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My February 22nd

Kenny Ardouin

Dedicated to all those who will never get a chance to tell their story, and their friends and family who are still picking up the pieces

About This Book

This book is my account of what happened on that fateful day in 2011 when a massive 6.3 earthquake struck out of the blue in Christchurch, New Zealand at 12.51pm. This book details the minutes and hours that followed as we entered a state of shock, panic and emergency. The images used throughout the book are photos that I have taken myself since the earthquake which give some insight into the devastation unleashed in Christchurch.



Me in my earthquake cleanup attire, March 2011

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Mt Pleasant, Eastern Christchurch, prior to the February Earthquake

It was a day that started just like any other. It started out just like any other normal, uneventful summer's day. When I woke up that morning, I, along with everyone else in this city of 350,000, had no idea that in just a few hours, the life that I knew would be turned upside down forever. It should've been just another day, a day that came, then passed without anything that would cause us to remember this day. But as we were shortly about to find out, it wasn't to be.

I remember the morning of Tuesday February 22nd 2011 being fairly routine, the drama of the September 4th earthquake now long behind us, and although there were a few reminders of its destruction around, mainly in the form of scaffolding and support beams supporting various buildings, earthquakes were definitely not on our mind, and when they were, they were referred to as somewhat of a novelty, the fact that Christchurch had had a massive 7.1 magnitude earthquake with no fatalities was somewhat of a miracle, and something we felt we could be proud of. By February 22nd, Christchurch was well and truly getting back on its feet, it was business as usual and this was a city definitely on the mend. The city centre was buzzing, the tourists were back and insurance companies and the earthquake commission were slowly moving forward settling people's claims. Christchurch was slowly but surely bouncing back. My calendar for the 22nd of February had changed multiple times, something I thought nothing of as the times and locations of appointments were changed or cancelled. In February 2011, I was working full time, with Tuesday and Wednesday being my weekly days off, so initially, I had planned to catch up with one of my friends at Starbucks in Cathedral Square at 12:00pm. But then, about a week or so before, my work announced that they were to be conducting stock take on the 21st and 22nd of February, so I would be required to work from 11am-11pm on 22 February. Reluctantly this meant that I had to cancel my plan to meet up with my friend, an action that potentially could have ended up saving two lives, or at least prevent myself and my friend from witnessing some horrific sights that no-one should have to see. However, on the evening of the 21st of Feb, this plan was to change again. We'd completed the first night of stock take at work, and found ourselves ahead of schedule, so my boss told me to come in at 4pm on Tuesday instead. I tried to rearrange my initial 12pm meeting, but by this point, my friend had already made other plans to be working that day. Not wanting to waste a valuable day off by being at home doing nothing all day, I contacted one of my other close friends and arranged to meet up with her at 1.45pm at Heathcote Valley Park. This would all have a lot of significance later on, but for now, I didn't give any of this a second thought. Seeing as I now had nowhere to be until 1.45, this put me at home for the morning.



