit teaching came as a by-product of her trying to make sure that the children were all happy and safe and having a purpose.

Kerry considers that the '*what*' and '*how*' she teaches didn't change, but she has become very aware of how the children are reacting to things now. She is very aware of the kids that are a little but unsure or a little upset about things and makes sure that she doesn't push them too far. If they are trying something new, and she can see them getting in a panic, then she will pull back and go easy – pull back and wait, because she doesn't want to overload children.

June 13, 2011

On Tuesday June 13th, the city had more aftershocks and the bridges out east were closed. After the June aftershocks, the liquefaction came inside. That is when they said, '*That's it! We are not staying here any longer.*' They couldn't keep the kids there, as they couldn't play outside because it was just sewerage liquefaction by the third time. The children wanted to go outside, especially the two year-old boy. In the end, they got out as fast as they could. They got bridging finance and they bought a new house and escaped.

They were really pleased they were insured with AMI. They had to settle all their outstanding claims very quickly because of that they didn't have any holdups. They got their money and they did okay out of the house being broken into three parts. They got a house that they wouldn't have been able to afford if they tried to sell their original home on the open market before the quakes. Kerry's husband is a plumber and he is really busy so that's been good too.

Kerry's reflections

As a family, Kerry sometimes wonders how it has affected them all. Abbey was two weeks old in September 2010, so for her the ground shaking is what she expects. Kerry watches the children and when there is an aftershock, they don't even react. Kerry watched Sam when he plays the earthquake game with his mate. They will build a building with their blocks and one of them will go '*Earthquakes!*' and they will knock everything over. For them it is a reality. Sam was walking on their bed recently and said, '*It's just like walking on an earthquake, Mummy.*' Their perception of a lot of things has been affected by their new normal. Kerry is not sure if she is sad about that or pleased that they are so resilient.

Resilience, according to Kerry, *'is the ability to cope with what is going on, and say this is what I need to do and this is what is going to happen, and I can do it.'* Kerry feels she is quite resilient.

When Kerry looks back, however, she can't believe that they stayed on the east side of Christchurch as long as they did. They should have taken the kids out of there a lot faster. It wasn't until they weren't there, that they started thinking, *'Why were we there, breathing that and living in that place?'* Kerry looks back over 2012 and feels that they should have moved when the house broke and when the kids couldn't play outside. They should have got out of that neighbourhood. Once they left and went back a week later, they realised how awful it had been, living over there in the red zone. However, the community came together amazingly and everybody knew where everyone was and really helped each other out. Everyone was digging each other out of the liquefaction. The community spirit was amazing.

One thing she really noticed was living in the east but working in Cashmere, the number of people who didn't know what was going on in the east. She realises that there were awful things that happened in Cashmere with retaining walls collapsing and so on, but there were different difficulties out east. Kerry thinks people in the west of Christchurch got a greater understanding once they started to hear more of the stories from the east of the city. At the start, everyone was very much thinking of what was happening to them and then people started to hear what had happened to others. Something happened to everyone and everybody was affected in some way. Over time, people had a greater understanding of what other people had been through.

Kerry hopes that Christchurch will be a better place. Kerry knows her neighbours now. When they first moved into Rebecca Ave in Burwood, they didn't know their neighbours and it wasn't until they had the earthquake that they got to know them. When they moved to Westmorland, the first thing they did was get to know their neighbours. When it snowed in 2012, they all got together and had coffee and that really helped.



Teachers at Cashmere primary school

Francis Ganderton

Francis's story

September 4, 2010

At the time of the first earthquake, Francis and his family were in the United Kingdom at a large family gathering for his parents' 50th wedding anniversary with people from different corners of the world. His first awareness of the September quake was hearing the BBC news saying, 'There's been an earthquake in New Zealand, in the South Island, in Christchurch'. It was difficult trying to find out what had happened to their house because they suspected there would be damage, because the footage in the UK was extreme. They came back to Christchurch to discover the chimney had fallen into their bedroom and there was a reasonable amount of damage, but they still were able to live in it until February 2011.

February 22 and the aftermath

When the February earthquake struck, Francis was at school and he was conscious that the house would have suffered significantly again. He had to stay at the school, knowing that his kids were at school elsewhere and not knowing if they and his wife were okay. It is always a difficult position to be in where teachers are responsible for their class but they've got their own personal circumstances to consider.

Their very old two-storey villa house had shifted off the foundations and they had a lot of bricks broken from their five fireplaces. The brick wall was bulging in his son's bedroom and the wall had fallen in their bedroom, so it wasn't safe. They went to his mother-in-law's house but when she returned from holiday, they left. To begin with, they didn't want to go back to their old house because they wanted to be away from all the damage. School was obviously closed and he was able to take extra leave until they found themselves a rental and things looked a little bit clearer. They realised that the house would be written off and that was largely because they were under-insured. The insurance company gave them replacement value rather than the market value, so they decided to take the cash payout.

One of the most difficult parts was the cumulative stress dealing with EQC and the insurance company. They made a decision to accept the insurance company offer so that they could move forward, but that was a bit fatal in terms of their ability to cope, financially and emotionally. They were fortunate to get paid out reasonably early on but they had to come to terms with a reasonably sized increase in their mortgage during and after the rebuild. They found the most difficult thing dealing with the uncertainty and the unknown. There was no clarity and no clear process to build their emotional strategy around that for coping; instead they felt worn down during the process.

They committed to a building company whom they knew and they felt that things would then move reasonably, seamlessly and smoothly **forward** Unfortunately this didn't happen. They really feel

they've been enormously let down by the way that they were treated. It has been really difficult, having to not only cope with the rebuild, but emotionally with losing a close friend over repeated delays and broken promises.

Coping with the stress

Francis found it really difficult. He wasn't sleeping well and at 2am when he woke up he would be really angry. He thinks it was definitely a physiological effect of the stress. He was getting a lot of stomach cramps and bowel discomfort and just not feeling right. Then he had to just get on and come to school and perform. He thought he was doing an okay job but he looks back now he thinks *'That was really very, very hard, that period.'*

They were promised six months for the rebuild. They were assured that because no other builds were taking place, they would be given a good builder who was efficient and skilled. However, the builder had other jobs which he just went off and did, so they were left. The schedule was 2 weeks, 3 weeks, 5 weeks, 11, 12 weeks behind and the delays just ate away at him. When the builder didn't turn up, Francis' anxiety went up to sky-high and that's how he was for the best part of 6 months, where things were progressively delayed.

For Francis it was a real frustration, an anger and a disappointment, the lack of being able to have any control. The thing he found most debilitating, personally, and for his family was that they were told that something would be there next week and three weeks down the track it were still not there. There were many disappointments and frustrations he didn't share with people. There were many examples of doors not put in correctly, the floor not being level and the builder delaying and being difficult. Francis and his family had mortgaged up to the hilt to find things not done or not done properly was stressful.

They undertook a formal complaint and the stress involved at that point was huge. It was taking a huge toll on the family. It was a massive issue because they were potentially financially ruined. They had to pay all of the accounts to the builder or they were in breach of contract, but Francis wasn't prepared to pay until the floor was leveled. It took a month of arguing and frustration. It was horrible because Francis felt like everything he'd worked for, for 20 years was potentially gone. All of a sudden there was added debt that they had to take on, which made them less willing to accept more delays and more excuses. They ran out of their mortgage support and in the last 2 months, it was costing them as a family about seven or eight hundred dollars a week in mortgage and rent.

Maintaining normal life

Francis had to keep his mind off the rebuild because in the holidays he was around at the building site the whole time. He came to school every day because he has a work ethic. Jacqui always said *'You need time, take it'* and on occasions he did but just when it was really needed. He came to work to partly to keep his mind off the rebuild, which was hard at times. One of his male colleagues at school was a great support. In the mornings, they'd just talk. In a way, having somebody to talk to was great. It helped him to verbalise and download the ongoing issues.

