



# MySafe:LA Podcast

Fire and Life Safety Education

Our mission: providing children, families, and seniors in Los Angeles with life-saving education, resources, and benefits.

## Episode 1

### Northridge Quake Overview

Announcer : You're listening to My Safe LA Fire and life safety podcast.

Cameron Barrett: Hello everybody, I'm Cameron Barrett. I'm the communications and education director for My Safe LA and we're the fire and life safety education partner of the Los Angeles Fire Department, and we are going to be talking about the North Ridge earthquake this week. In fact this entire month. The reason why is we've come upon the 20th anniversary, January 17th, 1994, the North Ridge earthquake hit Los Angeles and was the last, truly devastating, destructive earthquake that has hit Los Angeles. We've been real lucky over the last few decades. We're going to be talking to 2 officers of My Safe LA that lived through the quake, and have some fantastic tips about what to do during a quake, and most importantly, what to do before a quake hits to prepare and make sure that you can survive, and really bounce back. I am now joined by the Executive Officer of My Safe LA, David Barrett. Hi David.

David Barrett: Hey there Cameron, how are you today?

Cameron Barrett: I am fantastic. The reason why you've been asked to join us today is because you lived through the 1994 North Ridge earthquake. You were here in southern California. We are also joined by someone who not only lived through the earthquake, but reported on the North Ridge earthquake and that is Todd Leitz, our Public Information Officer at My Safe LA. Hey Todd.

Todd Leitz: Hey Cam, hard to believe it's been 20 years since the North Ridge earthquake.

Cameron Barrett: I wasn't around in 1994 in Los Angeles, I was on the East coast at the time, but both of you guys were in LA weren't you?

Todd Leitz: Yes we were.

David Barrett: I was in Orange County, it affected me down there, and I had family in LA so.

Cameron Barrett: Well what do you remember, I mean, did you feel it in Orange County?

David Barrett: From a scientific perspective, I didn't understand it so much at the time, but in many ways it relates in some way to what we're trying to look forward to in Los Angeles with early warning. I was asleep, obviously, it was 4:30 in the morning, and I woke up and I wasn't sure what woke me up, but I woke up and sat up in bed, and it was like, what is that sound? What I was experiencing was the P-wave of an earthquake and maybe five, ten seconds after I woke up ... Bam, I mean everything shook. Everything fell off the shelves, my dog went nuts, screaming and running around. I thought the house was going to collapse. At the same time, with the exception of things falling on the floor, nothing really happened. In Los Angeles, my girlfriend's mother lived in North Ridge and her house was destroyed, and so within hours we were up there. We experienced a number of the after shocks. We saw fires. We had to find shelter for her. It was a pretty amazing ordeal.

Cameron Barrett: How about you Todd, do you remember it?

Todd Leitz: I remember it like it was yesterday and my story is kind of long and involved because I was right in the middle of it. January 17th 1994, 4:31 in the morning. What we used to call 'o dark thirty. I was a young-ish radio news anchor for Metro Networks News working out of the studios at K-Earth 101 here in Los Angeles, and everyday I reported to work at 4am. I'd just driven under the Fairfax over-crossing of the Santa Monica 10 freeway less than half an hour before the earthquake collapsed it. I remember just before the quake, pounding away at my computer in my office ... I was trying to write a news cast because I went on the air at 5am, and I was thinking, " There's no news today. It's Martin Luther King Day and nothing's going on."

That's when the building started shaking, and shaking violently, and it was clear that this was a major earthquake. I dove under my desk, which is a good thing because my 3 television monitors and coffee maker ... Which was full of hot, freshly brewed coffee ... Flew off the shelves, smashing the glass that covered the top of my desk. I really can't remember how long the shaking lasted, but I waited it out and it seemed like a long time and I knew that this was a damaging earthquake and I felt like this was close by.

