

SURVIVORS



For real



*A book about hope and perseverance.
Based on eye witness accounts from the World War II and the
tsunami in Thailand.*



Bengt Alvång

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THANK YOU

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*Thanks to Judith and Sigmund Baum, and to
Sten Kjellander, who participated and talked about
their experiences.*

*Judith and Sigmund are some of the last survivors of
labor and concentration camps during World War II who still
can tell about the horror, which they do in schools and in other
settings, so that the new generation will not forget.*

*Sten, in his practical yet positive way, is one of the voices that
give comfort and hope to the many who have gone through the
worst that might happen to us.*

Losing a child.

*Thank you for contributing.
Your words give strength to all of us.*

B Alvång

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C O N T E N T	
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<i>Foreword</i>	1
<i>Judith</i>	3
<i>Sigmund</i>	9
<i>Sten</i>	17
<i>Contact</i>	31

FOREWORD

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*This book does not give you interpretations. It does not analyze.
It renders the survivors own words.*

*It is a result of detailed interviews with survivors of real life
traumas. The purpose was to find out HOW they survived.
HOW they managed to move on. After such tremendous events
as concentration camps or the tsunami in Thailand. After
losing their children, their families, but themselves surviving.*

*After interviewing Judith and Sigmund Baum and
Sten Kjellander, it seemed presumptuous to interpret and
analyze their experiences. It is not necessary.
Instead, their own words speak directly to you, without a detour
through someone else's interpretation and evaluation of
what was said.*

They have something to say about survival, about moving on.

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JUDITH

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Me, my mother and her mother were deported from Hungary, in June 1944.

I was two years old. Trains were going to Auschwitz and Austria.

Had we gotten to Auschwitz, we would have gone up in the chimney. Instead, we were sent to a labor camp in Austria.

At the camp, Mom had to cut trees in the same clothes she had on when she came in.



When she was not working hard enough,
she got a rifle butt on her head, fainted and was taken
back to the camp.

We were there for one year.

My father walked around in Budapest and gathered little
things to send us so that Mom would know that they
were all alive.

He went to Buda where the Germans had their head-
quarters.. They said: “You dirty Jew! The reason we will
not strike you dead is because you dare to come to this
place that everyone would avoid.”

They forwarded the things to us. That’s where I got my
courage from. An image of a hero.

In the camp, I was holding onto that one day the sun
will shine. My mother said: “If I survive and meet my
husband, I want to have a son.”.

In 1946 I got a brother. So, life goes on.

SIGMUND

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I was 13 when the war broke out. When I was 14, me and my family got to the concentration camp of Birkenau, one of the 48 camps that belonged to Auschwitz.

As we arrived, my 24-year-old sister Frida and my 9-year-old brother were gassed immediately.



My mother who was 52 years old and my sister Marija who was 20, spent five months in Birkenau. After that they were skinny and sick and they too were sent to the gas chambers. So, then me and my father were the only ones still alive.

In the Birkenau concentration camp I made it through five selections where those unable to work were culled and killed in gas chambers.

The whole thing was an organized and extensive industry. We were used and exhausted.

I wanted to live to experience the surrender of Nazi Germany. Yes, that was my wish.

I had been in Birkenau for 14 months, and later on when I was at the Flossenborg concentration camp in Bavaria, near the Czech border, the war was coming to its end, and I went with the death march from there. We walked for 6 days without food.

When the Americans came and we were liberated, we
got food parcels and they gave us guns and said,

“Shoot them! Shoot the SS!”

But we were too tired. We could only sit.

When the war was finished, I wanted to start living.
For eight years I have not been able to go to the movies,
go to school, go dancing or to the theater.

So when the war was over, I wanted to provide myself
with everything that I had missed so long.

Life!

