

## Chapter 17

### RUDELY AWAKENED

We could never have been prepared fully for what happened at 4:31 a.m. on Monday, January 17, 1994.

Chris and I were awakened by what seemed like a bucking bronco. I was convinced it was the big one. My first impulse was to look at the corner of the ceiling to see if it was changing shape. It was not, but the noise was deafening. Everything in our house was being thrown to the floor, and a nearby bridge on I-5 was tearing apart and falling on The Old Road. The shaking went on and on. The earthquake measured 6.8 on the Richter scale.

I went to get the flashlight we kept by the back door in the family room, which was so deep with debris that I had to climb over the couch to get to it.

Once we could see we dressed and responded to the loud knocking of the neighbors on our front door. Everyone else was already in the street. It seemed to be pitch black. The electricity was gone. It was a clear warm night, and the stars were incredible.

I looked around the house a little bit. Our family room was a shambles. Most of the shelves in our floor to cathedral ceiling bookcase had been ripped loose, and books were knee-deep on the floor. Our television had been thrown eight feet from its table. Pictures were down. The living room was in a better shape, so we could make our way from there through the dining area to the kitchen.

Our cats were hiding under the bed, and did not come out for days, although they were quite willing to eat.

In a very few minutes I gave Chris the bad news that I had a whole city to tend to. My car was in the driveway, which was lucky, because the garage, which I had finished cleaning the day before, was a shambles.

Chuck Kunze was going house to house, turning off the gas.

Fortunately traffic was light because some people were driving like maniacs, leaning on their horns and taking terrible chances, with all the traffic lights and street lights out. First I drove to the city yard. I saw a van full of engineers leaving. They would be checking the bridges.

Thirty minutes after the earthquake I was at city hall, arriving right behind assistant city manager Ken Pulskamp, disaster coordinator Adele Macpherson, and two others.

Our emergency operations center was the council chambers, and supplies were in a small room to the rear. There did not seem to be a whole lot more than pads of paper, pencils, flashlights and mobile phones in that room. The mobile phones would not work because there were too many people making calls, but the landlines worked.

We worked by the battery-operated lighting in city hall and began to set up the Emergency Operations Center in the council room. The first priority was to

install emergency phones. In the absence of the mayor, city manager George Carvalho declared a state of emergency.

More people were arriving. George put some people to work immediately to find a drinking water supply. He was not the only one to realize this might be the most critical problem. One of our neighbors, John Mayon, had left within minutes of the earthquake for Bakersfield to buy drinking water for our neighborhood. He had also volunteered his swimming pool for those of us who wanted to take buckets of water so we could flush our toilets.

We knew that communications was going to be a big problem. We could not get through to the media in Los Angeles, and they were swamped with the needs of the eighty-five cities in the southern forty per cent of the county area. I tried to get our local station, KBET at 1220 AM, on my car radio, but it was off the air.

Within minutes we had a lot of city staff on hand, with more coming in. George Carvalho said to one younger man, "Go to AV Rentals and get us a generator."

"What if they are not open?"

"Go to AV Rentals and get us a generator."

There was going to be a lot of red tape cut.

The pads of paper and the pencils were to keep track of money spent.

Councilmembers were not needed at that time. I drove east, to check on my daughter and granddaughter in Canyon Country, and to see what was happening at KBET. There was no one there, and I did not know where their transmitter was. Later I learned they had suffered major computer and transmitter problems. They had one of the most advanced systems in the country, but once it was down it was not going to be on the air for hours, if not days. I could listen to the Los Angeles stations on my car radio. They reported widespread devastation, but did not mention Santa Clarita.

Nearby, Denise's condo seemed to be in pretty good shape, although to some extent that was relative. I found her in her kitchen; she had swept her china into the trash. Otherwise, her unit seemed to be sound. Granddaughter Kylene was excited. She thought it was like an E-ticket ride at Disneyland.

From Denise's kitchen window I had a commanding view of the fires in Greenbrier Mobile Home Park, which had been caused by gas lines being ripped apart. That was another place I was not needed.

I had no idea how Danielle and Leon had fared. They lived in Northridge. While she was doing graduate work she was also working as a waitress next door to the Northridge Meadows Apartments. They arrived at our house before we heard that those apartments had collapsed; the early death toll listed at fourteen.