I remember picking my way through the debris of my office and I got to the studio where Metro had several booths for doing traffic reports on stations all over southern California and there weren't many people there at that hour. It was just me and I think a couple other people who were over-nighters, and the phone was ringing off the hook, so I answered a few panicked phone calls. I was trying to ascertain where the epicenter of the quake was, and we soon realized that our biggest client, CBS Radio's powerhouse all news station KNXNW had been knocked off the air by the quake. We worked to put out what we knew through KNX because our feed was still live and active.

In fact, to my knowledge, we were one of the only broadcast outlets still on the air immediately after the quake. After that, the next several hours were kind of a blur. I don't really remember much, but I know we were trying to get a grasp on the magnitude of the situation and report what we knew about injuries and damage.

I eventually got out and I hit the streets because I was a reporter, so I hit the streets to report on the aftermath of the quake, covering all the places that suffered major damage, but I made a pit stop to my own house in Sherman Oaks, which, as history shows, had been really hard hit by the quake for whatever reason. All the women in my life happened to be at my house, alone, during this disaster. My mother, my sister, my wife and my infant daughter rode out the quake and the immediate aftermath without me there, and I was working and desperately worried about what had happened to them, but I had a job to do and I just had to focus on that.

It turns out they were all okay; our house was damaged, nothing major. It's a day that's really seared in my memory, and what surprised me about it was how long it took us to fully recover and get back to normal, I mean normal commute patterns and all that kind of stuff in the aftermath of the earthquake. Boy, when that next one hits, we better be ready.

Cameron Barrett: Exactly, I mean, we talk about what needs to be done during an earthquake and I think that most of us know about that ... Drop, cover and hold on, and ride it out ... But it's the aftermath that really matters isn't it? You guys, you remember the aftermath don't you? It took a really long time ... And this was a relatively small earthquake and it was a relatively concentrated area that it affected because it was an up thrust fault that kind of bumped a

small area of LA. Imagine one that would rip the San Andreas ... That's going to be devastating.

David Barrett: Yeah, absolutely right. It's funny because we are in relative security most of the time, and we don't think about how traumatizing an earthquake would be. I was speaking to one of our designers and he told me that his aunt lived in North Ridge. A happy go lucky fun loving teacher, and from the moment that that earthquake in North Ridge struck, she was a morose, unhappy, terrified person who ultimately died of depression. It can change your life and, as you said Cameron, A concentrated area ... And the North Ridge quake lasted 7 seconds.

Cameron Barrett: Wow.

David Barrett: USGS says that if the San Andreas rips, it will be a full minute of shaking.

Todd Leitz: Yeah. Especially in the San Fernando Valley which is basically like a cereal bowl.

Cameron Barrett: Right, right.

Todd Leitz: With mountains on either side, so all of the fill of land here is just going to shake like a bowl of Jello, and you can just imagine the infrastructure ripping, the buildings toppling ... We need to get ready ...

The interesting thing about North Ridge, I thought was that ... I was in studios down in Venice and Fairfax ... Not to get too local here, but ... The quake was a good, what, 25 miles away from where I was? For some reason, just because of the lay of the geology and the lay of the land, the force of it came down and collapsed an over-crossing of the freeway and did quite a bit of damage down in that area, whereas other areas that sat on different types of soils and bedrock and things like that, weren't as badly damaged.

Kind of like a tornado can capriciously go through a town and leave some structures standing and others not. This type of quake was interesting because Sherman Oaks was hit very hard ... of course, North Ridge, the epicenter ... and then down toward the middle, Mid city Los Angeles off the 10 freeway had a lot of damage. I always thought that was really interesting, geologically.

Cameron Barrett: Yeah, it's a complicated city geologically. Like you said, there's bedrock, which will stand firm, and then there's a whole lot of fill

with a whole lot of people on top of it. With this huge population of Los Angeles, a densely populated city but a big city, too, there's really only one way to make the best of the aftermath of an earthquake and that's to prepare. Can you guys talk ... I mean you're safety experts ... Fire and life safety and earthquake safety and preparation experts. What should folks who are listening do, right this very second, to prepare?

David Barrett: Well, I think we can address it from a couple of different perspectives. I would tell you that nothing works well without a plan, and one of the things that we promote everywhere we go is make a plan and practice it. If you don't practice it, nothing's going to happen because you'll forget, and maybe twice a year do it once during the day, do it once at night.

