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Anchorage, Alaska
April 3, 1964

Dear Mother,

We have had several phone calls from outside and numerous letters from friends and relatives so Bill and I decided that we would compose one letter to send to many to tell of the happenings here in Anchorage during and after the "great earthquake"--as it is referred to here.

So much has happened since last Friday that I hardly know where to begin. At 5:36 P.M., our time, I was on the way home from the grocery store and stopped at a stoplight at the intersection of 9th and L Street. I was the second car in line waiting for the light to change. As I sat there the thought came to me suddenly that I would have to tell Bill that something was wrong with the motor of my car as it started to race even though I was stopped and then the car began to shake. I thought something was really wrong with it and then I noticed the car in front of me and those across on L Street were shaking and I knew what was happening--this was all in a matter of seconds, I suppose. The body of the car began to shake and roll violently though the wheels stayed in the same place, I guess, pretty much anyway. I held on tight to the steering wheel and tried to pray for everyone, not just for myself. I concentrated fully on this task and it absorbed my mind to the extent that after I saw the other cars shaking I saw nothing else. Less than half a block away a six-story apartment building that was underconstruction but to be ready for occupancy the end of this month completely collapsed and is a pile of rubble. Between 7th and 8th on L Street and beyond toward the inlet, the street dropped 20 to 40 feet and many houses sank with it. All this and much more was happening but I heard and saw nothing. When it stopped I felt rather numb. I was frightened but not terrified and, of course, did not realize the enormity of the situation. How I could have turned the corner toward home and not seen the remains of the apartment building I'll never know. We live just a block from L Street on 12th and I saw nothing unusual on the way home except a car in the street sideways which was quickly righted and many people outside their homes talking to neighbors. I drove into the driveway, picked up half a dozen tools which had fallen from the walls of the garage and put the car away. I went into the house to the kitchen and then saw a real mess. I glanced at it quickly and walked to the livingroom to see if Bill was home and at that moment he drove up. What a relief to see him--after I saw the house I realized that things were probably more serious than I had thought.

Bill's experience had been much more dramatic than mine. He had been downtown at Alaska Sales and Service, a General Motors dealer. He was writing an estimate in the basement of the building when the quake started. He and the rest of the employees rushed out and down half a block to a parking lot and thus away from falling debris. He said that fissures were opening and closing all around him and that the streets and sidewalks were rolling up and down making running extremely difficult. He watched the 15-story Westward Hotel sway back and forth crazily in the air and bang again and again into the building next to it. He said he would have sworn that it wouldn't stand. It has since been designated as the tallest structure in the world to withstand such a violent earthquake. As the quake progressed and above the general din came a crackling and a crashing and suddenly he saw the cold storage building completely collapse. He looked toward Fourth Avenue, Alaska Sales is on Third Avenue, and two blocks of stores slowly fell and broke up so that now that area is so low that if you walk past the stores you can step in the second story windows. The Denali Theater marquee now touches the ground. There was a constant sound of breaking glass. Where he stood the ground began to sink and a fissure broke open under his foot--he ran quickly toward higher ground and then suddenly all was still. The Alaska Sales building appeared to be undamaged but he didn't go back for his coat but ran to his car and started home to see how I had survived. He passed an apartment building that was a total loss, drove over a pile of bricks in the street, and about six blocks from home was stopped by the crevasse that crossed L Street, an opening about 100 feet wide and 30 feet deep. He turned around and found another way home. Coming by the L Street Apartments, a fourteen-story structure and just two blocks from our house, he saw that the building had been cracked and shattered from top to bottom. It is a poured reinforced concrete building which did not withstand the pressure of the quake. This building cost several million dollars and has since been evacuated and condemned. Needless to say, we were both extremely grateful to find each other safe and well!