I went home to tell Chris that Denise and Kylene were doing well, and to find out if there was any word from Danielle and Leon, who showed up, after checking on Leon's father. Their apartment had been hit hard. They were the last civilians to cross the bridge turning from the northbound I-5 to the Antelope Valley Freeway, having driven past gas main fires and picked their way through flooded streets in the dark.

Later, I could hear the phone in my home office ring once in a while, but I could not answer it. I could open my office door only about two inches. I could see that my laser printer was hanging by its cables off my desk. My computers and books were all over the floor, although the biggest bookcase had survived, with the books in it having shifted no more than an inch.

I found another old phone that did not require electricity to operate. However, we could make no long distance calls.

Mayor George Pederson ratified the state of emergency.

Bridges were out. Many had not fallen, but instead the roadbeds at the approaches had dropped as much as a foot.<sup>1</sup>

Helicopters roared as Sheriff's deputies were being airlifted into our valley.

We soon learned that all the roads to the south and west were cut.

The Red Cross was setting up shelters.

We did not know what would happen when the electricity was turned back on. We had to get the word out to people to turn off their appliances and lights so surges would not cause fires.

I checked back at city hall. Tents were going up in the parking lot. Phones and radio equipment were plugged into emergency power. Gail Foy was trying to contact the Los Angeles radio stations, with no luck. Other council members were showing up. I saw little of Jill Klajic, who was working hard in the community helping people.

Then we worked a little on the house, making paths through the rooms so we could navigate. We fixed candles ready to be lit, careful to make sure they were stable in case another temblor hit us.

Neighbor John Mayon delivered some water. There was no real need for heat. I went down to the area around Hart High School to find out what was happening. The Red Cross had set up a shelter in the gym of the Boys and Girls Club in Newhall Park, and people were setting up camp on the grounds. At first the shelter was full of senior citizens, many of them from the Valley Oaks Apartments, which had been hit hard. One man had died of a heart attack there. Most of the campers were Latinos, who did not want to go inside any buildings.

I stopped by Connie Worden-Roberts' house on Via Onda. Her house was torn apart, as was the Cronan's place next door. Bill Roberts looked very sick, and three days later was diagnosed with leukemia.

By the end of the day on Monday city hall had been declared unsafe and we had moved into tents set up on the parking lot. The pavement was covered with phone lines, and the Red Cross was serving meals. I went home to check in with Chris. She did not like being stuck at home, uncertain about what to do next. A 5.5 aftershock had taken out a long slumpstone wall. Fortunately for our dog, Trudy, it fell away from her run.

I said to Chris, "Why don't you go down to the Boys and Girls Club? There are lots of little kids down there who need help." She volunteered over fourteen hours a day the first week, and later took mass care training, volunteering in other disasters as far away as St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands. We did not begin

to really clean up the mess in our house for three weeks. Our granddaughter, Kylen Plummer, aged 3, also put in a great many hours handing out food.

The Red Cross opened more shelters quickly, and when they were overwhelmed the Salvation Army was there.

Our department heads worked as much as they could, several of them for the first twenty-four hours straight. As Priscilla Nielsen, the city's volunteer coordinator, put it, "Everybody was working so hard. It was like some primal 'Just Do It' thing. Just take care of things." Gail Foy, our public information officer, was as well informed as anyone could be. Our assistant city manager Ken Pulskamp, deputy city manager for community development Lynn Harris, building official Ruben Barrera, city engineer Tony Nisich, emergency preparedness coordinator Adele Macpherson, CDBG manager Vyto Adomaitis and city clerk Donna Grindey addressed problems as they came up, getting tremendous support from staffers.<sup>2</sup>

At 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday we had a council meeting under the tent, standing in a huddle. There was no notice and no agenda. We just met. We could do that in a disaster. Donna Grindey stood in the middle of the huddle with a battery-operated tape recorder, turning to each person who spoke. It was mentioned that KBET had come back on the air at 4:00 a.m. Tuesday.

We passed an emergency ordinance by title, without seeing the words in print, giving the city power to tear down those chimneys which presented a danger to their neighbors. By this time we knew that city hall had suffered major damage. Only later did we learn it would cost half its worth to repair it, but we had earthquake insurance.

As the second order of business I moved that KBET be named the official emergency radio station of Santa Clarita. "But nobody listens to it," came the response.

