

# SAFE HARBOR

PASTOR GARY KUSUNOKI FROM SAFE HARBOR MINISTRIES ASSESSES DAMAGE

story by Gary Kusunoki

*I have come into deep waters,  
where the floods overflow me. I am  
weary with my crying; my throat is  
dry; my eyes fail while I wait for  
my God.*

Psalm 69:2-3



*Military teams engaged in the gruesome task of body recovery.*

With each passing kilometer, the amount of damage grew worse, as did the body count. We asked how many people had died in each village—7 in one, 12 farther south, and then 25. Suddenly, when we reached the village of Hikkaduwa, the death toll skyrocketed—more than 1,500. Here a train was derailed by the tsunami. It had been full of vacationers on their way to spend the day after Christmas at the beach. There was an incredible stench of rotting corpses. The train tracks were twisted and mangled, and the engine lay on its side about 40 feet from the tracks.

Brightly colored holiday clothing was strewn over the landscape. The train had come into Hikkaduwa just after the first wave hit. People panicked, and ran to board it, thinking they would be safe on the giant vehicle. More than 400 people jumped on as the second wave hit, lifting the train from the tracks. The cars were tossed about wildly, some landing 200 to 300 feet away. Initially, its cars were under water, but the death toll became apparent as the water receded. Only 2 of the estimated 1,400 passengers survived.

The hardest part was seeing the small shoes and stuffed animals, reminders of the little children on board. No matter how much I tried, I kept imagining the revelry turning to horror as they looked out the window and saw the huge wave approaching.

*Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake!  
For in death there is no remembrance of You; In the grave who will give You thanks?*

Psalm 6:4-5

**In the hospital ward**—A mother was there with her 4-year-old boy, Yuan. They were the only survivors from her family. Her husband, father-in-law, and 11-year-old daughter were missing. She knew they were dead. The mother told us that on the morning the tsunami hit, she and her family were getting ready to leave. The first wave came with no warning, and it immediately destroyed her home. They were pushed into the rushing water. She never saw her family again. She



*Train cars were thrown 300 yards from the tracks by the wave. Three cars are missing and feared swept out to sea.*

grabbed Yuan and tried desperately to hang on to him. More than once she lost her grip, until finally he slipped from her grasp. She thought that he had drowned until relatives found him at another hospital. When I asked what she was going to do when they got out of the hospital she said she didn't know. They had lost everything. Her hus-



*Yuan, 4 years old, was pulled from the raging waters with a skull fracture. His 11-year-old sister and father are presumed dead.*

band was the provider, and she had no idea how she would survive.

At the hospital, we were shown the make-shift morgue that had been the repository of more than 1,000 bodies just a few days ago. Because of the stench and health problems, the bodies had been buried. About 700 bodies had been identified by relatives and taken away for burial. More than 400 people remained unidentified, and were buried in a mass grave; some of them were Westerners. Fingerprints and photographs were taken of each gruesome body.

The morgue had been turned into a macabre photo gallery, with pictures roughly taped to the wall. Although the floors had been cleansed and sterilized, the cleaning fluid could not mask the odor that still remained. It was so difficult to see. I had to rush out of there, unable to look at another picture. ☹

## Safe Harbor

<http://www.safeharbor.us>

1 800 797 HOPE (4673)

P.O. Box 80820

Rancho Santa Margarita, CA

92688 – USA