Francis and his wife had to keep on raising a family. He has a daughter with special or high needs and she's doing really well but she's had a remarkably challenging beginning to her life for five years. There was that extra aspect to deal with and his difficult relationship with a family member nearby. *'It's the cumulative things people are dealing with. People have got so many responsibilities, so much is going on and the big decisions are just not under their control. There is a lot of stress in something like a rebuild. A teacher's performance has to be affected. It is not possible to carry on being the person of usual everyday circumstances, if there are issues going on in the background.'*

It was difficult when everyone said how lucky he was getting a rebuild, because he didn't feel that was the case. Sometimes Francis did think he was lucky compared to 10,000 other families and he did feel guilty about feeling miserable. Everyone thought that they were paid out fully and quickly but they didn't see that Francis also had a new financial millstone added. They moved into the house in October 2012.

Reflecting on the process

Their decision to stay in Christchurch was considered very seriously, because if ever there was a time to go, it was after getting paid out. They were in a position to make a quick easy decision and go elsewhere but as a family they were keen to stay. Once they had signed up for the rebuild that was really their commitment but they certainly questioned it at later times. At the time they expected it to be a lot smoother than it turned out to be.

Francis always thought he was quite resilient but he definitely wonders now. He couldn't understand but he certainly hasn't felt anything like the anxieties that he was having constantly during the rebuild, ever before. His anxiety is now shifting to everybody else doing a rebuild because he is looking at the bigger picture and hoping desperately that there will be a rational approach taken for the rebuilds.

Francis thinks a lot of people have watched the development of their house as a sort of yardstick for something happening in Christchurch. They've still got a gap in the fence and cars pull over and have a look at their new home because people need to see something new being built and this helps in terms of the re-generation of the city.

2013, a new start?

They finally moved in: *'Honestly, just being in the house is great.'* His wife has great ideas and has put together a home that looks and feels fantastic. They've got a lot to look forward to. They are getting close to getting carpets down and wallpaper up. Hopefully, they'll have the end of year post-dinner party for the staff at the school, if his wife agrees. Francis can now say, *'We feel like it's been worth it.'* They put a huge amount of effort into choosing and designing the house and they've ended up with something that they're really proud of. At the end of 2012, Francis was excited about the coming year, especially from the school point of view. He felt like he'd turned an amazing corner and he could suddenly come out of the forest. He felt re-energised. Unfortunately, the year that followed was to bring a new set of stresses for which he needed to draw on the skills of resilience he had gained from his house-building experience.

Parents at Cashmere primary school

Julie Lassen and David Kirkness

Julie and David's story

September 4, 2010

Julie and David live in a hillside suburb near Cashmere School. During Sept 4, 2010 they had very little damage to their house; it was shaken, but there was very little damage. Some things fell off the bench and smashed in their kitchen. They had damaged beams and there was some structural damage but there were no broken windows. It was just a lot of shaking. The power came back on 4 or 5 hours later, and they still had water. The damage to the land became more visible later in the morning

Julie said, *'life went on and life was good.'* David said: *'Everyone in the weeks after September breathed a sigh of relief that no one died and said, "Wow that was lucky"'. It was probably because of the time that it happened because there weren't people in the city doing things.*

February 22, 2011

February was a different case altogether. Julie presumes she took Amelia to school as normal as she can't even remember what she did that morning but as soon as the 12:51pm February quake happened, she can remember exactly what happened for the next 24 hours in minute detail.

She was driving along the bottom of the hill, going to an appointment. When the earthquake struck, she didn't know what was happening with the car. There was nothing there, it was kind of floating ; it is hard to describe. She pulled over to the side of the road and as she did so, she looked into her rear vision mirror and there were about three other cars pulled up in behind her. There was a van pulled over on the other side of the road, and she wound down her window and said to the driver, *'Oh my God'* and as they did so, the road split between them.

Instinctively, she thought Amelia was at school and she would be fine. So she went to her appointment down Hoon Hay Rd. There was liquefaction and there were bumps in the road. She got to her appointment and checked in and tried to use her phone as she didn't have her cell phone with her. She went to use her phone to ring David and she couldn't; it had gone flat. She went in and the woman had fish tanks and there was fish and water everywhere. She said she was fine, so Julie raced back to school.

Julie came up Hackthorne Rd and there were quite high patches and splits in the road and she had drive round and over them carefully, hoping the car would get up the hill to school. She got to the school. There were some parents at the school really quickly. Julie thought the children would be in their classrooms, so she got to the classroom and no one was there. Luckily she saw another parent who said they were down on the field.

Julie went to the field and there was a mass of 460 kids and lots of adults; children crying and people cuddling. She tried to find where her daughter would be in the mass of people, and then there was that sense of panic and just not knowing where she was. Luckily, she saw a teacher who said, *'She is over there and she is fine.'* Julie went over to where she was, with a group of people and Amelia saw her and she burst into tears. Julie was rubbing her back and saying, *'It's fine, it's fine.'* There was another girl there from another class, who must have been in the swimming pool as she was shivering and so cold. There was nothing Julie could do, so she said to her daughter, *'We've got to go and see Dad.'*

They hurried home as best they could. Going up their hill, they saw the whole end of the house at the bottom of the street, had fallen away. They found out later that the man in that house was actually on the phone to EQC talking about the September earthquake. He was upstairs and he couldn't get out because the whole end of his house had collapsed and the stairs had fallen down.

They stopped and Julie took photos. Julie has a photo book of all the things that happened on that day as they drove home. She doesn't really know why she did it. She thought to herself, *'Shouldn't I be racing home to see my husband?'* She got home and David was there and they had an enormous hug.

They ended up sitting in the turning bay with their neighbours as they waited for husbands to **cohome**. As each person came home, they would hear more information. They were sitting down but the ground was shaking the whole time; it was vibrating and constantly moving. They tried to get a couple of vehicles out of neighbours' houses. One of the neighbours was inside, she was screaming and they were shouting for her to get out of the house.

Julie remembers the neighbour's teenage son went inside his house and came out with a bag of chips and drinks and David got the deck chairs out. It sounds like they were having a kind of party but it wasn't like that. They later found out that one of their neighbours who was pregnant at the time, had a miscarriage. They rescued the truck out of the garage of the immediate neighbours across the road. When the neighbour, Geoff, got home he said, *'Let's get out of here'* as their house was completely munted. Tanya had been in the garden and seen her house literally go up in the air, and come down slightly rearranged. The neighbours headed out of town and drove north and didn't stop until they got to Kaikoura.

David's memories

David had come home for lunch and he was sitting in the lounge about to bite into a sandwich, watching the BBC news and **whammo** they got hit. It was *'like a hammer punch'*. He knows in other parts of town, it was shaking, but there are different waves in the quake energy and in this area, it just hit it like a hammer. There were things crashing and smashing. The lounge window exploded in; things flew across the lounge both ways. Julie and David had a visitor upstairs and she was screaming. Their neighbour, over the road who was in the garden at the time, she was screaming. The lady next door was screaming and then Noel, the next house over, was yelling at her, **'Get out! Get out!'** That all went on for some time, so it was chaos. They knew what had happened. David's first job was to rescue the lady upstairs and get her out of the house and settled down.

Everyone got outside and onto the street and the shakes kept going on, almost continuously where they were. The neighbour's house had a big curtain wall of glass bricks and they kept falling in his driveway and exploding, so they had this on-going noise of violence and glass breaking. Over the next half an hour to an hour, they just sat through the earthquakes. Julie has a photo of one of their neighbours with her dog on her lap, waiting for her husband to come home. When Derek, her husband, came home, he told them that he'd been in a building next to the CTV building. He had seen the CTV building come down, out of their window and they thought they were also goners. They had actually crawled down their stairwell through dirt and dust to get out of their building. He had walked from the central city and it took him about two hours to get home. He was white and he just said, *'I thought I was dead.'* He was in a state of shock.

