

NORMA GIORGI 1931 EARTHQUAKE

STAYING AT TE AWANGA

Le Awanga
Saturday, Feb. 4th

Dear All;

1931

Will you kindly keep this carefully as 'tis the only account, I feel like writing - this is the first ^{description} I have attempted as previously, have not had the heart to even think clearly on state events, and do not care to impress things any more definitely on my mind, by re-writing these tragic events, and after each of the following have read this patchy and hurried epistle in order, would the last mentioned please return immediately, addressed to me, A. Hastings. Would you each just post on to the next.

✓ Douce & Bert.

✓ Auntie Edie & Sunny Jim

✓ Auntie Agnes

✓ Uncle Dick & Sheila

Auntie Hattie.

Love from the five Giorgi's and their Dog Pascha

Prima -

Le Awanga

Tuesday Feb. 3rd.

1931.

This morning we took the dog for a walk after breakfast as had to call for the milk - 'twas extremely close and calm. Mother stayed in bed as she has the flu - the men went in to town to the shop as usual, taking Les & Duff ~~also~~ to Beck's Pharmacy.

At 10.50 a.m. the most terrifying shock threw all off our feet and everything swayed so much that it was with the greatest difficulty we managed to rush from the house - as we were thrown from one side to the other. Once outside we managed to keep our feet and were very surprised to find there were no fissures in the ground. We were almost deafened with the mighty roar - and looking out to see we saw an immense cloud's like dense sulphur smoke

rose suddenly and spread with immense rapidity from Cape Kidnappers, and Kapier Bluff, and Wairoa Hills; within one minute the clouds ~~and~~ formed one invisible sheet of dust - the cliffs all round Hawkes' Bay had fallen with one accord - nothing ~~remained~~ remained visible but our own small beach. Everybody appeared dazed and awed with the terrible shock and catastrophe - nerves felt shattered and our hearts thumped so that we ~~could~~ were unable to stand firmly. All believed that Kapier and Kidnappers had vanished forever - and when after another hour the dust screen slowly ~~was~~ lifted the town of Kapier was sought but flames - which appeared to spread rapidly and by evening had partly travelled up Shakespeare Hill.

Several days previous - Sunday & Monday heavy seas ~~appeared~~ were felt, so that one could not swim more than a few strokes before becoming entangled in masses of seaweed. Monday evening the sea appeared worse - nothing

more than a glittering, seething monster
 which ~~had~~ endeavoured to enmesh the bathers.
 All this was noticed & remarked upon by
 many bathers on Sunday & Monday - some
 believing it to be caused by a subterranean
 eruption out at sea. Tuesday, immediately
 after the big shock, ~~the sea was seen to~~
 at every high tide was noticeable, but within
 half an hour - had receded some ~~twenty~~ ^{forty} feet
 or more below the average low-water mark.
 At most beaches this would appear - no
~~reason~~ for alarm, but ~~around~~ ~~the~~ at
 Le Awanga the sea barely recedes twelve
 feet any usual tide. Everybody became
 afraid of a tidal wave; this being highly
 probable after such an unusually heavy shake,
 so that twenty cars from the beach drove up
 to Glennys' Home on the Hill ~~at~~ ~~the~~ about
~~two~~ ^{one} miles from the waterfront. Once
 there - we all sat on the lawn - anxiously
 looking out towards Napier - all trying to
 fathom the reason for this and endeavouring

to see through glasses the amount of damage down to outlying districts. We appeared to have been more fortunate than most settlements as nothing more than smashed crockery and chimneys down were amongst our losses.

So awful was the first shake that we all realized both Hastings & Tropic would be ~~entirely~~ ^{total} ~~destroyed~~ down here, we were only saved by being in slow-burn wooden beach cottages, so now we only waited anxiously to hear if any ^{in town} escaped with their lives. ~~We~~ ~~all~~ nobody troubled about house, shop or property loss as that is only of common & minor importance now - lives are all that matter - everything else has lost its place in our affairs - so we all wait dumb with anxiety and agonised thoughts with our distorted minds for news from the town - with its taller buildings of Bricks, & concrete, and narrow streets.

Two more hours pass - about

two p.m. a car arrives - with a dished driver - dirty & torn. He has come out from Hastings. ~~as fast~~ ~~within~~ ~~an~~ immediately - but the roads are torn and cracked with large fissures so that cars can just move between the cracks; willow branches have been placed across in order to enable cars to move on the bridges which have in some places such as Harodale, risen two feet. The drive which usually takes 20 minutes from Hastings to Le Awanga, now takes over one hour - a nerve wracking experience going over cracked roads.

