

Hi all,

As many of you are aware, Cauldrons is based in Christchurch. We probably don't need to tell anyone about the devastation of the past week. First off, Debbie and her family are safe. They're rather shaken up by the ordeal, (no pun intended – well maybe a little) but they're okay. She has sustained a lot more damage from this quake than from the previous one, but all in all, things are okay. I'm safe, as usual, this time writing to you from Sydney.

Debbie would like to personally thank everyone for all the good wishes and understanding in this time of tragedy. Thank you for your support, it is always welcome.

For any of you who are in Christchurch or who have family and friends there, we hope that all are safe and well, you are in our thoughts and prayers.

The March newsletter that was going to be sent out has been put off because so many things are now up in the air due to the quake.

Coffee Meet

March will not have a coffee meet because we don't know where we'd be able to hold one – the destruction is too vast. In addition I'm sure people are going to want to spend the time sorting through their own lives and adjusting to the new world they live in.

Calendar

We're still working on the next calendar, although I'm not sure how our printers have fared. We'll get the calendars printed somewhere, but for now we're in a holding pattern.

PaganFest

We had announced the date for PaganFest on Facebook and I was going to update the website and pass the information along to you, our faithful newsletter readers. However, again, we're going to have to wait to see whether the festival site is okay. The September quake didn't affect it, but we'll check this out.

Cauldrons Shop

With regards to the store, I'm sure you can appreciate how slow things are at the moment mail wise. I'm not sure how courier deliveries are being affected. Additionally there has been some damage to stock, but right now I'm wanting Debbie to concentrate her efforts on her house and family, rather than the shop, so sorting out that stuff isn't high priority. If you're desperate for something, email us and we'll check it out for you.

Blurb

I had an article written for this newsletter, but it'll keep for another one. Instead I'm attaching something I had to write to process what was happening. Another story in a long line of stories.

Anyway, when we can get some concrete details sorted, once everything starts to settle down, we'll advise you. Hopefully in time for the next newsletter. Until then have a great Autumnal Equinox :)

Take care and blessings to all,
Luana and Debbie

Near Miss – Experiencing the Christchurch Earthquake from Sydney

It was supposed to be an exciting day for me. The move that would start my new life, a new beginning. I woke up early, to catch a flight at what was termed as 'stupid o'clock' by my best friend, Debbie. Bags were packed, a flight was caught, my mind filled with thoughts of how I would miss my friends, though even they were eclipsed by the excitement of what adventures lay ahead.

Three and a bit hours later, Sydney came into view. As we flew low to the north before turning around for a southward approach a smile spread across my face at the sights. Iconic sites that epitomise Sydney. The Harbour Bridge, the Opera House, all as identifiable as the Statue of Liberty is to New York, as the Cathedral is to Christchurch.

My brother took me from the airport to his apartment, my new apartment. After ensuring I was settled, I was left alone as he returned to work. I surveyed my surroundings. A modern setting, everything I didn't have in Tonga. Running hot water. Air-conditioning for the muggy heat. A huge room with a wall of closet space that any girl would envy. Oh and did I mention the gaming PC he'd put in my room, connected to super fast internet?

The excitement was still there as I logged onto Facebook, each page loading with lightning quick speed. Perhaps I could say hello to Debbie, although I expected her to be outside doing some work. I decided I would get hold of her as soon as I could to make sure she got home safely. As usual there were tears at our parting. Hers as we said good-bye again. Mine shed in private when I was able to sit and reflect.

I played around on the internet for a little, marveling at the speed before I saw a Facebook message from a friend which changed everything.

"Bugger that was a huge shock," she had posted. Nothing really indicated that it was more than another in the long line of aftershocks that Christchurch was getting used to. Curiously I went to the USGS (US Geological Survey - www.usgs.gov) website. It took me a few seconds to register that the 6.3 I was looking at was big. Was serious. The Mercalli scale rating was a 7. Much more significant than the similarly scaled 6.3 earthquake I'd experienced in Tonga only a week previous. This one was destructive.

What happened next was a rollercoaster ride of emotion. Although I'm sure it was nothing compared to what people who were in the heart of the quake experienced. Frantically I tried contacting family and friends. Like most people I was glued to the television as footage of the damage came flowing in. Tears rolling down my cheeks, I used Facebook to communicate to anyone on the ground. Had anyone been in contact with friends, were family safe and accounted for?

Prayers were offered to the Gods, more tears were shed, and finally a ray of hope. A call to Debbie went through. Fresh tears fell as I heard her voice, her trembling voice as she walked her daughter home through the debris. She was alive. Her family were safe. I could breathe again. More friends were located, more family checked in. Each piece of news was posted on websites to alleviate the tension and worry of those who were concerned.

What had started off as an adventure at 'stupid o'clock' had morphed into something so much more terrifying and as the newscasts showed one harrowing picture after another I came to realise that September was nothing. Life had gone on after that shock. This one would change things. Had changed things. My beautiful city lay in ruins. So many lives lost. So many more missing.

It was, still is, hard to watch the footage on television. Though the fit of sobs no longer accompany a news broadcast I can't help but feel totally useless. And another emotion that is completely irrational. Guilt.

Guilt. Because I left. Because if I had stayed just a few more hours I could have been there to help my friends, to hug my Debbie, to offer support. Guilt because part of me wanted to be there, to share in her experience so I could understand everything fully. Guilt because part of me was so relieved that I left in time. That I was safe in this gorgeous apartment in Sydney. Guilt over the relief I felt everytime I heard the rising death toll and knew that my friends and family were safe.

The rational thinking side of me knows that I had no part in causing this tragedy. It just happened. But this doesn't help the guilt. I know that it's best I'm not in Christchurch, because I was staying with Debbie and she doesn't need an extra body getting in the way, using precious water, creating waste. Another person to worry about.

How can I stop feeling so useless? I can't help shovel silt or clean up broken glass from here. I can't give a hug to my friends when I see they desperately need one. I'm not able to fix broken pipes, rebuild fallen buildings or stop the aftershocks. What I can do is offer my words of comfort. Be there when someone needs to vent, or cry, or laugh. Keep my tears in check so that theirs can be free to flow.

I may not be there to help in person, but the emotional support I can give is just as valid. Words have power. Any witch knows that. Words have power and my words are those spoken throughout the world. Christchurch, family and friends, we are with you. You are not alone. Though the lights may go out and the earth may rumble, we will be here to hold a candle to light your way. Anything we can do, anything you need, just ask and it is yours. Our love, our hopes, our prayers are with you. We pray that you are safe, that you find strength to carry on, to rebuild your lives.

Keep safe. Stay strong. Don't be afraid to smile.

Blessings

Luana