Eventually, Julie and David worked out that they weren't going anywhere. Their house was wrecked and they had no power or water. Between the aftershocks, David went inside and put a mat down over all the glass. There was honey and soy sauce and crockery and things like that all over the floor. They tried to run across and get down to Amelia's room. Julie was so scared there was going to be another aftershock and she didn't know if the house was going to stay up. She grabbed a bag and just threw clothes and things in it and threw it out the door. Then she tried to grab her wedding materials because she had weddings coming up that weekend. She tried to think and take everything that they needed with them.

They were **'munted'**, and it took them a while to come to the conclusion that they couldn't stay there with the constant aftershocks. They got in the truck and went out to Julie's mother in Lincoln. Her mother didn't really expect them to be there. She was happy to have them but she didn't really comprehend the scale of why they were there. As they had been out of touch, apart from the radio, they didn't know anything until they sat down and watched the tail end of the TV news – then they saw all those scenes and pictures.

Later, Julie's doctor was telling her that when she was down south at the time of the earthquake she saw raw footage of the disaster unfolding. Later some material was taken off the air and not shown again. She said she it really freaked her out because she didn't comprehend what had happened and the full impact until she saw those images.

After the quakes

Every day, for almost two weeks, they left Amelia with Julie's Mum, because they still had no power and water and school was closed. They also didn't want to take Amelia back until they had things sorted as there was glass everywhere. They went home and tried to clean up but they couldn't clean up honey and sticky stuff without water. When they went to clean up the lounge, the neighbour came to help. Julie was saying to the neighbour that she was really upset because her antique Buddha was lost and probably broken. The neighbour dashed away and then reappeared. He had salvaged it and it was completely perfect. All of the glass had shattered but the Buddha was completely fine.

One of the jobs on the list of things for David after September was to attach furniture to the wall. During the February earthquake, the wall unit which was full of glass had come down but luckily the jolt had moved the couch where he was sitting. His sandwich was still on the table with tomato on it.

David is very lucky to be here as the wall unit could have landed on him and there could have been a tragedy.

One day, Julie got a phone call from Amelia's teacher telling her that one of the mothers had been killed in the quake. She thinks she drank quite a lot of wine that night, as she knew the mother as they used to sit with her at swimming. So that news was pretty tough.

Julie and David got power after two weeks but it was three or four weeks before they got water. When they first flushed the toilet, they realised the pipes and things weren't connecting. They had to get a plumber in and get that sorted. Their house physically moved and had sheared the pipes off. Their house stood up until the end of the year and it was liveable once they got a few things fixed.

Going back to school

The school had a working bee to get it open, so Julie and David went along. Julie's job was to clean the Epicentre surfaces and wipe them down because of all the dust. They made a decision to go into the cloakrooms and empty the lunchboxes that had been sitting for there two weeks. That was pretty interesting! When school started again, it felt like the first sign of normality.

Challenges

David said they had a number of challenges. One evening he was walking around the neighbourhood and went down a drive to see a guy he knew. There was an engineer's truck in the driveway, so he said, *'I need an engineer'* and did a bit of sweet talking. A week or so later the engineer came after work to give him an opinion of where they were going to go with their house. They had concrete block walls with a slab and a wooden house on top. The concrete block walls had triple diagonal breaks through them and were twisted. The engineer said, *'I don't know how to fix this and I would be very interested if anyone thinks they can.'*

That was really the first they knew that the house wasn't fixable. They eventually got an engineer to look at it and write a report, before getting EQC in. That gave some sort of direction to life. They had to sort out the house out and insurance issues. That has been David's battle for the last year, working on that.

The challenge they had was that they couldn't get the insurance company to come and see them. They had to get EQC first but EQC had wrongly recorded their phone number. As EQC couldn't phone them, they weren't going to assess them. That was all a slow process because David kept ringing and nothing was happening. Julie was so worried about David's health because he was so stressed, that she got on the phone and got extremely emotional, to the point of tears. After they worked through everything, they managed to get EQC to come and see them. In the end, they had a good assessor and he basically said, *'You are 90% a write off.'* Once Julie and David had that message, they could ring AMI and move on.

The places that were part of their history are all going. Amelia was born at St George's Hospital and that had been demolished. The first house she came home to had also been demolished because the whole end of that house came down and crushed a car. Now the house they live in will have to go.

Parents at Cashmere Primary School

Amanda Corlett

Amanda's story

Amanda works in the school office with two other staff members and lives nearby on the hill. This account is from her perspective as a parent of three children in the school.

September 4, 2010

Amanda said the quakes of 4:35am on September 4, 2010 were frightening. It woke them all up but their house was absolutely fine. Their three children, Tom, who was 11 at the time, Jake 10, and Molly the youngest, were fine. Molly woke up, but the others didn't, so Amanda got them all up. Amanda and Dean have a two-storey house and they met the children in the middle and said, *'We think it's an earthquake, let's just stay here.'* They brought the children upstairs to sleep, and really felt that was it.

They got up and the boys had their soccer finals on the Saturday morning, and they all thought they'd just go to watch. As they were driving down the hill, where everything looked fine, they could see the damage. There were still fire alarms and burglar alarms and all sorts of things going off. They hadn't even thought about turning on a radio. They turned it on and realised the radio was advising people to stay home.

They went and checked her husband's building which was fine and that's when everyone starting ringing. That event was a good tester for them and made them think, *'Well these things do happen.'* The kids were great as they brushed it off: *'It's an earthquake, that's okay.'* Amanda had never thought about earthquakes, but realised that they can happen. At the time she thought, *'Oh, okay well we might want to remember that for next time'* but never really thought there would be a next time.

February 22, 2011

Before February, her children were still good and okay with earthquakes and aftershocks On February 22nd it was Amanda's day off, so she wasn't at school. She works for her husband on a Tuesday. They were out together at lunch in Addington. They were in a restaurant, when the earthquake hit.

Working in a school meant that Amanda got down on the floor and got under the table thinking *'I'll be a turtle'* but nobody else did. She was looking around from under her table and everyone else was running outside and screaming. Her husband was saying *'Get up!'* She got up eventually, grabbed her handbag and they all walked outside. There was a lot of panic. There were some people lying on the ground outside who were not hurt but were obviously feeling a bit faint or shocked. She thought of her children first, and said to her husband, *'Get in the car, we've got to get the kids.'* He replied, *'Do you think so?'* She said, *'Yeah Jake won't like this, we better go.'* Amanda walked past the people

who were lying on the ground. She wasn't very friendly or helpful but she really felt that the children would need them. They were lucky, that at that point, there wasn't much traffic on the road. They were able to drive almost straight to school. They saw a few buildings had come down but they never looked back to town because they were heading the other way. There were some power lines down over one road, which they had to drive around, but really the streets on Cashmere were empty. They came right up the hill to the school. They thought the kids would be okay and she didn't even think people would be hurt. She didn't feel it had been a major shake because where she was, nothing had happened. What she had seen was nothing really, so she still thought they would be all okay at school as well.

Arriving at the school

When they got to the school gate, they parked and got out of the car. The one thing she will never forget was the noise. It was like a moaning sound. They could hear the entire school and they could hear it from up at the gate. As soon as she got out, she thought, *'Oh my gosh, maybe they're not okay.'* They could just hear the noise; it was like a buzz. Amanda was so relieved to come in and see the children were all down on the field. They were all in a big group together and she thought *'Phew!'* She was so worried then about her son, Jake, because she knew he'd be the main noise. She thought, *'He'll be doing all of that because he won't like this at all.'* As she was walking across the field, Jake saw her and he just ran and threw himself at his mother, and she was so pleased to see him. The other kids were all good and sitting in bunches. The teachers had them lined up and she knew the office girls would be great and have it all sorted. So they'd checked the kids and everyone was all really quite good down on the field. They were calm but it was very noisy.

