

# Asian tsunami disaster news hits close to home

DISASTER, from Page 1a

Water did come in one place by the front glass doors and it took some cleanup, but no furniture was damaged.

Outside is a different story. I don't know how much the granite top table on our porch weighs, but it was washed to within inches of the glass doors. Boats are everywhere.

I heard the glass doors rattling about 8:30 a.m. and realized an earthquake was occurring somewhere. I thought Burma. No reason to be concerned.

The rattling lasted about 30 seconds. We left about 9:30 to drive to Malaysia for the week. When we reached the bridge to drive off the island, the exit bridge, the lower one, was closed. The cars were routed to the entrance bridge and all incoming traffic was turned back.

I figured terrorist attack. A truckload of Thais in front of us put their hands together and were praying. The phone rang, and Dang, one of our Thai family, called. The family's island, Maiton, was flooded on the beach level. The island is a mountain, so there is plenty of high ground and upper bungalows. Dang told us what was happening.

We started back to Phuket about 4 p.m. after talking to friends on the island who had checked the house. We got home about 7:30 p.m. We basically were two miles from disaster. Our friend's home was gutted, but she lived two miles south, on the bottom of the island.

The next day I walked down the beach a couple hundred yards to the Moslem village, the sea gypsies or boat people. Normally, there are about 30 long-tail boats tied down. Today maybe five are in the water and some of those are sinking. Their homes were spared, but in most cases, the boats were more valuable. They depended upon the daily catch to feed themselves and hopefully to have fish to sell. Today, wreckage blankets the beach. However, symbolic of our own good fortune, amid the debris and wreckage lay a fluorescent light bulb, intact, unbroken.

*In a follow up e-mail on Tuesday, Voni Taylor described some of the scenes she saw:*

I had just completed my scuba diving certification the week before. I had completed the two days of pool training and one day of open



A fishing village in southern Thailand lost many of the boats in the tsunami that hit the area on Sunday. The village was about two miles

northwest of where the worst damage was on Patong Beach in Phuket.

Photos by Voni Taylor

Pee Pee Island was totally destroyed. The wave washed across the entire island. Most people were still in bed or already diving, so the body count is huge. Some divers survived with stories of being slammed against coral reefs, pulled 18 meters down and being shot up out of the water like champagne corks. I could have been there. My mind is full of "could have's, should have's."

Huge trailers on the deep seaport dock are being used as a temporary morgue, and were filled with coffins. On the way back from the family's Maiton island we were in the procession of boats bringing the bodies back from Pee Pee.

This morning, the body count for Thailand was 400. This evening it's 1,100.

Noi, our Thai brother, said tomorrow the numbers will more than double because they had just gotten to a remote area that had been totally wiped out. Even the king lost his grandson, who was on a jet ski down here.

I can't write anymore. I can't sleep either. Usually the sound of the waves outside put me to sleep, but now I lay awake listening for another "big one."

We are so incredibly blessed. We are alive, we are well, and we are together. I love my family more than words can describe. It has really hit home at how many wonderful friends we have and how fast news can travel these days. The phone and e-mails have been constant.

Maybe I can sleep now. Maybe. Tomorrow is another day. We are fine. Please pray for all these families who have lost their loved ones.

sea training about three weeks ago, but then my training was interrupted by a business trip to Bangkok. The last day of training was suppose to be on Pee Pee Island on the following Sunday, but the boat was full so I completed my training at Ratcha Yai. The dive master said I could go to Pee Pee this Sunday for free but I had plans to go to Koh Lanta.

Anyway, three carloads of friends started off Sunday morning. Ken had noticed the sliding glass doors rattling like heck at about 8:30. We had some tremors last year, so he didn't think much of it. We left our house at exactly 9:45.

Apparently around 9:50, the water was sucked out to sea. People were snorkeling and suddenly found themselves on sand. Others were drawn to the expanded beach because fish were flopping around. And then wham! In came the wall of water 20-40 feet high. I can't imagine what would have happened if we were at home. Mom (Dawn) would have been sitting outside on the front porch drinking her coffee or writing letters like she does ev-

ery morning. The sliding glass doors would have been wide open. By the grace of God, we were not there.

We got back about 7:30 and although the water inside was minimal, we were happy to be home. The next morning really told the story though. We spent the day cleaning up and hearing horror stories. Our travel agent and her 7-year-old daughter had been swept out of their hotel swimming pool and taken out to sea. They haven't been found yet.

Today has been a tough day. My friend Shaloan and I went to the store and bought every toothbrush, toothpaste, bar of soap, and towel that we could find to donate at the Provincial Hall. Oh my God. It was organized pandemonium. People

were walking around dazed, translators were trying to communicate, but nothing prepared me for board after board of pictures of dead bodies needing to be identified. Children were separated from their parents — one 20-month-old baby was found alive, floating on a mattress out in the sea. The stories go on and on.

In the afternoon, Shaloan and I

ventured down to the most devastated area of Patong Beach. Cars were stacked on top of each other like match sticks. Huge boats were sitting in hotel lobbies. Mud was everywhere. It was unbelievable. But the really weird thing was that two blocks inland, everything is normal — business as usual. I guess that's lucky — although it's hard to feel lucky with so many dead.

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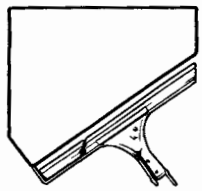
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