

# **MOMENTS OF MISFORTUNE**

## **Parts 1-3**

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### **MOMENTS OF MISFORTUNE – Part 1**

By Chuck Wallace  
Edited by Lisa Ballou

I knew it! Here he comes. Just like clockwork. He must have been waiting for me in the parking lot! My co-worker Matt dashes toward me in the pouring rain.

Trotting up, he loudly asks, “Hey, did you feel the earthquake last night?”

I heard him ask me something, but I was still leaning into my car to retrieve my briefcase, umbrella and cup of coffee when he asked.

I responded, “Sorry, Matt. I didn’t hear what you said.”

He breathlessly repeats, “Did you feel the earthquake last night?”

I reply, “I didn’t. I just heard about it while driving into work this morning.”

Excitedly, Matt exclaimed, “It was a 4.2 magnitude earthquake just offshore of the State Park, south of the Indian Nation. Lots of people felt it in the county!”

I answered, “Yeah, well, I didn’t feel anything or even know until the radio news broadcast the information.”

Matt further explained, “The radio said, there was no damage, but it was felt as far away as British Columbia and Oregon!”

I replied, “You do know we live in earthquake country. We just don’t have that many and the ones we do have, are fairly small. Hardly anyone feels them.”

Matt pressed on, “Sooner or later we’ll have a really big one. That’s what scares me the most.”

Walking away, toward my office, I answer over my shoulder, “Yeah, well hopefully, we’re all long gone when it does happen.”

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I rub my forehead while sitting at my desk, fairly exhausted and semi-perturbed after answering the same questions about the earthquake all morning. The theme of the day continued during my morning phone call to my wife.

“Yes dear.”

I continued, “I heard about it. Ever since I walked into the office, everyone has been talking about it. You’d think the world was ready to tilt off its axis.

“I know, but nothing even really happened, I mean, with the exception of a few people feeling the ground shake. It’s just one of those things.”

I tell her, “We’ve lived here for 10 years and nothing has happened even remotely impacting us. This is the first earthquake we’ve had close to us and we didn’t even feel it.”

Half listening to her questions and concerns about the earthquake, I patronizingly offer, “Hmm, yeah, right. Look, don’t worry about it. It’s over. Hey, I have to go, I have a conference call starting in a few minutes, ok? Yep, yeah, everything’s alright. Ok. See ya tonight. Good. I love you too.”

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Sitting at my desk, shuffling through the stacks of files to find the particular one I need, I think to myself, boy, am I glad I didn’t go to the meeting in Seattle today, I have too much to do. Thankfully, I don’t have to pay too much attention to this conference call. I can chime in from time to time, while responding to some of these never ending e-mails.

After half an hour of listening to the same exact issue we discussed last month, I unmute my phone and break into the meeting, “Yeah, I agree with what was just said, we need to begin working on the next objective of our strategic plan.”

Someone else comments, “I’d like to revisit the notes I have from the meeting two months ago.”

Not believing what I just heard, I make a strong recommendation to the conference members on the phone, “If we don’t begin moving forward....” --What the...?

My entire office lurches forward, shoving me against the edge of my desk. The shelves hanging along my wall all tear away with books and files bouncing and falling in complete disarray on the floor. My computer screen goes blank as the office lights flicker.

I jump up, “ahhh,” shouting out as my steaming hot cup of coffee goes flying cross my desk, spilling everywhere and over everything, including me, soaking my shirt and trousers, onto my stomach and into my lap.

A few ceiling tiles begin to fall on the other side of my office as I hang onto the desk, half standing, attempting to wipe the coffee and cool the blistering heat in my lap. Suddenly, the light fixture over my desk swings down and slams into the side of my head. I feel like I’ve been hit with a baseball bat. I grab the right side of my head and fall to my knees, knocked senseless from the blow.

The entire event ends after a few harrowing moments. My right ear has a constant ringing. I can hear others in the building yelling, but am unable to make sense of what they are saying. I look around my office, my right hand holding the side of my head, and see everything in disarray. Walking down the hallway, passing the other offices in my building, I see a mess of papers, books, pamphlets, tumbled file cabinets and fallen ceiling tiles.

The department head from down the hall asks all in the corridor, “Is everyone here? Are we all ok?”

One of the women from the office down the hall asks, “Aren’t we supposed to evacuate and get to high ground?”

A male voice responds, “Are we in an inundation area? I think we’re on high ground.”

Another person in the office calls out, “Where is the Weather Radio? Information should be broadcast on that.”

The woman answers, “I don’t think we have one. I’ve been here for 6 years and I’ve never seen one.”

A male voice from the middle of the crowd asks, “Well, what are we supposed to do?”

Half of the nine or so people in the second floor hallway are texting or trying to call someone.

A man from an office on the other end of the building shouts for all to hear, “The cell lines are busy.”

Another says, “I think I can text!”

The department head states in a loud authoritarian voice, “Let’s get outside. We’re supposed to go outside after an earthquake, then have the building checked to be sure it’s safe.”