Hastings is a total wreck! We have given up all hope of seeing "Father & Don", also Les McDuff who has been staying with us (from Melbourne) but goes in daily with the men to business - a chemist at Beck's Pharmacy. Roach's store, the largest in town - collapsed immediately, burying many

assistants and customers without warning. Fire broke out, so that many were burned alive, although dozens were saved in time, by the brave and unselfish fellow citizens who flew to their aid regardless of their own safety and frantically tore at concrete ^{slabs,} bricks, & wooden beams, in wild haste to extricate the sufferers. Gordon Roach, one of the sons of G. F. Roach, and head of certain departments, was found with two large beams of concrete across him and the flames only five feet away. The post office tower crashed to the ground, crushing beneath its immense weight, many people, one of whom was Ryan, ~~the~~ a reporter from Hawkes Bay Tribune - Tribune offices also fell a crumbling mass! People frantically tore out from offices and buildings, into streets of calamity - Buildings fell and crumbled on all sides and the ~~streets~~ streets were filled with dust & general uproar. On all sides ~~was~~ heard the screams ^{for help} of entombed women & children for ~~help~~ many of whom were saved quickly.

All escaped from our shop without injury with the exception of Father who was knocked down and buried beneath the bricks & mortar of the falling reserve room. Fortunately he was discovered almost immediately and was almost out from debris before he regained consciousness. The Hardy Boys and Father & Ron arrived up at Elenny's almost simultaneously. The shock of seeing them alive was such a relief that we almost collapsed. Father's head was a mass of cuts, with a huge lump on his forehead almost as large as his face - the knots having made his glass eye jump out - blood all over his clothes, - cuts & bruises all over. However, after bathing and wrapping all cuts, he ~~at~~ appeared much better, and by the ~~next~~ next morning the lump was down to the size of a small breakfast cup - bruises are coming out & within two days. Both eyes and forehead are positively black. Ron & Dad had to change cars at the bridge with Mr. Baird so only persons could cross by plank.

Len was almost hysterical, but went back with Ron to Hastings as it was useless for her to stop out here, worrying, so after resting up at Glennys, we brought Father home to bed - Mother of course is very miserable and ~~was~~ needed considerable calming up at Glennys, as of course she was thrown out of bed with the earthquake, Managed to get her clothes out, for her to dress on the lawn before going up to Glennys. Len & Ron did not arrive back till 6:4-m., as it takes so long to go in & out - Within the time it had taken Ron to bring Father out, people had already begun looting in the town - even while many still remained buried alive, but with the help of others our reserve stores were soon taken in to the main shops, before much was lost. The new Hawkes Bay Farmer's Building, Public Trust, our Commerce Buildings and ~~one~~ block with own shop, are the only large buildings left in Hastings, besides several small business premises and numbers of wooden houses ~~chairs~~, minus chimneys.

At nine p. m. that evening another sharper but shorter shock was experienced in Hastings, causing the remainder of many buildings to fall and fire to burst out and demolish several blocks. Citizens ~~are~~ armed with cudgons & wearing military ~~suit~~ belts acted as military police, were ~~allowed to~~ ~~all~~ picketed all through streets & town, ~~to~~ prevent despicable rogues from looting. ~~too~~ and the men & boys about here have been and are still wonderful - every day they go in to town, clearing debris and finding remains of dozens of victims, although in many ~~places~~ instances, even after two days, ^{people} ~~before~~ have been brought out alive.

Our home is a terrible mess though still standing - chimneys down, - the tank at back of house torn from the side and hurled down - crystal, crockery, pictures & ornaments smashed everywhere - preserves & jams one sticky mess - wardrobes, bookcases, etc., thrown face downwards on floors, some of which take four men to lift.

The gas stove stood out in centre of kitchen and large marble kitchen clock thrown down ~~at~~ back behind it. Windows sprung open & had to be nailed from outside. We can be eternally thankful we were not living at Hastings these few days - but were away from heavy furniture. Everybody slept outside on lawns - tarpaulins stretching from fences to curbing of street, sheltered thousands, parks were ~~also~~ ~~filled~~ & racecourses were ~~also~~ turned in to medical camps, where nurses & doctors worked by torchlight, attending to wounded, amputating etc. Eight babies have been born in the district - within the three days.