"Don't you worry, just pass my motion and everybody will listen to it."

The council did.

I had been given a mobile phone, and at the end of the meeting I called the station. "You've just been named the official emergency radio station of Santa Clarita. We need to have all your listeners go up and down the street, right now, and tell everyone you are on the air and all the information we can provide will come to them through KBET." Had Arbitron been working, the ratings of our little 1000-watt station would have gone through the roof.<sup>3</sup>

It was obvious that communications and the public psychology were most important. Meanwhile everyone was pulling together. The twelve candidates who were running against the incumbents had nice things to say about the city's response, although Ken Dean complained that the traffic was not moving well because the lights were not synchronized.<sup>4</sup>

I think it was Wednesday evening we had an announced council meeting. We showed up in work clothes and for that suffered a dig in "Tell It to the Signal." Someone complained we did not look like council members.

The lights started coming back on Wednesday evening. A lot of landlines were out because of flooding due to broken water mains, so the fire department had people all over the place to look for problems developing from the restoration of power. Then every few days something else would happen. Water pressure would come back on, even if the water was not fit to drink, or another bridge would be opened as city crews built asphalt ramps so drivers could negotiate the distance between the road bed and the bridges.

On Thursday George Carvalho asked me to go to Burbank for a meeting with President Clinton at the airport. I was the one councilman available at that moment. That was my first attempt to leave the valley. It did not work. Caltrans had punched a road through to the San Fernando Valley, but at 2:00 p.m. it was jammed.

We got a lot of help. "Sweet Alice" Harris and her friends from Watts came to lend their hands. Foreign aid came from Taiwan through the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. Working with city staff, council-members and the Red Cross, they wrote checks to individuals to cover specific needs.

On Thursday I asked Ruben Barrera, our building and safety honcho, to translate for me. Raquel Garcia helped, and Jan Heidt pitched in. I addressed the people in the park over a portable sound system. They gathered around to listen and ask questions. Convincing them that green tagged buildings were safe was not easy. We had building inspectors coming in from Watts and cities all over the Southwest to help, and they were doing a great job. However, the campers feared bribery and corruption.

I invited them to join us in the shelter for meals. They were not too eager. I told them this was one time no one should worry about having documents; we were there for everyone. It took weeks for some of the campers to go home, or seek shelter inside.

On Friday I was able to drive to Encino for a meeting with Henry Cisneros, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. I got through so quickly I was two hours early. While waiting for the meeting to start I saw my name on a place card at the front table, but then all the place cards were collected and put away. Cisneros and Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan gave a press conference.

I overheard two staffers talking. One asked, "Is Cisneros going to stay for the public hearing?"

"No, I think he is going to tour some sites with Mayor Riordan."

"What about the other mayors?"

"Well, they're just small mayors."

Riordan and Cisneros did leave and Assistant Secretary Andrew Cuomo explained that the meeting was a public hearing required by law before emergency funds could be distributed to cities. Then people started heading for

the front table. A bunch of council members from Los Angeles were there, and the rest of the people were staffers from Los Angeles and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. One seat was empty at the far end, and as they introduced themselves and I understood that Los Angeles had hogged all the seats at the table I slipped into the empty seat, and firmly grasped the microphone that had just been passed by it. I introduced myself as the only person present at the table who was representing all the other cities in the county, and two-thirds of the county's population.

Andrew Cuomo called on the audience to say what they had to say. The hearing was not organized and the acoustics in the meeting room were terrible. I was concerned about getting home during the rush hour, but I was allowed to speak after all the people from Los Angeles had spoken. Los Angeles Councilman Mike Hernandez was holding court in the back of the room and the racket was awful.

I said, "I'm a schoolteacher and I do not speak to noisy rooms."

Cuomo cleared the room of the Los Angeles council members. I outlined some of our problems and how we could use emergency funding, again saying that I was the only person from the other cities or the county at the table. A council member from Santa Monica stepped up and took a seat, and the Mayor pro-tem of Simi Valley in Ventura County sat down behind me.

I left with the paperwork for an electronic transfer of \$782,000, and drove home over Little Tujunga Canyon Road, winding through the mountains. Crossing the mountains took almost ninety minutes in the middle of the afternoon.

I called KBET to report on traffic and mentioned that I was bringing home some money. They told me to be careful how I was driving.