Another woman in the building speaks up and exclaims, “I’m not leaving the building. If a tsunami is coming, I am not going to be on the street.”

Their babbling and indecisiveness is driving me crazy as my head continues to pound from getting hit with the light fixture.

I shout, “Yo! Hey! Listen Up! We are not in a tsunami inundation area. Let’s just go outside like the boss said, and make sure everyone in the building is safe. We can figure out what to do once we’re outside.”

Matt approaches from the other end of the hallway wearing a rain poncho and backpack. He slowly high steps through the debris, shuffling it with each step, as he walks around the overturned file cabinets and maneuvers himself along the wall.

He asks, “Is everyone all right?”

I reply, “We’re going to get out of here and see if everyone from the building is ok.”

A voice from the back shouts, “It’s pouring rain out there. Can’t we just stay here?”

Matt responds, “Actually, newer buildings are built so they don’t collapse during an earthquake onto the people inside, but I think this is a fairly old building. Either way, they are only designed to prevent collapse from one earthquake. I’m not sure what would happen if we have an aftershock.”

The office manager asks “Where did you get that information?”

Matt replies, “I’ve read about it and have gone to a few conferences where they talk about building safety in earthquakes, non-reinforced masonry buildings, non-structural damage...”

Another worker cuts him off, “Yeah, well, I’d rather be wet than trapped in here if we have an aftershock.”

Hesitantly, the group agrees to leave and we begin exiting the building through the stairway at the end of the hall. My head is pounding as I follow the group and try to call my wife, worried about her and my kids. Attempting the call, all I hear is a busy signal.

I whisper out loud, “Unbelievable,” as I try twice more with the same busy signal. I think to myself, “I guess that’s why they’re called family plans, when one phone won’t work, none of the others will either.”

Walking out of the building into a gusty, steady downpour, toward the assembly area, I see other employees from the building congregating in their pre-designated assembly areas in the parking lot, the same ones we use for a fire drill. Everyone looks drenched from head to toe. Glancing to my left, I look at Matt in his rain poncho and backpack and begin to chuckle. What is this guy doing?

I teasingly offer, “Did you pack for the weekend?”

He says, “It’s my Go Kit. Don’t you have one?”

I look at him like he’s crazy, “What are you talking about?”

He replies, “A Go Kit. Everyone should have one. In case of earthquake, flooding...”

I interrupt, not wanting to know any more, “Yeah, well I don’t even know what you’re talking about.”

He responds, very concerned, “It’s a necessity for everyone living around here. I have food, water, a radio, clothes and a first...”

I speak over him, “Yeah, sounds great. But I’m not carrying all that stuff with me all day.” Changing the subject, I ask, “Where is our assembly area anyway?”

Matt replies, “Follow me. I know where we are supposed to go.”

Rain water is running down my back as we move across the parking lot to join the others. I slowly begin to survey the area immediately surrounding us through the sheets of rain and gusty wind. The chimney has collapsed on the home across the street and one of the parked cars in

front of our building has a large tree branch laying across the hood. This earthquake was worse than I thought. People are congregating on street corners and in other parking areas. It's almost surreal looking at the panicked expressions on the faces of everyone as they gather. Their voices are muffled by the continuous honking, wailing and whooping of the multiple car and home alarms activated during the ground shaking of the earthquake. Looking up, I see Harry, a first floor employee, limping toward us.

Someone yells out, "Oh my God, Harry has blood all over him!"

A small crowd gathers around him as he tells them he is fine. He explains how a cabinet in his office fell over and hit him on the corner of his eye, causing all of the blood.

Harry says, "It's just a cut. I'm all right."

Someone shouts out "I have a message! Texting works!"

Others begin confirming "Me, too!"

"Yeah, mine works."

I notice almost everyone around me texting on their phone. I pull mine from my pocket and begin to text my wife and kids,

*Are u all ok?*

Within seconds, my wife replies via text, *I'm ok. It was scary. House shook like crazy. Lights r flickering. Nothing from the girls - YES, your dog is fine!*

She continued, *Radio said EQ centered off coast. Some cities - Aberdeen have damage. That's where the school is & where Janie works!*

Adding, *No message from Katie's school. Hopefully, they r ok. I'm worried.*

I reply, trying to remain calm in the moment, but very worried about my kids. *We have a few minor issues. I don't think it was anything major. The girls will be fine. They know what to do.*

Impatient, frightened and very concerned, she texts, *Well, for knowing what to do, nobody's doing anything!*

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Matt, has been attending to the cut above Harry's eye with the first aid kit he stored in his Go Kit, walks over and hands me an extra rain poncho he is carrying.

“This will keep you dry.”

I thank him but give the poncho back, “It's a bit late for that. I'm soaked!”

Matt nods and stores the poncho in his backpack.

With a concerned look on his face, he offers, “The USGS said it was a magnitude 6.3 earthquake about 6 miles off the Grays Harbor coast along the Cascadia Fault Line. I looked at some social media sites, and they say there is moderate damage to some homes and buildings along the coast.”

