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Trail of ruin: Quake victims' shattered lives

BY SANDRA DIBBLE, UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER
SATURDAY, APRIL 10, 2010 AT 12:04 A.M.

EJIDO DURANGO, Mexico — By day, Dolores Echeverria returns to the spacious sky-blue house where she lived with her daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter until Sunday's 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck. Yesterday afternoon, she stepped through her mud-covered yard in Ejido Durango, past the craters where geysers had surged from the ground, and entered her darkened bedroom, its walls now covered with cracks.

"We carry out a few things, and we run out," said Echeverria, 66, one of thousands of residents of the Mexicali Valley wondering where to go from here.

Striking 30 miles south of the U.S. border, the quake left a trail of ruined houses, broken roads, destroyed crops and interrupted lives.

Suffering the greatest damage are the small communities at the southern end of the Mexicali Valley, Baja California's main agricultural region, where the state's governor estimated as many as 25,000 people have lost their homes.

North of the border, the quake's ripples reached deep into Imperial County, where authorities estimate damages at close to \$70 million.

In El Centro, more than 40 miles from Echeverria's house, another family has been struggling with loss.

"I had all my memories in there. I want to go back, I want to go back," said Elizabeth Lopez, 18, a high school senior and mother of a 1-year-old, yearning for the mobile home where she lived with her family of 10. Theirs was one of dozens of mobile homes shaken off their foundations Sunday. It could take \$10,000 and as long as four months to repair the damage.

For now, they are staying in a Red Cross shelter, the Ryerson Hall recreation center at the Desert Trails RV Park and Golf Course. The family was celebrating Easter in San Felipe when the earthquake struck. With several miles of highway badly damaged, they had to wait a day before facing the damage at home.

In San Diego County, about 120 miles to the west, the quake caused little damage. But those living close to the epicenter are still reeling.

"We see different people in different places going through tragedies, and we never imagine it's going to be us," said Vanessa Lopez, 22, Elizabeth's sister-in-law, cradling her 4-year-old daughter, Jenessa. "And when it is us, it's very, very hard to stand tall, and be able to ask for help. But with children, you cannot sleep in cars."



JOHN GIBBINS / UNION-TRIBUNE

Margarita Reyes lost her home in the quake.

At Sixth and Main streets in El Centro's old downtown, it would be hard to tell anything had happened to Brooks Jewelry and Gifts. The picture frames are back on display, the shattered glass and ceramic has been swept up. But owner Larry Bratten estimated that the quake cost him at least \$10,000 in broken merchandise. He counts his blessings that the 93-year-old building suffered no structural damage.

"Everybody's like a deer in headlights when it happens," said Bratten, 64, an Imperial Valley native. "What hurts most is that it couldn't have come at a worse time — the economy's bad, the unemployment's bad," he said. But with needed repairs and reconstruction, he said, "On the bright side, look at how many people are going back to work."

Farther south, more than 300 businesses remained closed yesterday in Calexico's historic downtown shopping district because of earthquake damage. The shoe stores, groceries and clothing shops are normally bustling with customers from Mexicali.

Some businesses had been scheduled to open yesterday, but an aftershock caused further damage, and it won't be until at least Wednesday that owners will be allowed to enter their shops, and only with structural engineers, City Manager Victor Carrillo said. He estimated that the city of 38,000 suffered close to \$28 million in damage.

South of the border, some families gathered yesterday at government-operated shelters. Others pitched tents by the side of the road, or outside their houses, hoping to ward off thieves and vandals. The geysers of water and broken irrigation canals have also wreaked havoc on agriculture in this part of the valley.

In Colonia Carranza, farmer Jorge Zazueta said about 45,000 acres in two of the southernmost irrigation districts are most affected. Zazueta fears losing his 750 acres of wheat, alfalfa and cotton. Though government engineers have begun repairs, he said they won't come soon enough to save his crops.



PHOTO BY JOHN GIBBINS - UNION-TRIBUNE

The Ejido Durango home of Dolores Echeverria is uninhabitable after the quake.



PHOTO BY JOHN GIBBINS - UNION-TRIBUNE

"All the canals and drains are broken. The parcels have changed their slope and can't be irrigated," he said, even if there were water.

