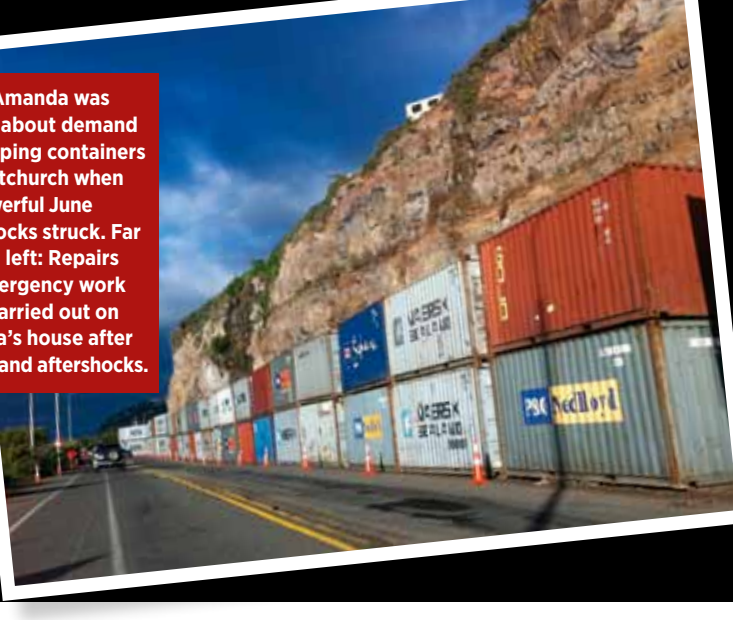


# SHAKEN NOT STIRRED

An edited extract from **Amanda Cropp's** new book about her family's survival in a Christchurch quake zone.



Right: Amanda was writing about demand for shipping containers in Christchurch when the powerful June aftershocks struck. Far left and left: Repairs and emergency work being carried out on Amanda's house after quakes and aftershocks.



## MONDAY, JUNE 13

At 1pm I'm about to send my shipping container story to the *Herald* when I'm forced to grab my computer screen to stop it dancing a jig off the desk. Mark is out in the front garden attempting to stay on his feet as the ground rocks in a massive aftershock. We agree it was a whopper and clean up, vacuuming plaster dust from cracks in the chimneys and mopping up water slopped out of the fish tank. Mark opens the flap in the cast iron fireplace in Nic's bedroom and retrieves a brick dislodged from the chimney.

According to the radio it was a 5.3 quake (later upgraded to a 5.7) and we text Ben in Sweden to let him know we are okay. I email my story to the *Herald*. Mark gets the ladder out and is about to climb up into the ceiling to check the chimney stacks when an even bigger quake strikes at 2.20pm. For the first time since these shakes started last September I am truly frightened. I grab the computer screen again and the light shade above me swings wildly. The house shakes so violently I fear it will come off its foundations and I hear things falling and smashing. It's like that movie *Groundhog Day* where the same scene keeps replaying. In our case the replay means no power or water, more mess and the depressing task of recording the wreckage for insurance purposes. Nic texts from school to say he is fine and asks if we have power – no doubt worried he may miss *Top Gear* on television tonight.

I dig out the camera and photograph the breakages, which include a Doulton bunny mug given to Ben as a baby, and

a Crown Derby coffee cup that was part of a set given to us as a wedding present. This time the big flatscreen TV in the front room, which didn't move at all in the previous quakes, has gone arse over kite. The screen acquired a spectacular dent when it hit the edge of the TV cabinet so the PlayStation will be out of action until we get a replacement set. (Silver lining: no Nic nagging me to go on the PlayStation whenever he is bored.)

In the dining room I rescue a gasping goldfish flopping about on the carpet and throw it back in the tank, where it swims around unharmed. Now Mark might finally listen to my pleas not to fill the tank so high.

Yet again I throw old towels down over the pantry contents on the kitchen floor so I can walk across it without treading the goo into the carpet on the other side. The yellow puddle staining the cork tiles in front of the dishwasher is a puzzle until I work out that it is the contents of a fancy glass bottle that stood on the kitchen windowsill. I hastily reassure Mark that while I was terrified, I have not wet my pants.

The sheep trough in the herb garden once again proves its worth, providing water to wash the muck off the kitchen floor. The Monin syrup brought all the way from France by Martin, our exchange student, was delicious, but by God it makes a sticky mess.

The burglar alarm can't handle the sudden loss of power and chirps incessantly like a demented cricket, our own personal disaster siren. Mark gets the generator going so I can vacuum up flour off the floor and for a while

it drowns out the rumbling noise of the constant aftershocks.

In the garage the roof box for the car has been flung out of its sling, Ben's surfboard has fallen off the wall and the mountain bikes have toppled, as has Mark's Vespa, which has its front wheel wedged under the car. Last time nothing fell off the walls inside but this time all the pictures are hanging crooked and a pen and wash of our house, painted by my mum, has flown off the wall in the front bedroom, shattering the glass. At least my quake wax did its job and all the ornaments stuck down are unbroken, including my new replacement teapot on open shelves in the kitchen.