I ask, “Do they say anything about people hurt?”

“Not really,” he adds, as he scans the various social media sites.

Wiping the droplets of rain from my phone screen, I try to call my daughters, but the lines are still busy. I heard one person talking to someone on the phone, but I guess with the earthquake being local, everyone is trying to make a call.

The building manager comes out and asks all to gather around.

The drenched group huddles around as he starts, “We don't have anyone qualified to inspect the building for damages. There are a few cracks along the first floor storage areas and at this point, I don't believe it is safe to re-enter the building without someone with some engineering knowledge looking at the damage. My suggestion is for everyone to go home, check on your family and then for tomorrow, confirm whether the building will be safe to re-enter with your supervisor.”

A voice comes from the middle of the pack, “Are we getting paid for this?”

The manager just looks at the person and shakes his head, apparently dumbfounded by the question.

The voice asks in a very irritated manner, “Are we still getting paid?”

The manager replies, much more composed than I would had been, “I don’t know. Let’s get out of the rain and attend to our families first. We can worry about money when the dust settles.”

As the crowd begins to disperse, I start walking to my car and realize my keys are on my desk in my office.

Exasperated, I blurt out, “It figures.”

Matt who is walking beside me asks, “What figures?”

I say, “My keys are on my desk.”

Matt offers to take me home, but I’m hesitant to accept his offer. And then, realizing I’m cold, wet and there may not be any other solution I tell him, I’ll take him up on his offer. Suddenly, half startling me, my phone rings. It’s my wife.

“What’s up kid?”

My wife begins talking a mile-a-minute, half sobbing. I can’t make out what she’s saying.

I say, “Slow down, I can’t understand what you are saying.”

She says, “Jack! Jack! Oh my God, Oh my God.”

I realize something is terribly wrong and try desperately to focus on her words.

“Shar, you have to slow down. I can’t understand.”

She composes herself and says, “The school called. Part of the roof collapsed onto some classrooms. They think Katie is trapped under the roof!”

## **End of Part One**

## **MOMENTS OF MISFORTUNE - Part 2**

By Chuck Wallace  
Edited by Lisa Ballou



My knees buckle at the news my daughter is trapped at the school. I'm not absolutely sure I correctly heard what my wife just told me. I feel as if I'm going to become physically ill.

After what seems like an eternity, I'm able to swallow the lump in my throat and ask for clarity, "Tell me again Shar, what happened?"

My wife once again blurts out "Katie is trapped inside of the school, it collapsed! The school called and told me and ..."

I become oblivious to everything else she is saying. My entire soul is on the verge of panic. I don't know how to respond to my wife. I'm having trouble thinking straight. My mind begins whirring; oh my god...oh my god.... The news is crushing. My heart is beating so fast and hard, I can hear the blood pulsing through my veins. I feel as if I'm going to pass out, as I drop to one knee in the puddled parking lot.

Matt, reaches out and grabs my arm, steadying me. "Are you ok? Are you alright Jack?"

I struggle to look up. I nearly drop my phone as I cling to Matt's arm and leg. I'm barely able to nod my head.

I can hear my wife shouting, almost pleading for me to begin conversing again, "Jack, are you there? Jack? Jack?"

Matt helps me to my feet and guides me past two other cars. "Here, sit in my car, get out of the rain."

Finally I'm able to put together a coherent thought and ask, "Shar, can you get to the school? I have to figure out how to get there."

She responds, "Where is your car?"

I tell her, "My car keys are on my desk in my office. We had to leave the building because of structural damage and I can't get back in."

My wife begins to sob, "I thought you'd pick me up and we'd go together. I don't want to go alone."

"Shar, I can't use my car. I'll try to get a ride to the school with someone and meet you there."

Matt overhears the conversation and offers, "I can take you wherever you need to go, Jack."

I look at Matt through the tears in my eyes and nod.

I tell Shar, "It'll be alright. Just get to the school. I'll meet you at the entrance."

Hesitantly, and still sobbing, she agrees.

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The drive to the school is taking forever. Some streets are blocked and Matt is doing his best to navigate secondary routes. It's all I can do to maintain my composure while I sit in silence.

During the ride, my oldest daughter, Janie, texts my wife and I, *That was crazy! R U guys OK?*

Shar texts back, *Thank God U R ok. We're good.*

Janie texts, *I'm at a friend's home. They closed the office. She lives around the corner. I'm helping her clean up.*

Adding, *The earthquake knocked me down and I broke the heel on my boot, tore the knees out of my pants, broke 2 fingernails and I think I lost my lipstick!*

She continues, *On top of all that, my mascara isn't waterproof and now I have black streaks around my eyes and down my face.*

I smile and chuckle; her message taking me away from this frightening moment.

"You really scared me to death out there," Matt offered, trying to work up a conversation to keep me from thinking about my daughter. "I thought you were having a heart attack. Are you sure you're ok?"

I shake my head and reply, "I'm ok."