The school looked good as there was no damage and there was nothing down. There were no walls down and everything was perfect but sitting on the field was awful because everyone could feel the aftershocks through the ground. They sat there for a while. Because she knows lots of the mothers and all the children, Amanda wandered round with her big Jake on one hip and Molly and Tom. Tom, all his friends and Molly were absolutely fine. They walked around lots of the other children to see anyone else who was panicking. She looked for the children she knew had had problems after the September quake, who mightn't be dealing with it. She picked up kids and hugged them. She had a whole bunch of kids hanging off her, hugging everyone, making sure that they felt okay as they walked around. Her husband came and did the same while Jacqui Duncan, the principal, was talking to all the children on the loud hailer. She had it all very organised and it felt very calm. Amanda stayed for quite some time as the parents dribbled in, in stages, and picked up their children. As they were some of the first parents at school, she gathered up all of her children's best friends and they sat together and waited until their parents came. Then they walked up to the car and went home.

Arriving home

They live near the school but as they got down to their street, the neighbours were sitting in the driveway and they said, *'Come in here.'* She thought they would do that, because she didn't know at that stage what their house would be like. She thought it would be wise for the parents to see it before the children did.

The children stayed in the driveway with the neighbours, who had put out some scooters and things for them to play with. The children were happy and laughing and distracted. Her husband went over

to the house, which is a relatively new house, and it was okay, but like everybody's houses, the inside was diabolical. They couldn't even get through the back door. Their kitchen is in the back end of the house and everything was on the floor and they couldn't get into the rest of the house. It smelt! As her lovely daughter, who was 8 or 7 at the time, said, *'Oh daddy, all I can smell is your grog.'* They stayed at the neighbours for a while. Amanda got out their camping equipment and set it up. They all had a cup of tea and biscuits with the children. The men went into the car in one of the garages and turned on a radio and sat listening to what had been happening. When they came out, they were looking incredibly grim. She mouthed to her husband, *'Is it ok?'* and he shook his head and said, *'No, it's not.'* That was the first time Amanda thought, *'Really? Is there more than that?'* Her husband said, *'I think we'll go round and have a look at our house.'* So she went with him, leaving the children with the neighbours.

They went back around the side of their house and they could see the city. It was then, as they were facing the town from their spectacular view of the city, Dean said, *'It's not good there'* pointing to the city. That was the first time Amanda thought, *'Oh gosh, this doesn't feel good.'* They stayed outside for a long time until they decided that they needed to sort the house out and get inside before it got dark. They took the children and let them play out on their own back lawn. Dean and Amanda went in and cleared an area to get inside but the kid's bedrooms really were a mess. Amanda didn't want the children to see the rooms because she felt that that would frighten them. So they set up an area in the lounge and brought blankets in. They hadn't realised that everything was smashed but they couldn't vacuum up and there was no water and there was no power. Amanda was thinking, *'Oh, it's alright, we'll just sweep it all away'* but she couldn't. They just had to push the debris into a corner and leave it all sitting there and hope for the best.

Amanda remembers saying to the kids, *'Don't take your shoes off.'* They all slept in the lounge that night but it wasn't good. It was scary and there were lots of aftershocks. They were on edge, waiting and waiting and it really didn't feel good. They have a big, beautiful glass balustrade across their deck and in the night, one of the panels exploded and there were pieces of glass everywhere. Even the neighbours heard it. They came outside wondering what on earth it was, but it was obviously that the pressure had just built up. The kids were hysterical after that and trying to calm them down and get them to sleep, wasn't easy. It was a rough night. The next day, the kids weren't coping. Jake was almost hysterical. Dean looked in at his work and it wasn't great either.

Challenges

Amanda's Mum and Dad were over on the east side of Christchurch, and they were in a mess. Her father was stranded in the house on his own with liquefaction, and he couldn't get out. Her Mum was at work at the time of the quake and was okay but there was no one could get to her father. They knew he was there and he was okay but his whole street had filled up with liquefaction. The house had tilted and he was in it and they couldn't get to him. Dean had a four-wheel drive so he said, *'I might see if I can go and get your Dad out.'* He went and got his father-in-law and took him over to their aunty's house. Amanda's elderly Dad will never get over the earthquake, the liquefaction and the events of that day.

The worst thing after that was that their neighbours came over and said that one of the mothers from school was missing. It was awful. The neighbour said that the mother, Lisa, hadn't come home

and would Amanda be able to ring Jacqui, the principal, and let her know. The message was that the community was aware that Lisa was missing. Lisa's children, Sam, is in Molly's class and Olivia, is in Jake's class. Lisa was a fabulous mother. They had a lot to do with her at the school and in the office. She was very sweet. They'd seen her most days at school. She was thinking about those little children who are her children's age and how it must feel that their mother hadn't come home.

Amanda couldn't comprehend how Ben, the Dad, and those children could carry on. What they must be feeling that she hadn't come back. Lisa had been at school that morning helping in a classroom. The authorities wondered if she'd said anything about where she was going or what she was doing, so they knew where to start looking for her. It was terrible for Amanda having to ring Jacqui and say that someone they knew was gone or missing or worse. Then, the kids heard. They were worried because they all knew her. It was a horrible feeling and it really, really got to Amanda. She just felt ill. Jake got really upset and Amanda was getting to the point where she wasn't able to keep it together much longer.

Amanda didn't want the children to see her getting really upset, so she said to her husband, *'I'd quite like to leave town.'* He didn't want the kids to think that they were running away, but no one was sleeping and she really wanted to go. She didn't want to lose it. There were bad things that she didn't want them to see. At the time everyone, friends and family, were texting as much as they could to check in, and everyone was worried about the children. They had a lot of lovely people ring to say, *'Are you guys ok? If you want to go somewhere let us know, we'll go together or we'll find somewhere.'* Amanda had a friend who was going to her family in Queenstown. She thought, *'We just have to go. We can't leave them here doing this all the time for too long.'* They had close friends who had a house in Twizel and they were going down there. The friends in Twizel said, *'Look, come and stay. We've got enough room for all of you.'* Dean was reluctant to go because he was helping everyone, including his own and Amanda's parents. His work was full of liquefaction. It was just a mess of chaos and panic. They were trying not to make it panicky for the kids, so they decided to go. Dean was not going to come but then he decided he'd return to Christchurch a few days later.

Getting back to normal

When they got there and they had this little bunkroom out the back. They had a bathroom and a toilet and they all crammed in. They all had a bed. As soon as they got there, they were all calm. They all stopped crying and obviously felt better. Amanda thought, *'That's all I want.'* They needed time to be able to talk, to explain what had happened and talk about what they were going to do. When the children were all hysterical and upset, they just couldn't; it just didn't work.

At least when they were in Twizel, they were able to say, *'Right, gee, that wasn't good, was it? That gave us a fright'* and calm down. They could be sensible about what they wanted to say and how they were going to deliver it, without it bordering on hysteria. They didn't want to say, *"We don't know. We don't know what happened, we don't get it. We don't know why it happened."* In Twizel they could say, *'Gee, it did happen and it has made a bit of a mess of the house but we're going to do this and this to fix it.'* They could list all the people they knew who were okay. It felt much better. It was a relief to have a whole week there. Dean stayed a few days and then went home.