Follow that plan, and there are many ways to put a plan together. We've got some pretty good information in the My Safe LA website about building a plan. You can learn about that by going to the My Safe LA website.

The LA Fire Department website has information, the Red Cross website has information. Southern California Earthquake Center has information as does Cal-Tech and the USGS. There's a lot of places where you can get information, but it starts with a plan and from there, Todd, what else do you need to think about?

Todd Leitz: Well it's not just a plan, but it's a plan for wherever you might be. Earthquakes are going to hit at any time. They'll hit at 4:30 in the morning like North Ridge did, or they'll hit in the middle of the day when you're at work, or they'll hit at night when you're out at the club or something. You have to think about; what would I do if there was a huge, damaging, catastrophic earthquake that hits when I'm at work, when I'm at home, when I'm out and about, when I'm in my car, what am I going to do? These are things you need to think about. Of course having some kind of an emergency kit with you at work, in your car, and of course, at home, is a great idea as well.

Cameron Barrett: That's a fantastic ... What should be in the kit?

Todd Leitz: Well, I think at the very least, you need to have a sturdy pair of shoes, because you may end up walking. There may be no passable roads, so you may be on foot. A pair of gloves, a dust mask. It's great to have a flashlight with working batteries, obviously. Maybe even a hand crank flashlight or a hand crank flashlight slash radio so you can get the latest information. A whistle is a great thing to have in your personal kit because if you

happen to be trapped, you can signal for help. Those are some basic things that are good to have in any kit, whether it be under your desk at work, under your bed at home, or in your trunk of your car.

Cameron Barrett: David, it's my understanding that the fire department asks you to be ready to manage on your own in a difficult situation for at least 72 hours. What are some of the things you're going to need in that time period?

David Barrett: You absolutely right Cameron. You want to have enough water. I think one of the things in this just in time kind of society that we live in now [inaudible 00:12:20] necessarily think about keeping things for a period of time, or having enough stuff, and as Doctor Lindsey Jones from the USGS says, people do not have nearly enough water. They need to have more water. Having enough water for every person in their family that they can live with for at least [crosstalk 12:39]

Todd Leitz: And pets. And pets don't forget.

Cameron Barrett: And pets. [crosstalk 12:41]

David Barrett: We absolutely don't want to forget our pets. Food, and when we're talking about food, we're talking about food that can be stored. One of the things that's really important about keeping water and keeping food and some of those materials is that they don't last forever.

If you create that kind of sustenance survivability kit for your house ... First of all it has to be some place where you can get to it if the house is damaged, and secondly you need to think about replacing it perhaps every 18 months or so. Originally we thought water would last for five years, but it really isn't potable if you leave it that long ... And it's very important not to leave water on top of concrete because there's a seepage problem through plastic which could actually affect the quality of the water.

There's a bunch of different kinds of things we need to think about and you're right, the Los Angeles Fire Department has 106 fire stations, under 1000 firefighters are on duty at any one time, and the USGS says that if the San Andreas rips, that there will be more than 1200 fires in just a few minutes. Just recently they've come up with a scenario about Hollywood and there they think more than 20 billion dollars in damage, 11,000 people injured or dead and the entire Hollywood area could be destroyed by fire. A

fire extinguisher and knowing how to use it is also a really important part of today's earthquake preparation kit.

Cameron Barrett: You can learn all about that at My Safe LA dot org as well. Fellas I think we're at the end of our time here, but thank you so much for talking about your personal remembrances and giving some safety and preparation tips for folks out there. We are going to be chatting with folks about North Ridge and about earthquakes in general all January long, and a lot of these conversations are going to be with first responders. Folks that were on the job in the Los Angeles Fire Department back in 1994, and all the things that they experienced trying to help Los Angeles recover and survive the North Ridge earthquake.

Announcer: This is a My Safe LA Fire and Life Safety podcast. Make sure to visit us at My Safe LA Safe LA dot org.