

**CHRIS HALLIGAN**

**Nature's disasters exhilarating**

The dream went like this: I found myself driving some convertible — I think it was my grandma's — across the South Padre Island Bridge. Suddenly, Tom Petty's "Free Fallin'" started playing on the radio.

Out of nowhere, I felt the overpass begin to shake violently. I lost control of the car. I found myself falling straight down into darkness. Next thing I knew I was white-water rafting down the Los Angeles River in my car, trying in vain to steer it, hoping the wheels could work as a sort of rudder. With another dark flash, I found myself washed upon the Pacific Coast Highway, completely dry. As if nothing had just happened to me, I looked at my clock and realized that I would be late for my lunch at the Cliffhouse in San Francisco — that is, if the earthquake hadn't launched the historic restaurant into the rocky sea below.

I awoke from that dream feeling titillated and refreshed, like I had just been on the scariest, most invigorating adventure of my life. It was fantastic.

I realized that morning that this dream was no coincidence, but that I was subliminally being sent a message. It was telling me something I already knew. This dream, in a sort of subconscious tapestry of events, was sending me a premonition. I found out that day that it must be in my cards that I was to be involved in some natural disaster.

How could I be so lucky?! I had only one question . . . when?

I say this not out of some sort of hidden sadistic desire, but because I, like many other people, consider the natural effects of disaster extremely exciting.

Just look at today's news sensationalism pertaining to disasters. Look at all the disaster movies made. Listen to people's testimonies regarding disasters in which they've been involved.

All of these things glorify disaster because it is interesting to see how people deal with it, and it's fun to imagine how we would deal with it if the "opportunity" arose.

Being a strong believer in the powers of fate manipulation, I decided that it was in my best interest to move to one of three places very soon to experience my disaster: California, the Gulf Coast, or the Caribbean — not because of all of the beautiful people, not because of all the money, not even because of the expansive beaches. While all of these things might contribute to my cause, I want to move to these places for one reason: They have more disasters per capita than any other place in the country.

ASUN elections aside, I have never



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actually experienced any kind of disaster. The closest I came to a disaster was my junior year in high school when a tsunami was to flood all of Whidbey, the island near Seattle where I lived.

Our entire community scampered into its cars and sped to the highlands of the locally famous Wahl Farm. We waited in anticipation for this huge wave of water to turn Wahl Farm into waterfront property and our homes into underwater gardens.

Man, were we disappointed when the tsunami dodged us and attacked some island in Japan instead. We were hoping for some exciting story to tell our grandkids some day. No such luck.

San Francisco, a glutton for disaster, has possibly the highest non-weather disaster rate per capita in the country — earthquakes, fires, etc., etc. I was really jealous of my friend, David, who got to experience firsthand a catastrophic earthquake.

It was the autumn of '89. Dave found it to be an unusually warm day in San Francisco. It was the first day of the World Series at Candlestick Park. Millions of people were in town for the festivities. Like so many other testimonials, Dave, too, felt something "not right" in the air.

"Negative karma was filling the air, choking us with its mysterious and faceless noose," Dave told me. "We just sat and waited."

I began to shudder in excitement as he told the rest of the story.

The ground began to shake violently. Huge cracks were forming in the streets, sucking the cars under. Buildings flashed into flames. Electricity was out all over town. People were panic-stricken; looters were having a heyday. That night, San Francisco made Lebanon look like

Lincoln, and I missed it all.

I wondered how Dave had been so lucky. Although many people weren't so lucky, which is sad, Dave got the advantage of experiencing it, living through it and telling about it.

We can't forget the flash fire that burned out half of Oakland this fall. People frantically trying to save their yuppie villas-on-the-hill, the community rallying to try to contain the monstrous flames.

Where was I during all of this excitement?

What about Hurricane Hugo? Truly a disaster of highly exciting proportions. I could only imagine driving down the street, the car blowing all over the road, rushing to get to my seaside home, waves lapping at it like they're about to have it for dinner.

I imagine barely getting the plywood up on the windows before seeing the neighbor's house collapse into the sea. Realizing that it might be time to abandon ship, I jump into the car, family all buckled in, and back out of the garage just before I see it slip down onto the beach and float away with the vicious tide.

Truly an experience one can only dream about.

Our most recent disaster was the flood of Los Angeles a couple weeks ago. The angels certainly left town that week, leaving the "city of sin and corruption" to be washed of its trespasses.

Cars were being sucked into the sea, the highways, usually surrounded by parched land, were flooded with water six feet deep. Homes were tumbling down the hills and within instants, campers turned into houseboats.

I wondered how come they got all the fun.

Many people will read this and think that I probably have flipped my lid. The Red Cross will send me horribly graphic pictures of disasters, Christian groups will condemn me as a heretic and people will write me letters telling of their harrowing experiences in the past.

But let's face it — we all love hearing about disasters and get a twinge of excitement in thinking that we are constantly surrounded with the opportunity to dodge fate, with our chances increasing depending on where we live.

Whether it's right or wrong, no one can say. We can't help the way we feel.

I can just hope that I might have my chance someday. Who knows? Maybe a tornado will hit Lincoln this summer, or a hurricane will hit Padre this spring break. If we could only be so lucky.

Halligan is a junior political science major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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