

## Risking lives, Mexicans try to salvage belongings after quake

October 17 2017, by Jose Osorio

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A woman cries as her husband accompanied by technicians gets into a building seriously damaged by an earthquake, to recover some of their belongings before its demolition in Mexico City, on October 13, 2017

Guadalupe Vazquez is standing below the wreckage of what used to be her home, patiently waiting for workers to recover the few belongings she has left after Mexico's September 19 earthquake: some photographs of her daughters hanging on the wall, still visible from the street.

The small but spry octogenarian lived in Mexico City's Narvarte neighborhood in a four-story apartment [building](#), half of which collapsed during the 7.1-magnitude [quake](#).

Her half is the one that collapsed, leaving nothing but one side of walls, including the one with the sepia-toned pictures of her daughters.

"Lupita," as her friends call her, miraculously escaped the quake, which killed 369 people, mostly in the capital.

The one-time mountain climber, who once traveled the world scaling some of the highest peaks on Earth, had gone out to buy bread just before the ground started to shake.

When she returned, Vazquez thought she had taken the wrong street: the building she had lived in for 50 years was unrecognizable.

Reality sank in when Vazquez saw her photos on the wall.

"I realized that would be the only thing I had left—if they manage to get them out," she said.

With the unstable building now set to be demolished, the authorities are letting one person at a time go back inside to retrieve belongings.

Accompanied by emergency workers, they bring out whatever they can, backpack after backpack, for themselves and their neighbors.



Technicians help residents recover some of their belongings from a building

Each time one of these daring young volunteers comes back down from the rubble, they are greeted with applause, hugs and tears.

"We just said goodbye to our home," said one, sporting a protective harness and helmet after making the trip.

Nearly a month after the quake, that goodbye is especially poignant.

Residents have set up an impromptu camp outside the building, staying there night and day—ostensibly to fend off looters.

The ground floor of the building used to house a dry cleaning service. For several days after the quake, a worker could still be seen ironing clothes on the street.

## Five minutes

Residents are limited to five minutes inside.

Hoisted by a crane, they enter through broken windows or holes in the walls, with strict instructions to move as little as possible.

Documents, photos and items of sentimental value are the most prized possessions.



This building is on the list of the first 13 that will be demolished

"It's crazy to be in there and see everything smashed to pieces, and you have to try not to create a single vibration," said Jose Colin, 38.

He managed to salvage a hard drive and a picture of him and his fiancée.

Like many of the younger residents, they were at work when the quake hit.

No one was killed when the building collapsed, something residents are calling a miracle.

Another resident, Oscar Landin, came down from the wreckage with a baby Jesus figurine for an elderly neighbor.

"I grabbed as much as I could... I wanted to get our documents from my mom's room, but it was impossible to reach," he said.

Nearly 50 buildings in Mexico City collapsed completely during the earthquake. Another 8,000 were damaged.

This one is on the list of the first 13 that will be demolished. Authorities are still carrying out inspections to decide how many more will be torn down.

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