As we lie out on the verandah tonight and look out towards Napier - all appears deserted - Seinde Island (Napier), the darling and social centre of Hawkes Bay is nothing but a tragic wreck; fires burning everywhere - hundreds of cars form a night long procession as people leave their ruined homes, but the twinkling lights of happy homes illuminate the hills

tragic tonight - only burning masses of
wreckage. ~~All night long many brave citizens~~
~~watched~~ Wednesday.

~~After~~ ^{all} Everybody here have their
cars packed with food ~~ready~~ and out on the
road ready to leave should another disaster
occur, and all night we make shift on the
veranda and attempt to sleep - nobody's
undresses - every new shake sets nerves
jarring - we all feel half crazed, but
everybody appears very calm and blasé
about things in order not to create a panic.

So Tuesday nightmare passes - the first
of many sleepless days & nights. By 8 a.m.
Wednesday morning, Mr. Hardy & the Hardy's boys
Ron and even poor old Father have gone in
to help extricate bodies and dig trenches
for bodies, and portions from operating parks.
As many as forty bodies were found, identified,
wrapped in sheep's wool & tarpaulin - names labelled
on outside and buried in one trench the first
day. Ghastly work for young boys - who suffer

Wed.
4th

terribly at night - living over again their day's work. In Hastings the relief organization is wonderful. Sewerage and main water pipes have burst and sprung everywhere, so that ^{typhoid} fever ~~is~~ now threatens the community. By 2 p. m. of the Tuesday - carts were going round the city with barrels of water.

At 11 a. m. Wednesday, Les McDuff stepped over the fence at Awaage - different from the boy we had said farewell to Tuesday morning - weary, dusty and ^{by} the dark look on his face, one ~~could say~~ ^{new} immediately he had seen terrible things - and been working hard. After washing ~~and~~ eating & resting a little, the story of Kapier was heard. This is the first news we had of Kapier, as all lines, telephones & post-offices are destroyed, and Kapier people did not know till this morning, Wed., that Hastings had ~~shared~~ ^{shared} the same terrible fate. ~~As~~ the people of Kapier ^{rushed} out from buildings they were blinded with the dust of the falling Bluff, and ~~was~~ splashed with water from

the bursting reservoir. Then a wild stampede
 for the parade to escape falling buildings,
 many of which became ablaze immediately,
 burning many ^{of which} ~~of which~~ could otherwise
 have been saved. ~~The~~ Masonic & other hotels,
 the ~~Pres~~ Leichonical College, nurses home &
 Hospitals, Old Peoples Home at Park Island
 all entombed many people. ~~Only~~ day long Tuesday
 has had been working ~~Monday~~ ~~people~~ ~~from~~
 nurses & patients from Public Hospital, when
 at 3 p.m. word arrived and ~~that~~
 the Old Peoples Home remained forgotten,
 so all went out there, only to find most
 of the inmates already dead. The flock of
 these old people was wonderful - while buried
 in the debris they would call out - "Here! Don't
 forget! My turn next!" All night long the
 rescuers worked, saving many. ~~to~~ People
 camped out along the parade, ~~while~~ ~~the~~
 & Nelson Park were turned into Hospitals.
 Next day relief cars came from all down the
 line, to collect refugees; ~~to~~ forty lorries

arrived with food, others with tarpaulins, and within two days Napier must be evacuated owing to fever threatening, as many bodies are unable to be recovered. Most people of the ~~country~~ ^{business districts} are ruined! But only lives are counted as loss these days.

By Wed. afternoon some plucky citizens ~~now~~ co-operated & printing machines ^{were} set in order - and a small bulletin issued with casualties and advice to the tent-dwellers. We are all outdoor people now - Tanned more than ever, as nearly all day we sit outside ~~doing~~ just thinking & waiting for more quakes. We would do anything to go in and help with the injured, but the towns are being cleared of women as quickly as possible in case of fever, but more & more men are required to help dig. They won't allow ~~us~~ in town - and hard work would settle our nerves and make us forget - it's positively frantic waiting every day for the men to come home

with news. Mr Frank McLeod who was out here Sunday, is supposed to be under the Public library, but digging was given up there today to concentrate on Roach's - so nine bodies have been left there - ~~with~~ ^{while} only four Mr. McLeod ~~is left~~ ^{remains}, looking for his wife today. Two more very sharp shocks were felt with dozens of small ones. The Post office has opened in a small wooden building - already telegrams have been sent. We received four today. ~~Another~~ The men arrived down about 6.30 p.m., very tired & dirty - then another fearful night of anxiety - watching fires at Napier and Napier's one eye, the lone lighthouse winking, just letting us know Napier is still ⁱⁿ existence. Another night on the verandah - nerves jaded with frequent quakes, ~~and~~ car ready, all dressed in case of speedy flight. Two sleepless nights have passed.