The Kitchen Floor minutes after the earthquake

Seeing as I'd just worked five days and a rather late night the night before, naturally, I had a bit of a sleep in on the morning of 22 February, blissfully unaware that I was completing the last night's sleep I would ever have in our home of six years in Mt Pleasant. It's hard to know when exactly I got up, but it would've been around 9.30-10am. I got up, had a shower, got changed and went and had my breakfast. Mum was on the phone to her sister in Scotland in the dining room and commented that there had recently been a slight jolt, which turned out to be a magnitude 3.17 on the Richter scale at 9.16am. I went about my own business and went back into my room and sat down on my computer, got through my emails, had a browse on Facebook (everything seemed pretty uneventful) and then about 12.15pm, I went into the kitchen, grabbed a pie out of the freezer and bunged it in the microwave. It was to be the last thing the microwave would ever cook, and the last thing I would ever eat in my home, yep, an Irvines mince and cheese pie. I grabbed my pie out of the microwave and went and sat down at the dining room table and mum also got herself something to eat and we sat down at the dining room table having a chat about various things. February 22 was a fairly overcast and chilly day for the summer, and so mum said that she was going to go upstairs and put a jersey on, as she walked back through the kitchen, she looked at the clock and remarked 'It's ten-to-two already! What time were you meant to be meeting Samantha?!' Thinking that I was late, and realising that I had left my mobile phone in my bedroom so if I was indeed late, I would've missed any calls or texts from Samantha wondering where I am, I picked up my plate, knife and fork, loaded them into the dishwasher in the kitchen, and looked up at the clock and said 'Mum, it's only ten-to-one!' She looked again at the clock and realised the mistake she'd made and said 'Oh, so it is, I'm going to get a jersey,' and headed off upstairs. Seeing as I was up on my feet now, I thought I may as well head back to my room and check my phone just in case I'd missed anything. I began making the five second journey from the kitchen, past the front door, down the hallway and towards my bedroom which was at the end of the hallway. It was very quiet, silent other than the soft patter of my feet walking across the carpet. I reached the doorway of my bedroom and all that was about to change.

I arrived by the doorway of my bedroom and the silence was suddenly broken by a rumbling noise. I was not in New Zealand for the September 4th earthquake, and so the largest earthquake I had felt up until now was the 5.02 port hills quake at 7.49am on September 8th, a very sharp jolt, that many mistook initially for a magnitude 6 quake, which we were to reasonably expect in the first few days following September 4. Therefore, I was totally unprepared for what was about to hit me next. It took me a second or two to realise that this was an earthquake, and another couple of seconds to realise that this was much, much bigger than anything I'd ever experienced. The noise intensified, into a huge noise where I could hear the house breaking



The Dining Room, I was seated at this table thirty seconds before the quake struck

up around me, being in a state of shock and panic, I remember that I was yelling 'fuck' at the top of my voice, but I couldn't hear my own voice as the noise was so intense. I was standing in the doorway facing into my bedroom and I watched as my bookcase and all its contents fell onto the floor, my cupboard doors opened and boxes were ejected from the top shelf of the cupboard and onto the floor, my computer and phone flew off my desk, part of the ceiling collapsed, I was convinced that the whole building was just seconds away from total collapse. The shaking continued to intensify as the seconds went on, common sense tells you that you need to get out of the building but I was paralyzed by fear and couldn't move. Then, almost as abruptly as the earthquake had started, it stopped. The February earthquake lasted a mere 25 seconds, but it felt like an eternity. That noise, I will never forget. I have never heard noise like it before or since, and I hope never to have to hear a noise like that again. I still have moments now and then, when that noise all comes rushing back to me, along with the memory of what was going on around me, and it still keeps me awake at night, throwing me back to that awful moment.

It was fair to say that in the immediate seconds and minutes that followed, I, like most others, was in a state of total shock and disbelief at what had just happened. I was surrounded by dust and debris, there was rubble in my hair, I looked around at the scene that was now before me and couldn't believe what I was seeing. Very quickly I turned around and started yelling out to mum to see if she was okay. My escape path had been blocked by a fallen bookcase that had fallen across the hallway, there were broken ornaments all over the floor, I looked back towards the kitchen and couldn't believe the devastation in there. Mum came running down the stairs, also in shock and disbelief and had a look around at the destruction. She didn't say much other than 'people will be dead this time'. We both knew the urgent need to get out of the building. The earthquake had caused part of the ceiling in front of the front door to collapse preventing me from opening the door. I pulled the door as hard as I could, and I must've pulled it pretty hard in my panic as the whole lock faceplate came off and the door flew open. We quickly went outside and I remember the orchestra of house alarms going off, but it was no symphony. I walked around the house yelling 'oh fuck' again at the top of my voice everytime I saw a new piece of devastation, the cracks on the side of the house that were big enough to fit my arm into, the swimming pool wall collapsed, the retaining walls; collapsed, the foundation wall; collapsed. Mum told me to calm down and stop swearing. I turned and looked to the city centre and could see this massive dust cloud rising from the CBD, and also realised that many people would not have survived it. By this point, everyone who was around had come out of their houses and was standing looking bedraggled outside their shattered homes, standing in their driveways or collapsed onto the footpath.