Saturday I did spend a little time helping to clear some spaces in our house. I slept every night in my own bed, but the rest of the family spent some nights on the living room floor.

On Monday I went to a faculty meeting at school. San Fernando High reopened on Tuesday. My carpool left at 5:00 a.m. We were at school at 6:00. I found my classroom cleaned up, but the walls full of cracks. By Friday we knew we could leave at 6:45 and make it in time for classes at 8:00.

The kids were wonderful. The first day we opened with a two-hour class and had each student tell what they had been through. Attendance was good, but we took the pressure off. Everything through the end of the semester was optional, including final exams, but they would get extra credit for everything they did. The response was terrific. Everyone worked very hard, but the success of the system never got through to the people who determine grading standards.

Each day I toured the shelters as I assumed the job of liaison between the city and the Red Cross and Salvation Army. Sometimes that meant doing odd chores or cooking. I checked in on senior citizens who were badly shaken. We helped Danielle and Leon get their stuff out of the building in Northridge.<sup>5</sup>

We had to buy a new refrigerator, but the televisions (one of which had fallen off a stand and rolled ten feet before being buried in books) kept working well for

years. The house suffered about \$25,000 damage. It took four years and retirement before I could fix everything.

It took years to clean up the city. FEMA was operating locally on January 20, three days after the earthquake. They worked long hours; the lines of people seeking help were immense. By the time I got around to making an application the early birds had gotten all the \$4000 grants. It took me about six months to earn that much money as a councilman.

The city moved into a temporary location on Golden Triangle Road while city hall was rebuilt. The frame had to be tweaked and steel reinforcements put in the corners. California Institute of the Arts suffered terrible damage. The hospital was hit hard. In many cases buildings were glued back together with epoxy, but a number of homes had to be demolished. We had a hard time finding the absentee landlords of a number of buildings. One of the problems was that there was a huge backlog of property ownership records to be filed at the county.

After about five weeks there was some return to normalcy. The council began to consider a plan under which staff would work longer days, and take every other Friday off. We were being required to cut commuting by the Air Quality Management District. The council met wherever it could, in the basement of the Bank of America building across the street from city hall, or in the boardroom of the Hart High School District.

Finally I began to think about the election. Eight of the fifteen people on the ballot were present at a forum in Kelly's Steakhouse. Rosalind Wayman and Kenneth Dean had decided to leave the race. I taught school that day.

Fred Heiser, who had already run for the State Senate on the Libertarian ticket, was seeking donations nationally and was way out in front, with \$17,680 by March 5, while Clyde Smyth placed second with \$8,361. Most of us got bad press for some violation or other of the elections code. If the candidates knew the code it seemed the volunteers or the printers did not.<sup>6</sup>

Dwight Jurgens called Smyth, Darcy and Klajic the winners about five weeks before the election. "There's nothing really wrong with Carl Boyer a hit of speed wouldn't fix. That's a joke...just my way of saying Boyer is a thoroughly relaxed man. He's also intelligent, well-known, and if there's a re-election-killing vote on his record, I'm not aware of it. But his close association with Leon Worden's constant and counterproductive petty sniping at Klajic isn't particularly helpful, and unless he's doing a lot of shmoozing behind the scenes, his natural, low-key demeanor may cause him to finish fourth in a three-seat race.

"No one likes Jill Klajic except those who go to the polls. Developers – particularly The Newhall Land and Farming Co. – cringe at her name. Elsmere dump-pusher Ken Kazarian would just as soon bury her under a heap of L.A. city's trash. Her fellow council members would like to see her and her collection of special-interest fanatics gone. She has, frankly, chosen to surround herself with some very strange people – maniacal John Drew, right-winger Chip Meyer and wordy Alan Cameron chief among them. The press dislikes her and mistreats her and she responds in kind....