Thursdays 5th

Many families from Hastings & Napier are now arriving down here, as this appears to

be^{as} safe as any place about ^{the countryside} Hastings & Napier,
 so our small settlement has turned in to
 a refuge camp. Again the men went to help
 excavate in town, ~~so~~ we spent another anxious
 day waiting for them, as these smaller sharp
 stakes might bring down remaining buildings
 and kill helpers. Mrs Wood's body was
 found this afternoon, and she was buried this
 evening. Dozens of cars have tried to come through
 sightseeing but were all stopped at Dannevirke.
 Such is human curiosity and callousness! To
 think of such cold-blooded curiosity!
 Mr Millar came through Tuesday evening at
 11. p. m. - as had received message over wireless
 saying ^{both the} business & father slightly injured, but
 was so horrified by the devastation that he
 & Bill left immediately ~~there~~ this morning.
 News came through that Wairoa ~~is~~ also is
 almost devastated - no connexion whatever
 between Napier & Wairoa - owing to bad fissures
 in ~~the~~ roads, though Gisborne & Wairoa are now
 connected. Another night missus sleep - still prepared,

dressed, & with car ready. The last few cars left Napier between midnight and 3 a.m. - a train tooled - trains can now go as far as Waitangi Bridge. We feel quite civilized - connected with outside life. More ~~people~~ families arriving here, Relief stores & meat have arrived down, so we feel better - the first "Dominion" copy was handed round the beach - while all scanned the long list of casualties for news of friends. Many have been killed and injured! The news is read feverishly but we cannot dwell on the gruesome details - everybody ~~is~~ is weary for want of sleep, tired nerves are beginning and ~~somebody~~ to tell! Today we plucked up enough courage to take off our clothes for the first time since Tuesday - three days - and all went for a dip in the lagoon - ~~can't~~ cannot trust the sea yet. Oh! How wonderful was that bath! We feel refreshed! Two cars arrived from ~~the~~ Palmerston Nth. and one from

Friday
6th.

E. Katakuna, as friends wish us to leave the district; but we have decided to stay as the men must be on the spot, in case of looting etc.

Some grocers & butchers have salvaged a little stock & opened in motor garages. All ~~wounded~~ injured have been taken to Palmerston Nth, ~~Palmerston~~ Wellington & Wanganui. Refugee camps have been opened by other towns - already five thousand people have left. Nurses & Doctors from all parts have rushed here. Warships arrived bringing, provisions, plastering dynamite etc., nurses & doctors. Bluejackets are picketed about Hastings & Napier, blasting dangerous buildings excavating etc., They have been wonderful & the Commodore of the "Veronica" (which was out in the "Iron Pot" at the time of the disaster) took charge of all arrangements in Napier. Napier South & Haumoana ~~the~~ have risen eight & twelve feet respectively, & West Shore ~~the~~ twenty six feet and the first span of West Shore Bridge is shattered.

The "Iron Pot" ^{or Inner Harbour's} is almost dry & the "Veronica" only about at high tide, and small ships will in future

be able to come in at High tide only. This will finish the controversy between Inner & Outer Harbour. Have had no word from Napier friends, though seen several Hastings people. Don Inghed arrived down with a load, and stayed for a cup of tea - also Lennox Hildreth with a lorry load from Hastings. Again the men arrived about 6.30 p.m. People are more settled tonight - we even went for a long walk, and slept a little tonight - as there were ~~only~~ small shakes, but still in our clothes and car prepared on roadway.

Saturday
4th.

Again the men left at 8 p.m. for Hastings, ~~and~~ but today things appear more settled - two sharp shocks about mid-day but others only slight - It will feel strange to sleep on still ^{ground} again after the eternal rocking and swaying of the earth - the bubbling, restless motion beneath this crust. We have much to be thankful for - fine days in which to attend injured, mend houses - etc, fine days & nights in which to live outside

and our small family still alive, though each night as we go to bed, we wonder & hope if we will meet again in the morning.

