

Boston

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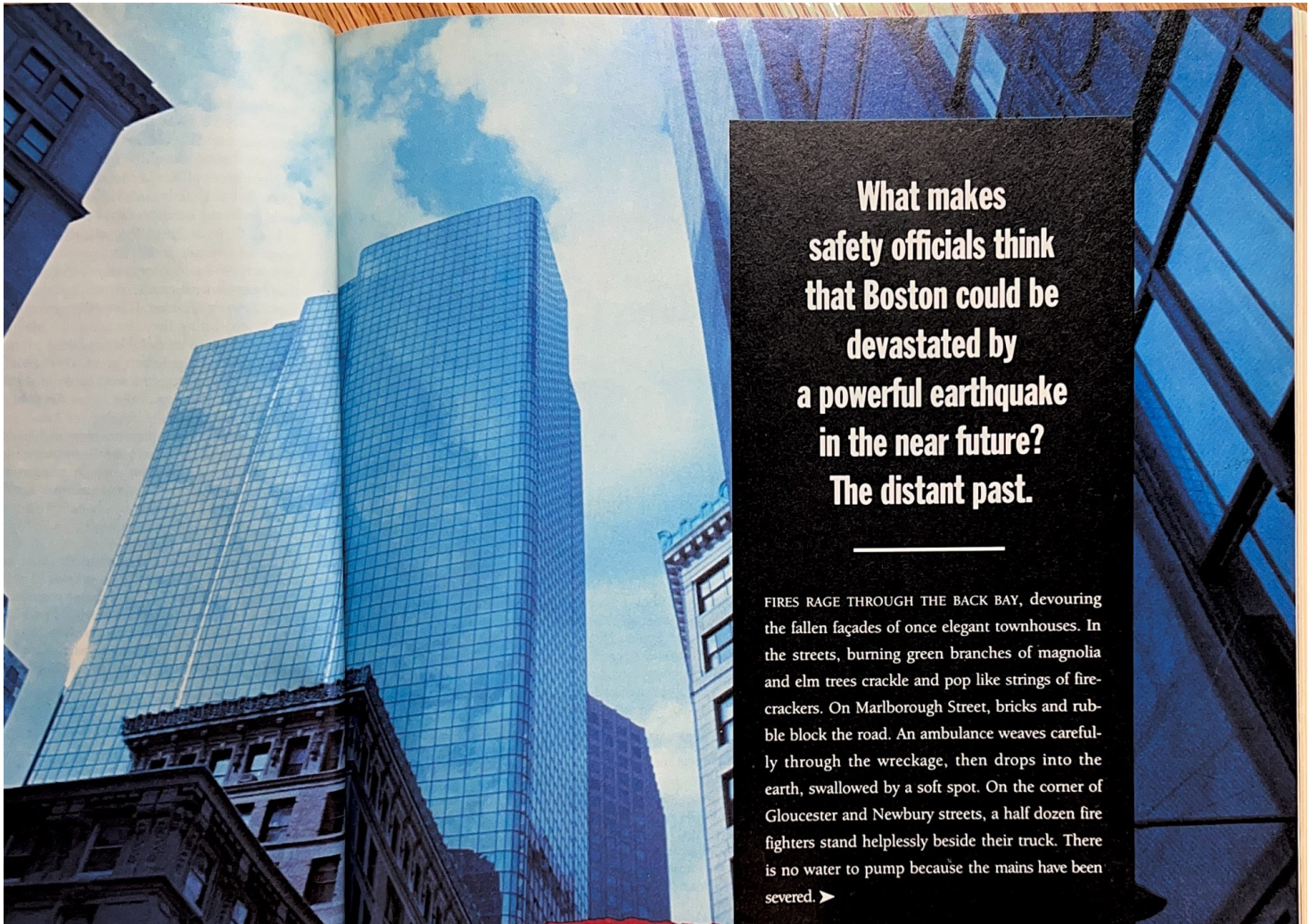
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**What makes
safety officials think
that Boston could be
devastated by
a powerful earthquake
in the near future?
The distant past.**

FIRES RAGE THROUGH THE BACK BAY, devouring the fallen façades of once elegant townhouses. In the streets, burning green branches of magnolia and elm trees crackle and pop like strings of firecrackers. On Marlborough Street, bricks and rubble block the road. An ambulance weaves carefully through the wreckage, then drops into the earth, swallowed by a soft spot. On the corner of Gloucester and Newbury streets, a half dozen fire fighters stand helplessly beside their truck. There is no water to pump because the mains have been severed. ►

