

Another From Rtn Joe Lindland, January 2, 2005

And I looked with his eyes

This morning I went with 4 wonderful ladies into Phuket Town. Phuket town is the major city on Phuket about 1/2 hour drive towards the middle of the island. It was a beautiful ride in the early hours with little traffic. It was their idea to go and I was the chauffeur. My plans today were to rent a car and see many attractions in Phuket. I was looking forward to a wonderful, pleasant day of sightseeing.

Alisa, one of the 4 would be my guide/companion and the 3 others were her co-workers. They all work at Bali Hai, a massage shop. They work from 10:00 AM to 12:00PM 6 days a week. They work very hard and earn on a good day \$25.00US take home. They live very meagerly and 4 of them will share a one room apartment. One room about 15 foot square with the bathroom in the corner. One bed for 2 to sleep on and the floor is for the other two. They spend their day working, go home to wash their clothes in the sink to hang dry overnight to get up and start again. They are all very happy and wonderful people. They have nothing, want nothing and live life peacefully with great pleasure. We should...I have...learned a lot from them. When they heard I was renting a car to see the sights, they informed me that I was taking them into Phuket town and if I wanted to continue on, I could pay for the Tuk-Tuk (taxi) for their return. Of course this was only a request from them but no one could refuse. They wanted to go to the relief center to make a donation to help their people. They wanted to give any or all of what they really didn't have. We arrived to find a area about the size of two football fields side by side.

As I walked around reading the signs there was one area that now housed all the embassy's for the tourists. There was another area the helicopters were coming in and out of. The Red Cross was set up taking donations of Cash, food, clothing or anything else that could help. There was a line of people standing waiting for a new job as the hotels and such they used to work in were now destroyed. Another area was for the lists of identified. The worst area was the boards and boards of pictures and pleads for the return of loved ones.

It was there I met him. His face was that of your brother. His face was that of your neighbor's sister. His face was everywhere. It was boards and boards of pictures and descriptions of missing locals and tourists. Rewards for information. Pleads for any word. His face could be seen in the eyes of every picture and in the words of every desperate cry for loved ones. It was the face of death and he had made eye contact with every soul on this island. I walked past the overwhelming outpouring of people helping, the news teams from all over the world and the locals and farangs (foreigners) all there for a common cause. But

to me, this cause is over. Death won. It showed everywhere you looked. The battle now is to go on with life. The battle will be hard but these people will be fine.

Now, come back to my friends who took me here. Look at them. Living life with so little and so happy. They showed me today again as I watched each one of them give money to the Red Cross. They each gave what was likely their food money for the week. And they didn't think twice about it. They didn't look back. And what I don't understand is that they did this like it was nothing and the sights that we all saw didn't seem to affect them. I on the other hand was put very hard in my place. I gave every penny I had but felt I did nothing. I kept seeing that face. Every face of every person on those bulletin boards just kept piercing through my soul. I can't imagine being the person who had to put up the picture on that board. I don't care what they say about the number of deaths-there are more people missing that will never be counted.

I've felt bad before in world events. 9/11 killed so many but it wasn't in my backyard. I saw it on the news, I felt for the families but I didn't see it first hand. To see it first hand is a life changing experience. While it's not a good one, it does open my eyes. Wide open and bloodshot. Today's experience was far worse than the first day I saw Patong beach.

There really was no point to the rest of the day.
Joe