Nearby, in Ejido Durango, Margarita Reyes sat in a park where a group of Apostolic Christians were offering help. The diminutive Oaxaca native cannot return to the small, borrowed house a few blocks away where she had lived with her son, who is a farm laborer, and her grandson.

The walls are profoundly cracked, and part of the ceiling has fallen. The state government is planning to resettle large numbers of residents — the exact number is being determined — to safer ground, where they will be given a plot of land and materials to start a house.

"What I worry about is leaving him a place," Reyes said of her 12-year-old grandson, Juan Antonio. "If God comes and gets me, where would I leave him? We don't know where we'll end up, and we don't have anything."

For now she is sleeping on a donated mattress, set on a concrete floor, wondering when the ground will tremble again.

*Sandra Dibble: (619) 293-1716;
sandra.dibble@uniontrib.com*

Juan Antonio Mendez, 12, went back yesterday to his family's house in Ejido Durango, Mexico, which was heavily damaged in Sunday's 7.2-magnitude earthquake.

Disaster preparedness guide: See today's [Smart Living section](#) for lists of what you should pack in a survival kit, what to do — and not to do — during an earthquake, how to create a family readiness plan and more.

HOW TO HELP

Donations for victims on both sides of border

- American Red Cross San Diego/Imperial Counties Chapters Disaster Fund. Information at sdarc.org. People also can mail a check or money

order to American Red Cross, 3950 Calle Fortunada, San Diego, CA 92123.

- Baja/Imperial Earthquake fund at the Salvation Army, P.O. Box 503580, San Diego, CA 92150-3580. People also may call (866) 455-4357 or

donate online at www.sandiego.salvationarmy.org.

Donations for victims in Mexico

- Wells Fargo Bank, account 6123425255, care of the San Felipe Rotary Foundation.

- Transfers can be made from U.S. banks to Banamex account 0430/7403094, care of Gobierno del Estado de Baja California Donativo Sismo. the routing number is 002020043074030944.

Donations of supplies

In Tijuana, items such as tents, bottled water, diapers, adult and children's clothing and blankets may be dropped off on weekdays in Room 1350 of the Palacio de Gobierno Municipal, the city's administrative center, at Avenida Independencia and Paseo del Centenario in the Zona Rio district. From the United States, the general information number is 011-52-664-973-7000.

Corporate donors

The National City-based International Community Foundation hopes to acquire tents, camping cots, flashlights, generators, kitchen utensils, blankets and radios

from corporate donors. The foundation is not set up to store large quantities of equipment from individuals, but people may make tax-deductible contributions to the International Community Foundation's Baja California Disaster Relief Fund at 2505 N Ave., National City, CA 91950. Contributions may be made online at uniontrib.com/baja-relief. More information is available at (619) 336-2250.

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valleygirl92243 Yesterday 08:55 PM

This article was very poorly written. It does not even come close to explain the amount of economic devastation that the Valley is currently experiencing. It will surpass over \$100 million in damages to buildings, infrastructure alone. Brooks Jewelry was just an example of damage to inventory only but is no where near the total picture of

what is being experienced so far. Many businesses lost not only their inventories but their buildings. Had this quake occurred the next day, on a workday, there would of been hundreds of deaths and this would of been very CATASTROPHIC to our area. We were very lucky and extremely blessed that it just so happen to occur on a Sunday, during a holiday when most families are together and the stores were closed. There stories of heroism occuring not only during the quake, but after quake. Those people whose lives were saved by good samaritians unfortunately not being reported by the media. Calxico has suffered severely (they are in the USA by the way) with El Centro coming in a close second in terms of damages. There is so much newsworthy stories coming out of the Valley, but no one really interested in reporting on it except our local newspaper the Imperial Valley Press.

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Bamboozlerite 04/10/2010 06:40 PM

No bueno. Glad I live here in San Diego, we're not too close to a major fault line like these people were and people in LA/SF.

Flag

Like Reply



RXWD40 04/10/2010 12:55 PM

1 person liked this.

Photo #2, "The Ejido Durango home of Dolores Echeverria is uninhabitable after the quake."

What I find interesting is the damage on the walls, but I noticed no matching debris on the floor.

Flag

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JimmyL Yesterday 01:12 AM [in reply to RXWD40](#)

Have you ever heard of a broom?

