

we know a president's speech is written in advance but it shouldn't sound like writing, it should sound like talking. President Clinton talks better than he speaks. If a speech writer is any good, he or she can make it sound like talk. Peggy Noonan made it sound that way for President Reagan and President Bush a couple of times.

Here are just a few phrases from notes I made the other night, that could have been

Andy Rooney writes a column distributed by Tribune Media Services. Readers may write to him in care of the syndicate, 64 E. Concord St., Orlando, Fla. 32801.

"We must set tough, world-class academic standards for all our children." (The phrase "world-class" is a cliché that has been very prevalent for about 20 years now and ought to be retired. The writer probably thought it made the president sound "with it" but it made him sound out of it.)

"It's time to stop ignoring..."

"I know it will be difficult..."

"Tell it to Richard and Luc Anderson."

The names change but this line always follows somewhere shortly after the speech-making president tells a heartwarming (or

"Therefore, I urge you..."

"So I ask you to remember..."

"And so I say to you tonight..." (Please, don't tell us you're going to tell us. Just tell us.)

"Let us weave these sturdy threads..."

"Let us not reserve..."

"Let us instead..."

"Oh, there will be naysayers..."

When it comes to speeches that are dragged out and made too long with the inclusion of meaningless clichés, I'm a naysayer.

COPING WITH THE QUAKE

How one neighborhood is prepared

Although the city is recovering from the Jan. 17 Northridge Earthquake, many Los Angeles residents remain displaced and frightened. How are you and your family coping with the disaster? What are you doing to ease your fears? What has given you the strength to carry on with your daily life? Send your thoughts to: *Coping With the Quake*, Daily News Opinion Page, P.O. Box 4200, Woodland Hills, Calif. 91365-4200. Or fax: (818) 713-3723. Articles should be no longer than 750 words.

by Katherine Dowling

My friend was taking a shower in her Sierra Madre home the morning of June 3, 1991. Her daughter was playing in a delicately decorated little girl's room complete with off-white bookshelves and wall cabinets. A small son was in the basement with his toys... and his dad's workbench with tools lining the wall.

My friend and her family now live in Aransas.

The temblor of June 28, 1991, was a very local, but quite devastating quake, and only one of a cluster which in recent years has caused a good deal of damage to various parts of the San Gabriel Valley. With the recent Northridge Earthquake, we are witnessing a geographic widening of at-risk communities.

Since the Sierra Madre Quake hit our block rather severely (two houses were condemned, and nearly all damaged) we have identified the scope of responsibility of our neighborhood Watch, originally formed to combat the crime wave we experienced during Rose Bowl season.

Our main emphasis is now on disaster preparedness. That emphasis came in January one early morning last October. Flames raced down the mountain and onto our still sleeping block, and neighbors were able to alert each other to pack and evacuate.

Let me outline how we have approached our task. Our operative theory is that local quakes, fires, mudslides and so forth will bring help from adjacent communities and

rescue personnel within hours, but the initial response must be on a neighborhood level. A more global disaster, particularly an earthquake, may leave us on our own for anywhere from days to weeks, especially if there is complete devastation of the freeway system, blockage of mountain roads and damage to the harbor and airports.

Therefore, we must identify our own neighbors who may have valuable skills, and lay out a chain of command to mobilize everyone in the most effective way possible under whatever circumstances we encounter.

Through a series of admittedly sporadic neighborhood meetings, we have mapped our street, roughly delineated the floor plans of the houses, and identified the neighbors by age, special needs (for example, elderly and arthritic), and occupation. Those with skills have also been identified.

For example, one neighbor has a short-wave radio and a generator; we have two surgeons; and another is a professional builder.

Each neighbor has been given a confidential sheet with these facts as well as the work numbers and an out-of-town contact number for each household. Children who may need care in a disaster now recognize neighbors whom they can trust.

We have a plan to check on each other in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Each family will contact the families in the adjacent homes to see if anyone is trapped or severely injured.

Each family is urged to have rescue tools such as a crowbar, wrench and so forth in a place unlikely to be obstructed by debris. As a physician, I keep some very basic first-aid supplies in my car.

We put emphasis on the type of injury most likely to occur during a quake. Probably the most common is glass cuts to the feet as people stumble out of bed. Sturdy shoes, a robe if you sleep au naturel and a reliable flashlight need to be near the bed in a location easily found when you are in a sleepy panic.

open at night, especially in children's rooms, so it won't wedge shut in a temblor. Post-quake and fire evacuation routes can be planned beforehand and alternatives should be planned if the first route is obstructed. Meeting places outside the house need to be away from facades which could come loose in an aftershock.

Surviving the immediate disaster is only the first step. Supplies must be kept up to date, and water is the most important. Each family is urged to have these supplies. Extra clothing also should be tucked away. We plan to discuss nitty-gritty items such as porta-potties and tents at our next meeting, because a lengthy disaster would put us at risk of disease. People who are blind without glasses or need their asthma medicine should store extra in a safe place.

It's been two weeks since the Northridge Quake, and I'm feeling the emotional repercussions worse than the day of the quake. As a mother of seven kids, I never have trouble sleeping — except after a quake! And those blasted aftershocks keep interrupting my work.

One thing that a neighborhood disaster plan does is busy one up psychologically. I can discuss my "yellow earthquake streak" with my neighbors, and they understand. Since many deaths in an earthquake, or fire, or other urgent disaster turn out to be cardiac in origin, the comfort neighbors offer each other can be lifesaving.

Our street will soon be connected with other blocks and ultimately with our neighborhood homeowners association, which can do more global preparedness, and it can serve as a distribution point for supplies, should this become necessary. We plan to identify representatives from each block who will meet with the association to do more widespread planning and serve as liaisons after an actual catastrophe.

Within the last decade or so, our neighborhood has withstood a minor flood, mudslides, two fires, Medflies and five or six serious quakes. Sometimes I look up at the sky and could swear I see a swarm of locusts on the horizon. I could be mistaken. Maybe that dark cloud is really brim-

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