

## A SURVIVOR'S ACCOUNT ON THE 2004/12/26 TSUNAMI DISASTER

On that fateful day, I was on the move from Galle to Colombo in a bus. Although, we saw the sea rolling on towards land around Ratgama/Boossa about 3-4 minutes after fuelling at one shed, having left Galle around 9:20 in the morning in an intercity, none of us would have taken it seriously since there have been numerous instances where the sea has eroded the land along this stretch of the coastal belt. But, on this particular instance, it appeared that this was not the kind of ordinary sea erosion as water continued to flow in the direction of land.



(map link : <http://www.srilanka-reise.de/srilanka/index.php>)

Fortunately, there was another fuelling station, which we turned towards, as the sea waves kept on invading land. Some of us got down from the bus as the water level rose to about 1 - 1 1/2 feet above the ground. We ran towards the backyard and then, the invasion of the sea appeared to have stopped for the moment. By sheer chance, the backside of the shed's property was a slope towards some low land and this also contributed towards the water level not rising gradually.

We started off in a few minutes. There was a guy who was seated beside the driver and who insisted that we should turn right and drive inland at the earliest possible junction. He seemed to know that there should be a short-cut road to Baddegama (which is situated around 10 km inwards) somewhere around. We all knew that there was one road running inland from the Ratgama junction but the nature of the sea and the state of the road didn't warrant any further travelling along the main road. Thus, we turned interior at the first road junction<sup>1</sup> while the conductor and a few others cleared the debris along the road, so that there was space enough to put the two wheels in between. I got down from the bus at Sandarawala junction at Baddegama, where we reached after travelling for around 20 pulsating minutes (they were the most tense minutes in my life). There was a slow bus to Galle from Baddegama<sup>2</sup> which I took to reach home safely (I don't know where it terminated since the whole of the town of Galle would have been devastated by then. I got down at a place called Beligaha junction, a distance of about 2-3 km from our house).

<sup>1</sup> Later, as I saw, this is actually the second junction from where it occurred.

<sup>2</sup> A totally inland route apart from the final 1 km ride towards the stand.

In the night, one of my friends told me that the next bus in the queue at the Galle stand was found jammed among the debris with all the passengers stuck inside and killed. I have not been able to ascertain this story myself, though all the buses in the stand are said to have been washed away to different places.

In this story we see the importance of listening to the locals of an area or people who seem to have knowledge about it when a natural disaster is likely to happen. If our driver also was too adventurous and went ahead, we also would have been possibly caught up with the worst disaster of our times.

Haritha Waidyaratne,  
240/A, Wackwella Road,  
Galle,  
Sri Lanka.