



Updates 1-2

1st- 2nd January 2005

Hello everyone,

The new year is upon us. May our coming days be filled with inspiration and kindness, so that we can work together to dispel the misery of the world.

I have details on the damage caused by the tsunami at Golden Buddha and the other towns: There are three villages on Koh Phratong: Tapa Yoi, Bak Jok, and Tung Dap. Of these, Bak Jok and Tung Dap have been completely destroyed. Other severely affected villages in the area include Baan Talae Nok and Hat Praphat. The villagers have lost not only homes, but their fishing boats - the main source of food and income for most families. These families rely almost completely on the sea for their survival, there is very little farming, cottage industry, or tourism in the area. According to Lory, whom I talked to today, the tsunami victims all now have some access to food, drinking water, and clothing. However, they are all huddled in the temple, and will need better housing soon. There is also concern about the mid-term, and long-term well being of the villagers, as many of the aid agencies may pack up and leave soon.

I would also like to take a moment to honor the losses that conservation has suffered on Koh Phratong. Naucrates, a grassroots conservation organization, is headed by Monica Aureggi, who has been spearheading sea turtle protection, environmental education, and other efforts on Koh Phratong for over 6 years. Naucrates has lost its research center, museum, computers, and all of the volunteer housing. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact Monica at naucrates12@hotmail.com

Among the deceased were two women who worked with us. Lisa Jones and Rebecca Clarke were both women of exceptional character and integrity. Their compassion for the environment, their concern for the people around them, and the joy they spread in the world will not be forgotten. As Koh Phratong emerges from this difficult time, Lisa and Rebecca will continue to serve as an inspiration for those of us who are working to protect the natural beauty, human communities, and marine diversity of Koh Phratong. My deepest sympathies go out to Monica, and the families and friends of Lisa and Rebecca.

The donation fund is doing well, but we still have a long way to go. More details to come.

Following is an excerpt of an email I received earlier today about the cremation ceremony held for 5 of our beloved friends. Below that is a gripping description of the damage in a village just north of Koh Phratong.

Thanks, and take care,

Bodhi

the monks in their ochre, orange and yellow robes sat on the platform in front of us, the clean white tiled floors cool in the tropical heat. an open sala (room) with a distant ceiling allowing our prayers to mingle with the monk's chanting of the ancient pali scriptures. "buddhanam saranam gachami; dharmanam seranam gachamii; sanganam seranam gachamii." sonorous melodies to carry our wounded emotions up into the space around us and out to the spacious landscape outside. a older thai woman sitting near lucy and the family would advise and lead us in our mutual prayers. at times, we were asked to lean forward to touch the one in front of us with an outstretched hand. a tide of humans reaching out for another suffering soul. a web of affection and support pressing toward the most vulnerable & wounded among us. hands stretched, fingers akimbo, bodies inclined as a human monument of love & tenderness. pace yourself. breath in. breath out. the crying has begun to recede. this is the third visit to the wat for prayers and benedictions. there is time yet to try to understand. time yet to forgive and heal. time to turn to our children and hug them again. time to learn to temper our angers and stretch our compassion. time. ever elusive. ever present. ever after...

Email from Paul Saunders, based at Baan Talae Nok

(Warning - this is a very depressing email)

As for the village, everything within 500 meters of the ocean is in big trouble. There was a hut in the middle of the road and the huts are all flattened. Some of them are just gone- there no rubble or debris to clean up everything has disappeared. You'd never know that there was a hut left there unless you'd seen it before. The school is a pile of rubble and apparently there were a few kids as well as the teacher in it when the wave struck. The teacher is dead as well as lots of the kids. There are 39 definite deaths and one body still unaccounted for. That is about one fifth of the population of the village. The body of Lek's son has been found and Nut's brother's family are all dead.

We went to the fishing village near the mangroves and it's unbelievable. There is nothing left at all. It's not like there's some foundations or rubble because the houses were all wooden. A government worker went to assess the situation and said that there was no disaster because he couldn't see any sign that humans had lived there. All the kids were killed and every adult except for two who climbed trees. The bodies of the rest have been found. The only sign that humans have been there for any length of time is a kid's swing left swaying poignantly in the wind; unfortunately there's no-one left to swing on it now. When you think of all the kids shouting "Hello!!!" at you it really brings tears to your eyes.

Some of the villagers up near the mangroves saw the wave coming and instead of climbing a tree they got on their motorbikes with their families and tried to beat the wave to the school where they could turn left and move away from the sea. None of them made it. What was even worse was that we were driving back to the centre and we saw a woman lying in the road. We put her in the back of the pickup and then took her down the road to some paramedics. She was ok and not involved in the wave- she'd just fainted upon finding her son's body.

We have also been to Hat Praphat Beach where the Research station is that works closely with the turtle project - the little village there is worse than Baan Talae Nok. There are seventy dead which is about eighty percent of the village. The carnage is unbelievable.