Going to Twizel was such a blessing. Twizel is Amanda's haven now. She looks upon it as the best place to go but the kids say there's nothing there. They've had many trips back down there since, because it feels like a good place to be.

Sad times

While they were there, they had a call from their neighbour to say that they had confirmation that Lisa hadn't been found. They knew she was in the city somewhere and she wouldn't be coming home. A few days later, teachers phoned to say that Ben, Lisa's husband, wanted all the children to know about Lisa, so that when his kids got back to school, they wouldn't be asking questions or making his kids uncomfortable. **It was just awful.** Then they had to sit the kids down and say that Sam's mother had died in the earthquake. It was horrible to see their faces. It was such a horrible thing to have to tell them but they were pretty good. They just felt so sad for their children. It panicked them. Then the **children** saying *'Gosh, sometimes mothers can go to work and they don't come home.'* *'What if you go somewhere, Mum, and you don't come back?'* **What** *'What will they do next and how will they do things?'* It was something they never thought they were going to have to talk about with their children. While Lisa wasn't a close friend, Amanda **she** knew her from the office and her kids had started school at the same time. They were very hard times. Amanda remembers that night making the kids dinner and taking it to them and thinking, *'Oh, God. Lisa is never going to do this again.'* She had to go and stand outside for a couple of hours. She bawled her eyes out. She thought, *'I can't do this in front of the kids. I can't let them know that this just breaks my heart. It's such a horrible, horrible thing and so many families are feeling the same thing.'* She sat out there for two hours crying and then she thought, *'Right, that's it. I've done it and they're not going to see that. Now I can go back and just say, 'It's horrid. It's sad but they need us and we need to make them feel the best they can by going back and carrying on.'"*

Coming back home

She rang her husband, Dean, who had gone home and asked him to come and pick them up. She made a list for Dean and said, *'Right, put the wardrobe doors on. Clean the glass up from outside. Sweep the floor.'* She thought, *'We need to make it look normal and then we can go back.'* The kids were anxious and worried. She had to explain that it wouldn't go away, but that they needed to go back and help other people and see what they could do. She was pleased they went away so they could talk. They came back and tried to be normal.

When they came home, they came up and looked at the school. They talked a lot about the school, and how the school was fine so that when the children went back to school, they would be fine, too.

Meanwhile, Amanda's Mum and Dad had to leave town because their house was too bad to go back to. They're still in that strange zone of not knowing what will happen to their home.

The children were good at getting back into a routine, getting back into doing things at school, seeing their friends, knowing everyone was ok, seeing Sam and Olivia (Lisa and Ben's children) who were fantastic. They just came back and carried on. Amanda's children noticed how strong Sam and Olivia were and how sometimes they'd mention their Mum, but they were really good and they just kept going. Amanda concluded: *'Tough times.'*

Parents at Cashmere Primary School

James and Helen West

James' story

February 22, 2011

James West, a senior Manager for PGC Perpetual, who worked on the first floor of the PGC building in Christchurch, was in Auckland for the day. The first awareness of the quake for him was sitting in a high rise building in Auckland, with a call coming in that there had been a major earthquake in Christchurch. He thought it was more media hype and that it would be fine. It soon became very evident that there was a real problem and that their building had gone down.

At the same time, he was endeavouring to find out where his family was. Helen, his wife, had gone from her work in Bealey Ave to his workplace, not realising that he wasn't there. What people don't realise is that when the PGC building collapsed, it didn't pancake onto the ground floor, it pancaked onto the first floor where they all worked. So Helen saw where he sat which was now about 2 inches thick and thought he was in there. It was one of his team members who said to her, '*No, no. He's up in Auckland for the day.*' His wife, Helen, wasn't aware or had forgotten that he was away for the day.

At that point, James and his colleague had their first phone communications with the people on the ground and realised that they had a real problem. A lady who worked for him gave him a description of what had happened. He thought she must have been exaggerating, so she gave the phone to one of the senior guys and he painted an even worse picture.

After he figured out that the children were all right, he moved into the emergency plan for the PGC. He was up in Auckland with a colleague, so they hopped into a car and drove down over a day and a half. They thought about trying to fly down but they figured the airport would have been closed, as it was closed for some time after the first earthquake in September.

As they got down through the North Island they started to see news items. They saw their building for the first time on the news in Taupo. When they got close to Kaikoura, there were streams of cars queuing at the service stations. It was like there'd been a bomb go off in Christchurch and they were about the only car driving into the city. Everyone else was driving out. It was quite odd. They immediately went to the PGC office. That was the start of the formal emergency response and recovery procedure for the PGC building. He had to explain the floor plan and where people were sitting to the emergency services. He was very, very nervous about going back to see the building but it was actually quite calming when he got there because the emergency service guys did such a good job of the recovery. They were very professional and they did a fantastic job. The people on the ground were absolutely brilliant.

They had a floor plan of 50 people. They had 30 people in the building who were trapped; ten of those were killed; ten were seriously injured; two were double amputees. There was just huge

emotional damage. They lost all their records and all their systems. They had a huge rebuild job. He led the recovery of the business for PGC Perpetual. One of his old colleagues, who was the ex-CEO of Perpetual, came back and managed the process with the families of the deceased.

Managing the crisis

The management of information was very important. They closed down stories or rumours of other people being trapped in the building, very quickly. It was just one of those things that happened. James spent some time talking to one of the victim's fathers. They knew early on that the son had died in the PGC building. They had an eye witness account from someone who had seen his son go under his desk at the time the earthquake struck. But it was not possible to say that publicly or to family members. It was a job for the emergency services and the police to report.

They did a lot of work making sure families had resources – money, basic things like water and supplies. Then there were all the arrangements for people who were injured. A lot of people came to his home as he still had water and showers.

It was one of the most awful things for James, going to ten funerals. He couldn't get to all of them as some were held at the same time. The process of going through so many funerals was difficult. Plus they had a number of very seriously injured people in hospital. It was just unimaginable. He doesn't want to go to too many more funerals for a while.

Support pours in

The support they had from past employees, the local community and from colleagues around the company, was overwhelming. They had food parcels. Whatever they wanted, they got. A number of key suppliers bent over backwards for them. They had free Air New Zealand trips and Scenic Circle hotels and free rental car for anyone who wanted to go out of Christchurch.

His brother-in-law and sister came up from the farm in Te Anau and they took their kids. His family drove south to his little old primary school and the kids had a ball going to school down there.

People knew **they** were in and they were given a huge amount of support. They got used to people cooking for them or being invited out. The community support was amazing.

James's reflections

James works on what actually happens, he doesn't dwell on the 'what ifs'. If he spent the whole time scenario-ing about what may have happened, it would just do his head in. For him, it is an experience from which he can grow. He hates to say it but he can get on with his life. It has been a very, very difficult phase but it was also a chance to stand up and help people where he could.

Because of the PGC experience, all of his family lived through the funerals and events. It wasn't something they never talked about; it was something that they talked about daily. They were going

to funerals, they were visiting ill people and they were recovering a business. Their children were exposed to the earthquake and the recovery process. They talked about it at home a lot.

Because they were dealing with it and talking about it every day, a really close group of people at work became a form of counseling support. It wasn't like they were tucked away and didn't talk about it. They addressed and talked about it every day for probably the best part of a year. That was very, very helpful for James, especially as he was with other people who had been through the same thing.

When people did flow back into the workplace, there were some fantastic stories and it was great. However, almost everyone at work hit the wall at some time. That was just part of their recovery process. It wasn't possible to necessarily pick when they were going to hit the wall but something would trigger it and then there would be an issue. They would deal with it together. They had very, very good counseling services and support, so they got through it pretty well.