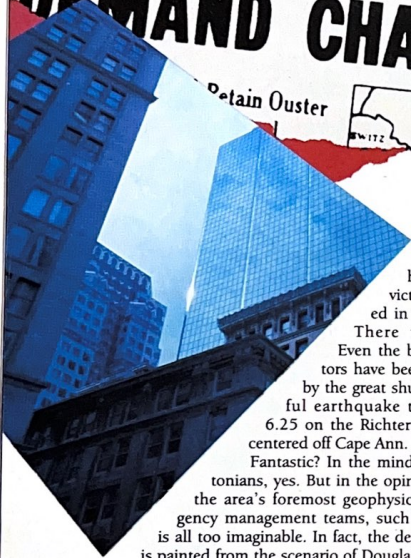
EARTHQUAKE!

By Kathleen Langone

E SHAKES NEW ENGLAND

Terrified as Houses Tremble—Phones Go Dead

DEMAND CHANGES AT VICTIMS



Detain Ouster



At Boston's hospitals, burn victims lie untended in dark corridors. There is no power. Even the back-up generators have been knocked out by the great shudder: a powerful earthquake that measured 6.25 on the Richter scale and was centered off Cape Ann. Fantastic? In the minds of most Bostonians, yes. But in the opinion of some of the area's foremost geophysicists and emergency management teams, such an occurrence is all too imaginable. In fact, the description above is painted from the scenario of Douglas Forbes, director of planning for MEMA, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency. Forbes's information comes from a study prepared by URS Consultants, Inc., of California and funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The Metropolitan Boston Area Earthquake Loss Study, released in 1990, attempts to predict the extent of damage to the area inside Route 128 from an earthquake with a Richter magnitude of 6.25 whose epicenter was off Cape Ann.

Why did FEMA want to know what damage would be caused by such an earthquake? Because FEMA officials know something most Bostonians don't. They know, for example, that an earthquake of that size did strike Boston once before—on the morning of November 18, 1755. Records from the time report that roofs collapsed, 1,500 chimneys were destroyed, and one of Boston's most famous landmarks, the Faneuil Hall grasshopper, was thrown to the ground when the five-inch pine spindle supporting it snapped. In the city's wharf area, so many bricks littered the streets that they were almost impassable. The quake, known as the Cape Ann earthquake because its epicenter was off Cape Ann, was felt from Nova Scotia to Maryland.

MEMA officials also know that the Cape Ann earthquake was just one of many that rippled through New England in the sev-

enteenth and eighteenth centuries. And they know that it could happen again. John Ebel, a geophysicist and assistant director of Boston College's Weston Observatory, the locus for seismic monitoring in New England, has calculated the likelihood that the above scenario will become a reality. He believes there is a 50 to 75 percent chance in any 200-year period that an earthquake with a Richter magnitude of 6.0 will strike New England. Says Ebel: it will happen again.

THERE IS A LONG CHAIN OF EVIDENCE THAT throughout the European colonization of this area, earthquakes frequently rumbled across the landscape. William Bradford's journal of Plymouth Colony has the following account of a powerful earthquake in 1638:

This year, aboute ye 1 or 2 of June, was a great & fearful earthquake; it was in this place heard before it was felt . . . and ye earth shooke with yet violence as they could not stand without catching hold of ye posts & pails yet stood next them.

And in a letter written to Governor John Winthrop after that earthquake, Roger Williams reported that an Indian elder had recounted four other earthquakes in the previous 80 years.

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, these seismic events were widely perceived as a result of the "terror of the Lord," and they were a boon to New England ministers. In 1727, following a quake that may have been as strong as the 1755 Cape Ann earthquake, large numbers of newly repentant sinners were registered in church records throughout New England. Special fast days were called by churches in most towns in eastern Massachusetts. Rev. John Cotton preached that he hoped the increase in church attendance was not fleeting and "that the impressions may abide untill the great work of their saving and thoro' conversion to God is accomplish'd."

Just 28 years later, when the Cape Ann quake hit, scientific study had already begun to mollify the fear of God's wrath. With the influence of the scientific enlightenment from Europe and the teaching of Newton's laws, many New Englanders attempted

ENTIRE SECTION ROCKS TO QUAKE

Violent Tremor at 2:28 Shakes All New England—Huge Buildings in Boston Rocked—Floors Jitter and Windows Rattle

U. S. FORCES

IN U. S. FORCES

DEATH

Shocked Sleepers Awakened—Calls Flood Newspapers and Police—Hospitals Alarmed

Millions Startled by Worst Shock Ever Felt Here—Early Reports Predict Little Damage Done

NAZIS TAKE ITALIANS TO ALB

to explain the earthquake in scientific, rather than religious terms. It had been established, for example, that earthquakes other parts of the world occurred near volcanic activity. Scientific thinkers theorized that New England's quakes were caused by subterranean volcanoes. Another, more fanciful theory was posed by Rev. Thomas Prince of Boston. He suggested Benjamin Franklin's newly installed lightning rods were conducting nature's force into the ground and later releasing earthquakes.

