Earthquake

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Members Only Magazine
Issue 14 December 2013
MoMento, PhotoForum members only magazine, Issue 14, December 2013:

Edited by John Collie and John B. Turner.
Production by Crystal Colour Graphics, Auckland.
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Front cover: John Collie: Earthquake damaged building, Cathedral Square, 1st July 2011.
Page 2-3: John Collie: Looking South down Lichfield Street from High Street, 1st July 2011.
Back cover: John Collie: Nee Ha Thai restaurant, corner of Manchester and Tuam Streets, 1st July 2011.
Earthquake

“Did the earth move for you?”, was the laconic text sent to us on the 4th of September, 2010. A few hours earlier I’d been sitting in the dark, huddled in the hallway with my partner and kids (who’d gone back to sleep. I’d been stabbed in the sole of the foot by a broken glass in the rush to the kids room, and had a tea towel wrapped around it in an attempt to stop the blood flow. I was feeling faint. The earth did actually move – really violently.

The neighbour’s chimney had smashed the rear window of our car. The city was black and deathly silent.

I missed the even bigger quake in February 2011 as I was on leave. A few days later I came back to Christchurch, and with a few other staff went into the Christchurch Art Gallery where I work. After assembling at the edge of the Red Zone we were allowed through the army cordon to rescue the freshly installed Petrus van der Velden exhibition. It was now sharing the touring gallery with at least 80 emergency workers, rows of computers and temporary worktables. I think the new occupants were happy when we removed these dark brooding landscapes with their tumbling down rocks from the dimly lit walls.

Two months after the February quake I was asked to photograph Neil Dawson’s Chalice for the cover of Art News New Zealand. I set off in my hard hat and hi-visibility vest with a guy from the parking division at council. He’d recently been seconded to his new role as Red Zone escort. We headed into the heart of the Red Zone – Cathedral Square.

I signed in to the Zone at the checkpoint and walked up Gloucester Street, taking some shots of the general destruction and abandonment. It felt strangely liberating – a mixture of war zone anxiousness and a strong sense of a lonely, stark and deserted landscape. When we arrived at the Square the Chalice looked pretty much OK, but of course Christ’s Church Cathedral was wrecked and looking all the more Gothic with its tower half down and a giant emergency steel structure propping up the facade and rose window. All around bits of building had dropped off, the bells lay motionless and silent on a patch of grass in front of me.

When entering the now accessible Cathedral Square one can watch scores of overseas and local visitors peering through the protective fence taking numberless photographs and having, arguably, a more religious experience of the power of nature than they ever might have had with the rote rituals of ‘churchianity’.

While things are slowly moving on in the city centre, the same can’t be said for the suburbs. A drive around the Avon Loop reveals broken roads, endless road cones, skewed lamp-posts and of course, damaged houses with overgrown gardens and now graffiti and evidence of the odd arson. The number of blank sections increases daily. This has caused a housing crisis – less houses for residents and the workers pouring in – the locals are getting squeezed every which way. The boy racers have competition from project managers in an enormous fleet of shiny new four wheel drives – I didn’t know there were so many diggers, loaders, nibblers and trenchers in existence, and wonder where will they all go after their job is done? Will they just be buried along with the millions of tons of rubble piling up in Burwood forest . . . ? Time will tell.

John Collie, 2013
Cory and his mates,
Hereford Street, June 2011

Stuart Page
Stuart Page
Mike, demolition worker,
Hereford Street, June 2011
Stuart Page
*Railway Station demolition,*
Moorhouse Avenue, September 2012
Stuart Page
*Man entering restricted use building, Cambridge Terrace, June 2011*
Stuart Page
Demolition worker,
Papanui Road, June 2011
Timothy J Veling

Dave Gorrie,
Avonside, Christchurch, 2012
THX 4 THE MEMORIES

Timothy J Veling
Avonside Drive,
Avonside, Christchurch, 2012
Timothy J Veling
*Red Zone Party,*
Avonside Drive, Christchurch, 2013

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