The injured are still probably the forgotten group of people. It's not the physical, but the mental trauma. There are some very, very damaged people. James thinks that there are a lot of forgotten people who were very seriously injured, particularly in their building. For people like him, life goes on pretty much untouched but the people with severe injuries have got serious issues to deal with -- and they will have for the rest of their lives.

The Canterbury Earthquakes Royal Commission

The Royal Commission was hard for James. He represented PGC at the Royal Commission. It transpired that there was quite a bit of engineering information about that building; how it was very unusual and wasn't as structurally sound as they were led to believe. The building was '*overwhelmed*' by the earthquake. It would have been nice for the engineers who did the inspections after the first quake to have had that knowledge of the building. The former PGC chairman sent him information when he was leaving. James was flicking through it and found a couple of reports from Holmes Consulting about the building. James and others thought they were in a very, very secure building but as it turned out, it wasn't. In reality, it wouldn't have made any difference but it would have been nice to have some more knowledge of how the building worked. He also realises that Christchurch has earthquakes and if people are going to live in New Zealand, they are going to get earthquakes. It is a fact.

Helen's story

February 22, 2011

Helen West was at work when the earthquake of February 22nd struck. She instantly hopped into her car. She got to the corner of Bealey Ave and Barbadoes Street and the road was closed. She took the car back to work and thought she'd walk to James' work and get his car.

When she got near James' workplace, she remembers standing on the corner thinking, *'I'm lost.'* She had no idea where she was, because she was looking for his building and it wasn't there. A guy said to her, *"Do not go down there"* and then he showed her where the people were all coming out. It was then that she realised she was looking at the flattened PGC building. It was just so lucky that Laura from the office saw her and said, *'He's in Auckland.'* She was going, *'Oh thank God'* so they rang him. She never actually got to talk to him because he was so busy trying to talk to the rest of the team. He knew that she was there and okay, so she made it across town, walked and ran and got a few lifts to the school.

Helen said there were lots of people helping. Every time she went to turn down a corner or down a street, she got stopped and they would say, *'You can't go this way.'* They'd say, *'Go this way. Or try this way.'* They were all so helpful. She always wondered where the people arrived from with all their safety vests. There were heaps of them around and everyone was so helpful. Helen feels that the emergency services made the choices that were right, on the day.

Getting to the school

At school, Ella was really good. She was 12 years old and one of the older ones. The teachers had given them jobs to do, like looking after the little kids, and that made them feel as if they had something to do. There were a few really upset children when she arrived, but there was really bad traffic and parents were still coming and on their way.

The school did a fantastic job. There was no panic and it was calm when she arrived. The main thing for her was that when she got up to school, she hadn't actually talked to anyone so she was a little bit of a mess. A couple of the teachers came up and she now knows now they were obviously trying to shield her from the kids, but they were just so good. She learned very early on not to show how upset she was.

Teacher, community and family support

The teachers sat her down. She was in the tent and had water and because she hadn't actually seen anyone that she knew, she just needed to talk. She sat under the tent with Rebecca, a teacher, for about half an hour, just thinking about what she was going to do next.

As Helen was walking past The Cup, the café near the school, the lady came out and said, *'The ice creams are all going to waste. Does anyone want an ice cream?'* So they filled up bags of ice creams and she took them to school. That was her daughter's highlight, getting an ice cream after the earthquake.

Then one of the teachers gave them a ride home because she didn't have a car. When they got home, it was great, as the neighbours, including some they hardly knew, came inside with her and had a look around. As soon as they knew James wasn't there, they made sure the house was okay and she was offered cars. James' aunty rang and asked if they wanted to go out to Amberley which was a good plan and that made James feel better.

They took one of the girls from next door as her mother still had a child at school camp at Living Springs. So for that mother to have one child safe, somewhere else, was great. Once they got out to the Amberley and had a nice tea, they sorted out what they were going to do with the kids. Then they came back the next day and James was home that afternoon.

Days afterward

Helen stayed in the city to help James but there was actually nothing she could do. She was baking, had people round for showers and went into her work and cleaned up just to keep herself busy.

It was a very good community experience in a lot of ways. The school community was great. They had a couple of friends who had lost their houses staying with them, so it was almost like they were back to their flatting days. They were sitting down having a glass of wine and people were inviting them around for dinner.

At home, Helen and James were talking about the funerals and who died. Helen isn't sure if they should have talked so much in front of their children, but their daughters were fine when they came back to the city.

The schools in Te Anau did a really good job of looking after their kids, knowing what they'd been through. They made their kids write their story. When the kids went back to school, they were a little bit nervous, but everyone was, and it just seemed to work really well. She wasn't sure what the teachers did but they made it work. She thinks they were lucky that the buildings were safe.

After effects

After the June 2011 earthquake, Helen went up to school. Abby her daughter was in tears. She thought her Dad was dead. She thought that his building collapses in earthquakes and people die. That's her view of what happens in a big earthquake, which is distorted, but she's moved on now.

Ella would also come home and talk about the 'moon man' and how some parents were really into his predictions. He just didn't help their recovery at all.

Helen was reading in the paper in November 2012 about children grinding their teeth. It's usually done by adults but people in Christchurch were grinding their teeth more because of stress. Their daughter, who is now 13, 14 had to get a plate because she was grinding her teeth and didn't even know she was doing it. When they were getting the plate made, the lady said there'd been a big increase in people getting plates since the earthquake. Helen isn't sure what to blame on the earthquake and what is just normal development.

Helen's reflections

Helen feels for the people who died who didn't work for PGC; the ones who got killed on the street, or on their own. They and their families didn't have that support from a large company. A lot of

people focused on the two big buildings collapsing but a lot of people didn't realise there were many injured elsewhere as well.

Six to eight months after the quake, PGC Perpetual re-structured. It was really emotional as the ones working in the company from Auckland and Sydney thought the earthquake was a long gone and it was over. They just thought it was 'business as usual'. The Christchurch team were so emotional about the restructuring; they had been through and lost so much together.

The first couple of months after the February earthquake were quite hard but they knew they were going to be. However, it's after that, that it got hard for Helen. Helen now hates reading the paper as it's so depressing with the people who haven't got their houses sorted. *'It's still going on. If they had told us it was going to take 10 years to rebuild, that would have helped. But they said a couple of years and then 5 years but it's so much longer than what people think it's going to be.'*



Parents at Cashmere Primary School

Nicola Laing

Nicola's story

February 22, 2011

Nicola had just arrived back in the city from Japan at 10 o'clock in the morning on the day of the earthquake. Bizarrely, she and her husband had come up to the school to see their two children because they hadn't seen them for two weeks. They were literally standing in the middle of the school talking to one of the teachers when the earthquake happened. Everyone got thrown to the ground, as it was very violent. They were standing facing the city, the CBD, and it looked like an atomic bomb had gone off. It was just the most extraordinary thing to witness.

The school was phenomenal. Nicola remembers standing in awe and her husband pulling her out of the way as the children streamed out of the classrooms and down onto the field. The teachers were incredible. They had the children in lines and in classes and it was very prompt and calm. The whole thing was incredibly calm. Jacqui, the principal, had the big megaphone which she had used for fire drills on other occasions. Nicola remembers trying to go and give her son a hug, but her husband said *'No don't. Stay out of there. The teachers have got it under control.'*

What was amazing was that although there were some children in tears and some were a little beside themselves, the teachers were calm, so the children were incredibly calm. Nicola is not sure if the children had seen what had happened. It was all really calm and then suddenly it was as if someone had flicked a switch and this stream of parents started arriving. The parents were literally streaming down the hill and into the school. Any parent who was in the area ran to the school. They paid no attention whatsoever to what the teachers were trying to do to keep everyone calm. They just went immediately to their children and it turned into complete chaos and there were suddenly crying children.