Although the earthquakes of 1727 and 1755 can certainly be classified as major seismic events, there were no deaths from either calamity. Most of the damage was to chimneys and stone walls. Today, seismologists attribute the damage to the fact that almost all buildings were made of wood, which bends with sudden movement, a fact that few buildings were taller than two stories. No one was hurt.

Boston is a city of brick, a building material that has, over the years, become more plastic. When a brick house is shaken apart, it falls apart. If Boston were to be shaken by an earthquake of Richter magnitude of 6.25—roughly that of the Cape Ann quake—much of the city would sustain severe structural damage. According to the executive summary of the MEMA quake report, hundreds of people would die and thousands would be injured. Damage to Boston and its immediate area would be "in the range of 2 to 10 billion dollars (with estimates being 5 to 6 billion dollars)."

While the quake itself would devastate the area, it is predicted, much of the damage would occur later. Fires would break out, and critical services of ambulances and fire trucks would be hampered by damaged roads, bridges, and buildings. Many emergency vehicles wouldn't even get to their garages.

Among the most frightening predictions is the effect on hospitals, which would be needed more than ever. Because of the possible lack of power and failure of back-up generators, which are not seismically resistant, in the 72 hours following the quake, the "functionality" of the hospitals would range from 10 percent to 26 percent.

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ENGLAND

ones Go Dead

T VICK

ENTIRE SECTION ROCKS TO QUAKE

Scientific Tremor at 2:28 Shakes All New England—Huge Buildings in Boston Rocked—Floors Jitter and Windows Rattle Violently—Harvard Calls It Worst on Record Here

UND MEMBERS IN U. S. FORCES

Seized in Raid in Chicago Shows Several Hundred Men Allegedly in Various Military Branches

Shocked Sleepers Awakened—Calls Flood Newspapers and Police—Hospitals Alarmed

Millions Startled by Worst Shock Ever Felt Here—Early Reports Predict Little Damage Done

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Although the earthquakes of 1727 and 1755 can certainly be classified as major seismic events, there were no reports of deaths from either calamity. Most of the damage was confined to chimneys and stone walls. Today, seismologists attribute the relatively light damage to the fact that almost all buildings were made of wood, which bends with sudden movement, and to the fact that few buildings were taller than two stories. Neither of those graces will save us today.

Boston is a city of brick, a building material that has, in engineering terms, no plasticity. When a brick house is shaken, it falls apart. If Boston were to be shaken by an earthquake with a Richter magnitude of 6.25—roughly that of the Cape Ann quake—much of the city would sustain severe structural damage. According to the executive summary of the MEMA earthquake report, hundreds of people would die and thousands would be injured. Damage to Boston and its immediate suburbs would be "in the range of 2 to 10 billion dollars (with the best estimate being 5 to 6 billion dollars)."

While the quake itself would devastate the area, the report predicted, much of the damage would occur later. Fires would break out, and critical services of ambulances and fire trucks would be hampered by damaged roads, bridges, and collapsed buildings. Many emergency vehicles wouldn't even get out of their garages.

Among the most frightening predictions is the effect on area hospitals, which would be needed more than ever. Because of the possible lack of power and failure of back-up generators, which are not seismically resistant, in the 72 hours following the quake, the "functionality" of the hospitals would range from 14 percent to 26 percent.

SUCH A CATASTROPHE IS UNIMAGINABLE to the general public, but the Weston Observatory's John Ebel reminds us that it almost happened just 53 years ago. In 1940, New England was shaken by a pair of earthquakes that measured 5.5 and 5.4 on the Richter scale. These were the Ossipee earthquakes of December 20 and 24. Headline news of Massachusetts towns being shaken shared space on the front pages of Boston newspapers with accounts of Hitler's Christmas truce from bombing raids on London.

Damage was greatest in the Ossipee/Tamworth area of New Hampshire, but as far away as western Massachusetts, dishes and household utensils crashed to the floor and telephone service was lost. In Chicopee Falls a water main burst, releasing 400,000 gallons of water. In the Peabody Museum in Salem, an ancient Japanese gargoyle crashed through a glass showcase.