We surveyed the damage in our house and found it to be mainly broken dishes. The kitchen cupboard doors opened and out came the dishes, the food supply cupboard spilled forth canned goods and, of course, glass jars of food. Take one bottle taco sauce, one bottle tabasco sauce, one bottle olive oil (exactly what fell out and broke), add canned goods and broken dishes, mix well--result, a mess! Pictures were hanging

crazily on the walls but none came down except two framed travel posters we have in our basement and the glass didn't break in either of those. We have a 4' x 5' mirror in the living room above the couch and it stayed in place perfectly. Some water from the fish bowl sloshed out on the coffee table but the fish swam happily in the remainder. Figurines and a large bowl of flowers on the stereo moved only slightly. The chess set on the game table, which is next to the buffet which had opened and spilled forth much of its contents, was found in place without a single man being moved. A bedroom lamp had fallen over and broken the bowl but no harm had come to the shade. Miscellaneous jars and bottles had fallen out of a supply cabinet in the bathroom and several had broken. A large glass vase had fallen from the mantle above the fireplace and so almost every room had broken glass, including the basement which was another mess of broken jars of food and canned goods. When the food cabinet fell it upset a table with a phonograph, radio, and records. All went every which way but seem to be intact. Art supplies fell from shelves and a tray was broken. Our total loss was probably less than \$75. and all things can be readily replaced. We lost nothing of value and no harm came to anything we really prized.

After checking the house carefully and opening the circuit breakers, Bill and I walked downtown to see the results of the quake. People were everywhere doing the same. One fellow had been driving home and his back bumper remained on the original street level but the street ahead of him dropped and the front bumper was on the street below which made his car sit on about a 70° angle. He said he was unhurt though he seemed somewhat dazed. He was stopped in front of his apartment which had sunk with the street and was a real shambles. He said he had to break down the door of his apartment to rescue his wife. All along the street the houses were tipped crazily off their foundations, and destruction was everywhere—all this just a few blocks from our house. We walked on downtown and it was difficult to comprehend that so much damage could be done in a few short minutes. Our J.C. Penney Company, which is our main department store, was a total loss. The front and one corner had dropped and the building buckled in the middle and sank. One woman was killed in front of the store in her parked car which was demolished by falling debris. Building after building was ruined. Better than 50% of the downtown buildings are severely damaged, many beyond repair. The buildings which remain and are usable are mainly old, comparatively small frame structures. Nearly every multi-story building of new construction is at present condemned. The city must build anew and there is talk of building the downtown section in some other area. For the sake of entertainment, we are happy that our main theater was saved and it houses one of our TV stations.

It was almost dark when we returned home Friday night. We got out the candles and built a fire in the fireplace as we had no light, heat, water or sewer. We turned on our transistor radio and already one station was broadcasting emergency messages. Very soon we were warned to move to higher ground as we are close to the inlet and they expected a tidal wave. Almost immediately some friends stopped by to invite us to their home in Spenard but Bill did not want to go so far from the house so we loaded some things in the car, the friends took our other car, and we drove just a couple of blocks away to higher ground. We sat in the car for about an hour when some people invited us into their home. It turned out to be a school teacher from the Inlet View School, which is across the street from us. Another family was being housed there also. We stayed there until about midnight when the danger subsided though the radio still didn't announce absolutely that the wave had passed but thought so. We went home and rebuilt a fire in the fireplace and made beds in front of it in the living room and tried to get some sleep.

Bill didn't sleep well and was up at six. I woke up for a few minutes but then went back to sleep until nine. By then Bill had gotten water from the army truck at the school and a crackling fire warmed the living room. Luckily we had a large supply of firewood. I am very grateful to have a husband who is so capable of handling any situation whatsoever. He always knows what to do! We started cleaning the mess in the kitchen and friends came by for breakfast. Later in the day other friends came by and I served malts (thawed ice cream). The ice cream had not been put away promptly Friday, and as the freezer had no power to refreeze it it remained soupy. Later we put the milk and butter etc. out in the snow which worked fine. By Saturday afternoon we had heat and light and telephone. Many times I have griped about the inefficiency of the Alaskans in so many respects, but I must hand it to them that they have really been on the ball in this emergency and have solved problems quickly and efficiently. Of course the military has been of great assistance to us. By Tuesday we had water and sewer again. You never realize how important the utilities are until you must go without them. The pioneers must have really had it rough. What a chore I had heating water etc. etc. just to wash my hair and take a bath. Luckily we are so close to a school where the water was made available. Early Saturday evening we were amazed to get a call from San Francisco from the regional manager of MIC. I don't know how he got through so quickly as we couldn't call anyone and couldn't send telegrams either.