My wife returns Janie's text, *Janie, I just tried to call you, but the phones are still busy. Katie has been involved in an accident at her school.*

Texting more, *Dad and I are heading there now. We will let you know more when we do.*

Janie texts, *WHAT? What's wrong, Is she hurt?*

Shar replies, *We'll let you know more when we do.*

Matt, showing great concern for the situation, reaches over, puts his hand on my shoulder, squeezes it and says, "Don't worry buddy, it'll be ok. We'll be there soon."

Not really listening, I grunt a few times to appear I'm paying attention to him, but can't keep my mind off Katie. She must be terrified buried under the building. I feel helpless.

Matt states, "We're here, but it looks like they're restricting access to the school."

I don't hear a word he is saying.

After a few seconds he declares, louder this time, "Jack, we're here. We're at the school."

Matt parks the car along the side of the road. There is gridlock at the school entrance. I am entrenched in my thoughts about my daughter. Panic catches me again, at the sight of the flashing lights of police and fire vehicles.

"Please let her be safe," I mumble as I weakly step from the car. Matt immediately joins me carrying an umbrella, protecting us both from the rain. He offers, "I'll go with you. I'm here for you, buddy."

After a few steps, I see my wife attempting to get through the barricaded parking entrance to the school. An officer is talking to her, but I'm still too far away to hear. She's soaking wet, and I see the puffiness of her eyes along with expressions of fear and disbelief.

I walk up behind her and put my hand on her shoulder. In fear and frustration, she jerks away yelling, "Don't you touch me!" Glancing around, she recognizes me and hugs me tight.

"They won't let me in, Jack! They won't let me see my own daughter," she exclaims loudly so all nearby can hear.

I plead with the officer, "The school called us, and said our daughter is trapped in the school. Please let us enter."

The officer looks at me and explains, "Everyone needs an escort. All families need an escort to a specific location." He further exclaimed, "I've radioed for someone to come and escort your wife. They will be here soon."

Someone saying they're from a news outlet overhears our conversation and asks for an interview.

I softly reply, "I'm sorry, not right now."

The newsman continues to ask, "Who are you? It will only take a few seconds."

Continuing to hound us, he holds out his cell phone and holds it in front of my wife's face asking more questions.

I get extremely angry and shout, "LEAVE US ALONE! What's wrong with you? We want to be left alone. What's wrong with you people?"

The police officer at the entrance beckons us to step inside the barricade. "Please just stay here until your escort arrives. They can't bother you in here."

We thank him for his compassion. Holding hands, we start into the entrance.

Matt hands me his umbrella and says, "I have my poncho. You guys need this more than I do. Take care of your family."

I take the umbrella, look over my shoulder and say, "Thanks for everything, Matt."

He gives sort of a half salute and waves goodbye.

Waiting silently, holding each other close, we await our escort. I feel Shar sobbing, as she pulls me tighter. I pull her to my chest, under the umbrella, comforting her as I attempt to keep us both dry. She's softly praying to herself.

A few minutes later, a young woman approaches and speaks to the officer. He points to us and she makes her way toward us.

She asks, "Are you Mr. and Mrs. McFadden? You're Katie's parents?" As we nod, she introduces herself, "I'm Susan Griffin, a nurse with Public Health. I have wonderful news, Katie has been found and she seems to be fine. I'm going to take you to see her. Right now she's being checked out by the paramedics."

My wife and I both break down, crying, hugging and thanking Susan. She smiles and says, "Let's get you both to where she is."

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We're led to a modular school unit far away from the affected school building. Stepping inside, I look around and see our daughter sitting up on an ambulance stretcher. She has a slight smile on her face, but I can tell she has been crying.

I quickly move to her and hug her tightly, "I'm glad you're safe, baby."

Katie breaks down, "Oh, Daddy!"

Shar approaches from the other side of the stretcher, hugs Katie and whispers, "I was so afraid. Are you alright?"

Looking around at the paramedics and others in the room she asks, “Is she alright?”

Not giving anyone a chance to answer, Shar turns back to Katie, “You’re alright, right? You’re not injured?”

One of the paramedics reveals, “She seems to be ok, other than a few cuts and bruises. I would suggest getting her a Tetanus shot soon, if she hasn’t had one recently. Your daughter told us she hid under a table during the earthquake. Everything collapsed over and around the table. Another girl was with her. Neither were hurt. The table protected them. They were just trapped where they were. Firefighters and a few construction workers helped to get the girls out.”

My wife says to Katie, “I prayed they would find you. Thank God you’re alright.”

Another paramedic offers, “We can transport to the hospital for an observation by a doctor if you’d like. The decision is up to you.”

I ask Katie, “Do you want to go to the hospital? Do you hurt anywhere?”

She replies, “I just want to go home, daddy, I don’t want to be here anymore.”

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Maneuvering away from the news media and the crowd of people attempting to get a glimpse of something, we arrive at my wife’s car and begin our journey back home. As I drive, I can feel my stress level drop significantly. It’s amazing how different I feel now that Katie is safe.