Ebel also points out that last October, the same area of New Hampshire showed renewed activity, with a 3.4-magnitude earthquake centered in Franklin. It is important to remember, says Ebel, that Richter magnitudes are not linear but logarithmic. An earthquake that measures 6.0 has 10 times more seismic wave strength than a 5.0 earthquake.

For the past 12 years, Ebel has been studying seismic activity in New England history, trying to come up with a model that will predict the next big movement. His task is complicated by the fact that no one really knows what causes earthquakes in New England. Local events are classified as "intraplate," because New England is not near any plate boundaries—unlike California, which sits on top of one. While New England is riddled with faults, most of them are classified as "inactive."

Ebel says that there could be undiscovered or inactive faults that may be becoming active again. He believes that the faults are activated by pressure from the ever-expanding mid-Atlantic ridge. The ridge, says Ebel, is a spreading zone in the crust of the earth. It creates new crust that pushes against the North American plate at about two to three centimeters a year.

His mathematical model, which (Continued on page 109)

Silber

next to him for more than 20 minutes when he was agitated from all that campaigning.

Natalie Jacobson.
The bitch.

THIS SPRING, AS ANOTHER SCHOOL YEAR draws to an end, and his twenty-second commencement at Boston University approaches, Silber still appears to have nothing to fear. In March, he sent letters apprising the trustees of his flustered performance on "60 Minutes," which aired in May. And the trustees returned the favor by granting him another vote of confidence at their annual meeting, in Scottsdale, Arizona.

In the meantime, Silber's people continue to negotiate with the Attorney General's Office over a new set of reforms for the governance of BU. Whatever cast those re-

Silber will be exiled to Bay State Road, a former confidant predicts: "For Silber, that's a killer. When you become irrelevant, you might as well slash your wrists."

forms eventually take, one thing seems clear: John Silber is BU's president for life—or until he decides otherwise. His loss of stature outside the walls of BU is harder to calculate. But one former confidant, a prominent Bostonian, predicts the maximum penalty: lifelong banishment from the seats of power.

"What happens is, nobody takes him seriously anymore," the confidant says. "He doesn't get invited to sit on boards. He doesn't get asked to speak in front of Congress on educational policy. He doesn't get to be a player anymore. He's exiled to Bay State Road, and for Silber, that's a killer. He becomes irrelevant. When you become irrelevant, you might as well slash your wrists, because relevancy is what he's been fighting for all these years."

For all its classical dimensions, the Silber saga has yet to rise to the level of tragedy. In scripting his own story, John Silber left out one important ingredient. Tragic heroes always achieve some understanding of what led to their fall. Silber has yet to admit that he has fallen, let alone understand why. And no one close to him, it seems, has the gumption to tell him where he went wrong. □

Earthquake

(Continued from page 61)
considered the frequency of all seismic activity in New England, indicates that in any 200-year period there is a 50 to 75 percent chance that an earthquake registering 6.0 on the Richter scale will occur in New England. Put simply: it's only a matter of time.

WHEN MEMA OFFICIALS READ THE early drafts of the *Boston Area Loss Study* in 1987, they realized it was high time for earthquake preparedness to become part of their mission.

"We developed earthquake annexes—a set of plans to be added to the existing emergency management plans for Massachusetts communities," says planning director Douglas Forbes. "We needed to delineate hazardous zones sensitive to the earthquakes and assign responsibilities at the community level for who will respond to the various emergency needs such as critical equipment, medical inventories, available doctors, transportation, et cetera."

So far, half the communities in the state have implemented such plans, and MEMA officials hope every community will be covered within the year. One problem, says Forbes, is that this is a voluntary effort. Some towns do it; some don't.

John Smith, director in charge of the earthquake programs at MEMA, says there are two parts to emergency preparedness. One is called structural mitigation, and it involves increasing the seismic resistance of buildings and roads. This effort started with the federal government in 1975, when a national building code mandating that new construction had to be seismically resistant in accordance with a region's seismic rating went into effect. In February of this year, the Seismic Advisory Committee of the Massachusetts Board of Building Regulations and Standards passed the first regulation of its kind in this country. A new code requiring seismic retrofitting for existing buildings when certain additions or modifications are made, it will go into effect this summer.

The second part of MEMA's emergency preparedness, nonstructural mitigation, includes a much broader spectrum of safety measures, from putting Velcro straps on computer terminals to practicing family drills at home, so people will know how to respond when and if an earthquake should strike.

"One of the most critical problem areas is that most school administrators think that fire drills should be adhered to during an earthquake," says Smith. "That is precisely what you don't want the children to do."

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