

10 Years After the Horrific Indian  
Ocean Tsunami

# Tsunami Reunion!

*It has been more than a decade since the Indian Ocean tsunami, the deadliest tsunami in recorded history. Some 230,000 people were left dead or were washed away by the monstrous waves, never to be seen again. Countless parents suffered the anguish of losing their children and countless children became orphans. In an incredible turn of events, 10 years later one family was told that there was a chance that their missing children were alive. Could it be possible? This is the story of one family's remarkable, heartwarming reunion.*



• *Shimon Rosenberg*

Septi Rangkuti fought with his last ounce of strength against the stormy waves that threatened to tear his two children from his hands. Just when he was sure that the worst was over, another wave, a dark wall of water mixed with solid debris, washed over him.

Septi put his arms around seven-year-old Arif and four-year-old Raudhatul in a determined effort to protect them from the angry ocean waves. He soon realized, though, that all his efforts were wasted. He was fighting against a power far mightier than he. Just then he noticed a large piece of wood floating by; it may once have been the door of a home. He grabbed the plank and lifted his children onto it.

Just then a third, much larger wave arrived. This was when the tsunami waters receded from land and returned to the sea. As the waters headed out, they drew everything into the ocean with them. Septi doggedly held onto the plank of wood, but the monstrous ocean wave was too much. One by one his fingers lost hold of the wooden door and the plank swept out to the open sea.

The devastated father could hear the terrified voices of his children crying “Daddy! Daddy!” His heart was torn but there was absolutely nothing he could do to save them. He himself was tossed around like a leaf on the waves unable to control his own destiny. Like his children, Septi found himself pulled irresistibly out to the sea.

## The Ocean Water Is Coming!

December 26, 2004, dawned like any other day in the countries lying around the edge of the Indian Ocean, from Somalia to Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Children went to school while adults went about their daily work. Fishermen were out looking to nab the day’s catch and peddlers were out peddling their wares.

In Sumatra, a volcanic island in western Indonesia, Septi Rangkuti lay back down for some shuteye after getting up early to take care of some urgent matters. On a normal

day, Septi, an electrician, would now be on his way to work carrying a sack with pliers and screwdrivers. Today was Sunday, however, and Septi had no emergencies awaiting his professional attention. He could afford to relax.

His wife had left to wash the clothes at the nearby well. A successful seamstress busy raising their three children, Mrs. Rangkuti was strong in character. Her parents died when she was young and she was forced to look after her four younger siblings. By the time she married Septi she had more life experience than many people have in a lifetime.

The weather was calm that morning and the skies were clear in Aceh, home to the Rangkuti family. Aceh is a province along the northern shore of the island of Sumatra. It is a beautiful area known for its picturesque panoramas. Forested hills frame the pristine oceanfront. The beaches have not been developed and retain their natural beauty. Perhaps that is the one positive outcome of the civil war that plagued the region for



Septi Rangkuti.



Aceh province on the northern coast of the island of Sumatra.

decades and prevented humanity from over-running the area.

The Rangkutis had a busy day ahead. Usually on such a day, when Septi was not especially busy with his work, the entire family would squeeze onto Septi’s red Suzuki motorcycle and set out to visit family and friends, or they would ride along the shoreline for pleasure.

The day was still young. In the children’s bedroom, eight-year-old Zahri and seven-year-old Arif—a mischievous boy who liked to climb and had once broken his nose in a fall from the roof—were still sleeping. Meanwhile, their four-year-old sister Raudhatul played with her toys in the room where Septi was sleeping.

At 7:58, Septi was startled from his sleep by the ground beneath him shaking. He was up in an instant, jumping from his bed and dashing into the children’s bedroom where he grabbed Zahri and Arif, who were just waking up in confusion.

Mrs. Rangkuti was in the middle of hanging up the wash to dry on a clothesline in the yard when she felt the tremors. In the blink of an eye she ran into the house and grabbed Raudhatul. The parents ran outside with their children and took shelter behind the wall of a shop, protecting the children with their bodies. A neighbor shouted to them that the shop was starting to split apart. Septi and his wife again grabbed their kids and ran from there. Just as they left their spot, the entire building collapsed.

The ground was quaking so forcefully that the Rangkutis feared it would never stop. It was an unusually long earthquake, lasting a full eight minutes before it mercifully passed. The Rangkutis were shocked and disoriented by the powerful trembling the likes of which they had never experienced before. They were living through one of the worst earthquakes in recorded history.

As soon as the trembling quieted, people along the oceanfront were exposed to an unbelievable scene. The ocean suddenly receded, exposing a large swath of the beach that was usually underwater. Curious



Aceh is famous for its beautiful panorama, with forested hills ringing in miles of pristine beaches.



The tsunami rushed in much faster than people could run, washing away everyone in its path.



Dramatic simulation of the tsunami at the Aceh Tsunami Museum.