

Miracles in a Trilogy: Typhoon Odette Reloaded

The disaster showed that miracles do happen when people look beyond themselves to help others in need.

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CEBU CITY. It's one of those things you may expect in a country that is visited by 20 typhoons a year, but you'd never know what it really means until a strong one hits you directly. That was the case of

Typhoon Odette — known internationally as Rai — that lashed through the Visayan region (central Philippines) on December 16-17, 2021.

The storm left a trail of destruction. 10.6 million people (3 million families) were affected. Victims included 178,235 farmers and fisherfolk who are among the most vulnerable of the country's population. Media reports showed coastal communities in the popular destinations of Bohol, Cebu, Siargao and Dinagat Islands leveled to the ground. Three months later, people are still trying to recover.

Cebu was one of the worst-hit cities. Everyone at that time needed water; everyone lived in the dark; everyone had difficulty communicating with the outside world due to poor internet and mobile phone signals;

everyone lined up for kerosene and gasoline; and everyone needed cash.

One of the first things I did — together with colleagues of the technical-vocational school Banilad Center for Professional Development (BCPD) in Cebu — was to check on the situation of our affected personnel and students.

CONGEE FOR ALL!

Lorna Gales, a BCPD trainer in Cookery and Bread and Pastry Production, managed to get in touch with us to inform us of her plight. BCPD director Beth and I made a two hour trip to her place in Naga City, 20 kilometers southwest of Cebu.

Lorna had invested everything in her house. Storm winds of up to 240 kph tore off portions of her roof and damaged the interiors. On top of that the community was suffering from lack of potable water, loss of

electricity, and scarcity of basic goods.

It was a harrowing experience for Lorna. “But I told myself that the most important thing was that we were alive and I thanked God that we were safe,” she narrated.

The BCPD school itself was damaged by the typhoon. But, as if on cue, help began to arrive from various sectors.

After Christmas, Apex Mining Company, Inc. in Maco (Davao de Oro) sent a team of engineers and technicians to the school with a generator and a tanker of diesel. BCPD has a good number of scholars and alumnae from Maco. Moreover, the company managers gave financial assistance, which was used to purchase rice, mineral water, relief goods, and GI sheets for the many school personnel whose roofs were damaged. Lorna was one of the first beneficiaries.

Jollibee Foods and Pan de Manila helped with food packs and bread. We were able to deliver packs of congee mix to Lorna. And so, there was congee for all in her community in Naga.

“I am so happy because people in the school really helped me to rise above this difficult situation,” Lorna said. “They came not just once but twice. On the second visit, they did not just help me, but gave me the chance to help the people in my place.”

“I am very blessed to work in BCPD because aside from being helped, I also became an instrument to share blessings to other people,” Lorna said.

IN EACH OTHER’S EMBRACE

Our next destination was Bohol, an island 126 kilometers south of Cebu City. We identified 17 severely affected families. We hired a truck

and vans to transport goods. I was accompanied by BCPD alumnae KZ and Claudine.

Kalinangan Youth Foundation (KALFI) and Angels Today, a private association, had sent BCPD much-needed supplies from Manila. We brought gallons of mineral water provided to the school by a military detachment.

Arriving at the port of Tagbilaran City at 5 a.m. on January 14, I saw the scenes of destruction — coastal communities wiped out, survivors in makeshift shacks, damaged furniture, appliances and other belongings strewn by the roadside. My heart ached because we did not have provisions to help all.

Christine and Mary Rose, BCPD alumnae from Bohol, joined us there and helped us navigate to our destinations inland.

One of the 17 families was that of Nanay Angelita Bautista, a widow. She stays at home with her grandchildren. All her children work outside Bohol, including a daughter who is a BCPD alumna. When she saw our van arriving, she ran towards us, crying uncontrollably.

“The wind was blowing so hard and the sound was one of the scariest I ever heard. I felt the impact of coconut trees falling on the ground,” she recalled in the local dialect.

“I gathered these children around me and we stayed by the wall hugging each other. I thought that if we would die, at least we would be in each other’s embrace,” Nanay recounted. “As the children cried, I began to pray Hail Marys successively. The trees crashed and our roof was ripped away little by little,” she narrated.

She received the limited provisions that we had at that time with heartfelt gratitude and not without tears, saying: “My family is very fortunate... you are here to check on me.”

She would later receive financial help for her house. A few weeks after, she sent me some photos of her fully-roofed house, along with more “Daghang Salamat sa tanan!” (Thank you very much to all!)

LITTLE STORE, BIG HEART

Dahl Paalisbo, a young KALFI member, posted on Facebook photos of her typhoon-ravaged community in Mactan island, off Cebu. The houses were leveled to the ground and the only one left standing was hers.

“I was shocked. I witnessed how my neighbors lost their homes; how they

scurried everywhere to look for their roofs,” Dahl narrated.

She wanted to help but, being a student, she did not have resources. So, she used social media to call for help. The first one to respond was her mother, who gave goods from her small store.

Dahl was moved. “I see how my Mom works hard every day to supply items for her store. But she was willing to give all,” Dahl said.

Drinking water had been a scarce commodity for weeks. “I had difficulty contacting people who might be able to help,” Dahl narrated. “But God really does His work. The help that we needed found its way to us,” citing food, water, and other relief goods coming from as far as Metro Manila.

She ended having enough to host a post-Christmas party for the entire

community. “My mom and I cooked spaghetti.”

A REAL CHRISTMAS

Christmas after Typhoon Odette was different for us all, but it was Christmas... a special one!

The spirit of solidarity was strong. On Christmas day, on the way home coming from a pilgrimage, the sight of Manila Electric Company trucks passing us by teared me up. These were sent from Metro Manila. Everyone wanted to give just a little more love, a little more hope.

And the beauty of it all is that help continued beyond Christmas time... to this day, three months after.

BCPD received a donation from United Kingdom-based Wonder Foundation, which enabled us to distribute construction materials to

the families of our severely-affected students.

“I keep on praying for help to come. I don’t know how, I just pray and pray,” a mother of one of our students confided to me when we visited her. “And it’s true, my prayers are answered,” she said in between sobs. “Here, help has arrived!”

In the words of Dahl, “I realized that there will always be a way, if you want to help wholeheartedly.”

**Contact us at BCPD Cebu. <https://www.bcpd.edu.ph/contact...>*

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