



In my view

Building something better in the wastelands of our days

On the Aceh waterfront after the 2005 tsunami, **Amy Gorman** walked along the beach saw death and devastation on a horrific scale. In her personal life too there has been devastating sadness. Yet through it all she says ‘I have been simply blessed.’

Suffering is a subject I would love to be able to write about – there is something beautiful in the way humans can share, love and live together through the most horrendous of their days. Okay, I have a problem sharing my own personal distress as it can awaken grief and pain that hasn’t yet been dealt with and I don’t want to spread sadness wherever I go – but we need to be vulnerable and share that distress – it helps us move through the suffering, it helps us relate to each other, it helps us find joy in what we do have. To go deeper in talking about the feelings and pain can bring us together and we grow.

The valley of the shadow

I used to think that I was struggling through the valley of the shadow, where I could barely lift my feet for the weight of heavy relationships, illness of those dear to me, and the sadness that had attached itself to my joyful heart – and perhaps I was travelling through that valley at that time. I’m not sure it is healthy to measure different types of suffering next to each other as we all have such different experiences of life, but my own suffering was put in some perspective when I witnessed in 2005 what people were dealing with in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. I came into contact with strong people who were picking up the pieces following the flattening of their towns, villages, families and friends by the biggest wave we remember.

Devastation at Aceh

The shock I felt as I stood at the water front in Aceh for the first time was shattering; it was not real to me that this level of devastation and death could exist. I had studied seismology and have worked in

shocking environments before but seeing with my own eyes mile upon mile of rubble, twisted cars, vast marooned ships and trees like pick-up-sticks would not register with learning about the hazards of subduction zone earthquakes – it seemed ridiculous.

Sitting with new friends and colleagues who had lost everything, experiencing together the worry of the nightly aftershocks knowing that more destruction could be on its way, listening to incredibly humbling personal stories through tears and building new friendships through

disaster. It reflects some perspective back upon my own life but it doesn’t take away the pain that I must face personally. I am still selfish and cry for myself when it doesn’t turn out the way I would like it to! Here is an example, I would love to have a baby, bring up a child, be a mother to the generations that follow; and my suffering at the moment is felt in the loss of many pregnancies. Children that would have been amazing, naughty, delightful, creative, intelligent and of course incredibly beautiful (ha ha!) have only survived for a number of weeks as my body fails to carry them. It is so strange to

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trauma and loss – this stuff remade me as a human being, I had lost nothing and I gained so much from what my friends shared even though I could not fully appreciate their suffering as my experience was so vastly different.

Sharing the pain

The raw experiences we have where we are stripped of everything, we are just ourselves and all we can do is be together, share our experiences (including the pain) and try to build something better in the wastelands of our days – this is where life is. Where we can share the joy of living and can laugh together in some understanding of what it is like to see death. Where looking each other in the eye and giving love is what makes us.

I have been privileged to have travelled to many places, to have seen how people live through appalling poverty, war, natural

grieve for a life that we have enjoyed for such a little amount of time, but still the grief batters me.

Life is precarious and precious

Perhaps I feel this kind of suffering so deeply because it is intrinsically linked to so much joy, that life is so precarious and precious that every ounce should be celebrated and cherished – and the loss for me of one so small is just as gutting as the loss of one grown old, perhaps more so.

For me, it is definitely better to have felt this deeply than not at all. I am hugely grateful for the time I have had with my children, my body rebounds from miscarriage pretty quickly, life goes on – in fact life gets more beautiful from the new understanding that grows inside me – so is this really suffering? I may not be ill, be living through daily bombing raids; I haven’t lost my