

The Essayistic Ponderings
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S.C. Earthquake? Seriously?

AN EVENT

Snow and ice froze the South this past week--no mail, no school, no capability to drive--and to make it worse, the prison's been on a lock-down/quarantine due to a horrendous flu outbreak. I'll be fine though, I had a flu shot seven weeks back; I just don't understand why so many other inmates declined at their chance to get one?

Last night, the week became even more unusual: V-day and there I was a little after 10 p.m. indifferently watching an episode of "Psych" on the ION channel while making a collage, for the cover of a composition notebook, a recent nonfiction book-in-progress of mine, entitled: "The Varieties of Life Experience, Volume 2." When suddenly I felt an odd tremble in my legs, the bunk was actually vibrating! Now, with this being a prison, such things occur quite often--prisoners in adjacent cells will often exhibit their mental shortcomings: futilely beating a wall, the metal desk, or toilet/sink combo, shudders of their idiocy advertised throughout the walls. But, the trembling was in tune, and resonant ... reluctantly, I realized the concrete quivered. I thought, that can't be a f*cking earthquake, I knew S.C. had them, just never anything I'd felt; yet the jouncing continued long enough for all those thoughts to fleet. I found myself focusing on the shake in my body, as if double checking I was in fact feeling it, and not having some muscle spasm or something--I am in my 30s now after all....

At eleven, I crossed NEWS19/CBS's reports of a 4.1 magnitude EARTHQUAKE. I thought, huh, imagine that, wait 'til my Japanese friend hears of this, taisou jishin, she won't believe it. The quake occurred at 10:23 p.m., one hour (65 miles or so) from my location here in Columbia, its epicenter in Edgefield.

A few decades ago, citizens would've wondered if we were under attack, if the military had tested some bomb underground, or if an alien ship had landed. How many V-day couples thought it was them, causing Earth to girate? Such a unique event, but, as it turns out S.C. gets 15-20 earthquakes, or "jishin," annually, they're just usually minute tickles of seismographs. There hasn't been one of such magnitude in a while, this was only the 5th since the 1970s. The oddest part of it all--for me--was when I noticed a lone clipping blown next to my TV, propped serendipitously against it:

Eerie in South Carolina.



A DISASTER

As a kid attending Seneca Middle School in the early 90s, I once perused a library book's photos of earthquake damage, some in S.C., a century or so ago: the state had shook it like a wet salt shaker. Such an event today would cripple transportation, not to mention the state's power and communication grid.

What would S.C. do with some massive contamination zone from a reactor melt down, or spill? A ruined water supply? The thought of damage to power plants via the earth, isn't scary enough for us; but it could become so, very quickly. Like a needed traffic light on a country road intersection: hired-by-vote politicians chosen to serve us, won't allot any of our dollars, or even acknowledge the need, until sufficient damage has occurred to render the danger indisputable. Usually two or more bodies are needed before a light will go up.

The questions, I believe, are: to what magnitude have our electrical power plants--nuclear/and hydro--been built to withstand? And if they were to crack all egg-like, is there some kind of contingency plan? Has the state checked to see if Flow or Flowbot have a box for that?

A HYPOTHESIS

So much ice recently, this state, along with that of neighboring states, back-to-back, all that water, frozen in place, unflowing and pushing its trillions of tons downward upon the Earth. If the plate was overdue for some release of tension, the ice could've pushed it to the breaking, or shaking, point.

I've heard that ice on one light-pole adds 500 lbs., for each inch that encases it. Why not calculate the amount of ice, statewide? I'd assume you could use the amount of rainfall, minus run-off. I'll use an inch of rain as example: 1" for every square mile, one mile is 5,280 feet/63,360 inches, 63,360 inches squared is $4,014,489,600^2$ but we need it cubed, which I think would require length x width x height-- $63,360 \times 63,360 \times 1 = 4,014,489,600^3$ (the same since we're working only with a single inch). Since 231 cubic inches equal one gallon, that would mean we'd get 17,378,742.86 gallons of water on every square mile, for one inch of rain! That's a lot of potential ice; and what does a single gallon of ice weigh? I don't know, you do the math for pounds.

Seven inches of rainfall in just a ten square mile region would equal over 1.2 billion gallons of water--statewide it would be like moving two Hong Kongs with doubles of all its citizens to S.C. overnight; there has to be a geological consequence.

A CONCLUSION

It's very comfortable in our materially surrounded worlds--sitting back, watching TV from cow-fleshed couches. But Nature doesn't care how thick, or high, our walls are, she'll continue despite us: she can blow down, burn, flood, or open up and swallow our walls and us with them.

This precarious ground beneath us was not always there, nor will it stay there. We shouldn't let ourselves be so rattled by it. Instead, take it as a warning, or, a reminder: to cherish, to appreciate what we have, or had.

"CRY NOT FOR WHY THE GROUND SHAKES: JUST BE GLAD YOU FELT IT!"

--J.E. Mahaffey