

Shattered

Simona Zecchi (April 21, 2009)



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As I slept soundly in my bed, I could not understand what that noise was: tinkling, shaking, bumping. I thought my dreams were overwhelming reality.

The shake went far beyond normal settling for me to misunderstand it, so I abruptly jumped out of bed and quickly stood under the small arch dividing the entrance from the kitchen, as experts advise to do in these situations.

After switching on the TV, with my eyes still caught between sleep and brutal awakening, I could



not gather anything from the news. Channel surfing was becoming a relaxing game. But there it was: only on channel LA7 broadcasting the English news through CNN could I get the facts: thousands of buildings collapsed – an earthquake in the center of Italy. Still I had not found what I selfishly wanted to know: where did it happen? I just wanted to be sure that it was anywhere but here. The location “center of Italy” did not ease my fears since that covers a lot of area, and Italy’s center was right where I found myself that day and where I actually live.

Since that very early morning on April 6, after the first shock that rocked the country, the area was hit by a flood of media coverage. TV, newspaper, radio, and Internet reporters all searched for stories, faces, victims, and ruins to unveil as part of their contribution that along with many volunteers, organizations, and institutions helped and comforted the Abruzzi region.

There are many stories that make up this terrible quake. They belong to ordinary people and can seem average and unimportant, and all very similar to one another.

Cristina, along with her family and nine other people, was housed under a tent in Piazza



d'Armi



tells about the difficulty of falling asleep for fear that she may never wake up, and the effort she makes to spend time playing with her children until tiredness doesn't catch up with them.

Her family was given an apartment by one of her husband's friends near Pescara, but fear still prevents her and her children from falling asleep. It's as if the quake has shattered all of the certainties life sometimes gives to human beings: paradoxically a tent becomes much safer than a house.

Luca, one of the students who died under the ruins of the Students' House, could not go back home for Easter a few days before the quake because he had to study for a university exam: an unintentional failure.

Blessed Easter tries to find its way through the tents, garrisons, and squares. Church services help to restore a sense of community, even if the churches themselves have been destroyed. Pope Benedict XVI has sent over 500 chocolate eggs to children, while the tents' inhabitants are still waiting for his visit. He is supposed to visit Onna and L'Aquila, and then say prayers in front of the Student's House.

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi visits the region daily, showing his presence and closeness to

the people affected while giving odd interviews in the national and international media. He has demanded the swift reconstruction of homes so that people are not homeless for too long: "I don't want any vagrants, shacks, or caravans on the streets. It's about our image!" (Espresso source)

Since last October the earth has trembled and continues to tremble throughout the Apennine Mountains and in L'Aquila, the heart of the Abruzzo region. Having a physics laboratory stationed in the Gran Sasso Mountains proved not to be useful enough to sound the alarm ahead of time.

Some journalists were present for an entire week, giving reports that attempted to include a variety of voices. The primary point of view praises the government for the work it has done until now, mostly with respect to preventative measures, regardless of whether institutions and civil protection agencies actually did their jobs by informing and protecting citizens.

Via don Luigi Sturzo, Via Persichetti, and Via XX Settembre in the heart of the historic center: Suddenly every small street and alley has become well-known and has been put under a magnifying glass by technicians, firefighters, and inspectors. Villa Sant'Angelo, Pizzoli, Onna: Places and areas in L'Aquila that are now smashed or closed. Perhaps one could list them all in a long monumental poem.



There have been 293 deaths during the aftermath, buried under new and ancient ruins. But the main question is: How could they have died under new buildings? How could that happen? Judges are investigating the structural integrity of the buildings, the materials used for construction, the anti-seismic regulations which were not followed, and work approvals granted by local institutions. Today Piero Grasso, attorney for DNA (Direzione Nazionale Antimafia), announced an anti-mafia committee which will oversee both the reconstruction funds and the assigned work contracts. This will not resurrect those who have died, but at least 55,000 people without homes may still have an opportunity to rebuild their futures in spite those who ignored the danger hidden under this land.

A friend of mine, Daniela, applied to be a volunteer with the Civil Protection Institute which sent her to Pizzoli (about 1,000 people were evacuated there) along with other volunteers. Despite the initial disorganization, she witnessed that those living in tents were ready to start rebuilding their homes as well as their lives. Difficulties such as cold weather and housing conditions prevented them from starting to do so immediately. Many elderly people tried hard not to give up, even with the lack of conveniences such as toilets located so far away from the tents. Volunteer units made up of common people along with military agencies (Guardia di Finanza, Vigili, etc.) demonstrated the strength of solidarity that comforts and encourages the people of Abruzzi.

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