

Student Name  
Date

## **A Vacation in Paradise**

The ad on the Internet travel site said, “You will experience golden beaches with glistening sand caressed by the gentle roll of the Indian Ocean,” so I decided I needed a break from work and I would spend Christmas 2004 in Sri Lanka at the exquisite Palms Hotel. I called my best friend to see if she would like to join me in paradise and she quickly replied, “Count me in!” I couldn’t believe it! In three weeks I was going to be in paradise.

We left for Sri Lanka on December 23, 2004. We couldn’t wait to put our toes in the Indian Ocean and feel the gentle roll of the waves on our feet as promised. Our hotel was on Kalutara Beach and it was more stunning than we could have imagined. The view from our hotel room was breathtaking. The Indian Ocean was calm and the water glistened in the warm sun. We congratulated ourselves on making such a great decision for a winter getaway. We spent the days at the beach and the evenings sight seeing. Sri Lanka was gorgeous and the people were wonderful.

December 26, 2004 started out like any other day in paradise. It was about 10:28 A.M. and we were lying on the sun-drenched beach soaking up the golden rays of the sun, when we heard ear-piercing screams. My friend and I jumped up and we couldn’t believe what we saw! What was seconds earlier, a gentle rolling ocean, turned into a man-eating monster.

We ran as fast as our sun-burned bodies could carry us. We tried to stay ahead of the water, but it became impossible. The water dragged us until we grabbed onto a pole. Suddenly the pole gave way and we were slammed into a tree. My friend and I were still together. We were able to climb the tree and look over the devastation that lay before us. The killer waves left a path of death and destruction that was hard to imagine.

We clung to the tree for dear life. It took about two hours for the water to subside. We climbed down carefully and knew immediately that we needed to help. We ran into a Doctor who quickly set up a makeshift hospital in our devastated hotel lobby. We did what we could. Everything was destroyed for miles and there was no place for anyone to stay. Later the Red Cross came and set up temporary headquarters a few miles from our hotel and we were able to help deliver fresh food and water for those who needed it. Helping others kept us busy so we were not able to dwell on our small problems.

It wasn't until later that we got a name for what happened. It was a Tsunami! It was explained to us as an earthquake under the ocean. It registered 9.2 on the Richter scale. Later we learned that approximately 229,000 people were killed, 30,000 in Sri Lanka alone. It was the deadliest disaster in Modern History and my friend and I had been a part of it and survived

On our way home we realized how lucky we were to be alive. We knew that we would never be the same and in some way that was alright with us. As our lives were passing in front of us we realized that it was not cars, money or jewelry that was important, but family and friends and helping others. Somehow the words, "golden beaches with glistening sand caressed by the gentle roll of the Indian Ocean," will never again sound the same. Our next journey will be to find meaning in why we survived and others didn't.