My wife begins questioning Katie about the earthquake, what happened in the room and how did the girls know to get under a table?

Katie doesn’t want to talk about it, but my wife won’t stop probing Katie with questions.

Suddenly, Katie yells, “It really scared me, mom!” Then lowering her tone, “The building started shaking and making noises. Sara, the other girl who was trapped with me, told me to get under the table in the room. I closed my eyes as hard as I could, wishing the noise and shaking to stop. The next thing I knew, everything started falling... I don’t ever want to go through that again! I’m never going back to the school again, either.”

Shar responds, reaching for her hand, “I’m sorry, honey. You don’t have to talk about it anymore. Just sit back and relax. We’ll be home soon.”

As I continue driving, I notice a few homes have chimney damage along various streets.

I ask my Shar, “How did the house hold up to the earthquake?”

She says, “Some of the book shelves fell and the spices from the kitchen cabinet are all over the floor. I was so worried, I didn’t finish cleaning everything.”

Chuckling, she tells me how our dog, Kailani, ran under the kitchen table to hide. Maybe Kailani knew the earthquake was coming, because she ran under the table before the shaking began.

Then in an alarmed tone she states, “Oh No! Your dog is probably eating the spices! I didn’t get the chance to clean them up. She’ll get sick.”

I jokingly respond, “She’ll be sorry if she gets into the chili flakes.”

Looking into the rear view mirror, I’m relieved to see Katie dozing off to sleep. My wife finally gets a phone call through to our daughter Janie, explaining what happened and that we’re all fine and are heading home.

Suddenly Katie starts shouting, “MAKE IT STOP.” She begins thrashing around in the back seat, straining against her seat belt.

I nearly drive off the road as her yelling practically scares me to death.

I shout, “What the..?”

Shar shouts, “What’s the matter? What’s the matter?”

Realizing Katie has had a nightmare about her ordeal, I pull over. Shar gets in the backseat with Katie, holds her and strokes her hair, calming her. She stays in the back seat, comforting Katie the rest of the way home.

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“Well, the damage wasn’t too bad here, and the dog seems to be fine,” I state later that evening, as we finish cleaning up. Katie is asleep on the couch.

I add, “There are a few areas I may need to patch on the walls, but it’s not too bad.”

Out of the blue, my wife declares, “Jack, I want to move.”

Dumbfounded, I ask, “What are you talking about?”

“Jack. I want to move. I’m serious. It’s too dangerous here. Our daughter isn’t even safe at school. Our home is broken. I’m scared. She’s scared. Did you know I had to sit in the bathroom while she showered because she was afraid to be alone?”

I stare at my wife, trying to understand exactly what she’s saying.

She continues, “I don’t feel safe. We’re not safe. I want to move.”

I reply, “Shar, it’s over. Yes, we had two small earthquakes, but we’ve been here for 10 years and never had anything like this before. It’s just happenstance.”

She cuts me off, “No Jack. I’m serious! I want to move. Our daughter almost lost her life!”

Raising my voice in a flustered tone, “So where are you gonna go?”

She responds, “I don’t know. I just want to move.”

I assert, “Shar, no matter where you go, there is always something that could happen. You just need to be prepared and understand what the issues are and get ready.”

She demeaningly fires back, “That’s great to hear, Jack. We’re not prepared for anything.”

I respond, “Then, we’ll get ready and start preparing.”

More demeaning than before, “Yeah, right. I asked about that preparedness business before, and did it happen? No. You’re just trying to buy time, hoping this blows over.”

Just as Shar begins to storm out of the den towards the dining room, the dog bolts upstairs ahead of a loud rumble that echoes throughout the house. Our home begins to shake and jerk. Everything goes dark as the lights go out. The motion knocks my wife to the floor near the dining room table, tosses me out of my chair, and flips the couch on top of Katie. The noise increasingly intensifies until it’s almost deafening. Glass is breaking everywhere, the walls are creaking and Katie is screaming at the top of her lungs from under the couch.

I yell out, “Katie, stay where you are! Shar, hold on to the table leg and stay there!”

It’s pitch black. I try to crawl to the table Shar is hiding under, but the jerking of the house keeps pushing me in different directions. I cover my head with one arm as some sheetrock from the ceiling falls onto my back.

Katie is screaming, ” MAKE IT STOP...OH GOD... STOOOOOOOP!”

Shar is crying out “Katie, stay where you are...stay where you are! Jack? Jack?”

I puncture my hand on a nail that fell onto the floor, cursing as I crawl over broken glass, cutting the palms of my hands. As I finally make my way under the table with my wife, I feel the warmth of blood seeping around my knee. This is really, really bad! My eyes are darting all around the room trying to see what is happening.

Katie screams, “DADDY? DADDY? WHERE ARE YOU? HELP ME. MAKE IT STOP!”

I yell across to her, “Just stay still baby. Stay where you are. I’m here. It’ll be over soon.”