Flag

Like Reply



RXWD40 Yesterday 01:38 AM [in reply to JimmyL](#)

Yeah actually I have heard of a broom, thanks for asking. And I guess it's not unheard of to clean, sweep and paint your uninhabitable home, while hundreds of after shocks are accuring and you are running out of the place.

2nd Paragraph, the words of Dolores Echeverria.

"We carry out a few things, and we run out," said Echeverria, 66, one of thousands of residents of the Mexicali Valley wondering where to go from here.

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LunarCycle 04/10/2010 08:07 PM [in reply to RXWD40](#)

Do we get to hear you live as a guest tonight on the former Art Bell show Coast to Coast? Are you suggesting a conspiracy by the Mexicans, that they hit their walls with big hammers to cause cracks after a known 7.2M earthquake, so they could have pictures shown of damage, for insurance they don't have, and house they might have to leave to go homeless? Please tell me what your point was?

Flag

Like Reply



RXWD40 04/10/2010 09:39 PM in reply to LunarCycle

My point being, as I should have elaborated earlier, is that the UT would do more justice to the people in the area by showing actual damage done by the quake such as the second picture. The young man does not look happy and for good reason. However the first picture looks as if it had pre-existing damage such as the large crack with blue paint inside it, damage around the door frame painted over, and only a few pebbles on the ground. So no conspiracy theories, nor big hammers or paranormal-themed talk radio, just believe it was a poor pick for a photo.

Flag

Like Reply



LunarCycle Yesterday 12:41 AM in reply to RXWD40

No problem, sorry if I misinterpreted your blog comment. Nothing wrong with paranormal talk radio, aliens, and people getting probed by aliens in some trailer park in the desert of Arizona.

Flag

Like Reply



RXWD40 Yesterday 01:45 AM in reply to LunarCycle

LunarCycle the faults all mine, I should have been more detailed on my thoughts rather than throwing out a vague question.

Flag

Like Reply



victhedoc 04/10/2010 11:37 AM

1 person liked this.

I'm sure the Mexican gov will come up off some of that oil money and help their own people. Sure they will. LOL.

Flag

Like Reply



MaoTzu 04/10/2010 12:07 PM in reply to victhedoc

Why are you such a hater all of the time?

Flag

Like Reply



victhedoc 04/10/2010 12:42 PM in reply to MaoTzu

2 people liked this.

What the heck are you talking about little commie.I'm just pointing out that mexico has all that oil money and they should spend it on their people who needs help.Besides the mexican's are such "proud" people you think they wouldn't want to take a handout from the American's.

Flag

Like Reply



MaoTzu 04/10/2010 01:19 PM [in reply to victhedoc](#)

"Sure they will.LOL." Why do you laugh at other people's misery? You do things like that constantly on this board, that's what I'm talking about, hater.

Flag

Like Reply



victhedoc 04/10/2010 01:44 PM [in reply to MaoTzu](#)

3 people liked this.

I'm not laughing at the people's misery.I'm laughing at their gov.who has all that oil money and still wants some one else to pay to help their people.

Flag

Like Reply



missionaccomplished 04/10/2010 02:38 PM [in reply to victhedoc](#)

1 person liked this.

Sure you are, dikkk. Just like in the immigration stories, eh? At least try to be honest about your contempt.

PS: As to your other point, why don't you do a little research. Mexico isn't even a member of OPEC.

Flag

Like Reply



victhedoc 04/10/2010 02:53 PM [in reply to missionaccomplished](#)

1 person liked this.

Who said anything about OPEC mexico is a big oil exporter.They get plenty of money from their oil.Let them spend it on their own people.As far as anything else you said,that is the common liberal comment.It means nothing.You do know that other country's then OPEC produces oil don't you.

Flag

Like Reply



missionaccomplished Yesterday 10:33 AM [in reply to victhedoc](#)

Well then, dic, you must be an expert.