Our neighbour to the east had appeared out of her house and was in shock and just said 'Oh my God! Look at your chimney'. Mum and I looked up to where the chimney should've been, only to find it wasn't there, instead, the massive concrete chimney had fallen through the dining room roof and landed on the dining room table, crushing it and the very seat that I had been seated in less than two minutes ago. I suddenly realised how close I had come to certain death. If I had still been sitting at that table when the earthquake struck, I know that I wouldn't have moved, as I wouldn't have thought for one minute that chimney was going to come down. If mum hadn't made a mistake with the time, if I hadn't been meeting up with a friend, if I had have had my phone in my pocket rather than in my room, I know I wouldn't still be here - someone had my back that day.

We continued to walk around the house observing the total devastation, the glass everywhere, the massive cracks, debris, bricks etc on the ground. It became clear very quickly that the house was now a total loss. Our neighbour Mark quickly arrived on the scene to check that we were okay, he clearly had been quite shaken up by what had just happened. He told us that he reckoned his house was a write-off too. We all started to become aware that we all had friends and family members that were caught up in this in town, and we all naturally wanted to know that they were safe. None of us had our mobile phones on us, I knew that mine was lying on the floor in my room, and mum's had been on the dining room table last time that she saw it. We realised that we would have to go back into the house amidst the fear of more massive aftershocks to retrieve my phone and I also suggested that we turn off the power so that if power were to come back on, it wouldn't cause a fire. I quickly grabbed my phone and then mum and I got in the car and headed off to pick up Daniel from school. When we got into the car, we tried to tune into local radio to get some information, but the local stations were down. I tried to call my dad and my brother Patrick but mobile networks were failing, so I only managed to get through to their voicemail. I remember seeing much devastation in the three minute car journey through Mt Pleasant, houses destroyed, power lines down, people crying. We got to the corner of Billy's Track and Major Hornbrook Roads, when another large earthquake rocked the car - this turned out to be a 5.84 in magnitude and the time was now 1:04pm.

We parked up by the school and I remember running down and into the school grounds, and obviously the earthquake had hit at lunchtime as I saw dozens of children's lunchboxes, sandwiches, fruit and juice boxes strewn all over the ground, and I could hear a lot of crying coming from around the front of the school. I walked around and found Daniel's class huddled together on the field, many of them very pale and I



remember seeing one child with a nasty looking cut on their leg. Mum came around and we collected Daniel, and headed back to the car. We saw the local dairy owner standing outside his shop looking quite shaken, so mum went to check on him whilst I sat in the car with Daniel. I saw an old guy driving down the hill, his car and windscreen had been totally smashed by falling objects. Mum tried to prepare Daniel for what he was about to see when he got home. We arrived back and tried again to make contact with dad and Patrick but to no avail. Mum went around the house and I sat in the driveway with Daniel who burst out crying when he realised he couldn't go back into the house again. I sat there trying to comfort him, although I found this really hard as I was upset myself. We were all still in a state of shock and disbelief, and felt quite helpless. We knew we had to do something to try and find Patrick, although we had no idea where he would be. He had school swimming sports at QEII Stadium in the morning and we knew that school had closed at 12.30pm due to a union strike, so he could be anywhere - was he still at QEII, making his way home, at the shopping mall, or even on his way into town? We had managed to get some radio coverage of what was going on at this point from a national station with limited information, but we had heard that there were many bodies in the streets of the CBD. Furthermore, we had not heard from and could not get hold of Dad, who we knew would've been at lunch in the city centre at the time. We decided that we would go for a drive to look for Patrick, so got back into the car.

