

Your Personal Coach

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Living as I do on a fragile island, has given me a heightened appreciation of the delicate relationship between human beings and nature. I'm aware of the dangers of hurricanes and tidal surges and try to make conscious, intelligent decisions about when to stay and when to leave. I'm prepared and follow all the expert advice about how to get ready for these natural disasters.

But, the earthquake that erupted off the coast of Sumatra at 7:00 AM on Sunday, December 26 spawning tsunamis that ravaged Sri Lanka, India and dozens of other countries has left me numb and speechless. These two-story high walls of crashing seawater have, as I write this, left more than 116,000 people dead with hundreds of thousands more at risk for death and disease in the aftermath of this unspeakable tragedy. In some parts of Indonesia, one in every four citizens is dead or missing and every coastal village and town has been destroyed. One Indonesia-based British conservationist, flying over the area in a helicopter, described the scene as being like "a nuclear blast had leveled the area." Calong, a town of 13,000, had been "vaporized," he said.

Throughout the area, survivors must cope with the grief of loss, the horrific memories of watching loved ones washed out to sea, and the hopelessness of losing all their worldly possessions, their jobs, their homes. I cannot even begin to imagine myself in this sad and devastated place or how I might possibly cope with loss of such magnitude.

Early Sunday morning, and hours before the killer waves had reached any shore, an American federal agency detected the earthquake – the most powerful recorded in the last 40 years with a staggering 9.0 on the Richter Scale -- about 100 miles off the western coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. The agency issued an immediate report that tsunamis could result from this rupture on the deep ocean floor. The report was picked up in Hong Kong, but the alert never reached many other parts of Asia or East Africa.

According to CNN, experts say that the catastrophic death toll in Asia might have been reduced had Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India been part of an international warning system – started in 1995 -- designed to alert coastal communities about deadly waves. Tsunamis, I have learned, are not as common in the Indian Ocean as they are in the Pacific where the ocean basin is rimmed by the Ring of Fire a long chain where shifting tectonic plates cause a high level of seismic activity. Such an early warning system has been in place in the Pacific since 1946 after tsunamis crashed over Hawaii. But the main reason these Asian and African nations do not have wave sensors is not because they are in a less seismically active area. It is simply because these countries are economically poor. According to one official with Indonesia's Meteorology and Geophysics Agency, wave sensors were not available because, "they are too expensive and we cannot afford them."

This is the digital and technological divide played out in real time, in real lives, in real deaths. If we are to become a true global community, we cannot let these differences stand. Information is the new global currency. Had we experienced this same kind of seismic event off the coast of North Carolina, we would have more warning through technology – waves sensors, cell phones, television, Internet, sirens. Perhaps our

technology would have been enough to save all our lives. Perhaps, not. But many communities would certainly have had enough warning to avoid the kind of loss of human life we are now witnessing on our news channels and in our newspapers.

As I watch the news and grieve, I'll be praying for the victims and their families. I'll be hoping for healing for the survivors of this horrific experience. I'll be making a contribution to the International Red Cross. In our global world, it is incumbent on wealthy countries to extend the hand of friendship and connection by offering generous support for recovery to our devastated brothers and sisters in Asia and Africa. And when we have cleaned up and the healing has begun, it is my fervent belief that we need to share more. We have an obligation to extend the benefits of technology to all the citizens of the world. Let it start here. In America.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2005 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.