Most of the time since the quake I have been cleaning and washing dishes. Tuesday I went to Alaska Sales to help. I did some office work and some general cleaning. Yesterday, however, the building was condemned and the fellows have gone to another office.

It was amazing how fast the stores began to open even if they had to move to another location. The grocery stores did a monumental job of clean up and worked around the clock, several were open on Saturday. The drug store still had piles of broken bottles in it when we went for some film but they too had really been working.

We have had friends here to take baths, have washed clothes for some, and, of course, had some for meals. Many many people are really having a rough time. Not only countless homes destroyed but so many apartment buildings are shattered so that families must move into every possible available space. The Mt. McKinley Apartment, a sister building to the L Street Apartment, was designed to stand a sway of 20 feet but swayed 25 feet and so must be destroyed. We have friends in Turnagain and they took me out one afternoon this week to see the area. All heavily damaged areas are blocked off and guards are everywhere. (We have heard of very little looting.) Cars going to Turnagain have stickers and it is absolutely impossible to get in the area unless you live there or are with someone who does. You just can't imagine how the bluff area looks--pictures do not do justice. It is absolutely unbelievable!! Blocks and blocks of ground has heaved up and tossed the homes every which way and then sunk below the original level. We walked down one street that ended suddenly where it broke off and down below, about 25 feet, the street sign was standing upright trying to do its job. The area looks as though a gigantic bulldozer went through it taking everything in its path. One house was intact except that it was below the level of the original area. It looked as though the bulldozer had made a circle around it. It is really amazing that Anchorage has only, according to tonight's paper, fourteen dead or missing and the whole state lists 129 as dead or missing.

We seem to have a continual stream of shocks which are only momentary but they tend to keep you on your toes. Today Bill was on the phone to Fairbanks and had to hang up in the middle of the conversation as we had a real tremor. It lasted 30 seconds and Seattle seismographs reported that it was 6.5 on the Richter scale which is mighty noticeable. Most people seem to suffer some from vertigo. It's like having been on a long train ride. You're off but can't quite believe it and feel as though you're still moving.

The schools are not open yet. The elementary schools are one story but I shudder to think of the problems involved with a class when things are falling and it is so difficult to walk. These schools do not have an outside entrance for each classroom as they do in California.

Bill expected to be completely swamped with work by now but people are still in shock and are too busy obtaining food and housing to worry much about their cars. He has put an ad in the paper as have most businesses and has had radio announcements made of where he can be reached. I expect soon though that he will be up to his ears in work. He will have several trips to make to other towns as well and I hope I can accompany him to some of the places.

I wish I could quote the list of popular songs in Anchorage right now. They are just too clever but the only one I can remember is "Standing on the Corner Watching All the Streets Go By".

This has been a fantastic experience and one we will remember all our lives. We are deeply grateful to Mr. Turner, Regional manager of MIC, for his efforts in calling us and then notifying our families so they need not worry. The radio Stations have been invaluable as a means of communication and when we started hearing the reports coming in from outside that were even worse than the actual conditions here, we were very very concerned for our parents. We didn't want them to worry and we had no way of contacting them to say that we were fine.

We came to Alaska for adventure and already we have had more than we anticipated. The next couple of years should be interesting watching the city rebuild after all this. We hope all of you are well and do write us when you have time.

Best wishes,

Bill + Lynn