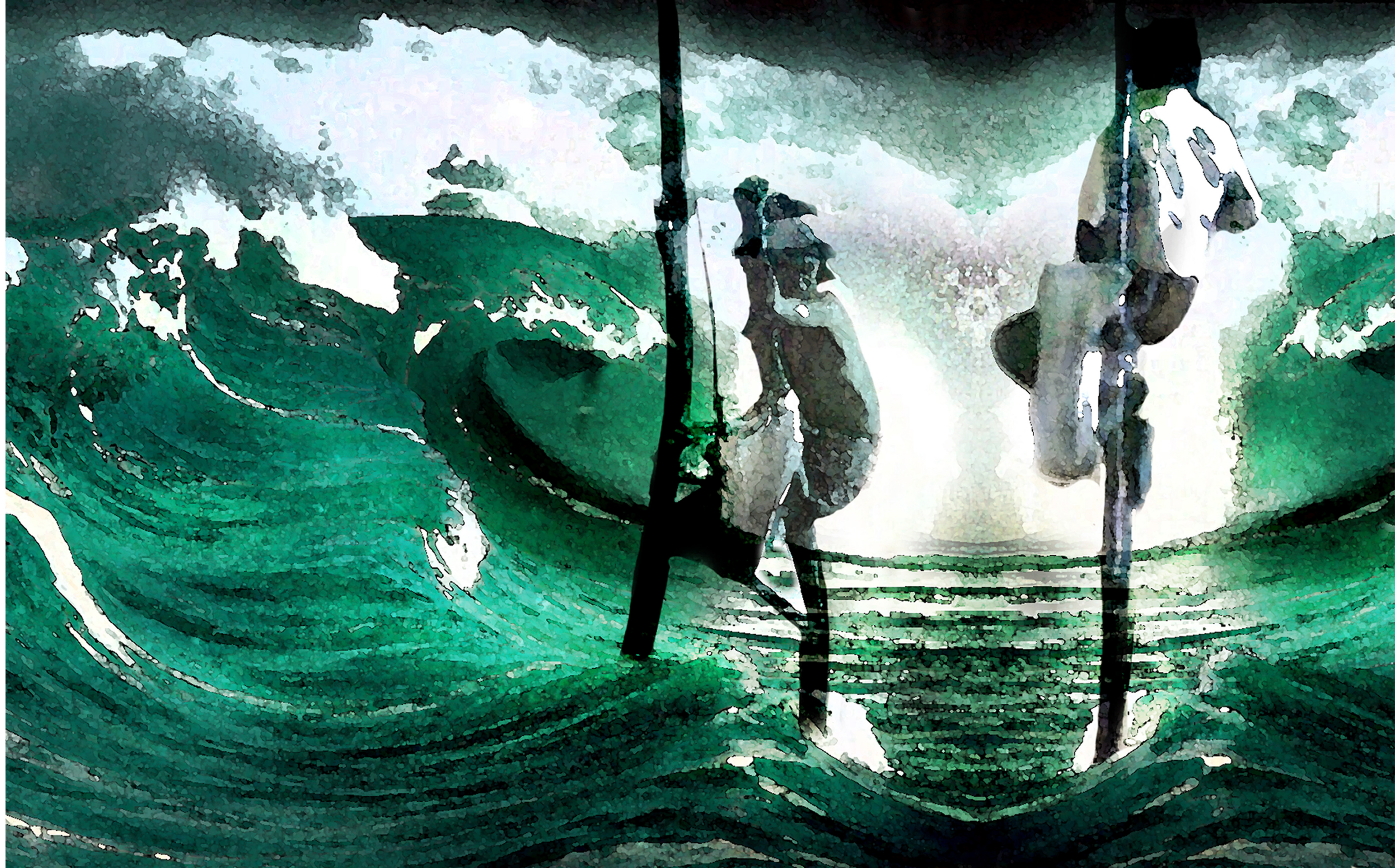
S T E N

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We stayed on Phi-phi Island – me, my wife and our two children. Anna 4 years old and Martin, 7. Four days of the holiday had gone by. We had just had breakfast.

We went to the beach, saw a crest a kilometer away. Boats in the bay began to swing heavily. We both took one child each in the hand, me our daughter and my wife our son, and ran toward the shore, to reach the shops.

“In case the water comes up on the shore”.



Get totally slammed when the wave hits us in the back,
and we are shot away like cannonballs.

Me and my daughter gets knocked apart. I fall into the
water, my lungs fill with fluid.

There is no more meaning for my life, I loose her.
Said good night.
I encounter a light, and so my survival reflex wakes up.
Coming to life. I come to the surface, I get air.

I am 300 meters away, on the other side of the island.
It is dead silent. I see no life. I get myself to the
boat of a Thai.
Laying there for an hour, chewing leaves.
They put plasters on me.

I get furious when they want to go to Phuket,
but they convince me that we can't go ashore
– the island is closed.

In Phuket we were taken first to one of the hospitals to
get stitched and patched up, and then we were offered a
place to sleep at a Chinese temple. There I was able to
break down.

At three o'clock in the night in Phuket, on the 28th of
December (on the third day) I get a phone call from
the Ambassador: "Your wife and son are at a hospital in
Bangkok. They survived."

I got a lift from a Thai man – in the middle of the night
– 860 km.

