

Night tremors

Kim Munroe – 30 January 2018

Writing Brief: Short Story, Fiction, 800 words

The train was getting closer.
Closer.
I stirred.
It's just a dream.
The sound was getting louder.
I woke with a start.
What the?
The noise was deafening.
The digital clock blinked 2:02a.m.
My bed was shaking.
The room was shaking!
Drawers were falling onto the floor!
I jumped out of bed and ran to Sammy.
He was lying in his cot, eyes wide open, gurgling with delight.
He thought it was fun.
I had no idea what to do but to snatch him up and hold him close.
What was happening?
There was knocking at the door.
Persistent.
I froze.
A whimper.
Sammy?
'Sammy where are you'?
How did I get on the floor with Sammy protected beneath me?
'Sally, Sally, it's Bill from next door, it's an earthquake, you need to get out quick.'
He had to scream out.
I could barely hear him.
An earthquake?
But, that's.....
I sprung up.
That's ridiculous!
I ran.
The door wouldn't open!

I screamed.

'Get under the table Sally, quick,' Bill yelled through the jammed door frame.

Sammy started screaming.

I could see Dave's precious Holden clock lying broken on the floor along with everything else that used to sit neatly inside drawers in the kitchen.

Through the bedroom door the digital clock blinked 2.04 and died.

Everything went black.

I tried hard not to think about how a table could protect us when everything else was falling apart. I tucked Sammy in tightly and put my hand over his tiny exposed ear, rocking him gently.

I don't know why, the room was rocking both of us.

I started to pray.

Suddenly the noise stopped and the house slowly ceased its motion.

The silence was eerie.

I sat and waited, and I thought.

I thought about all the things that had happened to us.

What bought us to Apollo Bay when we should have been on the Gold Coast in our nice little three bedroom home with Dave.

About how you have a plan, an expectation for your life, and then a drunk driver shatters everything.

Sammy and I had been out that morning to the maternal nurse for his two month check-up. She said he was perfect, putting on weight and expected to grow to 6'. I was bewildered how she knew this when he was barely 20 inches. She assured me he would. I'm not that tall, 5'4" at a pinch and Dave is 5'10.

Well he was.

When I drove up to our house a police car was out front. My immediate reaction was the commission house across the road. Recently a couple had moved in who fought constantly and loudly. Police attendance wasn't unusual.

I got out of the car, lifted Sammy and the baby seat out, and went inside. I had just put Sammy into his cot when the doorbell rang. Two Policewomen were standing at the door, their faces grim.

As a social worker in mental health I've seen a lot of sadness and distress from people who can't come to terms with life. I've always felt grateful for my Holden obsessed husband, our son and our life together.

These things happened to other people. Not me.

I'm not sure how I got through the next days and weeks, the arrangements, the funeral, sorting through Dave's things. Mum and Dad came up from Victoria to take care of everything. A month later they suggested I head home with them and stay in my aunties unit while she was in Europe.

So I did. And now here I am, sitting in rubble with heaven knows what happening outside, wondering why Mum and Dad ever thought this was a good place to retire. And wondering where they were, were they ok?

The night seemed eternal, my thoughts racing, looking back on everything that had happened.

Thankfully Sammy settled and seemed content to lie in my arms and sleep. I adjusted how I sat and lent up against the table leg. It seemed ridiculous that a table could hold us safe even though possibly the roof had caved in. I couldn't really see. Every so often the floor shook and I would brace myself. I realised there wasn't noise and guessed the major one had happened.

I heard people outside and then Dad's voice yelling for me. Suddenly Dad was in the room, taking us in his arms, telling me it was ok. Crying. We stumbled outside and I looked around.

The four story block of flats across the road had been levelled to one.

'Dad, did....' I couldn't get the words out.

'I'm afraid so honey, we don't know how many. I'm going in to help, here comes Mum, you two stay with her' he said and left.

Mum grabbed me and we clung to each other, Sammy squashed between us.

'Oh Sally, this on top of everything. You've lost so much, you've been so unlucky' she said, sobbing.

I looked across at what used to be the units.

No.

We were the lucky ones.