

# The Wisdom of Our Elders

Knowledge of the ocean and its currents passed down from generation to generation of a group of Thai fishermen known as the Moken (also Morgan) sea gypsies saved an entire village from the Asian tsunami in December 2004.

The Indian Ocean earthquake that created the series of devastating tsunamis along the coasts of the ocean killed between 230,000 and 280,000 people in 14 countries.

But by the time the killer waves crashed over southern Thailand, the entire 181 population of the Moken sea gypsies' fishing village had fled to a temple in the mountains of South Surin Island.

Hours before the tsunami hit, the Moken sea gypsies were living on those beaches, in harm's way, and would have likely all perished had they not listened to their elders.

"The elders told us that if the water recedes fast it will reappear in the same quantity in which it disappeared," Sarmao Kathalay, 65, the village chief, told *The Associated Press*.

So while Thais in some places along the southern coast headed to the beach when the sea drained out of the beaches – the first sign of the impending tsunami – to pick up fish left flapping on the sand, the sea gypsies did not.

When the water receded from the beach, the tribal chief ordered all 181 tribal members to run to the temple in the mountains. When the waters crashed ashore, the sea gypsies were safe on high ground.

Few people in Thailand have a closer relationship with the sea than the Moken gypsies, who spend each monsoon season on their boats plying the waters of the Andaman Sea from India to Indonesia and back to Thailand, the AP reported.

What is the lesson for us?

The *Book of Proverbs* reminds us repeatedly to seek wisdom and to heed the advice of our elders. This story illustrates the very practical benefits of obeying that exhortation.

Many of us don't have the life experiences to know the signs of upcoming pitfalls, but that doesn't mean we have to learn the hard way. We should listen to our elders and actively seek their counsel. Only then will we be prepared to run for high ground when the waters in our lives recede.

Those of us in Life Care and Century Park have the unique advantage of learning from those we serve – if we engage them in conversation and benefit from their wisdom.

*Whoever heeds life-giving correction will be at home among the wise* (Proverbs 15:31 NIV).

– Beecher Hunter