



The quake year by Fiona Farrell with photographs by Juliet Nicholas. Christchurch: CUP (2012). RRP: \$40. Sb, 208pp. ISBN: 9781927145296

These books put together

recollections and photographs of the Christchurch earthquakes. **Jeffrey Holman's** poems have his own photos of damage on facing pages.¹ **Fiona Farrell's** 19 interviews of people who have rebuilt some semblance of their normal lives a year later are extended by well-known Christchurch photographer Juliet Nicholas² – some photos of damage but far more shots of intact small things (keys, shoes, a musical score) or evidences of people getting on with life and a city starting to function (a wedding, a truly splendid variety of signs, the inside of a bakery or a cheesemonger's).³

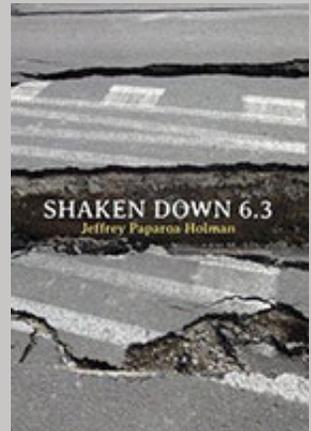
The people in these books aren't a cross-section of Christchurch (more than half of the interviewees are writers or artists), but they are all forthright about their experiences, and common themes surface in their stories.

There's luck, coincidence: diving under a strong table in the middle of the room; taking cover a handspan away from a collapsing beam; hearing a car-sized boulder just miss the house and crash into the deck; working in a building constructed up to standard. And afterwards: having friends in other towns able to put you up; having a flexible life-style that can be temporarily transplanted; being demon campers with your campervan packed and ready to go at all times. Having enough imagination and resilience to picture something outside the horror, if only for a moment.

Holman's chapter of reflection on his poems is straightforward: "I wrote the poems in this series for my own sake and sanity ... If they speak to anyone else, that is a bonus; for me, it was a way of taking ownership and some kind of control over an inner world that was manifesting the outward chaos. Inwardly, it was exhausting, and I was one of the lucky ones" (p 49).

And from Farrell: "Martin Aspinwall says they

Shaken down 6.3 by Jeffrey Paparoa Holman, Christchurch: CUP (2012). RRP: \$20. Pb, 56pp. ISBN: 9781927145302. Reviewed by Mary Cresswell.



have been lucky. He says it many times as he recalls this year, until it almost becomes a mantra" (p 163).

There's preparedness: In February, as Chris Moore and his colleagues at the *Press* were packing to shift into a new building, the old *Press* building disintegrated around them, and the floor fire wardens evacuated everyone. "There were hundreds of people, but no panic." (p 26); "Our people were in a state of trauma, especially staff ... who witnessed the injury and death of a colleague"; ... The *Press* administration took good care of its staff, checking on individual well-being, bringing in food" (p 29).

In February, nurse Karen Duncan was in the operating theatre, in the middle of orthopedic surgery; her account describes the hospital's shift from normal to emergency mode. "I think the quake has made us all more aware [of sudden life-changing events]. We think of luck as a kind of extra, but really we're just fortunate to get away with things. ... We'd forgotten about our vulnerability to huge events" (p 41).

Tusiata Avia recalls having teased a Mormon cousin about her emergency disaster kit (yeah, right, for Armageddon?). When she and her daughter finally came back home, she prepared an emergency kit and "placed it in the kitchen, just in case" (p15).

There is mental disengagement that comes and goes. There is terrible sadness and loss. And there is hard slog: people trudge from one more damn chore to yet another. Juliet Neill, puppeteer: "In February everyone had a purpose. Even the most dysfunctional people felt wanted, but that's gone. ... There was a feeling of community empowerment here in Lyttelton. We thought we could come together and be in charge of our own destiny, but that's become less and less; now it's all insurance



and this massive faceless bureaucracy – it’s just deadened everything” (pp 132-3).

Natalya Pitama, social worker, born and bred in Kaiapoi, is involved in just about everything under the sun as her home town tries to pick itself up: “What I want most of all is for people to have some control over their lives again, because they haven’t for over a year. Their lives have been in the hands of nature and other people” (pp184-5); “They just don’t get it, people outside the region: being here, in the thick of it, has been tough” (p 175).

Farrell and Nicholas’s introduction says that the original brief for the book assumed that Christchurch had in September experienced and survived The Big One, but “February 22 changed all that and the ongoing tremors have left no room for complacency, let alone celebration.⁴ Though in a way this book is a kind of celebration: of people’s courage, resilience, kindness, creativity, generosity and sheer capacity for joy in the face of fear and loss” (p 7).

And now, for just one moment:

after the toppling the creaking
after the shaking the shaking
after the shaking the questions
after the questions the questions
after the rage and courage
after profound desolation

after the nurse and the undertaker
we stand and we drink from a glass of water
(Holman, “After the Tremor”).

- 1 See also: <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/Writers/Profiles/Holman,Jeffrey>
- 2 Christchurch photographer Juliet Nicholas has been recording the life and culture of New Zealand for over 20 years. Her work has featured in hundreds of publications. She has also collaborated in the production of several books, including *Fine Cheese* (1995) and *Old Fashioned* and *David Austin Roses* (2004), as well as *Islands*, an oral documentary exhibition of Stewart Island and its people.
- 3 See also: <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/Writers/Profiles/Farrell,Fiona>.
- 4 Quentin Wilson, one of the earthquake survivors interviewed, is responsible for the very attractive layout and design.