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# Life of a CERT Victim

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CERT trainee Diane Bianchi rescues a victim from under a pile of debris Photo Ken Tom

There's nothing like the anguish of being stuck in a damaged building after an earthquake to make you realize that we'd better be prepared for the "big one." I started my CERT training more than a year ago. The Community Emergency Response Team prepares residents to get organized by neighborhood to assist in rescuing operations in case of emergencies such as earthquakes or fires. The six-week training teaches the right moves to ease pain and save lives. It helps residents become self reliant since it is likely that professional emergency personnel will be scarce in the event of a major disaster. The training is efficient, but nothing drives the point home like living though a real situation. I came as close as I ever want to be to such a situation when I played a victim during the graduation exercise of a group of CERT trainees. Four fellow CERT graduates and I met at the Contra Costa County Fire Training Center in Walnut Creek in the evening of August 14. We had been asked to wear old knock around clothes, something that can get dirty. We were to arrive there ahead of the class that would perform the drill for their graduation that night. That Thursday evening was hot on the tarmac of the training center. We were first taken to a building to be made up as real victims. The CERT training team came in with props to dress up realistic wounds and injuries. One "victim" displayed an opened fracture on his arm, he even had a pouch for "blood" that he could activate to appear to be bleeding at the scene; another was to portray a victim that had had a concussion and was incoherent; a third one "suffered" a large perforation that had opened her hand. Even though I have passed the age of reasonable child bearing, I was to be

pregnant. The whole make-up part was very amusing for us "victims." However, as we settled in the old house that's located in the middle of the training center, in the dark and heat, the anxiety started to mount. My character was supposed to be close to delivering her child but not hurt in anyway, just anxious for her baby and desperate for attention. As the trainees approach the house, we started screaming for help. Their job was to apply the procedures they had learned to evacuate and triage the victims according to their level of emergency. I was not hurt in any way, so I was to be treated as non-emergency. As I started playing my role, I started to really feel the anguish that would be mine if stranded in a house after a major disaster. The arrival of the rescue team was a real relief and their attention and reassurance was of great help. I could only imagine what it would really be like if many of the homes of my neighborhood had been shaken by a quake and rescue teams would assemble to bring relief to victims in an orderly fashion. It is likely that in our towns, which are very spread out and with not that many police officers and firefighters on duty at one time, victims could have to wait for hours to see any help if neighborhoods are not organized to help each other. CERT training is free and is available to all, from older citizens to young families. The last training session for 2008 starts on October 1st. For more information or to register, go to lamorindacert.org or call Ken Tom at 925-376-0533

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