

## A Tsunami of Good Will

by Dr. Richard Craft

None of us will ever forget the first sights of that large wave coming ashore in Indonesia, obliterating everything in its path. Nor can we ever forget the sight of helpless human beings swept along with the outgoing tide never to be seen again. It is reported that entire villages lost all their children. Unable to struggle against the elements, they were easy victims to a force bigger than their little bodies could handle.

What a tragedy, what a horrible moment for tens of thousands who in an instant came to the conscious realization that their life was over. It truly was a physical and emotional tsunami of staggering proportions, one most of us thought we'd never see in our lifetime.

Through the miracle of satellite TV, the tragedy was soon beamed across the world and we stood transfixed by its power and enormity. Within minutes of its broadcast, a tsunami of good will began to build in the hearts of millions around the world, especially here in the USA.

By the time this article is printed and in the hands of our townspeople, I predict that public donations alone will exceed \$500 million, not counting the government contribution, or the military response locating there for survival and rescue missions.

Other countries have responded as well and for this we thank them all for their generosity, but one factor stands out above all. While governments give from their treasuries, many citizens from these "developed" countries cannot give the amounts the American give because of the high taxes paid to run their governments.

It is interesting to note, that I had always thought America was the largest giver on a per capita basis, but I recently found out that Israel tops the USA. Here is a country that has known tragedy, isolation, suicide bombers, and great national pain and yet will contribute to any country where devastation has been felt.

I can well remember standing on **Main Street**, in front of *St. Mary's & St. Andrew's Church* with a large group of volunteers in 2001. A tsunami of major magnitude had been unleashed against innocent people in New York City and those who tried to save them. Our village and town re-

sponded in remarkable fashion and, when all was counted, I believe contributions from Kerhonkson, Ellenville, and points in between amounted to around \$50,000. I still can remember motorists coming through our line two or three times and giving each time in response to that human tragedy.

I see an even greater response with this latest crisis (I'm struggling to find the right words). Many in 2001 knew someone who knew someone connected with that tragedy. And please do not think that I am trying to minimize the tragic loss of life at the World Trade Center. The scene of falling twin towers, people jumping to their deaths, will be imprinted in my memory forever as activities at *Town Hall* came to a screeching halt that morning.

But somehow with determination, that complex will be rebuilt. With compassion, the public responded to families. Friends, loved ones, churches and all faiths gathered the wounded families to them and helped see them through a protracted and agonizing few months. Most have rebounded and gone on with their lives, even though a void exists in many families to this day.

Not so in Sri Lanka or Banda Aceh where entire families vanished. Survivors could not go back to their homes because there were none. They could not go to the tap and get a drink of clean water because there was none. They had lost their clothing, their meager resources, and found themselves sleeping on the still wet ground under a monsoon sky.

Tsunamis are no respecter of persons. Even vacationing, well-heeled visitors found themselves torn from their families, many tragically. They were all in the same state. The rich became poor and the poor became poorer. In many instances, the poor rescued the rich and the rich rescued the poor.

You ask, "What is the value of recounting all this misery in a town magazine whose motives are upbeat and positive?" I think it is time to thank each and everyone of you for responding to 2001, and yes to 2004-2005. I also think it is time for us again to realize that there is a world out there that is hurting. I saw it for myself twenty years ago when I visited the west African nation of Ghana. Many millions of people today live on one meal a day if they are lucky.

Civil wars rage, religious wars continue, famine is everywhere, and is almost a losing proposition. Armed insurgents battle government efforts to supply devastated villages with food and water, tyrants reign over vast territories, subjecting their citizens to bare existence. Yes, our problems whether we are blue or red seem to pale when we consider that fellow human beings are dying by the thousands each day of disease, starvation, land mines etc.

Yes, Americans have always been a generous people and once again we have been called to the task. We have been a haven to the huddled masses. Through our generosity we have rebuilt nations, nations that once were our dedicated enemies.

Yes, a tsunami of major benefit is in the works. It is my prayer for those who have survived that their future will be brighter than their past. It won't replace the lost loved ones not matter what the tragedy, but it will instill in hearts once devoid of it, the prospects of hope, something missing their entire lives. If you haven't done it already, write that check to your favorite legitimate charity and earmark it to their disaster fund. I know you'll do your part, because you are AMERICANS. 



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