



# Tsunami 2004: Unawatuna, Sri Lanka

*Miss Tracey Lee*

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Boxing Day, 2004, in Sri Lanka was a day when many people lost their lives in a 'freak act of nature'. Asia experienced the second largest earthquake on record in the Indian Ocean, off the west coast of Sumatra, releasing massive tsunamis which brought death and devastation throughout the region. The mega-thrust earthquake created a geological catastrophe and approximately six hundred miles of fault lines ruptured in the Asian sea. Two of the planet's plates went head to head. As one pushed down on the other it was squeezed and the pressure built up until the plates erupted, releasing an enormous amount of energy. The sea bed rose and within seconds the water column shifted to create a massive wall of water. The tsunami started to travel in different directions across the Indian basin. Although this was picked up by experts at the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre in Honolulu, there was no warning system in place in Asia. This meant there was no time for people to evacuate the beaches and head inland. Had a system been in place this would be a very different story and many unnecessary deaths could have been prevented. Early that morning, everyone was blissfully unaware of the horrors that lay ahead. They were going about their daily chores, eating their breakfast, taking an early dip in the crystal water or lying on the beach catching the early morning sun rays, happy and relaxed. What began as a normal day for hundreds of thousands of people turned out to be one of the most catastrophic days in history. In Sri Lanka alone, somewhere between thirty-eight thousand and thirty-nine thousand people became victims of the tsunami. It is estimated that at least three hundred thousand people died in twelve different countries throughout Asia and Africa on that day – the exact figure may never be known. The countries affected were Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India, Thailand, the Maldives, the Seychelles, Bangladesh, Burma, Kenya, Malaysia, Somalia and Tanzania. Tracey Lee was on holiday with her partner and family when the disaster struck. This is her story of survival against the odds.

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