We're convinced this quake was worse than the February one, something confirmed by the radio news: the 6.3 magnitude shake was centred just over the hill in Moncks Bay. That we should be going through this AGAIN is just unbelievable. Mark feels physically sick and is so jumpy he almost hits the roof when I stand in the middle of the living room and swear loudly at the top of my voice. Until now I have coped with the plague of shakes by approaching the whole experience as a journalistic assignment, albeit one in which I am unwillingly part of the story. I'm not sure how much more of this I can take, but pull myself together and text Ben to tell him there has been another bigger quake with more damage, and we are still okay. When I describe the chaos in the garage he wants to know if his chemistry experiment is okay and is relieved to learn that all the bottles were safely capped before the ground began to move.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMANDA CROPP AND AARON JONES.

Nic gets in touch to say he is hitching a ride home from Papanui High with a family who live in McCormacks Bay. He will walk home from Moncks Bay around the beach because rockfalls have closed the road into Sumner.

As I'm dumping broken glass in the rubbish bin, I see our neighbour Jane through the fence and hear about her lucky escape. She was driving along Main Road into Sumner when the second quake struck and heard boulders bouncing off the shipping containers. There were so many rocks on the road she had to abandon her car and make a run for it. I phone the *Herald* to slip a paragraph into my story saying that the containers did their job.

Power comes on about 5pm and once the bulk of the clean-up is complete I walk along the Esplanade hoping to meet Nic. Cave Rock and the Norfolk Pines on the waterfront are silhouetted against a deep fuchsia-pink sunset created by ash clouds from the Chilean volcano that disrupted so many airline flights this week. The scene is so postcard perfect it's hard to believe that just a few hundred metres away whole cliff faces have collapsed. In the village the quake has torn the top corner off the old Sumner Borough Council building, leaving it looking like a battered wedding cake, minus a bite.

No sign of Nic, so I go home where I find him calmly replacing the chess pieces that fell off Mark's chessboard. I love it that my son remains unperturbed despite all that's happened today. The first thing he says is, "Mum, I got 40 out of 40 in my French test." A test

that was completed between two quake evacuations onto the school field. Turns out he was late home because when he got to Sumner he noticed black smoke pouring out of the top of an apartment building in the main street, so he stopped to phone the fire brigade and waited until it arrived.

I realise how quickly we have swung back into quake mode. Bottled water on the bench, saucepans on the stove to boil water collected from a communal tank, pump bottles beside the basin for teeth brushing and hand sanitiser for hand washing. Luckily we kept a good supply of water in the garage, where the rows of bottles look like a beverage aisle in a supermarket. There's a further 40 litres in four big squishy plastic water containers reminiscent of the bladders dad used to blow up for us after he butchered pigs on the farm, and although the water has a disgusting chemical taste, it's fine for washing dishes.

The blokes are back to peeing on the lemon tree and Nic causes much amusement with his claim to have perfected the art of "hands-free peeing" so he doesn't have to use the pongy hand sanitiser.

Our main concern is that cracks in the chimney breasts in the boys' bedrooms have widened. With so many aftershocks, we worry the brickwork might collapse so Nic sleeps on a mattress in the sunroom.

This time a week ago I attended a meeting of the Sumner disaster planning group to discuss what we'd do in the event of another big quake, never imagining it would happen so soon.

## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

After the February quake Mark liberally dosed the herb garden trough with bleach so we had clean-ish water for washing floors. In the June quakes a wave of bleached water slopped over the side onto my herbs, which promptly died. This morning I take a gamble and plant replacements.

The media is going overboard on stories leading up to tomorrow's first anniversary of the September 4 quake and I'm irritated by a radio news item suggesting Cantabrians are more anxious than usual, as if the anniversary somehow increases the risk of another biggy. What a load of piffle. The fault lines aren't down there whispering to each other: "One year on, time to shake them up again, tee hee." Sure I'm anxious about the possibility of more quakes, but no more so than I was yesterday, last week or last month.

One thing is for sure, since the ground got the jelly wobbles my tolerance for media fluff stories has diminished markedly. I can't believe the newspaper space and airtime devoted to Happy Feet, the penguin that washed up on the Kapiti Coast and gorged himself almost to death on sand before being transported back to the southern oceans at great expense. I cheered the other day when I heard a Christchurch reporter tell an Auckland radio host that basically Cantabrians couldn't give a stuff about Happy Feet because we have more important things to worry about. ■

**Shaken, Not Stirred by Amanda Cropp, is available from book shops or Wily Publications, [www.wily.co.nz](http://www.wily.co.nz). RRP \$29.99, plus P&P \$5 in New Zealand.**