[Amazon.com](#) Review

The End of Oil is a "geologic cautionary tale for a complacent world

accustomed to reliable infusions of cheap energy." The book centers around one irrefutable fact: the global supply of oil is being depleted at an alarming rate. Precisely how much accessible (not to mention theoretical) oil remains is debatable, but even conservative estimates mark the peak of production in decades rather than centuries. Which energy sources will replace oil, who will control them, and how disruptive to the current world order the transition from one system to the next will be are just a few of the big questions that Paul Roberts attempts to answer in this timely book. As Roberts makes abundantly clear, the major oil players in the world wield their enormous economic and political power in order to maintain the status quo. Of course, they get plenty of help from the tens of millions of consumers, particularly in the US and Europe, who guzzle oil as if there is an unlimited supply. And this demand shows no sign of abating--nearly half of the world's population lives without the benefits of fossil fuels and they desperately want to be among the haves. In countries such as China and India, where energy systems are already breaking down, Roberts discusses how they are looking to oil to fuel their race for development, in many cases ignoring environmental considerations altogether.

Though there is much to be pessimistic about, Roberts does uncover some positive developments, such as the race for alternative energy sources, notably hydrogen fuel cells, which could help to ease us off of our oil dependence before a full-blown energy crisis occurs. No one book could cover every aspect of what Roberts calls "arguably the most serious crisis ever to face industrial society," but *The End of Oil* is a remarkably informative and balanced introduction to this pressing subject. --Shawn Carkonen

The other blogger's original comment was right on target. Knowing well your past aggressive comments, you are insensitive enough to make fun of the misery of others.

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bajajoes Yesterday 12:12 PM [in reply to](#) [missionaccomplished](#)

Oil has eached its "peak" production and is on the decline but not to worry, long before it gets critical we will has switched to natural gas which the US alone has over a 100 year supply.

And synthetic oil/fuel is possible..... the Germans did it during WW2.

I'm more concerned about all our wasteful wars and the demise of the \$Dollar which at best will devalued and may be replaced! THIS YEAR!

Flag



LunarCycle 04/10/2010 08:12 PM [in reply to victhedoc](#)

1 person liked this.

Mexico's oil exports have been dropping year-to-year, which is going to present problems for the Mexican government to balance budgets, because of the revenue shortfall. They are actually contemplating taxation on the people, just like the excessive taxation here, where Sean Hannity chants "they hate us for our freedom" and a bunch of chest beaters get enraged and want to go beat a Mexican or Arab on the street (and they cannot tell the difference between a Hindu-Indian and an Italian, but that is another problem here too).

Flag



tommythompson Yesterday 09:12 AM [in reply to LunarCycle](#)

Lunar, you make some good points. The oil revenue is dropping in Mexico because the Government has resisted putting oil money back into the production infrastructure. Consequently, the system has predictably been declining for many, many years. They knew about this decades ago & continue to avoid all responsibility.

As for the difference between Hindu-Indians & Italians ? If you hit an Italian he will kindly return the favor with enthusiasm.

Don't know who Sean Hannity is & don't personally know any chest beaters except for Raider fans at the "Q" - they don't seem politically inclined. A "bunch of chest beaters" aren't the people who have killed 20,000 Mexicans south of the border.

Taxation is more addictive than crack cocaine & our politicians have the biggest drug habit on the planet. Be afraid...be very afraid. Those guys spend money so far into the future they will be dead while others are still paying for their unrestrained habits.

Flag



Bowen 04/10/2010 04:34 PM [in reply to victhedoc](#)

Semantics are the preferred weapon of aggression for some.

Flag

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bluehairdave 04/10/2010 10:15 AM

Not to be a worry wart BUT. Has anyone noticed the quakes have stopped completely about 5 hours ago? From 1 aftershock every 2-6 minutes and now none at all? Anyone know the science behind this? Do they just drop off all the sudden or is this a bad sign?

Any geologists out there know what this means?

<http://quake.wr.usgs.gov/recenteqs/Maps/116-33...>

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cisco1v 04/10/2010 12:12 PM [in reply to bluehairdave](#)

1 person liked this.

that means kiss your behind goodbye,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,just kidding!

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luvnmama 04/10/2010 09:50 AM

Well, I have searched every combination of Carlos Slim Helú/ earthquake/contributions and everything in between on multiple search engines and the only article that comes close to matching any of the search terms is this article from March.

Perhaps he is planning on rebuilding his homeland quietly with no fanfare or publicity?

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2...>

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Cory 04/10/2010 11:25 AM [in reply to luvnmama](#)

1 person liked this.

Why don't you tell us about your donations and community service. You are one we would find at the start of the food line after a quake up there because you don't have enough sense to be prepared. By the way, I don't recall any of your high rollers coming into the Calexico area to help out...

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