We set off back along the damaged roads, there was now a massive hole near the top of Soleares Ave, and much damage on the other roads around. We knew that the Ferrymead Bridge would be out and therefore we would need to travel along Bridle Path Road, and Port Hills Road to get out and so went via Cannon Hill Crescent. I remember when we turned into Cannon Hill Crescent, I spotted a young woman lying unconscious on the footpath with an older woman who was trying to phone for an ambulance but couldn't get through. This is something that I often stop and think about, and feel like I should've done more. I had a mobile phone that was working for outbound calls at that time, and yet I didn't think at the time to use my phone to call for help. Wondering what happened to that young woman still bothers me to this very day. Feeling more traumatized, we carried on, past a house that had totally collapsed, and rockfalls were very apparent once we got onto Bridle Path Road. The roads had become very congested by this point with people desperately trying to get home, we turned onto Port Hills Road to head towards the city and the road was very badly damaged and full of traffic that wasn't going anywhere in a hurry. It was at this point I got a phone call from my best mate Tim, making sure that I was alright. I explained to him that we were still desperately trying to get hold of my brother and my dad, and that I'd keep him updated. We kept the call brief, well aware that we needed to

UNSAFE

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This facility was inspected pursuant to the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002

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Acting under the authority of the Civil Defence Emergency Management Controller:

Date: *29/03/20*

Time: *12:00*

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or
TXT: 021 02068179 with following details: Address, Placard colour, contact name, contact phone number

29/03/20

'Red Sticker' declaring the building unsafe and uninhabitable

keep the lines free for emergency calls. It wasn't long before Mum and I realised that this journey was quite futile. We didn't know where Patrick was, and if we were to carry on going, we may struggle to get back. We knew that he'd be trying to get home; he still was not answering calls or texts. On the way back home we passed a group of high school students sitting on a wall by Ferrymead Park, I remember Mum saying that their parents would be very worried and that they should let their parents know they're okay and go home. As we turned back into Soleares Ave, we were stopped by a couple of women who were sitting in a driveway with their children. Mum stopped the car and they said 'You can't get out [the bottom]. The road's blocked with boulders.' Mum thanked them and informed them we weren't heading that far.

Once we got back, our neighbour Mark came running across the road saying 'Cris is okay, I've spoken to Cris and he's okay, he's trying to make his way home now by bike'. Mark was about the only person in the vicinity that had a working landline telephone, and Dad, when he couldn't get hold of us, managed to call Mark. Mark was in a similar boat to us, waiting on news about his partner and son who were in the CBD at the time also. I decided I would go back into the house and grab a few essential items. My family had pretty much all laughed at me a couple of years before when I went to the effort of putting two emergency kits together with food and water supplies, but they were about to come in handy now. One of the kits was still accessible, so I grabbed it out from the bottom of the kitchen cupboard and went to exit the house when the front door slammed shut and another massive aftershock occurred. I desperately grabbed onto the door handle trying to open it, but the violent shaking of the magnitude 5.91 earthquake prevented me from opening the door. More of the ceiling collapsed around me and yet more stuff fell over. When the shaking stopped, I threw the door open and escaped with the emergency kit, vowing not to go back in again. The time was 2.50pm. Over the next couple of hours, many of the immediate neighbours congregated in or around our driveway, one of us occasionally getting a scrap of information and very slowly we started to see people getting re-united with their families. One of the neighbours, without thinking, mentioned to mum that three buses had been crushed in the city centre resulting in fatalities. This caused mum to panic a bit, knowing that Patrick may well have been on a bus somewhere. People kept coming over and telling mum that Patrick would be alright and that he's just finding it difficult to get home. I gave mum and hug and said 'Everything's going to be alright, he'll be fine'. I don't really know why I said this, as I wasn't convinced of it myself, in fact as the hours went on, I was becoming very concerned, but I guess that I felt like I should say something. Eventually around 4.30, Dad arrived home and explained how difficult it had been to get home on a bike and was instantly very concerned that Patrick hadn't made it home yet.