The teachers had done so well. She noticed the discrepancy between complete control of the children and the school, and then literally an onslaught of parents and emotion which erupted into mayhem. It was so sad as the children, up until then, had generally been pretty calm. There would have been 50-60 parents on site when the second aftershock happened. She could see the CBD and it was the complete mushroom cloud again.

Nicola and her husband were at the school for about an hour and they were trying to contact Meg, their oldest daughter. Meg's uncle lives half a street away from the school, so they knew she could walk there so they weren't very worried about Meg too much. Eventually, they got a text to say Meg was with a parent friend of theirs.

Going home

It was quite extraordinary to walk down the hill seeing houses down and fences over. Nicola lives on a street with a lot of triple brick homes. Lots of people had already made it home and they were meeting on the street. The whole street got together to support each other.

Nicola's family is really good friends with people in one of the houses in their street who suffered a lot of damage. Janelle, their friend, had been standing in the kitchen as the earthquake happened and she couldn't get James, her two year old, out of his high chair. She could hear the house collapsing around her. She kept saying to herself, '*But the chimney has already fallen down. The chimney has already fallen down*'. The whole front of her kitchen fell out. Nicola could see right into their house. The whole wall was missing and there was nothing left. It was pretty obvious that Jason and Janelle couldn't go back into their house that night.

The first night

The children's grandparents, from Blenheim, had been looking after them for two weeks while Nicola and her husband were away in Japan. The grandparents had coped really well. They were anxious but they coped well. Nicola and her husband put up a tent on their front lawn even though their place wasn't too badly damaged. They had been travelling for 20 hours from Japan so they were jetlagged and incredibly tired. They ended up arguing at about 8pm about where they'd sleep. Her husband wanted to sleep inside but Nicola refused as the earthquakes were on-going. Her husband went inside and Meg, their daughter stayed with him. Meg was not happy about this as she had to sleep on the foot of the bed. He told Meg the next morning that if there had been a really big one in the night, she would probably have been crushed by the drawers. Nicola was in the tent with two children and her parents from Blenheim. She remembers the ground shaking and the constant vibrations throughout the night. She heard her mother sobbing for most of the night as she was thinking about how they were going to get home. They had their neighbours with three small children also staying in the tent, including James who had an ear infection and was beside himself with the pain. It was just one of those very odd nights with the ground constantly vibrating and it didn't stop.

Hilariously, other neighbours appeared from somewhere during the night. They walked into their garage and discovered that the paint for their renovations had tipped over and was on their concrete. So they decided, at midnight, that they needed to clean it before it set. Nicola remembers it was raining and they were out with the hose and scrubbing brushes for about an hour and a half. In the end she had to get up to see what on earth was happening and what they were doing.

In September, Nicola and her family were in Castle Hill. They turned the television on and had information from moment one. They knew what was going on the whole time. In February, they had no idea. It was odd as there was no power. Her husband is a doctor. He ascertained quite quickly that he wasn't needed immediately in the hospital, but he went in anyway. As they have a house in Castle Hill, they decided to leave with the children and go there but her husband didn't come. He stayed in the city with another five Dads. They share the house at Castle Hill with another family. One of the business colleagues of the other family, knew a mother who had died. While they were at Castle Hill they were having hourly reports of what was happening in the search for the missing

mother. The children just watched a lot on television and it looked like the movies and none of it really connected. It was very surreal.

St Margaret's College

Nicola's daughter, Meg, was a student at St Margaret's. From a parental perspective St Margaret's school was extraordinary. Right from the beginning they said that they had lost buildings and they would be shut for about five or six weeks. It seemed like a terribly long period of time but they very quickly realised the enormity of their problem, as they had some very clear thinkers. The school was very definite and certain. The school was fantastic to deal with. They were very clear that they would get work out on the computer for the students. Everyone at St Margaret's must have a computer and as Meg wasn't doing NCEA, they were not unduly concerned about her studies. Teachers were onto it promptly and it was very smooth, calm and really quite impressive. They also got girls to come in to school and help other communities.

At the end of year, Meg's school does something called the RIGHT Journey. They make the girls write a speech with a mentor. Nicola went to this evening at the end of 2011. The girls got up and spoke about their year and their projects. On one level, it was sad but very special as one girl's Dad, and another girl's grandfather, had died in the earthquake. No one knew for a very long time about the grandfather, as the girl didn't tell anyone. His house was in Redcliffs. He was gardening and rubble fell on him. The granddaughter is quite positive and her grandmother is amazing. The girls only found out that the grandfather had died as the grandmother was in the movie about the earthquake, 'When a city falls'. Another girl was making a speech and everybody in the room knew she had lost her father. She stood up positively and talked beautifully and didn't even mention her Dad. She said at the very end that she wanted to thank her mother for holding the year and their family together. It was the most poignant, extraordinary comment. Nicola, Meg, and almost the entire class started crying. If people hadn't known the story, they wouldn't have known how much the words meant.

From a parent's perspective, it was an extraordinary privilege to listen to these girls talk about what had actually been a harrowing and very, very difficult year in such a positive light. The girls talked about the highs and lows of the year and what they wanted to achieve or what they had achieved and where they wanted to go. It made people realise that, as devastating as the earthquake had been, and for two of them in the class it couldn't have been more devastating, life is bigger than that. Even though it was difficult and there were all these unbelievably difficult things that had occurred, life was continuing. The positivity and the joy that the girls had got out of the year, despite the earthquake, was evident. If nothing else, it showed the resilience of people. It was partly the age of the girls but it also reflected on how the school handled the whole thing. The school said this is the best they can do; these are the options and they will just keep moving forward. It was also how the girls supported one another and how close the class is and became during that year. The most extraordinary thing was that the girls had had an amazing year in 2011. The whole school had been shut and pulled down around their ears, and half the classes were in marquees. There couldn't have been a more disruptive year and effectively the earthquakes weren't mentioned in the speeches and it wasn't deliberately avoided or anything; it was just everyone was over them. The girls had had a great year in 2011 and potentially for them it had been no different than the year before.

Family of children at Cashmere

Meg Laing

Meg's story

Meg is daughter of Nicola and sister of Fergus. Meg was a Year 9 student at St Margaret's in 2011.

September 4, 2010

September 4, 2010 wasn't a very big event for Meg, a Year 8 at Cashmere Primary School, and her family. They were in Castle Hill near Arthurs Pass. The epicentre of the September earthquake was near Darfield. Her younger brother didn't even wake up, as it was early Saturday morning. Meg turned on the television in Castle Hill to discover that Christchurch had had a huge earthquake. There was some concern until they got in contact with their family in the city. Initially, they thought the earthquake was centred in Greymouth or the Southern Alps because of the Alpine fault.

Meg's mother was watching television and a reporter from Wellington who had no idea what was happening saying, "*We don't know what the damage is; we know it's severe*". It was the Internet with a blow-by-blow account that told them what was going on. Meg remembers the media saying that they thought people would have died. After seeing all the images of the damage in the city and she was surprised that no-one had died. Meg recalls that they lit a fire with family friends and went back to bed.

Meg's father and sister were in Christchurch. Her Dad didn't even get up. He just lay in bed and figured he would wait it out. Meg's sister went running in to her father saying she had seen an explosion outside, and it turned out it was the power stations blowing out. They live on the Cashmere Hill and she was watching the "fireworks" explosion from that height.

February 22, 2011

Before February 22, 2011, earthquakes and aftershocks were not something that frightened Meg. They had had aftershocks at school after September and she was comfortable with them. She didn't even stand up, as they didn't bother her. At school they did lots of earthquake drills and they all knew exactly what to do.

