



chapter 4

by Elizabeth Swenson

A recent New Yorker article outlined, in great detail, the thing that runs through my head when I can't sleep at night. Having woken up for any myriad of reasons I lay there as my mind begins to wonder and eventually, without fail, I end up in the same terrifying cycle.

“Soon after [the] shaking begins, the electrical grid will fail, likely everywhere west of the Cascades and possibly well beyond... In theory, those who are at home when it hits should be safest; it is easy and relatively inexpensive to seismically safeguard a private dwelling. But, lulled into nonchalance by their seemingly benign environment, most people in the Pacific Northwest have not done so. That nonchalance will shatter instantly. So will everything made of glass.”

The article by Kathryn Schultz published in June 2015 details the history of the Cascadia subduction zone, which runs for seven hundred miles off the coast of the Pacific Northwest, beginning near Cape Mendocino, California, continuing along Oregon and Washington, and terminating around Vancouver Island, Canada. Based on the most recent Cascade earthquake, a magnitude-9.0 on January 26, 1700, scientist can predict the most likely outcome of the impending earthquake.

“The shaking from the Cascadia quake will set off landslides throughout the region,... It will also induce a process called liquefaction, whereby seemingly solid ground starts behaving like a liquid, to the detriment of anything on top of it. ... Together, the sloshing, sliding, and shaking will trigger fires, flooding, pipe failures, dam breaches, and hazardous-material spills. ...Four to six minutes after the dogs start barking, the shaking will subside. For another few minutes, the region, upended, will continue to fall apart on its own. Then the wave will arrive, and the real destruction will begin.”

I stopped reading after that. Having seen videos of 2011 Japan earthquake I know how this story ends. As I'm laying in bed unable to fall asleep I am wrought with anxiety over the emergency box we don't have packed and the seismic straps we haven't installed on our foundation yet. Will it really matter if it is as bad as they say? What is it about the darkness of the middle of the night that our deepest fears and greatest anxieties emerge? How do we face our beds at the end of each day with that looming anxiety? As Barbra Brown Taylor explores, I think we have to be willing to wrestle

with our anxiety and fear by the light of day too. I'm not sure that packing an emergency box will alleviate my seismic anxiety, but there is something important about taking it out of the darkness and looking at it in the full light of day. For weeks following the publication of Schultz's article the impending earthquake was all the Pacific Northwest could talk about. Pre-made emergency kits flew off the shelves and we discussed our emergency plans over dinners and in staff meetings. A few months later, we are lulled back into nonchalance by our "seemingly benign environment". But I think we will all be safer in the long run if we can keep talking about it. We have a lot of work to do to prepare our buildings, roads and lives to survive the really-big one. We can not relegate it to the darkness of our bedrooms.

If you want to read the article in it's entirety you can find it here: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/07/20/the-really-big-one>