“But while those who represent the Santa Clarita establishment resent her, only the young and foolish underestimate her.”<sup>7</sup>

I had been careful about the people surrounding me. My wife, Chris, was my campaign manager. She could think on her feet. Some people had donated a large billboard to my campaign, and I asked that my contact numbers be put on it. It turned out that listing a city number was illegal. We wiped that number off and continued with my home office number. I got only three calls throughout the campaign, with one of them coming from a curious constituent who just wanted to check who would answer the phone. I probably got three calls a month at home, so the campaign did not intensify the public’s efforts to reach me.<sup>8</sup>

One of the issues of the campaign was the sale of the Santa Clarita Water Company, a private concern organized by the Bonelli family, to either the city or to the Castaic Lake Water Agency. I wanted the city to buy the company, but did not push hard for it because I wanted public opinion to come out in favor. Perhaps it was the experience with the Pinetree annexation that made me a little shy.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile Jill Klajic was being pounded for her trip to Tahiti after the earthquake. She had been recruited to go to Papeete for a seminar on landfills. Papeete had severe garbage problems at the time. When my wife and I went there on vacation in 2001, three years after I had retired from the council, the problems had diminished considerably, so perhaps Jill’s participation really helped.<sup>10</sup>

On March 25 Dwight Jurgens played with the candidates’ minds. “Klajic, Darcy in lead for seats, says spin doctor” was the title of his column. He cited a poll commissioned by a non-incumbent candidate. He had me third, and Clyde Smyth a distant fourth. An anonymous “Tell It to the Signal” posting stated that Art Donnelly was one of my top supporters and was also on BKK’s payroll. Art had succeeded me as chairman of the incorporation committee when I resigned to run for office, and I did see Art occasionally in the audience at council meetings. I was never aware of any expression he made of support for me.<sup>11</sup>

On March 27 *The Signal* listed six good candidates out of the fifteen on the ballot. Larry Bird (a Newhall landlord concerned about blight), Carl Boyer, Jo Anne Darcy, Dennis Farnham (a 25-year Los Angeles Police Dept. veteran), Clyde Smyth and Linda Storli were their choices.

On April 7 Dan Hon gave his personal endorsements in his column in *The Signal*. They were Darcy, Boyer and Smyth. Dwight Jurgens and Tim Whyte were making book, with Jurgens saying it was Darcy and Klajic with either Boyer or Smyth placing, and Whyte saying it would be Darcy and Smyth, with Klajic possibly third, but the “Stealth Incumbent” Boyer a possibility. On April 10, after failing to list Fred Heiser as qualified on the 27th of March, *The Signal* made its endorsements: Boyer, Smyth and Heiser.

Gonzalo Freixes got big coverage in the *Daily News* by saying he wanted a Latino on the council, and there should be a council district drawn to accommodate that wish. The problem was that no Latino had ever run for city council. If one had, and the Latino population (thirteen per cent of the total) got



solidly behind their candidate, Latino representation was theirs. After all, not that many non-Latinos were voting.<sup>12</sup>

When it was all over Darcy, Boyer and Smyth celebrated victory at Rattlers in Canyon Country. It was a long evening. The race for the third position was very tight, with Landslide Clyde ahead of Jill Klajic by eight votes when the preliminary counting was done. The recount showed the difference was sixteen votes. Darcy had 5,460, Boyer received 4,216, Smyth enjoyed 3,804, Klajic totaled 3,788, and Fred Heiser had 2,985, with 2,784 reported for Dennis Farnham and 2,406 for Linda Storli.<sup>13</sup>

I was no longer the balance of power, but I was glad that the 15.7% of the voters who had made the effort to go to the polls had dumped Jill Klajic.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The Signal*, Jan. 18, 1994, and *Daily News*, Jan. 18, 1994.

<sup>2</sup>*The Signal*, Feb. 10, 1994.

<sup>3</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 23, 1994.

<sup>4</sup>*The Signal*, Jan. 31, 1994.

<sup>5</sup>Letter to my father Carl Boyer, Jr., and stepmother Cleo Childs Boyer, written from notes, Feb. 6, 1994.

<sup>6</sup>*The Signal*, March 5, 1994, and *Daily News*, March 5, 1994.

<sup>7</sup>*The Signal*, March 6, 1994.

<sup>8</sup>*The Signal*, March 8, 1994; *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1994, and *Daily News*, March 9, 1994.

<sup>9</sup>*The Signal*, March 17, 1994.

<sup>10</sup>*The Signal*, March 20, 1994.

<sup>11</sup>*The Signal*, March 25, 1994.

<sup>12</sup>*Daily News*, April 10, 1994.

<sup>13</sup>*The Signal*, April 15, 1994, and *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1994.

<sup>14</sup>*The Signal*, April 14, 1994.