For the February 22nd earthquake, Meg was at school in Year 9 at St Margaret's College on Papanui Road. Meg was staying with her aunt and uncle, who live in town, because her parents were away in Japan. Meg was at school and it was lunchtime. She remembers it was not a warm and not a cold day and the girls at school were feeling lazy. They were about to go outside, as they had just finished Geography. They had Meg's computer out. Her friend's birthday party had been the Friday before and Meg had her pen drive in her computer copying photos. They were watching the photos download and laughing and then the earthquake struck.

Meg considers herself quite clear headed in moments of panic. She remembers pushing her computer, not closing it, further onto the set of tables so it didn't fall off. She left her phone on the table and her bag, which she could have easily grabbed, but she didn't. She grabbed her friend, Hannah, who usually freezes up in earthquakes and pushed her underneath the desk. Then they crawled under the desks to the door. They sat by the door for a while before they went outside. Gaby, her friend, was stuck in the toilets where she fell down. She was banging on the door but she was fine.

Liquefaction was all over the field and coming up very quickly. Her shoes were getting saturated, so she took them off because she didn't want them getting wetter. There she was in bare feet standing in all the liquefaction on the field. The liquefaction was exploding out of the ground. It was like a river, literally pouring out of the ground. It wasn't dribbling or slow, it was gushing, in the middle of the lawn at school. There was a massive lake in the middle of the field and everyone was standing in huddles around it, with stuff gushing out of it. It eventually slowed down.

Meg was scared when somebody pointed out the city. They could see the smoke rising from the CBD. It looked like a bomb had gone off and the clouds of dust were coming up. Everyone was freaked out, especially her friends whose parents worked in the city.

Emotions and reactions

Lots of people were crying although she was okay. She remembers waiting to leave being really hard. There were teenage girls feeding off each other's emotions. Meg thinks a lot of people wouldn't have cried, if all their friends weren't crying. Meg usually cries quite easily in movies but at the time of the earthquake she didn't cry, mainly because she thought that if she started crying, she wouldn't be able to help anyone else. She also felt if she burst into tears, it would be worse for the people who were crying.

There was another strange reaction. Meg has two friends who are both very motivated, pay attention to everything but can be sarcastic. After the earthquake they started laughing and they found everything funny, with jokes about the earthquake that were really insensitive. They were both laughing and laughing; like hysterical laughing. It wasn't crazy laughing but they genuinely seemed to find the earthquake funny. Everyone was quite shocked that they found everything funny. There were some people who were crying and some who were genuinely holding it together and trying to sort everyone else out, and then those two laughing.

Some staff went home pretty quickly but Meg was only at school for an hour. Students had to get signed out. That was chaotic because she was there for probably an hour waiting to get signed out. Her friend was at school for five hours because she lives far away and her parents had to come and get her.

Meg had no idea where her parents were. She didn't know if their plane had landed, and she didn't have her cell phone, as it was still in the classroom. Her friend's Mum, who lives in Cashmere, just happened to be at school after the earthquake to pick up her three daughters so she took Meg with her. Her friend's sister, Annie, was at a tennis lesson, so they went to get her. They spent about

three hours driving all over town trying to find Annie because she wasn't at the tennis courts. Eventually, hours later, they got a text which had been sent two minutes after the earthquake which said that Annie was fine and she was heading home.

While looking for Annie, they went to Christchurch Boys High School and it was deserted. Meg was shocked because, even in the weekends, there are always people there but it was just so silent and so dead. There were cars everywhere. People were walking down the street with their cellphones videoing the scene. They drove past Riccarton Mall and people were driving on the footpath because there were no traffic lights. Everyone was honking their horns. Meg tried to call her Mum. Eventually she got home. She was fine, and even when she saw everyone, she was still fine.

At home

She went upstairs to her bedroom and then started crying because her room was a mess. Her drawers had come out and her bookcase had fallen over. She just burst into tears. She didn't even know why she was crying. She thinks she was so upset because she really likes having a semi-tidy room but now her room was just a mess.

The neighbourhood

Later that afternoon, their neighbours wanted to get their hard drive from the computer in their munted house as it had all their photos. Between shakes they were doing these runs from outside, just running in and getting stuff. It was an old house with a lot of indoor furniture so it was easy to grab a drawer and run out. They were doing these hilarious runs which were quite dangerous. The computer hard drive was upstairs. People could see directly into the house and no one was prepared to go up the stairs. People could see the office and the hard drive from outside, so they were trying to work out how they could put a plank and walk across. They got one of the boys from the street, a 20 year old, called Tom. If anyone was going to have the nerve to do it, it was going to be him. He crawled across the ladder and got it out. Everyone was standing round and cheering. But when he had to come back and there was an aftershock. Everyone held their breath but he was okay. He kept crawling. He crawled back safely. The house did come down later with more aftershocks. One of the walls in that house had a newspaper from World War One. The original owners had written on it, '*When someone knocks this down, they are going to find this newspaper.*' It was so old...and they found it and it was really cool. They still have it.

The neighbours gave Meg's family their Wii computer game to hold onto and Meg's family were so excited as they had never had a Wii before. Meg and her brother brought it straight home and plugged it into their television and soon everyone was playing Wii.

After the earthquake

In the days after the earthquake, Meg and friends made bacon and egg pies and cleaned up liquefaction. They went and helped people, drove around in the car and looked for people to help. In fact, in late 2012, almost two years later, they went back to the houses where they helped but people don't live there anymore as the area is all red-zoned.

That time off school after the quakes was so much fun for Meg. They spent three weeks in Castle Hill with other family friends on a totally unplanned holiday. It was sunny and hot and they went swimming and walking, running and biking and they made earthquake movies and did other strange things. Meg considers it was like someone had made them suddenly go on a spur-of-the-moment holiday.

Going back to school

St Margaret's school lost almost all of their school buildings that day. Every single building needed to come down and the school re-opened in pre-fabricated buildings. They were the second to last school to return, as Avonside Girls High went back after them. At home, Meg did plenty of Maths Buddy, the online computer programme, while school was closed.

They did knitting when they got back to school. It was kind of cool and it became earthquake themed. They knitted blankets and beanies and some people did really intricate baby booties and peggy squares and gave them to the Salvation Army. They also did needlework that was earthquake themed with pictures like a seismic graph, the Student Volunteer Army's logo, a liquefaction picture, a road cone – all the common symbols of the time. They even had a started using sign language because everyone was watching Jeremy (a sign language interpreter) on television. He became family celebrity during the earthquake and EQC announcements.

June 13, 2011

Meg remembers the June 13, 2011 aftershocks. Her father works very close to her school and he picked her up on his bike. In fact, they weren't even sure if they were going to close the school. Her father just turned up and they went to the hospital nearby, where he works. Everyone was outside, the power had gone off and there was liquefaction in the hospital. They were scared that when the power came back on, it would mix with the water and cause a fire. Everyone was outside including patients except one person in the middle of surgery still in the building with no power, just continuing.

Meg's Dad gave her money to get some food for people, so she walked to Merivale to get McDonalds. She was in a huge queue but as she was on her own, everyone let her in until she was at the front. Meg thought that that was amazing. She was almost back at the hospital when the second aftershock started, so she sat down on the road as she felt like she was going to fall over. Then she remembered that her father had gone into the building to try and fix this electrical problem, so she freaked out and ran back to the hospital. When she got there, everyone was fine and the generators were back on and the surgery had continued.

After that, they walked home for over an hour until her mother picked them up at the Brewery. It was such a weird day as the streets were empty. There were no cars like the time before. Everyone had left their cars and decided to walk. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon there was not a car to be seen in and around the CBD. There was just nothing.

Meg's reflection

Meg thinks the September event didn't connect with her at all, whereas February did. On the day it happened, things that don't normally happen, happened. There were things that shocked her. She remembers a girl who had glass all over her hair and her arms and her legs had little red lines all over them because she had been sitting just underneath this big glass panel that had fallen on top of her.