But it seems to last forever. The noise is getting louder. My home appears to be disintegrating as it jerks left, then right. Everywhere, I hear objects crashing onto the floor, walls and wood creaking, and glass is breaking. Katie begins to scream hysterically. Shar is sobbing and has a death grip on the center post of the table. I have never been so frightened in my life.

## **End of Part Two**

## **MOMENTS OF MISFORTUNE - Part 3**

By Chuck Wallace  
Edited by Lisa Ballou

The pandemonium is unrelenting. Glass shatters. Objects fall with a crash, creak, bang and thud echoing throughout the darkness, painting mental pictures in my mind of the destruction of our house by the earthquake. Falling debris is pummeling my head, back and legs as I struggle to crawl to the dining room table. I feel like I'm being beaten and punched as my nostrils fill with the smell of brick dust and sheetrock. My eyes burn and I choke on the dust, as I maneuver through the darkness and debris. Finally, reaching the center post of the dining room table next to my wife, I feel relief from the protection afforded by the tabletop.

The sounds of my wife choking and crying, and Katie's muffled screams sift through the thunderous noise of the event. I am helpless to assist either of them as Mother Nature thrashes each of us and our home.

I muster everything I have to comfort my wife, "I'm here Shar. It'll be over soon."

I only hear the sound of her coughing, sobbing and crying. Abruptly, the entire house jolts to the left. Shar and Katie both yelp and cry out. Then, unexpectedly, the house shifts to the right, heaving upward, throwing me forward, head first, into the center post of our dining room table. My head makes impact with the center post, exactly where the light fixture hit me on the left side of my head earlier today.

Cursing and seeing stars, I attempt to place my hand over my head, still holding the table center post with my other hand. The house jolts once more, much stronger than before. I'm propelled forward into the center post again, this time smashing the fingers on the hand covering my head. Everything is creaking, cracking and falling down around us, creating noises that terrify me. The darkness makes the entire ordeal more frightening than any event I have ever experienced. Will the house collapse over us? Will my family be alright? How much longer will this continue?

Shar is sobbing and praying out loud for everything to stop. Katie is still calling out for me, screaming as another loud noise resonates around the room.

I yell out, "I'm here Katie. It's alright. Just stay where you are. I'll be there soon."

As we all remain under cover, I begin to worry about if my other daughter Janie is safe at her friend's house. Then, just as suddenly as the earthquake began, it stops. Home and car alarms are blaring throughout the neighborhood. Debris is slowly and randomly falling around us, and I can



hear the flow of water leaking from the second floor and possibly from the kitchen. Shar and I begin to crawl out from under the table. It's so very dark. I can't see anything.

I ask, "Are you alright?"

Shar, still crying, answers, "I don't know...I think so... Get Katie!"

I say, "Just stay here for a minute. Don't move around until I can find some lights."

Moving toward Katie, I yell, "I'm coming Katie. Hold on, baby. Daddy's coming."

Reaching into my back pocket, I pull out my cell phone and turn on the light. The white light pierces the blackness of the room. I'm amazed at the debris and the luminescent curtain of floating dust particles I see throughout our home, as I move toward the couch where Katie is crying. I step over fallen, broken sheetrock, and weave my way around items from our shelves and cabinets that have overturned and emptied their contents all over the living room. Once at the couch, I begin pushing pieces of sheetrock off its back, and clear an area where I can flip the couch over to check on Katie. Lifting the couch, I peek under to see her balled up tighter than seems possible. I roll the couch away. She doesn't move.

"Katie? Are you alright? Are you hurt?"

Slowly opening her eyes, squinting at my cell phone light, she whimpers "No, I'm alright, but... I'm really scared."

"We'll be ok," I respond without much confidence, and add. "Do you have shoes on?"

"No, I took my slippers off to lay on the couch" she replies.

I begin looking around the couch with the light from my cellphone and find one slipper, handing it to her. I flip and toss some of the debris around, but can't find the second slipper.

"Shar," I shout out, "do you have shoes on?"

She responds, "I have my sneakers on."

I ask, "Are the boots you wore clam digging last week in the downstairs closet?"

She replies, "Yes, I just put them away."

I tell Katie, “Stay here, I’m going to look for a pair of shoes or boots you can wear to get out of here. Do you have your phone with you?”

She pulls it out and shines the light. I tell her to shine it on her mother until I get back with her shoes.

I call out, “Shar, stay where you are until I get Katie some shoes. I’m going to try to get to the closet. We’ll work our way outside together, when I get back.”

Working my way through the debris and broken items on the floor, I can see our front door is jammed open at an angle. I can’t see anything outside, just darkness. I get to the closet door. It’s partly open but won’t budge far enough to get inside easily. I look inside and see the boots. Kneeling down and reaching in as far as I can, I’m able to grab one, then use the other to drag the far boot closer to me. I pick them up and maneuver over, across, and around everything that fell during the quake.

I reach Katie and hand her the boots to put on. “Dad, these boots don’t fit. They’re too big.”