~~Again~~ ^{Also}, there has been the bright friendly light of the full moon, wonderfully magic the night previous to the disaster - a perfect night, the ~~lights~~ bayrind twinkling lights of Kapier's Happy Homes sending friendly messages across the glittering moonlight waters of the bay. Tuesday night, a fierce ~~deep orange~~ ^{moon} glowered down on the ^{distorted} ~~ruined~~ ^{or charred remains} of a once ~~happy~~ peaceful & contented district - ~~the~~ ~~to~~ and in the distance, the ~~flaming~~ ^{beacons} of many destructive fires of Kapier, ~~burning~~ ~~remnants of~~ ~~houses~~ the funeral pyres of dozens of buried citizens. Even though Kapier is supposed to be evacuated, many ~~family~~ families are still encamped along the beach. Three hundred casualties arrived from outlying districts as the country parts are beginning to connect up with the main towns

So within another day or so will know how Wairoa has fared. It is so strange awaiting news of our own district, from Wellington as the "Dominion" is the only paper arriving, there being only a small circulation of the Hastings & Napier ^{papers} bulletins. We do not expect Napier will ever be a town again, as the roads on the hills have all fallen in, and everywhere are landslides, while huge fissures ^{score} the streets of what ~~was~~ ^{is} was once a town. Probably the two business areas of Hastings & Napier will now amalgamate at Hastings - Friday evening we laughed cynically at advertisement in "Dominion" of Talkies, dances, etc., & all declared we would never feel safe in a Public building - such trivialities ~~are~~ beyond our apprehension within these days of horror, but human nature is very fishy - in a few months we will be back in our wrecked homes, all trying to pull the town together - The men are doing wonders cleaning debris from the hidden streets and

salvaging the few goods ~~to~~ to be found beneath the ruins, extricating people and burying ~~the~~ limbs & bodies. ~~So~~ So far we are about as lucky as anybody as our actual buildings still stand though greatly dilapidated - with the exception of ~~one~~ two shop - an old place which ~~fell~~ collapsed altogether, ^{when the next brick shop fell on it} so although we have lost ~~thousands~~ several thousands we have our lives and a little else to be very thankful for. Each day we realize more fully how very fortunate we are - especially as we read of the numbers of lives lost. One cannot say enough of the wonderful organization, courage & presence of mind of our own countrymen, In the face of danger, with buildings still falling and fire raging they turned round and worked frantically & unceasingly, rescuing those entrapped in the files of brick & concrete. Poor must have suffered agonies whilst hurrying to extricate Father, who lay like one dead - and

terribly cut & bleeding about head, but all that is almost forgotten already - and every time we look at dear old Dad we marvel - Thousands had positively miraculous escapes. The Loxy Theatre fell immediately, throwing the manager's wife, Mrs Fote, out on to the street where she quietly picked herself up and walked away, this also happened to the Porter at the Grand Hotel," while many on the bottom were killed, among whom was the Proprietor, Mr. Ross. Almost every shop that existed has a death to mourn among its assistants. We would not write ~~the~~ of the ghastly sights that helpers in the very town discover daily. The Hardy boys, Ken & Les McDuff do not say much, but their strained nerves relax in their sleep and the poor lads ~~talk~~ talk hard & quickly, reciting the torturing sights. If only we girls (five of us at Le Avanga) could go in and help, we would feel better, but there are numbers of trained nurses,

and as many people are being kept out of the town as possible owing to water supply difficulties, etc.

Some of the usual rackets about town of course made hay, while the seashore. Many cash boxes were stolen within fifteen minutes of the big quake — mad brave adventures! Then they gathered around cellars of demolished hotels, regaling on free whisky, champagne, etc, while others were desperately freeing their fellow citizens. They drank, slept, and forgot for awhile! Many caught looting were knocked down by the picketed men ^{with bludgeons,} while in Napier the marines shot at two of the despicable offenders.

News has just arrived that Napier is not to be evacuated - sanitary & sewerage affairs are almost properly in hand - most of the bodies have been recovered - many families are comfortably living in tents on the shingle beach - no panic has ever appeared, as reported in many papers, this being ~~reported~~ proved by the heroic manner in which the able ones turned round & ~~to~~ gradually organised orderliness out of ~~chaos~~ ^{chaos} - also reports saying this ~~is~~ catastrophe is being painted blacker than reality, as outsiders can have no idea of the destruction everywhere, ~~and~~ untrue. Many injured in the earthquake and immediately taken away, also had no idea of affairs, as they were well away before they could realize or see the effect of the quake. In all towns people are asked to return to the stricken areas and help to organize affairs to a normal state. Butchers, bakers & grocers have opened in small sheds - bulletins have been printed in both Hastings & Napier, and all hope things are settled, although the earth still trembles and ~~and~~ many ^{shakes are still felt.}