

Continued From Page 8

beneath that crust, we might as well not exist for all the difference we make.

In three weeks the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction opens in Kobe. It will now have something new to think about.

I personally felt useless. I couldn't give blood, so I gave money. I took a bag of clothes to Samitivej Hospital. I rang up the British Embassy to offer assistance, but as they were already bombarded with volunteers wanting to help, they put me on a list and said they'd call me. On impulse, I went to the arrivals hall at Don Muang Domestic Airport, where I saw the cut,

January 16th

I've been trying to marshal some thoughts about the earthquake, and find that anything original I have to say would be crassly inadequate, and anything adequate would be crassly unoriginal.

In short, many of us were damn lucky when the light of the world dimmed three weeks ago. We should remind ourselves of that every day. But we won't because familiarity with good fortune breeds contempt for it. But, as the old Irish proverb goes, "Do not resent growing old: many are denied the privilege."

Joseph Conrad, who wrote vividly of this region and its perils, observed that "the sea has no generosity" and that its fearful power was beyond man's control. The truth is what it has always been: nature, uncontrolled, unbidden, unpredictable, can still humble our pride and wreck our schemes in an instant.

We mortals are a thin film of thought confined to a narrow band around an undistinguished planet orbiting a pretty average star. A few thousand feet above us or a few hundred feet below us, our lives are impossible. Venturing beyond, we must take fragments of our home climate with us to keep ourselves alive amid the vacuum and radiation above or to re-enter the fire below.

On December 31, Fawzan al-Fawzan, professor at al-Imam University, Saudi Arabia, said on al-Majd TV:

"If people are remiss in implementing God's law and in being zealous and vengeful for His sake, Allah sets his soldiers in action to take revenge. The oppression and

bruised and bewildered faces, the numbed souls, empty stares and many, many tears. Then I noticed the huge guy who held a crude sign above his head which read: FREE HUGS HERE. Business wasn't brisk, but he raised a smile, and morale.

I sat down next to an Australian woman hugging her four-year old daughter. She didn't want to talk. But after awhile, and to no one in particular, she asked: "How will this all end?" I couldn't think of anything to say but remembered a line from Shakespeare: "Like it always does, with tears and a long journey". She glared at me, eyes brimming, then slowly nodded and hugged her little girl even tighter.

corruption caused by America and the Jews have increased. Have you heard of these beaches that are called 'tourists' paradise'? You have all probably heard of Bangkok. We read about it and knew it as the centre of corruption on the face of this earth."

Well, Happy New Year to you too, Fazwan, and to all the other Saudi guys currently enjoying the Bangkok nightlife.

An aid worker sent an e-mail this week in which he wrote that in one small section of the Indian coastline affected by the tsunami there are now 51 non-governmental organisations helping 49 villages. The local people are joking that the greatest threat to their safety now is being run over by a big white jeep. They are, of course, the lucky ones.

A long-time resident of Phuket sent an e-mail in which he complained that because so much conflicting nonsense was being written about the island resort he was wondering what the Japanese word for bulls**t was.

It's taikutsu. And I like the sound of it.

Being deeply suspicious of political power anywhere, I shuddered when I saw wads of cash being given to a politician on Thai television. I wouldn't give a banana to a politician.

Is there an appropriate message for the New Year? Right now, I doubt it. But if it's of any use, this was carved on the chapel wall at my school:

"Hold fast to what is good and true; guard what is beautiful; help the unfortunate; stoop not to malice, backbiting and denunciation; be noble, stay noble; defend precious standards and traditions and institutions; honour the masters, master your craft, respect the past, be loyal to your art and to fellow artists; guide and cherish the young; forget yourself, remember others."

oo0oo

Anywhere. At any time.

Only give to registered charities.

"Bohemian Rhapsody" by Queen (1975) has been widely acclaimed as the most irritating Christmas number one ever. It has recently been adopted as the official song of the US Army in Guantanamo Bay.

"By the time the song gets to the first chorus of 'mama-mia, mama-mia' our detainees are anxious to tell us everything they know," says the commander of interrogation, "and by the time it gets to that second chorus, well, hell, we're telling them everything WE know."

"The world turns so fast," noted a colleague, "that when the tsunami hit I was still trying to work out how to say 'fraud' in Ukrainian." Like an idiot, I couldn't resist. So, how do you say fraud in Ukrainian? "It sounded like splidjzit," he spat, adding: "but I might have been wrong." He was: it's . . . Oh, never mind.

Continued Page 22

First Choice Trading Company Rawai Phuket

NOW OPEN

- | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| ❖ Imported Meat & Bacon | ❖ Pork Pies | ❖ Pork Chops |
| ❖ Lamb Chops | ❖ Pork Ribs | ❖ Bar-B-Que Packs |
| ❖ Prime Beef Steaks | ❖ Meat Pies | ❖ Frozen Vegetables |
| ❖ Tetley Tea Bags | ❖ Bistro Gravy | ❖ Chicken: Legs /Wings/ Breast |

Burgers & Various Cooked Pies & Cooked Meats: Roast Beef/Roast Pork/Roast Lamb/Ham

- | | |
|--|---|
| ❖ A Selection of Fine Cheeses | ❖ Sausages - English and made from our own recipe |
| ❖ And Much Much More ... Including a selection of our finest wines | |

Delivery Can Be Arranged

We are located at: 44 / 1 Viset Rd., Rawai, Phuket, 83000

Tel / Fax: 076 289 041 Mobile: 01 958 6511