I reply, “Just wear them. There is too much broken glass, nails and who knows what laying around here to cut your feet on.”

After Katie adjusts the boots on her feet, we work our way to Shar, and using the lights from our cell phones, we trek through the debris, through the partially open front door, to the outside. It’s a bit chilly outside, but it has stopped raining. We walk to my wife’s car, which is parked in front of our house. Luckily, I carry her car keys on my key ring. I pull them from my pocket, open the door and pop the trunk to get out two blankets for them to drape over themselves, along with a large LED flashlight so we can see better.

Katie says, “Where’s our Go Kit?” Looking directly at me she asks, “Don’t we have a Go Kit?” She turns to her mother, “What about water?”

Shar immediately replies, “Ask your father why we don’t have any.”

I look over at my wife, sigh heavily, and give her the exasperated, I get it look. I’m guilty of not preparing our family for disaster. I admit to Katie, “We don’t have a Go Kit.”

Katie cuts me off, “Dad, we’re supposed to have a Go Kit. We learned about disaster preparedness in school and that we’re supposed to have a Go Kit.”

Shar chimes in, “Your father didn’t go to school that day, honey. He had something better to do on that particular day ... and every day after.”

I try to ease the situation. “We don’t have anything else in the trunk we can use. Let’s make the best of what we have. In the morning, I’ll go back in the house and get what we need.”

Katie exclaims, “What if I need to go to the bathroom? Do I have to go back into the house?”

I ask, “Do you need to go now?”

Katie responds, “No.”

Then Shar asks, “Is anyone going to ask me?”

I ask, “Do you need to go?”

She says, “No, but I might soon.”

I say, “Well, try to hold it until I figure out what to do.”

That was enough to set Shar off on a diatribe about my disaster preparedness neglect, “This is not good Jack. I don’t like this at all. We aren’t ready for this. We have no food, no water, and no bathroom. I told you time and time again about this....”

I say, “Please, Shar, I get it. But we can only do what we can now. . please try to relax...”

“Don’t tell me to relax,” she yells back. And although I can’t see her eyes in the darkness, I can tell they are glaring at me.

I ask, “Please, can we just work to make things better for all of us?”

Luckily, Katie jumps in, “The phones aren’t working, other than the light. We can’t text either.”

I tell Katie to turn her cell phone light off to save it in case we need the cell phone lights later. I turn to see if I can light up the front of the house with the LED flashlight. There is a large crack from the mid-roof level running down next to the front door. All of our windows are broken and I notice the curtains blowing around in what’s left of our window frames.

I hear Shar gasp and begin to cry again, “Oh my god! My house. Oh god. It’s broken. Oh, what are we gonna do?”

Suddenly, a large commotion comes from inside of the house and our dog Kailani, comes bounding through the doorway. I call her over and attempt to put her in the car with my wife and daughter.

Katie excitedly says, “Kailani, you’re safe! Mom, she’s safe! Good girl. Come here puppy. Get in the car...that’s right. Good girl.”

Kailani looks more relieved than we do that the earthquake is over. She lays over Katie’s lap in the back seat of the car.

As I hand the car keys to Shar, she holds onto my hand and asks, “Do you think Janie is safe?”

I answer as I squeeze her hand, “She’s smart. She knows what to do. I’m sure she’s safe.”

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Looking around, I don’t see or hear anyone else outside and tell Shar, “I’m going to walk up the street to see if anyone needs help.”

Be careful Jack. Don’t get hurt.”

I respond, “I will. You know I’m always careful.”

She adds, “Like I said, be careful.”

Unexpectedly, the ground begins to shake again. I kneel down and Shar ducks and covers her head as Katie pulls Kailani tight and holds on for dear life in the back seat of the car.

Shar yells out, “Not again...oh godddd!”

It only lasts a few seconds, maybe eight to ten. It was nowhere near the size of the earthquake we just survived. As the aftershock stops rumbling, I hear more debris falling from my home and from nearby homes.

I get up, look to see if my wife and daughter are alright, asking, “Are you ok?”

“Yes, We’re ok, Jack.”

I respond, “We’ll probably have these for a while. If this was a coastal earthquake, it probably generated a tsunami. I hope everyone understands what to do.”

Shar looks at me in panic, as does Katie, “We’re safe, right?”

I say, “Yeah. We’re safe. We’re nowhere near the inundation zone. We just need to stay safe while walking around in the debris and stay safe during the aftershocks. They can be pretty big.”

“I’ll be back soon,” I declare, as I begin walking up the street using the flashlight to light my way.

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As I’m walking up the street, I see two or three lights in the distance. I hear a few voices from far away, calling out asking if people are safe. I stop at my neighbor’s home, knock hard with the flashlight and try to open the front door. It’s locked. I yell into the broken front window and listen – nothing but water running and the faint message coming from an All Hazard Alert Weather Radio that must be buried beneath the debris in their living room.

