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REMEMBERING THE PERFECT STORM – “YOLANDA”

YOLANDA is supposed to be a sweet female name, but it turned out she was violent. Days before its landfall, people were already aware of the coming typhoon but its strength was taken for granted. Our country is situated along the most active “storm-alley” or “typhoon-belt” where plentiful supplies of warm water and moist air provide the energy to trigger super typhoons. An average of 20 typhoons made a visit each year. Filipinos in the eastern part of the Philippines are used to bad weather, so they don’t bother to think about the storm.

Yolanda, considered the “Storm of the Century”, was the strongest tropical cyclone to ever make landfall. Packing winds of up to 320 km/h (199 mph), bringing gust that reached 379 km/h (235 mph), waves as high as 15 meters (45 ft.) and up to 400mm (15.75 inches) of rain slammed shortly before dawn in Tacloban City on November 8, 2013. “Storm Surge” that caused extensive destruction are new English words or vocabulary to many of the Filipinos now. They never heard of this term before or maybe the weather forecasters failed to explain what it is.

NOVEMBER 7, 2013 (Thursday) – There was little sunshine in the early afternoon in our town the day preceding this day, which was mistakenly thought by some as a sign the storm would not come. They didn’t know that “calmness before a storm is a natural phenomenon.” In spite of the fair weather, I continue securing our windows with nails, bought rolls of packaging tape and put an “X” to all our glass



windows to prevent from breaking (it did!). Canned goods, bottled water and candles were stored in our kitchen and changed new batteries to our seldom used flashlights. Two or three days ago, our appliances were packed and placed in a secured area in the house. Every now and then I called the family of Elmo, Allan and Clarita reminding them to prepare for the worst and to find a safe place in their house because this typhoon is the strongest to ever hit our country. Before lunch, my sister Wennet called from the U.S. to check on our readiness of the coming typhoon. She approved of my preparation. When typhoon Yolanda or Haiyan (its international codename) was spotted in the Pacific Ocean, I kept tracking its path through the internet. Raul Marquez told me my estimated time for Yolanda to hit Palompon was wrong. Mine was 11:00 a.m., while Raul said it would be 8:00 in the morning. I went to bed early that night.



NOVEMBER 8, 2013 (Friday) - I woke up at 4:00 in the morning, again tracking Yolanda in my computer. A drizzle slowly making noise in our roof. Then I received a text message from my cousin Ma. Joyce “Gingging” Vitor who is living in Tacloban that the storm was hammering the city with very strong wind and heavy rain. I texted back asking on their situation there but no reply. I immediately packed my desktop computer (the only

unpacked equipment) and placed it in the reserved spot of my closet for safekeeping. I roused up the rest of my family and told them we have to take an early breakfast. Raul was right! It was a matter of minutes before 8:00 a.m. when the wind was getting stronger accompanied by moderate rain. Then we started to feel the fierceness of Yolanda. Most of the time we stayed

at the secured spot in our house which is Gina's room. Occasionally we opened the main door of our living room protected by the concrete wall of our garage to watch the wrath of the storm. Because of strong whistling wind and heavy downpour houses across the street cannot be seen. It was frightening! Two and a half hours later there was an unusual stillness. The wind and rain tend to stop, the leaves didn't move, some toppled down trees and debris blocked the streets. People were getting out of their houses to inspect the damage. They



thought Yolanda was gone. It was the eye of the storm passing over town. I told my neighbors to go back inside their homes for the worst is yet to come. Then I saw my brother Elmo shivering while he opened our gate with his wife Carmencita. (They are living a few blocks away from us.) They said, the whole roof of the apartment they are staying was destroyed. After 15 or 20 minutes the storm was back and a stronger

wind and heavier rain pounded Palompon. At the height of the storm's fury, we heard somebody knocking at the door of our steel gate. It was Isagani Diegor living across the street. He asked permission for a temporary shelter of his family because their house had collapsed. We immediately ushered them in. His wife and children were shivering, his youngest child was crying, afraid of the storm. His mother who had a stroke was carried by him singlehandedly - his adrenaline worked. We had extra clothes stored in a box so we told them to change to a dry one then offered them meals. Moving at the speed of 40 kp/h, Yolanda finally left town at 1:00 p.m. No more wind and rain. For 5 agonizing hours the storm took pleasure of creating wide destruction. This time more people were out in the streets. Regardless of their misfortune they managed to smile and laugh that made the Filipinos well-known throughout the world of their resiliency. I hurriedly checked the situation of my family. Thank God they are all safe. The devastation left by Yolanda was beyond the imagination of man. Our town looks like a war zone. Steel trusses were twisted, galvanized roofs were ripped off or blown away, glass windows were broken and entire roof of some houses especially those made of light materials were gone. More debris like wood, steel sheets, and trees were blocking the streets. Electric posts were lining towards the road, some were down, and a few were cut in half. The entire section of our extension roof was blown away and landed at the back of our house. Helped by the rush of wind, the rain entered into my room and to the other area. While the people were cleaning the streets, the clouds moved and the sun appeared, though not shining brightly just enough to make us feel his presence. Around 3:00 p.m.



Carmencita said she had a signal in her cellphone. I grabbed her phone and immediately sent a text message to Nubbin, her son working in Cebu, to tell Edna and Wennet that everyone in the family is safe and in good health to ward off their worries. In the evening Palompon was enveloped with total darkness, there's no electrical power. We were cut-off from the rest of the world in terms of communication - no cellphone signals, no internet, no TVs or computer. I said to myself, it would take years for our town to recover from this disaster. Every typhoon victim has its own story, this is mine.