

In his second letter (6.20), Pliny the Younger describes what he heard, and saw, after he and his mother left his uncle's villa. Among other things, he observed scared and shrieking people who faced certain homelessness and possible death as a result of the disaster:

Ashes were already falling, not as yet very thickly. I looked round: a dense black cloud was coming up behind us, spreading over the earth like a flood. "Let us leave the road while we can still see," I said, "or we shall be knocked down and trampled underfoot in the dark by the crowd behind." We had scarcely sat down to rest when darkness fell, not the dark of a moonless or cloudy night, but as if the lamp had been put out in a closed room.

You could hear the shrieks of women, the wailing of infants, and the shouting of men; some were calling their parents, others their children or their wives, trying to recognize them by their voices. People bewailed their own fate or that of their relatives, and there were some who prayed for death in their terror of dying. Many besought the aid of the gods, but still more imagined there were no gods left, and that the universe was plunged into eternal darkness for evermore.

There were people, too, who added to the real perils by inventing fictitious dangers: some reported that part of Misenum had collapsed or another part was on fire, and though their tales were false they found others to believe them.

A gleam of light returned, but we took this to be a warning of the approaching flames rather than daylight. However, the flames remained some distance off; then darkness came on once more and ashes began to fall again, this time in heavy showers. We rose from time to time and shook them off, otherwise we should have been buried and crushed beneath their weight.

I could boast that not a groan or cry of fear escaped me in these perils, but I admit that I derived some poor consolation in my mortal lot from the belief that the whole world was dying with me and I with it. (From Pliny's Second Letter to Tacitus, 6.20. Scroll down to LXVI. See, also [Pliny's Letters](#), beginning at page 17.)

Pliny and his mother survived; thousands of others did not.

See, also:

People of Pompeii

Pompeii and Vesuvius

The Last Day of Pompeii

Final Moments of Pompeii

Death of People in Pompeii

Credits:

Clip from "[Pompeii: The Last Day](#)," a docudrama produced by the BBC (in association with TLC/NDR) and co-produced in association with France 2. Original air date, on BBC One, was October 20, 2003.

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The film is based, in part, on Pliny the Younger's letters about the Vesuvius eruption. It uses computer-generated images to recreate what the eruption must have been like for the residents of Pompeii. Online, via BBC's Channel at YouTube.

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Alex Furguson (Pliny the Younger)

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Jim Carter (Polybius)

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Pompeii-While-Vesuvius-Erupts0>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Pompeii-While-Vesuvius-Erupts0>