Moving from home to home, I encounter a few neighbors, all with damage to their homes, but none were injured by the earthquakes. Some have Go Kits, most do not. Some don’t even have flashlights. Many have candles and have moved a few chairs to their front lawns. Nobody feels safe in their homes, especially since we can’t truly see the damage incurred.

Every once in a while, a small group of three or four people walk up the street passing our homes. I chat with a few, who tell me they are moving toward Sam Benn Park, because someone told them the assembly area for tsunami was situated there. I told them I hadn’t heard that information, but that didn’t mean it isn’t true and disclose the park is about two blocks away. They said the damage from the earthquake on our street was similar where they lived, about four blocks down the street toward the river. I asked if anyone was hurt, but all they knew was someone broke an arm running from his house during the earthquake. Most injuries they heard about were minor.

Meeting up with Bill, a neighbor from up the corner, I notice the sky beginning to lighten, signaling daybreak approaching. Suddenly I realize I’ve been walking around for hours. I talk Bill into joining me to check on our other neighbors. Methodically moving from home to home,

we arrive at a home on the other side of our street where Pearl and Joe live, an elderly couple with a small poodle. I go up to the house, and the door is closed, but unlocked.

“Hello?” I knock, open the door and call out into the living room.

I see lots of debris and then see Pearl sitting on the floor holding her dog.

I move to her, and ask, “Are you ok Pearl?”

I notice a small cut on her forehead as she looks to me. She is mumbling to herself.

I ask, “Where’s Joe? Where’s Joe, Pearl?”

She continues to mumble and points to a large china cabinet laying on the floor. I shine the light to it and notice two legs, most likely Joe’s, sticking out from underneath.

I gasp, “Oh Jeez.”

I move to the cabinet quickly and attempt to lift it up. I barely get it up to my knees when Bill appears out of nowhere and helps push the cabinet upright. Joe’s hands are shaking but he isn’t talking. I lean down to get a better look and Bill said not to move him. He might have a broken neck or back. I hand Bill the flashlight and run out using the cell phone light, to get one of the blankets from our car.

I return and say, “We can’t leave them in this place. Things could still fall and Pearl is having some issues. Let’s get them outside.”

Bill asks, “What about Joe?”

I respond, “I don’t know yet. I just know they can’t stay in here. Maybe we can put them in their car.” I search Joe’s pockets and exclaim, “I got em,” as I pull his car keys out!  
“One of us can stay with them until we get some help.”

We move some of the debris surrounding Joe, so we can roll him up in the blanket, hoping to stabilize him as best we can. Bill and I move Joe’s arms ever so slowly to his sides as we wrap him up *papoose style*.

I ask Bill, “Do you want me to move Pearl to the car? I’ll put her in the front seat and then we can get Joe into the back seat.”

Bill responds, "I can get her, you stay with Joe."

I hand him the flashlight, and he talks to Pearl, slowly helping her from the home to their car at the curb. Pearl refuses to let go of her poodle. Just as Bill begins to close the door to the car, the ground begins shaking again. I look to see the cabinet next to Joe begin falling. Moving quickly I step under it and try to keep it from falling on Joe. The ground motion and the heavy, bulkiness of the cabinet causes it, as well as me to fall. It positioned itself over my lower body as I lay atop of Joe, on my back, perpendicular to his lower body with the cabinet on me, but not touching him. Struggling to move, Joe groans. I realize I'm having trouble moving myself. The trembler stopped quickly.

I yell out, "Bill.... Bill? Hey Bill, are you there?"

There is no answer. I struggle to move from under the cabinet again. Joe groans louder but doesn't say anything. I don't think I can get out from under here without someone helping.

Afraid I may hurt Joe more than he already is, I try to yell out louder, "Hey Bill? Bill?"

I lay there for fifteen or twenty minutes attempting four or five times to get from under the cabinet, but can't without hurting Joe.

I yell out, "Bill? BILL? Are you there?"

Jeez, where did he go? He couldn't have just left me here.

Suddenly a larger rumble begins and large pieces of ceiling tiles and sheetrock fall directly upon Joe and I. A large piece crashes into my head, and I see stars. More debris tumbles and falls over us as I'm hit with something very solid and hard, a brick. I attempt to cover my face as bricks thud down upon us. Abruptly, I am smashed with hundreds of pounds of bricks. Oh god, the chimney has fallen through his roof.

After what seems like an eternity, the earthquake stops. I cannot move at all. I can't see anything other than a small bit of light from what I believe may be the sun coming up.

I can barely breathe. I try to yell for help, but not much noise is produced as I yell out, "Help...help..." I'm choking but can't cough.

I am having trouble breathing. We're being crushed under the bricks.

I try once more to call for help, "Help ... Bill?"

I couldn't even hear myself call out. I think I'm going to suffocate. I close my eyes, listening to my heartbeat get softer, and slower as I can barely draw a small breath. I see my family on my closed eyelids. I should had said I love you more often. I listen to myself breathing, shallow, panting, and slowing. Breathe..... breathe..... brea..the.....  
brea...t.....h.....e..

### **END OF PART 3**