Christchurch's tallest building - the 'Hotel Grand Chancellor', July 2011 (being demolished)

Dad described some of the devastation that he saw on the way home and again tried to get hold of Patrick. It has now been almost four hours since the earthquake and we hadn't heard anything from him. As more and more people were arriving back into the area, it was difficult not to have some grave concerns for his safety. Dad decided to go back out on his bike and look for him, I tried to stop him, saying that we should all stay together but understandably he wanted to do something to assist with finding him. The radio was still providing us with very limited information, of course, no-one had power in the area (and it would stay that way for more than three weeks), so it seemed like everyone else in the world knew more of this disaster than those of us who were caught up in the middle of it (it wouldn't be until we left town the following day, that we would turn on a TV for the first time and realise the true horrifying scale of this disaster).

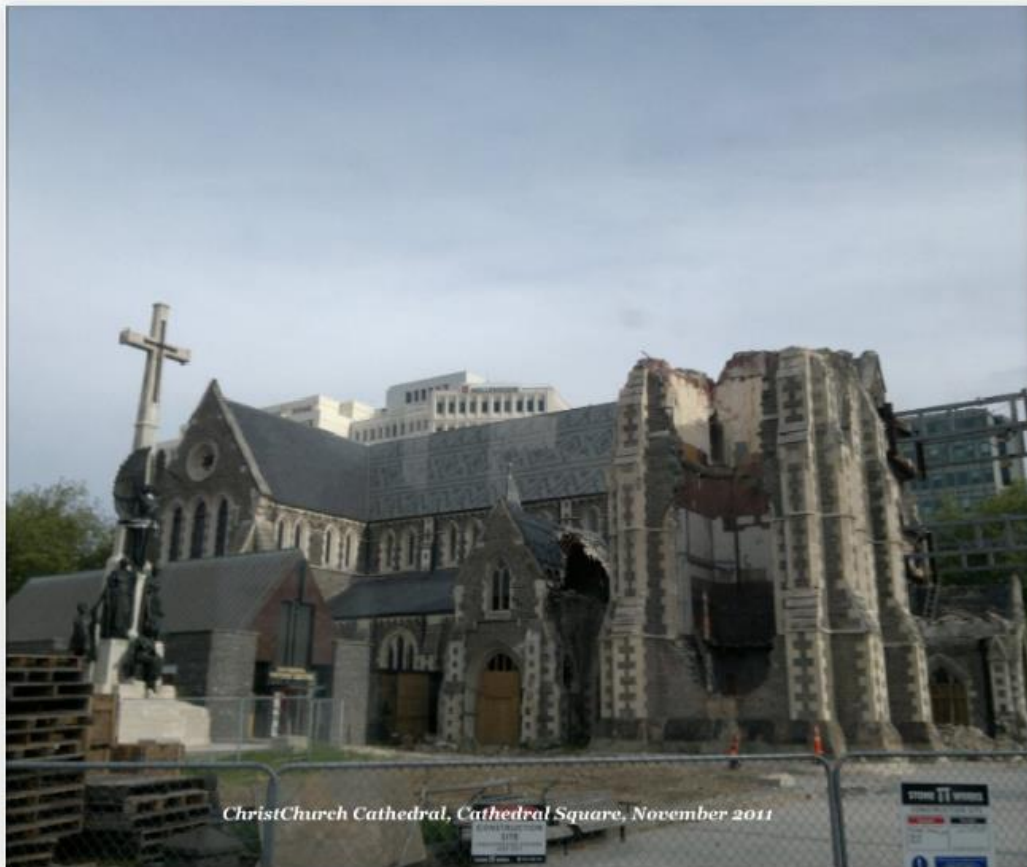
Mum was concerned that Patrick may have tried to contact her on her phone, which she could not access as it was on the dining room table moments before it was crushed, but by some stroke of luck it had fallen into a place where it was quite visible underneath the table. With all the glass around and the inevitability of more large aftershocks, trying to retrieve it seemed like a ludicrous idea. But before I could protest, she had climbed in through the broken window and grabbed her phone. It was at this point that Mark and his family came over to ask if we'd heard any news. Mum looked at her phone, but there was no missed calls or messages. It was starting to look quite grim, and it was becoming harder to say that everything was going to be okay with every minute going by that we heard nothing. Mum started going through all the possible worst case scenarios of where he could have been at 12.51. Then finally, a fantastic sight, Patrick came walking round the corner. There was an immense feeling of relief amongst Mum, Daniel and I, as well as the community which had now congregated on the driveway and road outside. Nothing else seemed to matter now, the fact that the house was wrecked, didn't seem important, what was important was that we were all alive. And that's what makes this a success story, because for 184 families, they will never be together completely again, and hundreds of others are left with injuries which will affect their quality of life forever. The only immediate problem now, was that Dad had gone out looking for Patrick and we didn't know where he'd gone and couldn't get hold of him. Despite better judgement, we still decided to get back in the car and go looking for him. We didn't know where he would've gone or where to start looking so we headed down the hill. Knowing that we wouldn't be able to get out of Soleares Ave, we tried for Maffey's Road instead. I remember seeing a house where the entire front wall had collapsed and it looked like a dollhouse where you could see everything, it was completely exposed. Like most of Mt Pleasant, Maffey's was devastated. As we got towards the bottom, the road had pretty much collapsed away and was completely destroyed in parts.