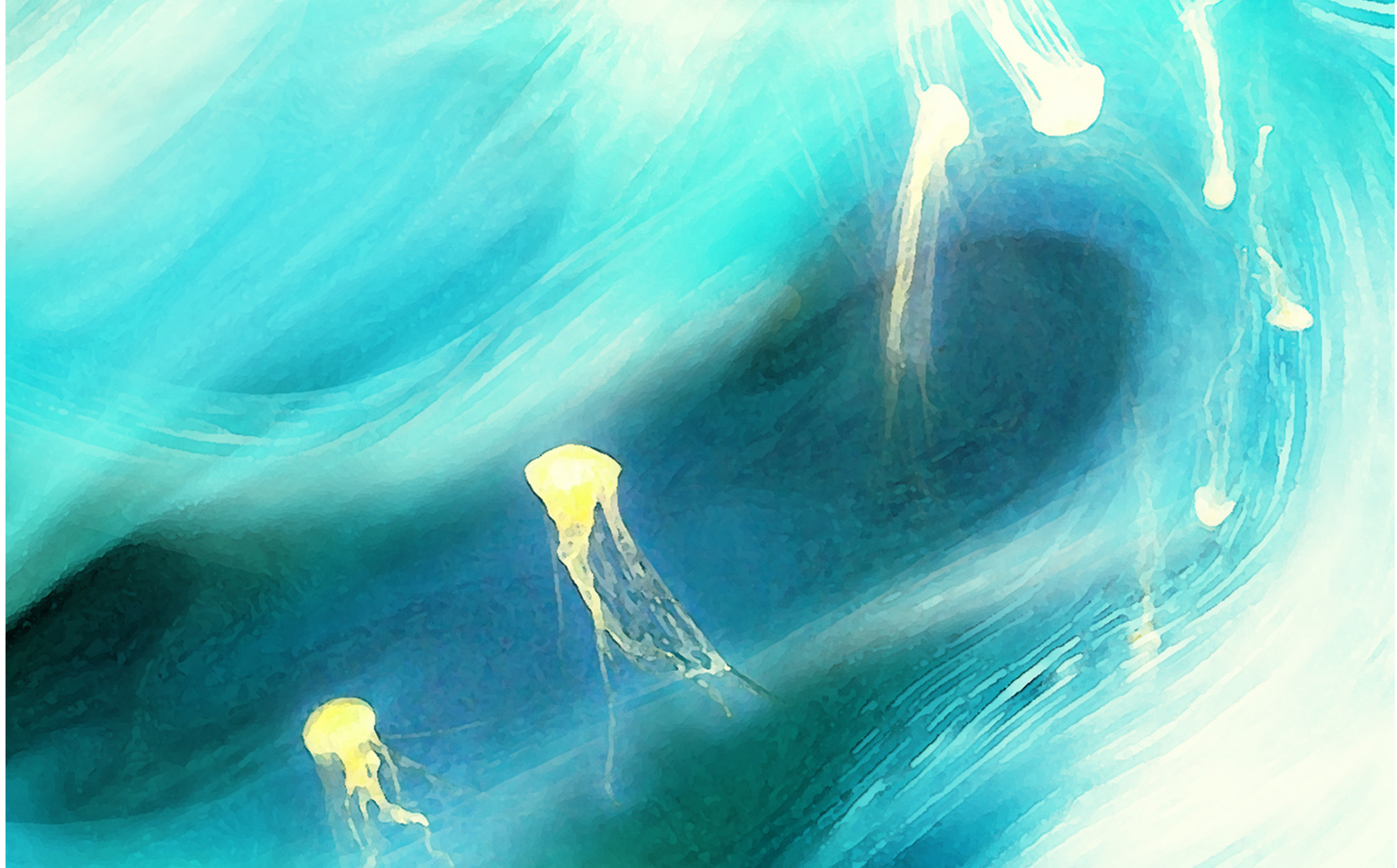
At the airport in Bangkok I was an odd figure: bloody
and patched up, amongst businessmen in Armani suits.
When I arrive to the hospital, my wife is drugged and
our son hysterical. Twice came the news indicating my
daughter was alive. Both times I broke out in a thrill of
joy. Both times it turned out not to be true. I must
keep searching.

I go around to hospitals, in wheelchair, looking for my
daughter. One week after coming home to Sweden I was
told that she had been found, dead.

Going down to Thailand. It's beginning of June.
There lies our daughter.

Anna travels with us to Sweden on the same airplane.
It was a great satisfaction to be able to take her home.
Me and my wife were received at Arlanda by our priest
and by the airport manager. It was a strong experience
to feel the reverence they showed us. The mustering of
support for us was enormous. One is not alone.

The more times I could tell relatives and friends about
it, the closer I came to comprehension and ability to take
in what had happened. Certainly there were some who
avoided contact but I looked at it as a way for them to
show respect.



We have become more tolerant with each other and with others. Some may feel that their worries cannot be mentioned because they do not measure up to what we have gone through.

But everything is important, even “your little” sores. Every worry must have its space.

The following years has been very eventful. We increased the pace of our activities. There was energy to fill life with.

We have been travelling, renovated and sold real estates, and two years ago we adopted a boy from Thailand. One should not stop life. It is like letting the sails fill.

And Anna is with us all the time.





Bengt Alvång

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For real

*How can one move on after having survived a
concentration camp or a tsunami, but lost one's
child or family?*