

## Boxing Day Tsunami by Faye Blackshaw

1

Have you ever had that sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach that you might not actually survive? I did eleven years ago. But let me go back.

Suitcases ready at the door, we left London on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2004, on what we thought was going to be the holiday of a lifetime.

Since as far back as I can remember, Dad had always been going on about Sumatra; how much we would love it in Indonesia. Mom, who was always telling Dad that maybe we would go next year, was becoming tired of Dad and his holiday resort brochures.

To Grace and my great surprise Dad bounded in, grinning from ear to ear, exclaiming “We’re going! We’re going!” All the excitement was calmed down a bit by Mom saying we had lots to do before we could leave: horrid injections; organizing someone to look after our cat, Misty and buying new beach gear.

2

We fell in love with the resort instantly. Time went by in a happy blur. Swim, eat, explore and sleep. The rustle of mosquito nets lulled us to sleep at night and the trumpet of an elephant woke us in the morning, reminding us of the adventures that lay ahead that day. Christmas, the best and most unusual Christmas ever, was spent eating the most amazing food, lounging on the spectacular beach and gazing out to the crystal waters of the bay.

The same wonderful heat. The same tropical noises. The same refreshing salty smell. Yet something felt weirdly different on Boxing Day morning. We shrugged it off and forgot about the oddness. We followed the same usual routine as the morning wore on. Seven o’clock and even nine o’clock came and went. Then everything changed...

3

People looked around in curiosity and confusion as slowly the sea drew back its cool refreshing grasp at an alarming rate. All this was hard to take in as it looked totally weird with fish flapping helplessly around on the exposed sand. A towering wall of water was growing bigger out at sea. It was travelling closer and getting ever taller. Suddenly a cry went up.

Tsunami! Tsunami! Within seconds the unstoppable water rushed in. As the wave crashed over I grabbed onto Grace (my little sister). I felt something hit me hard. We tumbled forward together. I felt totally out of control. I felt warm blood gushing out. I struggled to the surface. I lost grip on Grace. I gasped in huge lungful’s of air.

“Grace!” I shouted. To my immense relief I heard a return cry from nearby. My arms closed around her. Reason to fight for survival rushed back into my heart. Holding onto each other for dear life, we drifted on when, just in time, I grabbed onto a tree. Once more the mass water started to rush back

out to meet the sea. I knew this was my chance. I clambered up the tree in frenzy, half dragging my sister in my haste.

The next thing I knew I was cradling my sister close. I hoped we were now safe. Again the treacherous waters surged around the tree, reaching higher all the time.

I'd never been a huge fan of praying but right then I prayed with all my heart. Willing myself to cling on, not only to the tree but to Grace as well, with all my strength. Somehow I managed. Not daring to leave the safety of the tall tree, we made ourselves as comfortable as we could in its branches. My last thought as darkness fell was of Mom and Dad. Had they survived? Where were they?

4

Rummaging in my pockets I had managed to produce a somewhat scratched penknife; a soggy tube of sweets and an almost full bottle of water. Using my new found treasures I sponged out and wrapped our bone-deep gashes. A day or a week might have passed in the eternity we spent up in that tree.

In the end we summoned all our courage and climbed slowly down from our safe haven. Littering the ground was the wasted remains of people's lives. Heaps of debris was strewn in every direction. Everywhere we looked destruction filled our eyes. Dead fish and other small animals lay motionless among all the mess; a constant reminder of all that did not survive that terrible day

A pitiful whining noise filled our ears. Looking around we stumbled forward when suddenly a limping kitten emerged from under what might once have been a car. It came hesitantly closer until we could almost touch it. I marvelled at how this tiny creature could possibly have survived. Grace reached out offering it her hand and then cradled the tiny bedraggled creature to her chest. As kind hearted as she is, Grace could not leave the little thing there.

5

Almost overwhelmed by a wave of total despair; my eyes filled with tears. The gash on my arm was throbbing terribly. A longing for my parents rushed over me. The shadow of doubt of ever finding them clouded me. I feared that we were now all alone in the world.

Suddenly the sound of our crying was joined by another's. Looking up I scanned the wasteland around us. A flicker of hope was sewn in my heart. By my side, Grace let out a shriek of joy as we saw our father emerge; looking desperate and a mere shell of the man he was

Unable to control himself, he staggered towards us in floods of emotional tears. We waded forward into his arms and clung to each other sobbing relief. I had never seen my dad crying before. Grace and I looked expectantly around for Mom. We looked at Dad and saw the devastation in his eyes and realised Mom was never coming back to us.

That reunion was the happiest and the saddest moment in my entire life.