ChristChurch Cathedral, Cathedral Square, November 2011

Somehow we got down to the bottom - this road was closed shortly after and has never reopened. We ended up on McCormacks Bay Road and immediately we could see the effect of liquefaction - the entire road, reserve and properties on this road were now knee deep in sand and silt. We decided at this point not to even attempt going any further and turned around and went back to wait for Dad to come back.

Dad arrived back at what must've been around six o'clock. We listened to the radio in the car for a bit, and we began to realise how lucky we all had been to survive relatively unscathed, when so many others had not. We began to wonder who we may know who may not have made it. I spoke to all my closest friends to ensure their safety and their family's safety. Thankfully, everyone was alive, but of course, they all had a different story to tell. I remember Samantha apologizing to me as she hadn't been at Heathcote Park at 1.45 like we planned, I told her not to worry, seeing as I apparently hadn't made it there either! Shortly after, we began receiving many calls and texts from friends and family in the UK who were waking up to the devastating images on the news. We were unsure what we were going to do next, although we knew we'd never be in our house again. We set up a tent on the grass up the top of the garden in such a position that if the house were to collapse, there was no risk of it collapsing on the tent. Despite it being February, it was a cold night in the tent, and looking out across the city, a very dark night also. When darkness fell across the city, we got into our tent and it was very silent, other than the jolt of aftershocks every 15 minutes or so, and with each one you would hear more things crashing, smashing and breaking around the place. This was to be the first of many sleepless nights. It was a day that started just like any other. It started out just like any other normal, uneventful summer's day. When I woke up that morning, I, along with everyone else in this city of 350,000, had no idea that the life that I knew would be turned upside down forever. It should've been just another day, a day that came, then passed without anything that would cause us to remember this day. It turned out being a defining day in our lives that will change our priorities in life and our future in more ways than we can think of. It's the day that I and the people of Christchurch will never forget. This is just my story, of where I was and what I was doing that fateful day - everyone who was in Christchurch that day will have a different story, I am just thankful that I am still here and able to tell mine.



Christ Church Cathedral, Cathedral Square, November 2011





The big snow of July 2011 - 'the icing on the quake'





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